

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 9 AUGUST 2020



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Abhishek Bachchan tests negative for Covid-19, discharged

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Rahul slams govt over Asha workers' strike to demand better benefits

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Sushant case: Kriti Sanon shares cryptic post on Instagram



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Swimmers enjoy the water at Hampstead Heath ponds as temperature soars in London Friday evening. — AFP

Man beaten up over 'Jai Shri Ram' chant, 2 arrested

Jaipur: In a horrific incident, a Muslim auto driver was brutally beaten by two persons and forced to chant "Jai Shri Ram" and "Modi Zindabad" in Rajasthan's Sikar district on Thursday. The culprits allegedly pulled the driver's beard, punched him, knocked out his teeth, and asked him to go to Pakistan. On the basis of an FIR, the police has arrested the duo.

Sanjay Dutt in hospital, Covid -ve

Mumbai: Sanjay Dutt was admitted to Lilavati hospital in Mumbai after complaining of breathlessness and chest pain. The actor tested negative for coronavirus and has been kept for observation in a non-Covid ward. Dutt tweeted, "Just wanted to assure everyone that I'm doing well." Full report on Page 4

'Period Leave' for Zomato employees

New Delhi: Food delivery company Zomato has said it will give women employees up to 10 days of "period leave" per year, as part of an effort to combat what it said was stigma around the issue. Zomato is one of the most high-profile organisations to institute the policy in the country, where menstruation is still taboo.

COUNTERPOINT



No need for a villain and his gang... our heroine and her family will play those roles too!

WEATHER

Max: 37°C
Min: 28°C
RH: 79%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Light rain

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Shravana Bahula
Shashti full day
Star: Revathi till 7.06 pm
Variyam: 5.39 am to 7.27 am (Sunday)
Durmuhurtam: 5.01 pm to 5.51 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm

SUNSET TODAY 7.07 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.48 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 10.07 PM
MOONSET TODAY 10.35 AM

Kozhikode crash: Toll rises to 18

Black box recovered, 23 passengers are in critical condition | AIE plane had landed 1 km beyond runway threshold in low visibility

AGE CORRESPONDENTS
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/
KOZHIKODE/NEW DELHI,
AUG. 8

The black box of the ill-fated Air India Express flight AXB1344 was recovered on Saturday even as the toll in the mishap rose to 18 with a passenger succumbing to injuries. As many as 23 passengers are in critical condition in various hospitals of Kozhikode, officials said.

There were 174 passengers, including 10 infants, two pilots and five crew members on board the aircraft at the time of the accident. The deceased include the pilot, Capt. D.V. Sathe, co-pilot Akhilesh Kumar, and four children — three girls and a one-year-old boy. Two girls were aged two and the other was five.

The Centre and state governments announced compensation of ₹10 lakh each for the families of those who died in the crash.

Digital Flight Data Recorder (DFDR) and Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) of the ill-fated aircraft have been retrieved. AAI (Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau) is conducting investigations. Union civil aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri, who arrived in Kozhikode to take stock of the situation and

implementation of the relief measures, tweeted. An official of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said the DFDR and CVR, which jointly make up the "black box" in an aircraft, will be sent to Delhi for further investigation.

Mr Puri said the weather conditions on Friday evening were unfavourable because of heavy rain and the pilot seems to have tried to bring the aircraft to a halt on the runway but it skidded, leading to the tragic accident. The AIE flight from Dubai overshot the tabletop runway at the international airport in Kozhikode while landing in heavy rain, fell into a valley 35 feet below and broke into two parts on Friday night.

The AAI also said the pilot "attempted first landing on runway 28 but could not sight the runway and subsequently carried out a missed approach (known popularly as go-around) and requested for runway 10", adding that at the time of the second attempt at landing, it was raining

and the reported visibility was 2,000 metres. It is understood that the DGCA had earlier asked the Kozhikode authorities to carry out maintenance work at the airport. However, the works were not carried out effectively.

With the single-day rise of 61,537 cases, India's coronavirus tally reached 20,88,611 on Saturday, while the death toll due rose to 42,518 with 933 fatalities being reported in a day.

But Union health ministry said India has one of the lowest cases per million at 1,469 as against the global average of 2,425, and added that India's fatality rate has declined to 2.04 per cent.

There has also been a sharp increase in Covid-19 recoveries. With 48,900 patients discharged in the last 24 hours, India's total recoveries has reached 14,27,005, taking the recovery rate to 68.32 per cent. The active

PM will launch ₹1tn fund to boost agri infra

New Delhi, Aug. 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Sunday launch a financing facility of ₹1 trillion under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund.

He will also release the sixth instalment of funds of ₹17,000 crore to 85 million farmers under the PM-KISAN scheme, an official statement said on Saturday.

The virtual event will be witnessed by thousands of farmers and cooperatives across the country. Union agriculture and farmers' welfare minister Narendra Singh Tomar will also be present. The fund will catalyse the creation of post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets. — PTI

India Covid fatality rate down to 2.04%

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 8

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— PTI

LeT group planning something 'big' busted

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, AUG. 8

Jammu and Kashmir police on Saturday claimed that it has busted a financing network of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) after arresting six of its operatives. "The group was planning something big and spectacular," a senior police officer claimed.

Inspector General of Police (Jammu range) Mukesh Singh identified the accused as Mudassir Farooq Bhat, Tauqeer Ahmad Bhat, Asif Bhat,

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Khalid Latif Bhat, Gazi Iqbal and Tariq Hussain Mir. Mr Singh claimed that all the accused were working for Mohammad Amin Bhat alias Haroon alias Khubeb, also a resident Doda "who is an LeT cadre trained in Pakistan in 1997 and is currently operating from there."

"After being imparted arms training in Pakistan in 1997, Haroon had returned to Doda," the IGP said. ■ More on Page 3



Officials stand by the debris of the Air India Express flight that skidded off a runway while landing in Kozhikode, Kerala, on Saturday. — AP

Pilot was recipient of IAF 'Sword of Honour'

New Delhi: Captain Deepak Vasanth Sathe, the pilot in command of the ill-fated Air India Express flight who died in the crash on Friday, was a decorated fighter pilot with the Indian Air Force (IAF) for 22 years after which he started flying for Air India to Air India Express.

A former Wing Commander with IAF, he was one of the most experienced commanders with more than 10,000 flying hours. He had also, Union minister of civil aviation Hardeep Singh Puri said, landed aircraft 27 times at Kozhikode's Karipur airport in the past.

Captain Sathe, 58 and a Mumbai resident, was a gold medalist from the 58th course of NDA, Khadakwasla, in Pune. In June 1981, he passed out from Air Force Academy with the Sword of Honour for topping the pilot's course.

He had flown MiG-21 and MiG-27, became a flying instructor in IAF Academy and a test pilot with the Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd.



Capt. Sathe

Rescue operations by locals saved lives

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The immediate rescue operations carried out by the local residents of Kondotty taluk soon after the plane crash on Friday has come in for huge applause for saving many lives.

Dozens of local residents rushed to the Kozhikode airport when they heard a "terrible thud" — the Air India Express plane had fallen into a valley 35 feet below. "We rushed to the spot and somehow managed to reach the aircraft. I could see people screaming, wailing and writhing in pain. Many were lying unconscious with broken limbs. Without waiting for a moment, we started bring out people from the aircraft and rushing them to hospitals in whatever vehicles were available," said Anzar, a local resident. "Small kids were trapped under the seats and it was such a distressing sight... Many of them were seriously injured... My hands and shirt were soaked in the blood of the injured persons," another local resident said.

Public fury over massive Beirut blast

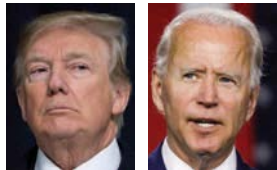


Lebanese protesters clash with security forces in Beirut on Saturday following a demonstration against the political leadership they blame for a monster explosion that killed more than 150 people and disfigured the city. Thousands poured into the city's main square, where they set up symbolic nooses to hang politicians whose corruption they blame for Tuesday's explosion. ■ Report on Page 6 — AFP

'Russia acting against Biden; China opposes Trump'

Washington, Aug. 8: US intelligence officials believe that Russia is using a variety of measures to denigrate Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden ahead of the November election and that individuals linked to the Kremlin are boosting President Donald Trump's reelection bid, the country's counterintelligence chief said in the most specific warning to date about the threat of foreign interference.

US officials also believe China does not want Mr Trump to win a second term and has accelerated



Trump Biden

its criticism of the White House, expanding its efforts to shape public policy in America and to pressure political figures seen as opposed to Beijing's interests.

The statement Friday from William Evanina is believed to be the most pointed declaration by the US intelligence community linking the Kremlin to

efforts to get Mr Trump reelected a sensitive subject for a President who has rejected intelligence agency assessments that Russia tried to help him in 2016.

It also connects Moscow's disapproval of Mr Biden to his role as vice-president in shaping Obama administration policies supporting Ukraine, an important US ally, and opposing Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Asked about the intelligence assessment in New Jersey, Mr Trump appeared to dispute the idea that Russia was disparaging Mr Biden. "I

think the last person Russia wants to see in office is Donald Trump because nobody has been tougher on Russia than I have ever," he said. But the President seemed to agree with the intelligence indicating China didn't want him reelected. "If Joe Biden was President, China would own our country," he said. Mr Evanina's statement comes amid criticism that the intelligence community has been withholding from the public specific information about the threat of foreign interference in American politics. — AP

BORDER ROW

India & China engage in talks to disengage

1st Maj. Gen. level talks after Galwan

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, AUG. 8

India and China on Saturday held Major General level talks at Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) to discuss disengagement at the strategic Depsang plains and other friction points. The Major General level talks were held after five rounds of Corps Commanders level meetings. The outcome of the meeting, which began at 11 am and ended at 7:30 pm on the Chinese side of the LAC, was not immediately known.

Depsang plains and Pangong Tso have emerged as the major sticking points in the disengagement process. Till now military talks had mainly concentrated on disengagement at Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Hot Springs and Gogra Post.

In Depsang plains, Chinese troops have been preventing Indian Army patrols from going to Patrolling Points 10 to 13. In Depsang plains, Chinese are concentrated at a place which is around 20-25 kms from a strategic airstrip, the Daulat Beg Oldie Advanced Landing Ground (ALG). This is one of the world's highest airstrips which was built in 1962 and was reactivated in 2008. There has been a huge build-up of troops, tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery at Depsang and DBO sector by both India and China. Estimates say that India has deployed around 15,000 troops and Russian T-90 tanks at DBO with Leh.

■ THERE HAS been a huge build-up of troops, tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery at Depsang and DBO sector by both India and China. Estimates say that India has deployed around 15,000 troops and Russian T-90 tanks at the Depsang-DBO sector. Unlike other friction points in Ladakh, the Depsang plains, situated at an altitude of over 15,000 feet, are flat and suitable for tank action.

Unlike other friction points in Ladakh, the Depsang plains, situated at an altitude of over 15,000 feet, are flat and suitable for tank action. This was for the first time that Major General level talks were held after the Galwan Valley clash on June 15. Depsang plains has in the past seen many incursions by China, including in a major face-off in 2013. A senior official said that Saturday's meeting was routine, to just discuss issues like patrolling patterns. "There was no discussion on disengagement," he added. The PLA is unhappy with the construction of the 255 km-long Darbuk-Shayok-Daulat Beg Oldie road which ends near the airstrip. PLA presence at Galwan valley and Depsang plains is a threat to this crucial DS-DBO road which provides all-weather connectivity to Indian posts at DBO with Leh.

6 Rajasthan BJP MLAs sent to Guj

Porbandar, Aug. 8: Half a dozen BJP MLAs from Rajasthan arrived in Porbandar in Gujarat on Saturday ahead of the Assembly session in their home state on August 14.

More BJP legislators from Rajasthan will arrive in Gujarat, one of the legislators said after landing here by a chartered plane. Talking to reporters after arrival here, BJP MLA Nirmal Kumawat alleged that the Congress government in Rajasthan was "harassing" Opposition MLAs, and said they were here on a pilgrimage to Somnath to seek mental peace. "CM Ashok Gehlot lacks majority. He is harassing and putting mental pressure on BJP MLAs using SOG (Special Operations Group)," Kumawat alleged.

Cops to probe phone tapping rumour in Raj

Jaipur, Aug. 8: Rajasthan DGP Bhupendra Singh on Saturday instructed the police to investigate the complaint lodged against the rumours that phone numbers of six MLAs holed up in a Jaisalmer hotel are being tapped, according to a statement. The DGP clarified that the police did not tap any number. — AP

PAGE 3

SHORT TAKES

Body of DJB staffer found in water tank

New Delhi: The body of a 40-year-old Delhi Jal Board (DJB) employee was found inside a water tanker in East Delhi's Mayur Vihar on Saturday, the police said. The police said that no suicide note has been recovered. "Uday, a resident of Karawal Nagar, was working as a pump operator in DJB. His body was recovered on Saturday morning," a senior police officer said. According to the police, preliminary enquiry revealed that he was an alcoholic and had issues with his wife over his drinking habit. The inquest proceedings have been initiated. He is survived by his wife and daughter, who is studying in Class 10. "Disinfection exercise is going on. Water from the reservoir will be flushed out and supply will resume only after testing the water quality. Water supply to around 600 flats in Mayur Vihar Phase 2 is hit. Normal supply will resume by Sunday morning," a Delhi Jal Board official said.

30-yr-old man shot at during scuffle

New Delhi: A 30-year-old man received a bullet injury during a scuffle in Janakpuri area, police said on Saturday. The incident took place on Friday at around 8.30 pm at Janakpuri's A-Block area, they said. The injured has been identified as Brahmjeet, a farmer and resident of Hajar district in Haryana. According to police, Brahmjeet owed ₹10 lakh to one Paramveer of Rohtak in Haryana. He was visiting his elder brother Kamaljeet, who lives in Delhi's Uttam Nagar. On the day of the incident, Kamaljeet was at A-Block, Janakpuri to meet his relative Ashish when Paramveer, along with his relatives Manjeet, Navin and an unidentified friend, came there and asked him to return the money, a senior police officer said. A heated argument ensued which led to a scuffle. Meanwhile, Brahmjeet reached there and attacked Navin who fired two to three shots one of which hit him in the stomach, the officer said.

20-year-old woman hangs self in Noida

Noida: The body of a 20-year-old woman working with a private company was found at her rented accommodation here on Saturday in a suspected suicide case, police said. The incident was reported to the police at around 6 pm from a paying guest facility in sector 12, under Sector 24 Police Station area, officials said. "The girl's body was found hanging from the ceiling fan of her room through a 'chunni'. She hailed from West Bengal and worked for a private company in Noida," an official from the local police station said. "It appears to be a case of suicide. There was no suicide note found from the spot and the reasons behind the extreme step are yet to be ascertained," the official added. The body has been sent for post mortem and legal proceedings are underway, the police said.

45-year-old jumps to death from 17th-floor

Noida: A 45-year-old woman died after she allegedly jumped off her 17th-floor apartment in Greater Noida on Saturday, police said. The incident took place around 8.30 am in Bisraha area, they said. "The woman had lost her husband over a year ago and she was working in the irrigation department in Meerut district. She was staying here with her son and daughter-in-law in their 17th-floor flat," a police official said. No suicide note was found from the spot. What prompted her to take the extreme step is yet to be ascertained, the official said. The woman's son and daughter-in-law were at home when she jumped off the balcony, the official said, adding the body has been sent for post-mortem. Earlier, a 62-year-old woman had died after she allegedly jumped off her 19th-floor apartment in Noida in July. A 28-year-old woman had jumped off her 16th-floor flat in Greater Noida in June. According to officials, mental health issues are a major reason for people resorting to suicide.

Total death toll mounts to 4,098 1,404 new cases take city's tally to 1,44,127

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 8

The national capital recorded 1,404 new coronavirus cases on Saturday taking the tally in the city to over 1.44 lakh, while the death toll from the disease climbed to 4,098. Sixteen deaths have been recorded in the last 24 hours.

The Delhi health department bulletin said the death toll from the coronavirus infection has risen to 4,098 and the total number of cases climbed to 1,44,127. The positivity rate stood at 5.7 per cent while the recovery rate was over 89 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Union health secretary took a meeting through video-conferencing with health departments of Delhi and a few other states, to review the measures for controlling Covid.

Out of the total number of beds in Covid hospitals, 10,469 are vacant. Also, 2,549 beds in Covid care centres are occupied by persons under quarantine, including travellers who have returned by Vande Bharat Mission

▶ **THE POSITIVITY** rate stood at 5.7 per cent while the recovery rate was over 89 per cent. 1,29,362 patients have recovered, been discharged or migrated so far. The number of people in home isolation stands at 5,372. The number of daily cases after dipping to three-figure count last Sunday has again shown a rise in the last few days, recording in excess of 1,000

and bubble flights. According to the bulletin, 1,29,362 patients have recovered, been discharged or migrated so far. The number of people in home isolation stands at 5,372.

The number of Rapid Antigen Tests conducted on Saturday stood at 19,902 while the RT-PCR, CBNAAT and True NAAT tests figures were 5,500, in all adding to 24,592, according to the bulletin.

The total number of tests done till date in Delhi stands at 11,68,295. The number of tests done per million, as on

Saturday was 61,489. On Saturday, the number of containment zones stood at 478.

The number of daily cases after dipping to three-figure count last Sunday has again shown a rise in the last few days, recording in excess of 1,000. The number of tests has shown a rise in the last few days, with 24,592 conducted in the last 24 hours.

On Friday, the daily cases count was 1,192 and 23 deaths were reported. The daily cases count on August 1 was 1,118, however, during August 2-4, cases had gradually dipped: August 2 (961), August 3 (805) and August 4 (674). But, from August 5 onwards, the cases have again shown a four-figure trend: August 5 (1,076), August 6 (1,299) and August 7 (1,192).

The active cases tally on Saturday rose to 10,667, from 10,409 the previous day. On June 23, the national capital had reported the highest single-day spike of 3,947 cases, till date. The death toll from Covid in Delhi stood at 4,082 on Friday.



Labourers look for transport to reach the local destination after arriving from Uttar Pradesh during Unlock 3.0 at Anand Vihar in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

18-member working group to improve party's image': BJP

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, AUG. 8

Gearing up for the municipal polls to be held after 18 months in the national capital, Delhi BJP has decided to form an 18-member working group or committee to suggest works to be done to improve the party's image among the electorate and to counter AAP.

BJP national vice president and city unit in-charge Shyam Jaju told this newspaper that the working group will be led by three senior party leaders and include five senior members each from the party ruled three municipal corporations.

The names of the three leaders will be announced soon as well as the names of mayor, deputy mayor, chairman and deputy chairman of the standing committee, and Leader of the House of the three corporations.



Shyam Jaju

Mr Jaju said that the corporation is doing lots of good and providing civic service on a day to day basis and this working group will focus on suggesting value addition to works done for improving perception and image makeover.

BJP, which is ruling the civic bodies for three consecutive terms, is facing severe criticism from AAP for poor civic infrastructure and corruption in the municipal corporations.

Recently, BJP ruled North Corporation threatened to file defamation case against AAP MLA

Raghav Chadha and Atishi Marlena for labelling baseless allegations of corruption.

In the last civic elections in 2017, BJP won for the third consecutive time by winning 181 of the 272 municipal wards in the city. The AAP managed to win in around 50 wards. The next election of the municipal corporations is due in April 2022.

The AAP, in recent times, has been quite vocal in raising civic issues and attacking the BJP for its alleged failures in ruling the three municipal corporations. AAP leaders have been slamming the municipal corporations over a range of issues including corruption, taxes, management of cowsheds (gaushalas), and civic amenities.

In view of the approaching corporation elections, the AAP has also announced restructuring of its Delhi unit.

Get compost plant fixed or shut it down: CM to NDMC

New Delhi, Aug. 8: Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday visited Gole Market area in his New Delhi

Assembly constituency and directed New Delhi Municipal Council officials to fix the problems being faced by the locals including a smelly compost plant.

Mr Kejriwal directed the New Delhi Municipal Council officials to solve the problem of stench emanating from the plant within 10 days or shut it down, said a Delhi government statement.

The chief minister visited the plant at sector 4 of the Gole Market area and the residents complained that there was a menace of flies and mosquitoes due to it.

"The chief minister has given a deadline of 10 days to the New Delhi Municipal Council officials to ensure cleanliness in the area and said that if the problem is not addressed by August 20, the plant will be shut down," said the statement.

Aam Aadmi supremo Arvind Kejriwal also planted a medicinal sapling in a park and met members of the resident welfare association in the area.

He directed officials to expedite work to solve problems of drinking water, power cuts, and non-pruning of trees as listed by the locals, said the statement.

— PTI

Gautam Buddh Nagar's Covid total reaches 5,868

Noida, Aug. 8: Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar on Saturday reported 65 fresh Covid cases, taking the district's case-load to 5,868, official data showed. Thirty-one more patients were discharged since Friday, according to the data released by the UP Health Department for a 24-hour period.

So far, 4,888 patients have recovered from Covid in Gautam Buddh Nagar, the second highest among districts in UP after Lucknow (6,293), it showed.

The number of active Covid cases stands at 937 and deaths at 43.

The mortality rate among coronavirus patients is 0.743 per cent, according to official statistics. The recovery rate of patients dropped slightly

to 83.29 per cent from 83.65 per cent on Friday, 83.26 per cent on Thursday, 82.72 per cent on Wednesday and 82.95 per cent on Tuesday.

Gautam Buddh Nagar stands 12th on the list of districts in the state in terms of active cases. The maximum active cases are in Lucknow (5,640), followed by Kanpur Nagar (4,634), Varanasi (2,098), Allahabad (1,931), Bareilly (1,679), Gorakhpur (1,416), Jaunpur (1,127), Aligarh (1,200), Ballia (1,087), Ghaziabad (1,045) and Azamgarh (963), according to the data.

There were 46,177 active cases across Uttar Pradesh, while the death toll rose to 2,028 with 47 fatalities since Friday.

— PTI



ASHA workers stage a protest demanding permanency in employment and increase in wages outside Mini Secretariat in Gurugram on Saturday.

— PTI

ELECTRIC VEHICLE POLICY

AAP govt hopes 50% of Delhi's 2-wheelers will be electric by '23

New Delhi, Aug. 8: The Delhi government's new electric vehicle policy envisages incentives to cut to 50 per cent by March 2023 fleet of petrol-powered two-wheelers used by delivery service providers in the city.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who launched the Delhi Electric Vehicle Policy on Friday, sought the cooperation of all stakeholders in implementing it.

"I am glad Delhi's EV policy has been well received by all stakeholders. It was prepared after wide-ranging consultations spanning over a period of more than 2 years. Now, I seek everyone's cooperation in successfully implementing it," he tweeted on Saturday.

It is expected that the incentives will encourage delivery service providers



like those engaged in food delivery, e-commerce logistics and courier services to switch to using electric two-wheelers, the EV policy stated.

"To ensure the switch happens in a time-bound manner, all delivery service providers shall be expected to convert 50 per cent of their fleet operating in Delhi to electric by March 31, 2023, and 100 per cent by March 31, 2025," it said.

The delivery service providers who commit to achieving these targets will be eligible for financial support from the Delhi Finance Corporation (DFC), according to the policy for

the two-wheeler segment.

Two-thirds of new vehicle registrations in Delhi comprise two-wheelers, with the most popular segments being motorcycles between 110-125 cc and scooters between 90-125 cc.

"Any attempt at electrification of Delhi's vehicle fleet needs to address these segments to achieve significant reduction in air pollution," the policy said.

Ride-hailing service providers will be allowed to operate electric two-wheeler taxis, subject to operating within the guidelines to be issued by the transport department of the Delhi government, it said. The demand generation incentives for two-wheelers offered under the policy will be based on battery capacity (energy content measured in kWh) used in vehicles.

— PTI

New Delhi, Aug. 8: The Delhi government sent notices to over 5,500 companies for not filing tax returns on Friday.

The government is also preparing a list of tax defaulters, it said in a statement.

"Nine sectors, including e-commerce, insurance and financial services, were not affected by the Covid pandemic, but around 935 companies in these sectors have paid zero tax and 2,017 have paid 50 per cent tax," Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, who also holds the charge of the finance department, said. The AAP government will strictly scrutinise the reasons behind these companies not filing tax returns, he added.

An analysis has found that the government has received around ₹2,015 crore less tax compared to the corresponding period last year. In 2019, it had collected around ₹5,792 crore

▶ **9 SECTORS**, including e-commerce, insurance and financial services, were not affected by the Covid pandemic, but around 935 companies in these sectors have paid zero tax and 2,017 have paid 50 per cent tax

in tax returns, but from January to March this year, the tax collection has been only ₹3,777 crore, the statement said.

The city government is working round the clock to increase its revenue, which will help it take up various development and pandemic-related works, it added. In a review of the tax collection of the last quarter, it was found that 10,800 companies registered under the GST (Goods and Services Tax) have either paid no tax or lesser tax to the Delhi government, the statement said.

"The Delhi government has initiated action against these companies

and notices were sent on Friday to 5,584 companies under GSTR Act 3A for not filing tax returns and VAT notices to 36 companies for not filing tax returns," it said.

Mr Sisodia has directed the Dialogue and Development Commission (DDC) of Delhi to conduct a detailed study to improve the revenue base in Delhi, the statement said.

In a bid to improve Delhi's revenue deficit situation, the trade and taxes department of the government, under directions from Sisodia, has started analysing the return-filing status of the taxpayers registered under the GST.

The deputy chief minister held a meeting with the officials of the department, where it was informed that around 15,000 taxpayers were analysed and nearly 970 of them had not filed returns for 2020-21 from January to March, the statement said.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Cong RS MP to lose Punjab cops security

Chandigarh: The Punjab government on Saturday decided to withdraw the state police security given to Congress Rajya Sabha MP Partap Singh Bajwa, citing that he virtually faced no threat. The decision has come days after Bajwa and another Congress Rajya Sabha MP, Shamsher Singh Dullo, sought a probe by the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate into the alleged illegal liquor trade in the state following the hooch tragedy that claimed over 100 lives. The state Congress unit on Friday had written to its central high command recommending their expulsion for anti-party activities. Mr Bajwa on the other hand demanded immediate removal of CM Amarinder Singh and Punjab Congress president Sunil Jakhar in the interest of the party and said that if they are not removed, the party will be obliterated. — PTI

Murmu takes charge as new CAG

New Delhi: Girish Chandra Murmu has assumed office as the Comptroller and Auditor General of India from August 8, 2020, an official statement said on Saturday. Earlier in the morning, the former Jammu and Kashmir Lt. Governor was sworn in as the Comptroller and Auditor General at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Mr Murmu made and subscribed to the oath of office before President Ram Nath Kovind, according to a Rashtrapati Bhavan statement. A former bureaucrat, Murmu is a 1985-batch IAS officer of Gujarat cadre. His tenure as the new CAG will be up to November 20, 2024. He succeeds Rajiv Mehri, who demitted office on Friday, the office of the CAG said. As a constitutional functionary, the CAG is primarily entrusted with the responsibility of auditing the accounts of the central and state governments. — PTI

BSF kills Pakistan 'intruder in Barmer

New Delhi: A Pakistani infiltrator was killed by the Border Security Force on Saturday along the India-Pakistan International Border in Rajasthan's Barmer district, officials said. "BSF troops observed a Pakistani intruder who crossed the IB and attempted to sneak over the fence. He was challenged but he still crossed the fence and ran towards the other side." "Troops fired upon him and he hid behind a bush, but was found dead during search of the area," the BSF said. The incident took place around 1 am at the Bakhasar area along the border, they said. The BSF patrol also saw "10 to 15 torch light flashes and heard shouting from the Pakistan side." The BSF is on high alert in view of the forthcoming Independence Day. — PTI

Guj: 7-year-old girl killed by leopard

Dahod (Guj): A seven-year-old girl was mauled to death by a leopard in Dahod district of Gujarat, a forest department official said on Saturday. The incident took place at Kantu village in Dhanpur tehsil on Friday evening, he said. The leopard attacked Dholki Samsubhai Bhuria when she stepped out of the house to wash hands before dinner, said the official of Vasiya Dungri forest range. The animal dragged the child into the forest for about half a kilometre before leaving her and escaping, he said. She was rushed to a nearby hospital where she was declared brought dead. Efforts are being made to capture the leopard by setting a cage-trap, the official added. — PTI

Bengal allows intl charter flights

Kolkata: Easing restrictions, the West Bengal government decided to allow international charter flights carrying Indian nationals with Covid-negative certificates to land at airports in the state, a senior official said on Saturday. The restrictions on Vande Bharat Mission flights will, however, continue, he said. The state government has written to the ministry of external affairs in this connection. The state government has decided that presently only charter flights carrying stranded Indian nationals from abroad having a negative test report may land at airports. — PTI

■ 'Political leaders corrupt, not a single soul cried over arrests'

J&K chief secy kicks off row

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, AUG. 8

Jammu and Kashmir chief secretary B.V.R. Subrahmanyam's remarks that its political leaders were "corrupt" and, therefore, not a "single soul had cried" over their detention in August last year has drawn flak from various political parties of the erstwhile state. They have accused him of contravening service rules and breaching propriety.

The CS had on Friday while speaking to a group of visiting media persons here said, "J&K was a broken state and there was no system in place due to years of mis-governance, corruption and unbelievable levels of fraud committed by leaders of mainstream parties and separatist organizations." He had added that, therefore, "not a single soul had cried" over their detention on August 5 last year when the state was stripped of its special status and split up into two Union Territories.

He claimed that J&K was "a big ponzi scheme," when he was sent here in June 2018 and was asked by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, "Go, clean up the administration, rebuild it and hand over the 'amanat' (precious possession) to the local people."

Reacting sharply to his remarks, People's Democratic Party (PDP) said that the CS has committed "gross abuse" of civil service rules and asked him "If no one sheds a tear for them why are the leaders jailed under PSA (Public Safety Act)?" It termed Mr. Subrahmanyam's remarks as "uncalled for and utterly flagitious".

The PDP accused him of having come to J&K "with a colonial mindset and being the chief executioner of RSS" in the erstwhile state. "It is ironic that he is finding fault with the entire population of J&K while running the most



A policeman clicks a photo of truck drivers as the security has been enhanced ahead of the Independence Day at the entry point of Jammu on Saturday. — PTI

■ J&K was a broken state and there was no system in place due to years of mis-governance, corruption and unbelievable levels of fraud.

— B.V.R. Subrahmanyam, J&K CS

corrupt administration that the state has ever witnessed. He is, in fact, heading a cabal of officers who are affiliated with RSS and are enforcing their agenda in Kashmir. IAS has never stooped to this low".

The PDP alleged, "His only fame to glory is establishing a culture of impunity, polarised administration, systematic sidelining of local officers, fragmenting of bureaucracy on feudal lines and perpetuating the quid pro quo culture of rewarding incompetence. This is the part of the RSS campaign to destroy the identity of Kashmir and they are now attributing criminal charges on almost everybody in Kashmir in the name of terrorism, separatism and corruption."

J&K: LeT's financing racket busted, 6 held

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, AUG. 8

Jammu and Kashmir police on Saturday claimed that it has busted a financing network of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) after arresting six of its operatives. "The group was planning something big and spectacular," a senior police officer claimed.

Inspector General of Police (Jammu range), Mukesh Singh, identified the accused as Mudasir Farooq Bhat, Tauqeer Ahmad Bhat, Asif Bhat, Khalid Latif Bhat, Gazi Iqbal and Tariq Hussain Mir. He told reporters in winter capital that some time ago the police authorities received information that a "terror financing network" is operating in Jammu following which J&K police counterinsurgency Special Operations Group (SOG) detained Mudasir Farooq, a resident of Doda district, for questioning. "After it was established that he was associated

with a LeT financing network he was formally arrested," he said.

The police officer claimed that the police confiscated a tiffin box containing ₹150,000 on July 19 and that during further investigations and interrogation of Mudasir it was revealed that five more persons are also part of this group. They too were subsequently arrested and a case has been registered against them under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Mr Singh claimed that all the accused were working for Mohammad Amin Bhat alias Haroon alias Khubeb, also a resident of Doda "who is an LeT cadre trained in Pakistan in 1997 and is currently operating from that country".

The IGP said, "After being imparted arms training in Pakistan in 1997, Haroon returned to Doda where he was involved in LeT's terror activities. He then went back to Pakistan in 2006.

PM will also release ₹17,000 crore to 8.5 crore farmers PM to launch ₹1L cr agri funds today

New Delhi, Aug. 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Sunday launch a financing facility of ₹1 lakh crore under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund. He will also release the sixth instalment of funds of ₹17,000 crore to 8.5 crore farmers under the PM-KISAN scheme, an official statement said on Saturday.

The virtual event will be witnessed by lakhs of farmers and cooperatives across the country.

Union agriculture and farmers' welfare minister Narendra Singh Tomar will also be present.

The Union Cabinet had approved the Central

Entrepreneurs of N-E to get 'permanent market links'

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, AUG. 8

The North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFI) has embarked upon an ambitious plan to facilitate "marketplace" to entrepreneurs of MSME sectors facing challenges in the region due to pandemic situation or any other reasons in the northeast states.

Informing that facility that the NEDFI intends to create will be of help especially for those entrepreneurs who are located away from Guwahati, the deputy general manager of the NEDFI, Mr Ashim Kumar Das said that the product categories would include handloom and handicraft items, non-perishable food products as well as MSME products.

Pointing out that the facility would be on the pattern of the NEDFI Haat Showroom, he said that the selection of the products would be done on the basis of product quality, shelf life, space requirement, market demand, etc.

Apart from existing entrepreneurs, the self-help groups (SHGs) and co-operatives belonging to NER will be able to avail this facility. He said that the initiative would help in creation of new entrepreneurs too, especially to those women groups or individuals who are producing products at home and are looking for an opportunity to showcase them in a proper marketing platform.

The products will be displayed in a permanent mode and hence unlike an exhibition, the participants need not to spend on stall rent, travel and accommodation. In case an entrepreneur wants to participate in other events, they will have the liberty to take back the products.

Rahul slams govt over Asha health workers protest

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 8

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday hit out at the Centre over the ASHA health workers' strike demanding better service conditions and benefits, saying the government was "mute" already, but now maybe "blind and deaf" also.

"ASHA workers take health protection to homes across the country. They are truly health warriors, but today they are forced to go on strike for their own rights," Mr Gandhi tweeted in Hindi.

"The government was mute already, but now maybe blind and deaf also," the former Congress president said tagging a media report about workers under the ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist), anganwadi, and National Health Mission being on a two-day nationwide strike from Friday.

The two-day nationwide strike by almost 6 lakh ASHA workers has been called by central trade unions against the Centre for not providing ade-



Rahul Gandhi

quate assistance — lack of safety equipment, delay in pittance — amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Asha workers have played a significant role in contact-tracing, carrying out surveys and organising awareness schemes for the coronavirus in India.

They want better and timely pay, and a legal status that ensures minimum wages, to sustain their work of helping Indian officials track down high-risk contacts of Covid-19 patients across slums and hard-to-reach rural parts of the country.

Losing the ASHAs would not only threaten India's virus-containment effort, but also impact the other essential health services they provide to rural households that range from child vaccinations to tuberculosis control.

Jaipur police told to probe complaint against phone-tapping 'rumours'

Jaipur, Aug. 8: Rajasthan DGP Bhupendra Singh on Saturday instructed the Jaipur police to investigate the complaint lodged against the rumours that phone numbers of six MLAs holed up in a Jaisalmer hotel are being tapped, according to a statement.

The DGP said the information is "utterly baseless, false and misleading" and asked Jaipur Police Commissioner Anand Srivastava to take immediate action in this regard, the statement said.

Amid a political crisis triggered by the revolt of dissident Congress leader

Sachin Pilot against chief minister Ashok Gehlot, the Congress had shifted the MLAs backing the CM to the Jaisalmer's Suryagarh hotel, accusing the BJP of the bid to topple its government in the state.

On Friday, it was claimed in a message circulated on WhatsApp that phone numbers of six MLAs lodged in the Jaisalmer hotel are being tapped. The message was circulated with a list of phone numbers. The DGP in the statement clarified that the Rajasthan Police did not tap the phone number of any MLA, neither in the past nor in present. — PTI

CBI to look into financial dealings of Sushant, Rhea

Investigative agency to get documents from ED

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 8

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), probing Sushant Singh Rajput death case, is all set to collect crucial documents related to four bank accounts of the late actor from the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Sources said, "It is suspected that money from two of the four bank accounts belonging to actor Sushant Singh was transferred to his friend, Rhea Chakraborty." The ED, which is also probing money laundering case involving Sushant Singh's death, has collected certain documents related to bank accounts of the late actor; sources said, adding that the CBI sleuths will soon take possession of those documents. Rajput was found dead in his apartment in Mumbai's Bandra on June 14. The Mumbai Police, which is investigating the case, said that the actor died by suicide.

Rajput's father, K.K. Singh, had last month lodged a complaint with the Bihar Police against Rhea Chakraborty, her family members and six others for abetment to suicide of his son and fraud. Mr Singh had accused Chakraborty, of having befriended his son in May 2019 with the intention of furthering her own career.

The father also wanted a police investigation to ascertain where the ₹15 crore, which he claimed was deposited in a bank account held by Rajput, had been transferred.

The CBI on Thursday registered an FIR against Rhea Chakraborty, Indrajit Chakraborty, Sandhya Chakraborty, Showik Chakraborty, Samuel Miranda, Shruti Modi and others involved in the case, officials said. It took over probe from Bihar Police.

Meanwhile, Rajput's father met Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Saturday.



Sushant Singh Rhea Chakraborty

■ SOURCES said, "It is suspected that money from two of the four bank accounts belonging to actor Sushant Singh was transferred to his friend, Rhea Chakraborty." Rajput was found dead in his Mumbai apartment on June 14.

Will act as per SC orders, says Maharashtra mantri

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, AUG. 8

Despite an FIR filed by the CBI in connection with Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government on Saturday said that the case is still with the Mumbai police as the matter is subjudice in the Supreme Court, which will hear the matter on August 11. After the decision of the apex court, the state will decide its next course of action, said state home minister Anil Deshmukh adding that the Mumbai police is probing the case very professionally.

A senior official of the state government, requesting anonymity, said, "We

have been apprised that Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh is closely monitoring this case". The state government is in no mood to hand over the case to CBI, he added.

"Mumbai Police is investigating the case in a professional manner. How the investigation moves forward will depend on the order of the SC which will hear the matter on August 11. We will move ahead as per the directions of the Supreme court," said Mr Deshmukh.

Rajput's girlfriend and budding actress Rhea Chakraborty had moved the SC seeking transfer of the FIR, accusing her of abetting Rajput's suicide at his Mumbai residence.

Actress releases text messages in her support

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 8

In a bid to support her claims, Rhea Chakraborty, girlfriend of late Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput on Saturday put out some text messages exchanged between them and gratitude notes, which she claimed were written by Rajput. Along with this, she also uploaded a picture on social media of the 34-year-old actor's water bottle stating that these three things were the only property of Rajput that were in

her possession.

During the ED interrogation, Chakraborty claimed that the 500 sqft residential property in Khar (east) was bought using her money and that she had not taken any monetary help from Rajput. The ED has not found any direct bank transaction between the two actors and the details of other accounts is now being checked. The probe entails allegations by Rajput's father of Chakraborty taking away ₹15 crore from the deceased actor.

Covid phobia: Villagers shun body of Odisha youth for 15 hrs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR, AUG. 8

The body of a 25-year-old youth was found lying at his home in a village at Konark in Odisha for more than 15 hours as relatives and villagers stayed away suspecting that he had been infected with Covid-19, reports said on Saturday.

The youth identified as Bichitra Rout had died on Wednesday at Mankaragoradi village in Odisha's Puri district and his family was forced to arrange for personal protective equipment (PPE) kits and other protective gear before the body could be taken to the cremation ground in the outskirts of the village. The reports added that none of the villagers was ready to carry the body on their shoulders for fear of contracting the disease. Finally the body was carried to the local cremation ground in a cycle cart the next day.

The last rites were performed on Thursday evening, the officials said.



Municipality workers and family members being sanitised after cremating a person who died of Covid-19 during Unlock 3.0 in Karad, Maharashtra, on Saturday. — PTI

Odisha cop confines woman in govt quarters

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR, AUG. 8

The Odisha police on Saturday faced an embarrassment after a 25-year-old woman alleged that she was raped by a Subedar of the 7th Battalion of the Odisha State Armed Police for over four months.

The woman in her complaint lodged at Capital Police Station alleged that Subedar Debasis Swain on March 28 called her to his government quarters in

the pretext of engaging her as a maid and immediately confined her to a room there. "Subedar Debasis Swain called me to his official quarters in Unit 1 here on March 28 for domestic work with a monthly salary of ₹4,000. The cop told me that his wife and children have gone to their village due to lockdown. Hearing this, I told him that I will come to work once his wife and children return from the village. But he immediately con-

fined me to a room in his quarters and threatened to kill me if I made any attempt to escape," the woman told reporters after lodging the police complaint. She added that the cop used to rape her at gunpoint everyday after returning from duty. "On August 1, the Subedar dropped me near Xavier Square in Dharmasala area of Jaipur district and threatened me of my life if I disclosed the matter before anyone," she said.

SHORT TAKES

Body art: Activist Rehana surrenders before Kerala cops

Kochi: Controversial activist Rehana Fathima surrendered before the police here on Saturday, a day after the Supreme Court dismissed her anticipatory bail plea in cases against her for circulating a video in which she was semi-nude, allowing her minor children to paint on her body. The police said Fathima presented herself before the South Police station under the Kochi commissionerate this afternoon. The activist will be produced before the magistrate court here after completing formalities of her arrest, they said. The allegation against Fathima, who made an attempt to enter the hill shrine of Lord Ayyappa in Sabarimala in 2018, is that she asked her children, a boy and girl aged 14 and 8 respectively to paint on her semi-nude body. The video was shot by her and uploaded on social media. After the video was found by the cyber dome of Kochi Police, a case was registered against the activist in June, for offences punishable under various sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act), Information Technology Act, 2000 and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. — PTI

Dutt admitted to hospital, says he tested negative

Mumbai: Actor Sanjay Dutt, who has been admitted to a city hospital here after he complained of breathlessness, on Saturday said that he is currently under “medical observation”. The 61-year-old star said at the Lilavati Hospital, he was tested for Covid-19 that turned out to be negative. He also assured his fans that he is “doing well”. “Just wanted to assure everyone that I’m doing well. I’m currently under medical observation and the Covid-19 report is negative as well,” Sanjay said in a brief statement posted on Twitter and Instagram. “With the help and care of the excellent doctors, nurses and staff at Lilavati hospital, I should be home in a day or two. Thank you for your well wishes and blessings. Please stay safe, everyone,” he added. His sister, Congress leader Priya Dutt said the actor was taken to the hospital in the evening for a “regular check-up”. “He was admitted to Lilavati Hospital around 4.30-5 pm for a regular check-up as he was feeling a little breathless. They did a Covid-19 test and the result was negative,” she said. — PTI

Teen gets bail on condition of social media sabbatical

Bhopal: The Madhya Pradesh high court’s Gwalior bench granted bail to an 18-year-old student with a condition that he will have to take a two-month sabbatical from social media for “digital detoxification”. A single bench of Justice Anand Pathak directed Harendra Tyagi, a high school pass out, to submit a monthly report about his “digital detoxification” at the police station concerned. The court on Tuesday also ordered him to complete his studies for the Pre-Agriculture Test (PAT). The applicant’s counsel Sushant Tiwari told PTI that Tyagi was arrested after he had ventured out of his home during the coronavirus-induced lockdown to buy some tobacco and got into a fight with the shopkeeper in Bhind district. The accused, who has been in custody since June 24, has been charged with voluntarily causing hurt and criminal intimidation among other sections of the Indian Penal Code. Tiwari informed the court that his client had learnt a lesson the hard way and considering the Covid-19 pandemic, the case must be considered sympathetically. After hearing the arguments, Justice Pathak granted bail to the accused with some conditions. The court directed that the accused will have to exit all social media groups and he should not be present on any social media platform for two months for “digital detoxification”. — PTI

Shaken, stunned, crash survivors recall horror

Locals rush in to save shocked passengers

Kozhikode, Aug. 8: It all happened in a flash. Or so it seemed. Just when they thought they had reached home, their plane skidded off the runway at the airport here, breaking into two as it fell into a 35-foot gorge in pelting rain, survivors of the crash said on Saturday. The 184 passengers on board the Air India Express plane from Dubai that crashed on Friday evening had waited a long time to get tickets on the repatriation flight, part of the Centre’s Vande Bharat Mission to bring back Indians stranded abroad in the coronavirus pandemic. For some, the homecoming never happened. Eighteen people were killed, including the two pilots. For others, the screams of their fellow passengers trapped in the twisted metal, the injuries, the close brush with death and the interminable wait to be rescued are part of a nightmare they may take a long time to wake up from. Dozens of local residents rushed to the airport as they heard a “terrible thud” after the crash. They brought shocked passengers out of the Boeing 737 even before first responders could reach the airport. “Small kids were trapped under the seats and it was such a distressing sight. When we reached there some were deplaned,” a local resident said. “Many of them were seriously injured. Legs were broken... My hands and shirt were soaked in the blood of the injured persons,” he added. People from Kozhikode, Malappuram and even Kannur thronged blood banks in various hospitals to donate blood for the injured. All this happened within minutes of the hospital authorities sending

▶ **THE FOUR** cabin crew were among the 172 people who escaped with injuries. Officials said 149 people were admitted to various hospitals and the condition of 16 is serious.

out an SOS for blood requirement including that of rare groups.

As they recovered from their injuries, some shaken and traumatised, others still coming to terms with what had happened, there were those who said there was much to be thankful for.

One of the survivors, Ramshad, is injured but his wife Sufaira and four-year-old daughter Saidasherin escaped without any serious wounds.

“We did not realise what really happened other than the fact that the flight was shaking,” said Ramshad, from Vatakara near Kozhikode, grateful that his family was spared. Ashraf, who belongs to east Kozhikode, now under treatment at the Medical College Hospital here, said he is yet to recover from the shock.

Recalling the frantic moments, another survivor said people jumped out into the wooded darkness in the rain from the emergency door. “As soon the flight crashed, emergency door was opened and people jumped out to safety,” the survivor said.

Vijaymohan, who escaped with minor injuries and is recovering in a hospital, said he thought it was a nightmare, unsure whether he was dreaming it all or living through it. “I thought it was a nightmare. I could see heaps of twisted metal spread around when I opened my eyes after the initial shock of the impact,” said Vijaymohan. — PTI

Kearal govt to give ₹10L to kin victims

Kozhikode: The Kerala government announced ₹10 lakh compensation to the families of those who died when an ill-fated Air India Express flight veered off the runway while attempting to land at the Karipur international airport here. The CM also said out of the 18 who died, 14 are adults and four are children. Currently, 149 people are in various hospitals of Malappuram and Kozhikode. — PTI

Vijayan praises ‘fast response’ of locals

Kozhikode: Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan praised the “fast response” of the local people and officials in being the first to reach the aircraft crash site to rescue passengers, braving inclement weather and Covid-19 fears. Mr Vijayan, who is at Kozhikode to visit the injured, said in a tweet that the fast response of the local people and the officials made all the difference. — PTI

A ‘back home’ last selfie goes viral

Kozhikode: A selfie taken by Sharufudheen Pillassery, along with his wife and three-year-old daughter in PPE kits inside the Air India Express flight from Dubai that crashed here, has gone viral as reports emerged that the journey turned out to be his last trip. Before take off, Pillassery had posted the selfie, on his Facebook page with the caption “Back Home”. However, he did not make it. — PTI



Locals wade through a waterlogged street following heavy rainfall in Kottayam district, Kerala, on Saturday. — PTI

Death toll in Kerala landslide rises to 26

Thiruvananthapuram/Idukki (Kerala), Aug. 8: The death toll in the massive landslide that destroyed a row of 20 houses of tea estate workers in the high range Idukki district of Kerala on Saturday climbed to 26 with 11 more bodies being recovered from the debris, as efforts were on amid continuing rains to locate those missing.

In his press meet at Thiruvananthapuram, chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said 11 bodies were recovered from the site of the landslide at Rajamala while three are yet to be identified.

“This is in addition to the 15 bodies recovered yesterday. This brings the death toll in the landslide

at the tea plantation to 26. Rescue operations are continuing at Rajamala in full swing.

An amount of ₹5 lakh was announced yesterday as emergency assistance for those who lost their lives. “The government will bear the medical treatment expenses of those injured in the disaster,” Mr Vijayan said.

He said 78 people were staying at the spot where the tragedy occurred.

While 12 were rescued, 26 bodies were found, he said, adding that efforts were on to find the rest.

Mr Vijayan said the state will support the families of the victims to enable them return to their normal lives. — PTI

At least 5 Indian airports have tabletop runways

New Delhi, Aug. 8: Constructed on elevated terrains and mostly having little space for last minute maneuver, tabletop runways at times pose challenges for pilots while landing their aircraft.

And Air India Express planes have crashed at least twice on such runways in little over a decade. At least five airports, including at Kozhikode where an Air India Express aircraft crashed on Friday, have tabletop runways. Tabletop runways are constructed on hilly or elevated terrains.

Also, there could be low lying areas adjacent to such runways and there could be gorges at the end of such runways.

Airports Authority of India (AAI) chairman Arvind Singh told PTI that tabletop runways are there at four airports operated by it. They are at Kozhikode, Mangalore (Karnataka), Shimla (Himachal Pradesh) and Pakyong (Sikkim).

The Lengpui airport in Mizoram, which is with the state government, also has a tabletop runway. State-owned AAI oper-

AirAsia jet aborts take off at Ranchi airport after bird hit

New Delhi, Aug. 8: An AirAsia India aircraft departing for Mumbai on Saturday morning aborted its take-off at Ranchi airport after encountering a bird hit, said the airline spokesperson.

This incident occurred a day after an Air India Express flight from Dubai with 190 people onboard overshoot the runway at Kozhikode airport in rainy conditions and went down 35 feet into a slope before breaking up into two pieces, killing at least 18 people.

“AirAsia India aircraft VT-HKG operating from Ranchi to Mumbai as flight 15-632 encountered a bird hit during scheduled departure at 11:50 hrs,

▶ **Airport director Vinod Sharma said that after the bird hit, all the passengers were deboarded and given snacks**

today, 8th August 2020,” stated the airline spokesperson.

The pilot aborted take-off and the aircraft was being inspected, the spokesperson said, adding that the flight was scheduled to depart once the aircraft is cleared for operations.

However, later during the day, the spokesperson said another aircraft VT-JRT from Kolkata is being made available as an alternative to ferry guests from Ranchi to Mumbai.

The spokesperson

informed all its passengers are being attended to and served refreshments by its guest services staff at the Birsra Munda airport. “AirAsia India prioritises the safety of our guests and crew and regrets the inconvenience caused on account of this delay,” the spokesperson said.

Birsra Munda Airport director Vinod Sharma said that after the bird hit, all the passengers were deboarded and given snacks.

The plane was brought to the bay and thoroughly checked, he said. At 3.30 pm, the plane was to take off again, but then sparks were noticed and it was once again brought to the bay. — PTI

at Mangalore, Kozhikode and Lengpui.

“Because of the undulating terrain and constraints of space, these airfields require extra skill and caution while carrying out flight operations. “The hazard of under-shooting and overshooting, in particular, can lead to grave situations, as was the case in this incident,” the report had said.

It had also said that tabletop runways have a problem of access roads around the airfield, which may need to be used in case of aircraft accidents. — PTI



Tulsi Ram (centre), father of Air India Express co-pilot Akhilesh Kumar who died during a crash at Kozhikode International Airport on Friday night, along with relatives at their residence in Mathura on Saturday. — PTI

Capt Sathe survived crash in 1990s, but returned to flying

Mumbai, Aug. 8: Captain Deepak Sathe, pilot of the Air India Express flight who died along with 17 others after the plane crashed at Kerala’s Kozhikode airport, had survived an air crash in the early 1990s when he was in the Air Force and was hospitalised for six months, his cousin said.

Sathe had suffered multiple injuries on his skull in that incident, but due to his strong will power and passion he cleared the test and started flying again, he said.

The Air India Express flight from Dubai with 190 on board overshoot the tabletop runway in Kozhikode airport in Kerala on Friday night while landing in heavy rains and fell into a valley 35 feet below and broke into two portions.

Captain Sathe, 58, who was the pilot-in-command and his co-pilot Akhilesh Kumar were among those who died in the incident.

Sathe was a former Wing Commander of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and had served at the force’s flight testing establishment.

His cousin, Nilesh Sathe, who is advisor finance at the National Highways Authority of India (NHAD), said in a Facebook post, “It’s hard to believe that Deepak Sathe, my friend more than my cousin, is no



— PTI

more. He was pilot of Air India Express carrying passengers from Dubai in ‘Vande Bharat Mission’, which skidded off the runway at Kozhikode International Airport yesterday night.”

“Deepak was an experienced aerial operator with 36 years of flying experience. A passout of NDA, topper in the 58th course and an awardee of ‘Sword of Honour’, Deepak served Indian Air Force for 21 years before joining as a Commercial Pilot with Air India in 2005. He called me just a week before and was jovial, as always.”

“When I asked him about the ‘Vande Bharat’ Mission, he was proud of bringing back our countrymen from Arab countries. I asked him, ‘Deepak, do

you carry empty Aircraft since those countries are not allowing entry of passengers?” He had replied, “Oh, No. We carry fruits, vegetables, medicines etc to these countries and never the aircraft flies to these countries empty.” That was my last conversation with him.

“He survived in air crash in early nineties when he was in the Air Force. He was hospitalised for 6 months for multiple skull injuries and nobody thought that he would fly again. But his strong will power and love for flying made him clear the test again. It was a miracle,” Sathe said.

According to him, Captain Sathe is survived by his wife and two sons, both passouts of IIT Bombay. — PTI

Opp. charges baseless: Mantri Issues red-flagged by DGCA in past addressed: Puri

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, AUG. 8

All issues such as excessive rubber deposits, water stagnation and cracks that were red-flagged by aviation regulator DGCA in the past were “addressed and rectified” by the Kozhikode airport operator, said aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Saturday in a series of late-night tweets while rejecting criticism from the Opposition.

He also assured that the findings of the enquiry being conducted into the crash-landing of the Air India Express flight at the Kozhikode airport would be made public, adding that the aircraft that had crashed was a Boeing 737-800 (narrow-bodied aircraft) and not a wide-bodied aircraft (about which questions had been raised from some quarters).

The minister’s statement came after various news reports stated that DGCA had issued a show cause notice to the director of the Kozhikode airport on July 11 last year after it found “various critical safety lapses” in different places, including the runway and the apron.

“Some of my colleagues in the political system have raised queries



Hardeep Singh Puri

regarding Kozhikode air accident without ascertaining facts. It is indeed a fact that several issues were routinely red flagged by DGCA, & were addressed by the airport operator. These pertain to excessive rubber deposits, water stagnation, cracks & other routine issues. The short point is that raising such concerns is the normal work of DGCA. DGCA also strictly ensures that these are complied with & rectified under all circumstances. This was done by the airport operator.”

“In case of Kozhikode accident, an enquiry has been ordered under Aircraft Act, black boxes of flight IX-1344 have been recovered. Findings of this investigation will be made public... As far as wide body aircraft are concerned, DGCA had carried out a thorough assessment & prescribed comprehensive mitigation measures,” he added.

THE ASIAN AGE

9 AUGUST 2020



Shashi Warriar

Off the beaten track

My first brush with a ‘Madras autowallah’

These days, when I have time on my hands, my mind drifts back to old times, and to surprises, of which there are many. Back in the 1970s, my elder brother went off to college, to a hostel and to what I thought was freedom. Envious, I nagged my parents into allowing me to go on a longish train ride from our home in Trivandrum to Madras, some twenty hours away by the metre-gauge line that was, in those days, the sole direct rail route between those cities.

My parents saw me off with ₹50/- for expenses, tickets both ways, instructions on what not to eat on the train, and written instructions on how to get to my cousin's place in Besant Nagar from Egmore railway station. Also, for emergency use, I had the phone number of a friend of Dad's, and one final instruction relayed from my Madras cousin: *Don't ever take an autorickshaw in Madras because the drivers are all cheats!*

The train left Trivandrum in the afternoon, and I managed to follow Mom's instructions on food until dinner-time, when I succumbed to temptation and polished off a fragrant but forbidden chicken biryani. The night was pleasant and I slept well enough, even though the berth was merely a plank, and the ride was bumpy as it always was on metre-gauge railway lines.

I came awake to sunlight, a queue for the toilets, which I wanted desperately to use, and the sight of fellow passengers packing their bags, preparing to get off. I asked one of them how long it would take to get to Madras, and he replied, "Less than ten minutes." No hope, evidently, of making it to the toilet before that. I asked him about the buses my cousin had written about, and he replied, "Oh! No problem. There's one every twenty minutes. You'll get to Besant Nagar in an hour."

That roiling stomach made an hour look like an eternity. Dad's colleague lived in Adyar. "What about Adyar?" I asked. "Is that closer?"

"Yes," he said. "About half the distance."

By now the train was drawing up at the platform and there was a surge to the door. Larger passengers loaded with luggage shoved me out of the way in their rush to get wherever they were going. Perhaps they, too, needed a toilet, I thought, and waited for my turn to step off the coach. Saving half an hour seemed important enough, I thought, to justify calling Dad's friend to ask if I could go straight to his place.

There were coin telephones in the course of the station. In those days the coin telephone system worked as follows: you got your coins ready and dialled the number you wanted to call. When the connection was made, you would be able to hear whatever the person you called said, but he or she wouldn't be able to hear you until the coin slotted into place. The phone wanted a ten-paisa coin, which I had, but what I didn't know was that it required a "new" or aluminium ten-paisa coin, not the steel ones I had. When I dialled Dad's friend, he couldn't hear me: all he knew was that some stranger was trying to get through to him.

I gave up after the second attempt and decided that my internal situation had now become an emergency, and so, against my cousin's emphatic advice, I took an auto, the first in a queue. The driver was a tall, lean, bare-footed man in an orange lungi and a khaki shirt, with frizzy hair, a drooping moustache, and red eyes. I distrusted him on sight, but since the queue was rigorously enforced, I had no choice.

When I got into the vehicle and tried to tell him where I wanted to go, we discovered that he knew just enough Malayalam and I knew just enough Tamil for us to communicate basics. I remembered Mom telling me that the auto fare to Besant Nagar would be eight to ten rupees. This being my first time alone in a strange city, I kept my eyes glued to the meter as, in a very short while, it went up to what I thought was ₹13. I swallowed, collected my scattered wits, and told the driver there was something wrong with the meter. He stopped and got out of the vehicle to look at the meter, and burst out laughing, saying that it was showing only ₹1.30... While I shrank back into the passenger seat, he resumed the ride, his mood vastly uplifted by my display of foolishness.

When we got to the Besant Nagar bus stop, I couldn't find the sheet of instructions I'd been given, and had no idea how to get where I wanted. My emergency was now compelling, and I needed to find my cousin's house before things broke loose. The driver saw that I was in doubt, and asked me where I wanted to go. I told him my cousin's name, that she lived somewhere in the neighbourhood, and I didn't know exactly where. He knew that I was a stranger, a kid, didn't know the language, and was in some kind of trouble. He parked his vehicle, and told me in simple Tamil to follow him. He asked a couple of passers-by where so-and-so lived, and, in a couple of minutes, found their street. As we entered it, I saw my cousin at a second floor balcony watching our progress... Jackpot!

There was just enough time to hand the driver a ten-rupee note before rushing up the staircase: I've never climbed four flights of stairs that fast, and I'll probably never forget the relief that followed. But the enduring memory is of that evil-looking auto man who turned out a gem...

Shashi Warriar has written fairy tales, thrillers, a semi-fictional biography, satires, and a love story. Besides writing, he teaches strategic communication at a business school.

Subhani



Jaishankar's new vision may face a reality check



K.C. Singh

Come September, external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's book *The India Way* will be out. His intention, stated on record, is to encourage "an honest conversation among Indians, without discouraging the world from eavesdropping". An excerpt published recently from the book's introduction outlines his worldview. It raises a number of interesting points.

First, serving foreign ministers generally avoid treatises on challenges and policy options of a government, constrained by the need for secrecy over real thought processes within a government. Henry Kissinger penned his four experience-based books — *White House Years* (1979), *Diplomacy* (1994), *On China* (2011) and *World Order* (2014) — after he left office. Similarly, other US secretaries of state like Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton have penned their thoughts only after retirement. Thus, unable to write with candour about the diplomatic choices before the Narendra Modi government, Mr Jaishankar has chosen to provide broad perspective on the evolving geopolitics. In any case, he realises that in the current politically surcharged atmosphere, when the public wants answers on how the government proposes to counter the Chinese intrusions, it is best to play professor.

He expounds that the bipolar world is now gone and we are headed towards "multipolarity and less multilateralism". He ignores 50 years of Indian foreign policy after Independence when the non-aligned movement was born to defy the bipolar world and did provide, however fitfully, a third leg. India's alliance of convenience with the Soviet Union in 1971 enabled it to stymie America's support for Pakistan, its treaty ally. France under then Presi-

dent Charles de Gaulle pulled French forces out of the Indian periphery. Two, delayed economic reforms. Three, the reluctance to espouse nuclear weapons, leaving India stranded between the signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the five nuclear weapon powers, with differential powers and obligations. Mr Jaishankar is right about the last point as India did have the knowhow and fissile material for a possible nuclear test before the 1967 cut-off date, which would have enabled it to sign the NPT as a nuclear weapon power. It has been speculated that after 1965 India-Pakistan war, PM Lal Bahadur Shastri may have authorised such a test had not he and Dr Homi Bhabha, the custodian of India's nuclear programme, died tragically within days of each other in January 1966. However, it must be contextualised that India was then in a defensive mode after the demoralising defeat in 1962 at Chinese hands and Jawaharlal Nehru's death in 1964.

Mr Jaishankar, in an article published recently, traces contemporary global dilemmas to differences over the "relationship between the State, politics, society, business, faith and the markets". This omnibus conclusion and his remark on Partition as India's strategic burden deserve a riposte. Ironically, the minister's own party would be the first to contradict him on Partition. Were roughly 400 million Muslims of Pakistan and Bangladesh to join India's Muslims in an imagined undivided India, the demographics would be the BJP's electoral nightmare. After attaining a dominant position in South Asia, following the 1971 victory, India's gains were frittered away as the nation went into a decade of internal strife, the Emergency, the rise of the Congress fam-

Prime Minister Modi handpicked Mr Jaishankar, first as foreign secretary, days after he handled President Barack Obama's visit to India in January 2015, by displacing an incumbent. Then he plucked him from retirement to make him external affairs minister. So, the book is meant to provide intellectual clothing to global convergence between right-wing populist leaders. Mr Jaishankar notes three seminal events constraining India's strategic options. One is Partition, which diminished India territorially and demographically,

enabling China to manipulate Pakistan and others in the Indian periphery. Two, delayed economic reforms. Three, the reluctance to espouse nuclear weapons, leaving India stranded between the signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the five nuclear weapon powers, with differential powers and obligations. Mr Jaishankar is right about the last point as India did have the knowhow and fissile material for a possible nuclear test before the 1967 cut-off date, which would have enabled it to sign the NPT as a nuclear weapon power. It has been speculated that after 1965 India-Pakistan war, PM Lal Bahadur Shastri may have authorised such a test had not he and Dr Homi Bhabha, the custodian of India's nuclear programme, died tragically within days of each other in January 1966. However, it must be contextualised that India was then in a defensive mode after the demoralising defeat in 1962 at Chinese hands and Jawaharlal Nehru's death in 1964.

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Partition didn't stymie India. It was a historical inevitability due to irreversible communal polarisation, exacerbated by Muslims' fear of marginalisation in a democracy.

ily heir, etc. Pakistan, on the other hand, got a lucky break with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, rekindling their US alliance and gaining protection for their clandestine nuclear weapons programme. Ignoring Pakistan's weapons programme was a strategic mistake. Thus, Partition didn't stymie India. It was a historical inevitability due to irreversible communal polarisation, exacerbated by Muslims' fear of marginalisation in a democracy. Mr Jaishankar's party is today proving those fears correct by their majoritarian agenda. The malaise afflicting India today is this uninhibited pursuit of the BJP's core agenda, in line with similar democratic regression towards illiberalism in many democracies like the United States, Brazil and others.

Foreign policy thus can't be conducted in isolation from domestic politics. Mr Jaishankar is in receipt of a bipartisan letter from the US Congress on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. If the November election produces a Joe Biden victory, and particularly if the Democrats capture both Houses, the Modi government's domestic politics will come under more scrutiny. President Barack Obama too had engaged the Modi government cautiously. He ended his 2015 state visit with a Siri Fort speech reminding India of its constitutional pledge to uphold the "dignity of the individual", respect for religious diversity and freedom of faith. The Modi government's second term has mainstreamed majoritarian politics, ranging from Ayodhya, the Ram Mandir to the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act and the abolition of Jammu and Kashmir's special status.

The lesson from the past is that a united India is a stronger India. An India distracted by partisan politics loses its edge, regionally and globally. Intellectual hair-splitting and bandying about of geopolitical terms cannot change that.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

LETTERS

KITE SALES CUT

Independence Day is synonymous with kite flying. Localities in Old Delhi, and north and north-east Delhi, vie for the title of best kite flyer in competitions held around the city this time of the year. Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, people are not stepping out of doors and being extra careful. This has crashed the sale of kites.

Sankar Paul

Chakdaha, West Bengal

DIRTY POLITICS

MY KUDOS to Republic TV and other news channels for investigating the deaths of actor Sushant Singh Rajput and his manager, Disha Sallan. The Mumbai police had refused to do a good job investigating these deaths. But thanks to the insistence of these channels, the CBI took up the investigation. Now we can sit back and watch them carry it out over the next several months. No news is not good news, and neither are bad economics and injustice. As a bonus, we will get to watch some dirty politics ahead of the Bihar election.

Jubel D'Cruz

Mumbai

MUNNAR TEA WORKERS

KERALA WAS hit by double tragedy on a black Friday. Several people died when an Air India flight crashed near Kozhikode airport. On the same day over 15 died and more than 50 went missing as rains triggered landslide near Munnar. The tea plantation workers of KDHPLE were affected. Most of these female workers are dalit migrants. They have the worst wages and bargaining power in the informal sector. Their plight has been ignored by the TV channels.

M.R. Jayanthi

Mumbai

HOCKEY PLAYERS ILL

IT SHOCKS US to learn that five hockey players, including captain Manpreet Singh, who reported for the national camp in Bengaluru, have tested positive for the coronavirus. All of them had recently returned to the SAI campus in the city after going on a month's break and could have contracted the virus while travelling from their hometowns. Though the quarantined athletes have not interacted with other athletes, the development may throw the training programme out of gear. Here's wishing the affected players a speedy recovery.

N.J. Ravi Chander

Bengaluru

FEMININE MYSTIQUE

WATCHING BERTRAND Blier's Oscar-winning 1978 film, *Get Out Your Handkerchiefs*, amid the semi-lockdown. This is a great contemplation on the myth and mystery of a woman. A man tries to set up his loving but otherwise unhappy wife with a different man thinking, wrongly, that he is the cause of her unhappiness. He factors in the other man's interest in her but he fails to take into account that she, in fact, does not like this man. Later he complains that it is impossible to truly understand a woman. The woman, on the other hand, finds in a teenager what she could not in both adults. Though it doesn't have all the answers, this movie provokes reflection and debate. Good art often does that.

Priyanka Mathur

Kolkata

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

When Somen Mitra shoved Amar Singh out of Kolkata

Miffed Uma turns up

The Ram Janmabhoomi temple *bhoomipujan* at Ayodhya was a grand affair where everything went as per plan. But behind the scenes was disquiet within both the BJP and the Congress. Uma Bharti, a key figure during 1980s-1990s Ram Janmabhoomi movement, first said she would stay away and then landed up on the banks of river Saryu. Uma was reportedly miffed that she was not formally invited at the first instance. The firebrand *sanyasin* has not been keeping well so the Covid-19 scare is said to have also played on her mind while initially declining to be there.

In the Congress, the leftist lobby worked hard to oppose Ram Janmabhoomi temple inauguration but pressure from party MPs worked. Rahul Gandhi took a nuanced position while Priyanka Gandhi, Amarinder Singh and Kamal Nath took a pro-temple stand. Nath organised *Hanuman Chaalisa* at his Bhopal residence and posted a picture of him in a saffron robe on twitter. Not to be left behind, Mani Shankar Aiyar wrote a newspaper article pro-

fessing Congress faith in secularism.

Pilot intractable

There are so signs of truce in the Rajasthan Congress. The Ashok Gehlot government has dropped its charges, rebel Sachin Pilot is reportedly still insisting upon the removal of Gehlot as chief minister. Peacemakers want Rahul, Sonia and Priyanka Gandhi to draft either Gehlot or Pilot into the AICC secretariat but both are unwilling. Rahul, who is set to return as AICC chief, is in particular opposed to the idea of jettisoning Gehlot as a pre-condition.

A quiet goodbye

It was a sad and quiet exit for Amar Singh who for most of his life remained boisterous and flamboyant. Defence minister Rajnath Singh, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Jayaprada were prominent persons who paid their respects at Singh's Chhattarpur farmhouse in Delhi minutes before his mortal

remains were consigned to flames. Amar's political journey began in Kolkata with Subrata Mukherjee and against Somen



By WAQYANAWIS

Mitra who died recently. During a Kolkata corporation election, the Amar-Somen animosity turned so intense that Amar had to flee Kolkata. He could only return to the city after giving an undertaking that he would not indulge in Kolkata's municipal politics. The initial setback in politics made Amar turn to the Birla and Bhartiya households that gave him a big foothold in Delhi.

Celluloid patriotism

Have you heard of a Patriotic Film Festival? Well, everything is possible in New India. The National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) is organising an online patriotic film festival as part of the Independence Day Celebrations 2020 by the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Shyam Benegal's 1996 *Gandhi Se Mahatma Tak*, Bimal Roy's 1944 acclaimed Bengali film *Udayar Pathay*, Mani Ratnam's Tamil hit *Roja* (1992) and Rajkumar Santoshi's 2002 drama, *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* are some

of the acclaimed films which can be watched on www.cinemasofindia.com.

Just good neighbours

Love in the time of Covid: Nanavati Hospital, Mumbai has been insisting that megastar Amitabh Bachchan is not a shareholder in Radiant Life Care, the private company that manages the hospital. However, an interesting development has come to light. Abhay Soi, the promoter and managing director of Radiant, and the Bachchans are soon going to be neighbours. Both families reportedly have bought apartments in the Uber luxury development Three Sixty West at Worli, which will be serviced by the Ritz Carlton Hotel chain. In the spirit of friendship and loving neighbourliness, we expect many more lyrical tweets in praise of the hospital from you know who.

The writer is a keen observer of the goings-on in backrooms of power

IN BRIEF

Russians fume over Governor's arrest

Moscow: Thousands of demonstrators gathered again Saturday in the major Russian Far East city of Khabarovsk to denounce the arrest of the region's governor a month ago. Sergei Furgal was arrested on July 9 on suspicion of involvement in murders and taken to jail in Moscow. The estimated 3,000 demonstrators protested the charges and want him returned to the city for trial. Furgal, who has been removed from his post, is a popular figure in the region bordering China about 6,100 kilometers (3,800 miles) east of Moscow. Since his arrest, daily demonstrations have been held in the city, with attendance peaking on weekends.

Indian man dies while rescuing kids

New York: A 29-year-old Sikh man died after he jumped into a river to rescue three children who were swept away in the US state of California, according to media reports. The man, identified as Manjeet Singh, was visiting Reedley Beach on Wednesday evening near his home in Fresno County when he saw the three children struggling in the Kings River, the Los Angeles Times reported on Friday. Two eight-year-old girls and a 10-year-old boy were playing in the river when they were pulled under a bridge by the current, Reedley Police Department commander Mark Ediger said.

800 rally over arrest of protest leader

Bangkok: Hundreds of demonstrators rallied in Thailand on Saturday, after police arrested two leading anti-government protest leaders in an apparent attempt to stifle growing political unrest. Around 800 demonstrators packed a concourse near a shopping mall in central Bangkok to hear speeches denouncing the arrests and call for Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha to resign. Tensions rose briefly as police officers moved in, telling the crowd they were only observing. They withdrew to a chorus of boos and chants for them to get out. After a period of relative calm in Thailand's fractious politics, the temperature is rising again with a wave of anti-government protests.

US kids, parents perform DIY tests

Washington: In a comfy suburb just outside Nashville, a young family swabs their noses twice a month in a DIY study seeking answers to some of the most vexing questions about the Coronavirus. How many U.S. children and teens are infected? How many kids who are infected show no symptoms? How likely are they to spread it to other kids and adults? "The bottom line is we just don't know yet the degree to which children can transmit the virus," said Dr Tina Hartert of Vanderbilt University, who is leading the government-funded study. Evidence from the US, China and Europe shows children are less likely to become infected with the virus than adults and also less likely to become seriously ill when they do get sick.

SCIENTISTS: COVID MAY HAVE LONGER INCUBATION TIME

Beijing, Aug. 8: The incubation period of Covid-19, which is the time after which those infected with the novel coronavirus start showing the first symptoms, could be as much as eight days — longer than previous estimates of four to five days — says a new study which involved the largest amount of patient samples to date in such an analysis. The research, published in the journal Science Advances, identified pre-symptomatic individuals at their time of departure from the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the Covid-19 pandemic originated, and then followed these infected people until their symptoms developed.

According to the scientists, including Chong You from Peking University in China, the existing estimates of four to five days for the incubation period were based on small samples sizes, limited data, and self-reports that could be biased by the memory or judgement of the patient or interviewer.

Rajapaksa to take oath today

Party won in 145 constituencies, bagging a total of 150 seats with its allies

Colombo, Aug. 8: Mahinda Rajapaksa will be sworn in as Sri Lanka's prime minister at a historic Buddhist temple on Sunday, allowing the powerful Rajapaksa clan to consolidate their grip on power in the island nation.

The 74-year-old Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP) leader, who polled over 500,000 individual preference votes — the highest ever recorded by a candidate in the country's history of elections — will take the oath of office for the ninth Parliament at the

sacred Rajamaha Viharaya in Kelaniya, a north Colombo suburb, according to an official statement.

The SLPP, led by Mahinda, registered a landslide victory in the general election, securing two-thirds majority in Parliament needed to amend the Constitution to further consolidate the family's firm grip on power for the next five years.

The party won in 145 constituencies, bagging a total of 150 seats with its allies, a two-thirds majority in the 225-member Parliament. It

● **THE NEW** government has decided to restrict the size of the Cabinet to 26, though it can be increased up to 30 in terms of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.

polled 6.8 million votes (59.9 per cent).

On Saturday, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, 71, congratulated his elder brother Mahinda for winning the General Election. "I extend my warmest

congratulations to Prime Minister @PresRajapaksa and all the candidates of the @PodujanaParty, who contested the recent General Elections and was elected to Parliament by popular vote and the National List," the president tweeted ahead of the swearing-in ceremony on Sunday morning.

The Cabinet of Ministers will be sworn-in on Monday, followed by the swearing-in of the state and deputy ministers, the Daily Mirror newspaper reported.

The new government has

decided to restrict the size of the Cabinet to 26, though it can be increased up to 30 in terms of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.

The Rajapaksa family — including SLPP founder and its National Organiser Basil Rajapaksa, who is the younger brother of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and former president Mahinda — has dominated Sri Lankan politics for two decades. Mahinda previously served as the president for nearly a decade from 2005 to 2015. — *PTI*

Relaxation time



Hikers walk in front with the Matterhorn mountain in background above the resort of Zermatt as heatwave sweeps across Europe on Saturday. — APF

VOTERS WEARY OF PUERTO RICO PRIMARIES

San Juan, Aug. 8: Two candidates who both served as replacement governors in the wake of a Puerto Rican political crisis are competing against each other for a chance to win the job in their own right as the disaster-struck US territory holds primary elections.

Governor Wanda Vázquez of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party is seeking the party's nomination in a Sunday contest with seasoned politician Pedro Pierluisi, who represented Puerto Rico in Congress from 2009 to 2017. Pierluisi was sworn in as governor last August when Governor Ricardo Rosselló resigned following widespread street protests over a profanity-laced chat that was leaked and government corruption.

The main opposition Popular Democratic Party, which supports Puerto Rico's current political status as a US territory, is holding a primary for the first time in its 82-year history. — *AP*

Whitmer meets Joe Biden as he approaches V-P decision

Lansing (US), Aug. 8: Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer travelled to Delaware last weekend to meet with Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee's first known in-person session with a potential running mate as he hears a decision.

Whitmer visited Biden on Sunday, according to two high-ranking Michigan Democrats who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to discuss the matter publicly. The first-term governor of the battleground state has long been on his short list of possible running mates. Flight records show a chartered plane left Lansing's Capital Region International Airport for Delaware Coastal Airport at 5:33 pm and returned at 11:16 pm.

The governor's office declined to confirm or deny the trip. "We don't discuss her personal schedule," spokeswoman Tiffany Brown said. Biden's cam-

Biden risks losing Black voters after race remarks

Washington, Aug. 8: Joe Biden's controversial remarks about race this week risk alienating young Black voters who despise President Donald Trump but are not inspired by his Democratic rival.

When pressed by Errol Barnett of CBS News on whether he'd taken a cognitive test, Biden responded that the question was akin to asking the Black reporter if he would take a drug test to see if "you're taking cocaine or not? ... Are you a junkie?"

In a later interview with National Public Radio's

Lulu Garcia-Navarro, Biden seemed to draw distinctions between Black and Hispanic populations in the US.

"Unlike the African American community, with notable exceptions, the Latino community is an incredibly diverse community with incredibly different attitudes about different things," he told the Latina reporter. He later walked back the comment. Black voters as a whole delivered the Democratic nomination to Biden, powering his commanding win in the South Carolina primary,

which rescued his floundering campaign. But that success was heavily dependent on older Black voters.

In a general election where Democrats say no vote can be taken for granted, young Black activists and elected officials say this week's missteps could make it harder to get their vote. "Trump is terrible, and he's a racist, and we have to get racists out of the White House. But then Biden keeps saying racist things," said Mariah Parker, a 28-year-old county commissioner in Athens, Georgia. — *AP*

LAW & GOVERNANCE

If cops are convicted they will face charges: Attorney

Black girls handcuffed, probe on

Denver, Aug. 8: Prosecutors are investigating whether suburban Denver police officers should face criminal charges for putting four Black girls on the ground and handcuffing two of them after mistakenly suspecting they were riding in a stolen car, a district attorney said Friday.

The incident on Sunday attracted national attention after a video of the girls — some in tears — being detained in a parking lot spread on social media. The traffic stop happened in Aurora, where officers are also being investigated following the death of 23-year-old Elijah McClain after he was placed in a

chokehold last year.

In the Sunday incident, officers eventually determined the car carrying the girls, ranging in age from 6 to 17, had the same license plate number as the one they were seeking from another state. Aurora Police Chief Vanessa Wilson and the department are cooperating with the investigation, 18th Judicial District Attorney George Brauchler said in his announcement.

He called the public accounts of the confrontation "very concerning." "Everyone is entitled to be treated equally under the law," he said. "No one is above the law. If our investigation determines that

● **BRAUCHLER IS** a Republican and a vocal defender of law enforcement, but earlier this year he criticised members of Aurora's police department for helping shield an officer found passed out in his patrol car from criminal prosecution for suspected drinking and driving.

the officers involved committed a crime, I will not hesitate to file charges and prosecute them."

Brauchler is a Republican and a vocal defender of law

enforcement, but earlier this year he criticised members of Aurora's police department for helping shield an officer found passed out in his patrol car from criminal prosecution for suspected drinking and driving.

Aurora police apologised after the video taken by a bystander showed the girls, with the 17-year-old and a 12-year-old lying on their stomachs with their hands cuffed behind their backs. A 14-year-old girl was lying next to the 6-year-old, also on their stomachs next to the car. They can be heard crying and screaming as officers stand with their backs to the camera. A woman on the other side of

the car is seen being led away in handcuffs. An officer eventually helped the handcuffed girls sit up but left them with their hands behind their backs, and police eventually determined they had stopped the wrong car.

Part of the reason for the mix-up might have been that the car had been reported as stolen earlier in the year, police said. Driver Brittney Gilliam, who had taken her nieces, sister and daughter out for a day at a nail salon, has characterised the officers' actions as police brutality. "There's no excuse why you didn't handle it a different type of way," Gilliam said. — *AP*

HK, Chinese officials jeer at US sanctions

Hong Kong, Aug. 8: Hong Kong's leader and China's top representative in the city took pot shots at the United States on Saturday after the Trump administration sanctioned them and nine other officials for allegedly cracking down on freedom and undermining the local autonomy of the former British colony.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam took to Facebook to say that the US got her address wrong, listing the official address of her chief deputy instead. She noted that she was the deputy when she applied for her US visa in 2016. "By the way, my entry visa to the US is valid until 2026.

Since I have no desire to visit this country, it looks like I can take the initiative to cancel it," Lam said. The sanctions, announced on Friday by the US Treasury Department, block all property or other assets that the individuals have within U.S. jurisdiction. Luo Huining, the director of the central government's liaison office in Hong Kong, said being included on the list shows that he has done what he should for the city and his country.

"I don't have a penny of assets abroad. Isn't it in vain to impose 'sanctions'?

Of course, I can also send 100 U.S. dollars to Trump for freezing," he said in a statement on the office's website.

Hong Kong Commerce Secretary Edward Yau, who wasn't sanctioned, called the sanctions "unreasonable and barbarous" and said they would harm US interests in the city, an Asian financial and shipping hub. Hong Kong has long enjoyed civil liberties not seen in mainland China because it is governed under a so-called "one country, two systems" principle in place since it reverted to Chinese rule in 1997.

However, Beijing imposed a national security law on Hong Kong at the end of June, following months of anti-government protests last year. The new law prohibits what Beijing views as secessionist, subversive or terrorist activities or what it sees as foreign intervention in Hong Kong's internal affairs. Police now have sweeping powers to conduct searches without warrants and order internet service providers and platforms to remove messages deemed to be in violation of the legislation. — *AP*

Schools in US face major virus test

Washington, Aug. 8: Reopening schools is easy. Keeping them open will be the hard part.

As educators prepare to welcome students back to class for the first time in months, schools' ability to quickly identify and contain Coronavirus outbreaks before they get out of hand will be put to the test in thousands of districts around the country.

Newly reopened schools in Mississippi, Indiana and Georgia have already reported infections just days into the academic year, triggering virus protocols that include swiftly isolating infected students, tracing their contacts and quarantining people they exposed.

"It doesn't matter if you open schools in July, like we did, or if you open in August, September or October. All schools are going to have to deal with the issue of positive Covid-19 test results," said Lee Childress, superintendent of Corinth School District in Mississippi, where more than 100 students are quarantined at home after being exposed to a handful of infected classmates.

Schools are trying to mitigate the risk of transmission by spreading desks apart, serving meals in the classroom and keeping groups of students together throughout the day. Many schools — but not all — will require students and staff to wear masks, which health

GERMANY ISSUES TRAVEL WARNING FOR BULGARIA, ROMANIA

Berlin, Aug. 8: Germany's Foreign Ministry has issued a travel warning for parts of Bulgaria and Romania because of regional spikes in Coronavirus cases. The ministry says on its website that tourists should avoid unnecessary travel to Blagoevgrad, Dobrich and Varna in Bulgaria.

Varna on the Black Sea coast is a popular tourist destination. It also urged travelers to avoid seven counties in Romania, most of them in the west of the country. Travellers returning to Germany from those areas must undergo a compulsory Coronavirus test. — *AP*

experts say is critical to cutting down on spread.

Administrators say it might be difficult to control the mixing and mingling that happens at every school. Asymptomatic carriers could silently spread the virus to many others. A student might not remember every contact, or be reluctant to tell the truth because that would mean forcing friends into quarantine. — *AP*

Face coverings made must in UK

London, Aug. 8: Face coverings are now a legal requirement across most indoor settings in England and Scotland from Saturday as part of the UK government's efforts to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Under the new rules, face masks or some form of face covering must now be worn in cinemas, museums, places of worship and aquariums besides public transport and shops and supermarkets, where it was already mandatory.

In Scotland, the rule also covers banks and beauty salons and in the devolved administration of Northern Ireland face coverings in all enclosed public spaces will become compulsory from Monday. Those who break the law on wearing face coverings, unless exempt on certain narrow health and age grounds, could be fined up to 100 pounds, with greater police presence in place to ensure the rules were

being followed.

The move comes as the government extended localised lockdowns in northern England and added the city of Preston in Lancashire within the remit of stricter measures, as the spread of the deadly Coronavirus failed to show a decrease in the number of cases per 100,000 people in the region.

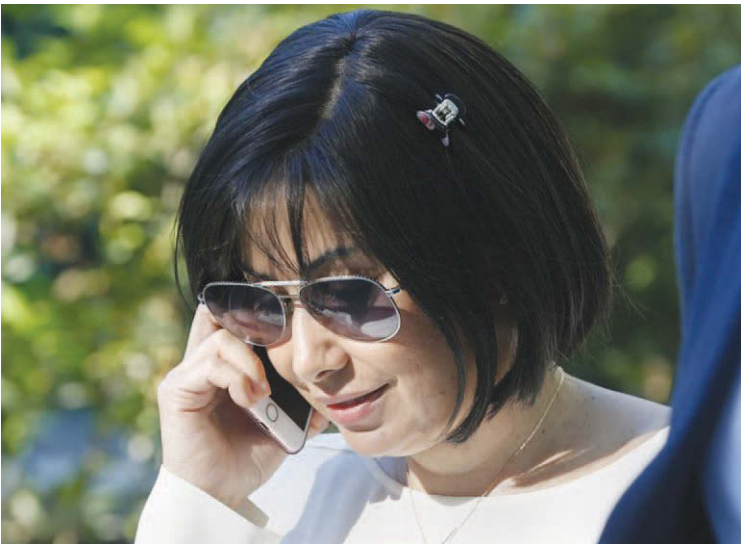
"I chaired a meeting of the Local Action Gold Committee, and unfortunately, the data does not yet show a decrease in the transmission of this terrible virus," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock. "It means we must keep the current restrictions in place to allow more time for the impact of this ban on indoor gatherings to be felt, and make sure local residents and their loved ones are protected. At the request of the local area we are also extending these restrictions to Preston," he said. — *PTI*

Gold in secret vault is traced to Hugo Chávez's former nurse

Joshua Goodman

focus

■ In 2011, Hugo Chávez named Claudia Patricia Díaz Guillen Venezuela's national treasurer. She was replaced when Chávez's successor Maduro was elected in 2013. Díaz and her husband, Adrián Velásquez, currently live in Madrid, where they were briefly arrested in 2018 on a Venezuelan warrant.



Claudia Patricia Díaz Guillen, the former nurse of late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (right), leaves the national court in Madrid, Spain, where she fought and won a case of extradition at Venezuela's request for alleged money laundering. It was 2014 when Díaz, then Venezuela's former treasurer, was looking for a safe haven to store the unexplained wealth she had accumulated over the years, and allegedly turned to one of the oldest ways of moving vast sums of money anonymously: buying gold.



years later, a nearly identical amount of bullion was apparently sold by a representative of Díaz, with much of the proceeds deposited into a Swiss bank. Those transactions are now at the centre of an international criminal investigation into the network of shell companies and dodgy Swiss bankers that have helped turn Venezuela into one of the most corrupt countries in the world. While as much as \$300 billion is estimated to have been raided from Venezuela's state coffers in two decades of socialist rule, investigators' understanding of how the dirty money was laundered is still emerging. The physical transfer of heavy gold bars — something previously unseen in court records — underscore the creative lengths to which some Venezuelans have gone to hide their stolen wealth.

With a reputation for secrecy and the world's highest income per capita, the German-speaking microstate of Liechtenstein has long been a banking magnet for the world's uber-rich. But like neighbouring Switzerland, with whom it shares a currency and customs union, its reputation as a free-wheeling offshore financial centre has been rocked by scandal. Spurred by pressure from the US, which has indicted numerous Venezuelan officials and sanctioned Maduro's government for financial crimes throughout the world, the two countries are now doing their utmost to expose corruption in Venezuela.

"Venezuela has become a virtual pariah," said Michael Levi, an expert on financial crimes in Europe and professor at Cardiff University in the UK "Tight-lipped bankers were happy to take their money for years but now everybody is avoiding the country at all costs not just to protect their reputations but to avoid regulatory and even criminal penalties."

Details of the investigation into Díaz and five alleged associates come from a 14-page legal assistance request sent November 22, 2019, by a court in Liechtenstein

and the response two weeks later by prosecutors in Geneva pledging cooperation. A translated copy of the petition, and the Swiss response, were provided separately to the AP by two people on the condition of anonymity because the probe is ongoing. The state court in Liechtenstein confirmed the authenticity of the request. Switzerland's Attorney General's office said it transmitted the information in May but is not conducting any criminal proceedings at the moment.

Díaz was virtually unknown until she and her husband, a former security adviser to Chávez, appeared in 2016 in a dump of secret financial documents known as the Panama Papers, which provided a rare look at how some of the world's richest people hide their money. Authorities raided the couple's Caracas home and seized what they described as a collection of luxury cars, artwork, and documents related to real estate holdings inside and out of Venezuela.

Díaz, 46, was a former petty officer in Venezuela's navy who took care of an ailing Chávez before the Venezuelan leader died of cancer in 2013. In 2011, Chávez named her Venezuela's national treasurer. She was replaced when Chávez's successor Maduro was elected in 2013.

Díaz and her husband, Adrián Velásquez, currently live in Madrid, where they were briefly arrested in 2018 on a Venezuelan warrant.

In addition to the probe in Liechtenstein, the couple has been sanctioned in the US for their alleged involvement in a \$2.4 billion currency scheme and are identified as unnamed co-conspirators in a Miami federal indictment against Díaz's predecessor as treasurer. Spanish prosecutors are also investigating their purchase of a \$1.8 million apartment in Madrid.

Ismael Oliver, the Madrid-based lawyer of both Díaz and her husband, said that his clients had "no knowledge, official or otherwise," of the investigation by Liechtenstein.

"She radically denies having had any gold ingots or any bank account in Liechtenstein," Oliver said. A key focus of the investigation is Swiss banker Charles-Henry de Beaumont, who worked at the Geneva-based Compagnie Bancaire Helvétique SA at the same time Díaz oversaw the OPEC nation's finances. The Liechtenstein request identifies Beaumont as the person "in charge of transferring the funds of corrupt members of the Venezuelan government to Switzerland." Beaumont has not been charged with any crimes.

According to the Liechtenstein court's request, Beaumont was allegedly working with Danilo Diazgranados, a Venezuelan financier who generated attention in 2017 for owning the offshore firm that bought Trump aide Anthony Scaramucci's hedge fund when he joined the White House. The family-owned CBH is one of Switzerland's smaller banks but has seen its assets more than double, to 10.5 billion Swiss francs (\$11.4 billion), since 2013 at a time its business in Venezuela was booming. Assets from Latin America accounted for a third of its business last year compared to 12% in 2013, according to the

bank's financial statements. It's not clear how Beaumont and Díaz are related. Attempts to reach Beaumont were unsuccessful. He did not respond to messages at the phone number and e-mail address provided by people who know him. George Yoss, a Miami lawyer believed to have represented him in the past, also did not respond to several phone calls and emails.

But the company Díaz allegedly used to purchase the gold, Amaze Holding Ltd., was registered in June 2012 at the same St. Vincent address within days of two other companies — Greenhill International Ltd. and Amblia Ltd. — that Beaumont allegedly owned and controlled, according to the Liechtenstein court. Wire transfers from Panamanian shell companies were routed through CBH to Greenhill and Amblia's accounts at the state-owned Liechtensteinische Landesbank in 2012, according to the Liechtenstein court.

The court, in its request, said Díaz controlled Amaze through another Venezuelan woman, Norka Luque, who is identified as a friend of former Defense Minister Carmen Melendez and a "straw-woman" for various high ranking politicians and figures in Venezuela." Efforts to locate Luque were unsuccessful.

Prosecutors in Miami are also targeting Beaumont.

In 2018, they filed their own legal assistance request to Geneva accusing the French national of creating several shell companies to launder as much as \$4.5 billion stolen through fraudulent currency deals with Venezuela's state-run oil giant PDVSA. The shell companies lent PDVSA bolivars allegedly purchased on the black market, where they were three times cheaper. But they were repaid in U.S. dollars at the inflated official rate, allowing anyone with a "sham loan contract" to triple their money almost overnight, according to U.S. prosecutors.

US prosecutors contend that Beaumont pocketed \$22 million by charging a 0.75% fee for all incoming and outgoing wires routed through CBH to the shell companies he helped set up.

"Beaumont also used these money brokers to receive and maintain his kickbacks," according to prosecutors. A portion of the funds was allegedly used to purchase a \$4.6 million property in Miami and another one worth \$1.3 million in the Dominican Republic.

Mark Pieth, a money-laundering expert at the University of Basel, Switzerland, said that CBH could lose its license or face other disciplinary action if it is determined they knew, or should've known, what Beaumont was doing for his Venezuelan clients. However, U.S. prosecutors in their exchanges with Swiss authorities in 2018 suggest the bank had itself been defrauded by Beaumont.

Pieth said the actions undertaken by CBH appear similar to those by other Swiss banks that have recently been penalised for failing to combat corruption involving Venezuelan clients.



An eco-corridor for the endangered Golden Lion Tamarin crosses over an interstate highway in Silva Jardim, Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil.

Endangered Brazilian monkeys get a bridge to themselves

The overpass juts from a forest over a four-lane highway in a rural area outside Rio de Janeiro. It's meant for a very special sort of pedestrian: golden lion tamarins, small orange primates that for decades have been at risk of extinction.

The little primate, whose name derives from the shock of orange fur that frames its face like a mane, has watched its habitat shrink over decades — even centuries — of rampant deforestation. Animal traffickers have also targeted the brightly colored monkeys.

Bowing to pressure from an environmental association — and following a court order — the highway's administrator in late July finished construction of the overpass that's aimed at helping conserve the species.

About 20 meters (65 feet) wide and twice as long, the bridge connects the Poco de Dantas biological reserve in Rio state's Silva Jardim municipality with a farm that the Golden Lion Tamarin Association acquired to transform into an ecological park.

Recently planted trees on the overpass — only inches tall at present — are expected within two years to reach heights allowing the monkeys to cross from one swath of Atlantic forest to another.

Some of the monkeys, which weigh about a half kilogram (a pound), can be seen clinging to the trees beyond in the forest beyond.

"Our objective is to consolidate a landscape of conservation for the monkey. The biggest problem is the fragmentation of the forests, which were already very deforested by the expansion of urban centers," said Luiz Paulo Ferraz, a geographer and executive secretary of the association, known by its Portuguese initial as AMLD. Connecting the forests means more space for the primates to roam and reproduce, and so to sustain genetic diversity, he said.

Before colonization, the Atlantic forest biome covered 330 million acres (more than 500,000 square miles) near and along Brazil's coast, of which more than 85% has been cleared, threatening plant and animal species, according to The Nature Conservancy.

More than 70% of Brazil's population lives in areas that are or once were Atlantic forest, according to Rafael Bitante, chief of forest restoration at SOS Atlantic Forest, another environmental organization.

And while few Brazilians have seen a golden lion tamarin in person, virtually all have held one in their hands: It features on Brazil's 20 reais bill (less than \$4). The animal has become a symbol for wildlife preservation in Brazil and beyond.

In the 1970s, when scientists began conservation efforts, there were just 200 individuals of the species remaining, according to the AMLD. Creation of the government's Poco de Dantas reserve in 1974 was the jumping-off point for rebuilding the animal's population and habitat in Rio state's interior. In 2003, its international conservation status was upgraded to "endangered" from "critically endangered."

The number of golden lion tamarins reached 3,400 in 2014, the year of the most recent census by AMLD. A yellow fever outbreak in 2016 and 2017 caused the death of an estimated 900 animals — the biggest blow to the species since the start of conservation efforts.

Eco-corridor for the endangered Golden Lion Tamarin crosses over an interstate highway. (AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)

They require more habitat to boost their numbers, according to Carlos Alvarenga Pereira, the coordinator of AMLD's forest restoration program.

"It's a local challenge, and requires the participation of rural communities, convincing farmers to replace unproductive farmland into recovered forest," Pereira said.

Public prosecutors had to go to court to get a judge's order requiring the highway operator to erect the bridge, which was a condition in the public tender for the highway's concession. The association's Ferraz said it is a rare example in recent years of an infrastructure project aimed at encouraging conservation in Brazil's Atlantic forest.



A Golden Lion Tamarin holds on to a tree in the Atlantic Forest.

Woman is 1st in US to get 2nd face transplant

Michael Casey

meanwhile



Carmen Blandin Tarleton speaks at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston following a face transplant.

Carmen Blandin Tarleton, whose face was disfigured in an attack by her ex-husband, became the first American and only the second person globally to undergo the procedure after her first transplant began to fail six years after the operation. The transplant from an anonymous donor took place at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital in July.

The 52-year-old former nurse is expected to resume her normal routine, which all but ended when the first transplant failed a year ago.

"I'm elated," Tarleton told The Associated Press, in an exclusive telephone interview from her home in Manchester. She is still healing from the operation so photos are not being made available of her new face.

"The pain I had is gone," she said. "It's a new chapter in my life. I've been waiting for almost a year. I'm really happy. It's what I needed. I got a great match."

More than 40 patients worldwide have received face transplants, including 16 in the United States. None of the American patients had lost their donor faces until Tarleton.

But in 2018, a French man whose immune system rejected his donor face eight years after his first transplant underwent a second. The doctor who did the transplant, Dr Laurent Lantieri of the Georges Pompidou European Hospital in Paris, said that patient is "doing very well."

Dr Bohdan Pomahac, who did Tarleton's first face transplant, was hesitant to do another and favored doing reconstruction surgery instead. But his team became convinced of the merits of a second transplant after Tarleton described how much the first one improved her life.

"She really wanted to try one more time," said Pomahac, who

led the 20-hour, second surgery. A team of around 45 clinicians removed the failing transplant and then prepared sensory nerves and blood vessels in the neck for the surgical connection. The face was then transplanted and Tarleton will gain sensory and motor function in the coming months.

Unlike her first transplant, the donor this time around was considered a much better tissue match. Because of her previous injuries before the first transplant, 98% of donors were incompatible matches. Even then, the first face led to several cases of acute rejection, in which the body attacks the new face and

strong drugs are needed to suppress the immune system.

"Now, I am very optimistic and hopeful that it will last a lot longer than the first transplant," said Pomahac, who has described the match as miraculous. "But, of course, that is wishful thinking, speculation. I don't know. She really got lucky."

Brian Gastman, a plastic surgeon at the Cleveland Clinic who led its last two face transplants, said Tarleton's case illustrates the limitations of these procedures.

"When you look at most organ transplants, there is a shelf life," Gastman said. "We are getting to the point where these face transplantations are hitting against the maximum number of years someone can have one in."

Tarleton was burned on over 80% of her body and blinded in 2007 when her estranged husband, Herbert Rodgers, beat her with a baseball bat and doused her body with lye because he thought she was seeing another man. In 2009, Rodgers pleaded guilty to maiming Tarleton in exchange for a prison sentence of at least 30 years. He died in prison in 2017.

The first transplant transformed Tarleton's life. She got off strong medications for her pain, took up the piano and was able to travel and give inspirational speeches — often talking of how she had forgiven Rodgers. She also became close friends with the daughter of her first donor, a 56-year-old woman who died of a

stroke. She also got a synthetic cornea in her left eye.

But by last year, the face was failing. She began experiencing scarring, tightness and pain because of a loss of blood flow to her face. Black patches appeared on her face. Her eyelids contracted and her lips began disappearing, making it difficult to eat. She was mostly housebound and resumed taking strong pain medications.

"I couldn't do anything," she said. "I was pretty much in pain."

She requested in October to be put the hospital's list for a second face. That process took much longer, in part, because she was taken off the list for two months because of the coronavirus pandemic. She was added back on when the state allowed elective surgeries to resume.

Now that she has her new face, Tarleton is hoping to once again travel and give inspirational speeches — those will be on Zoom until there is a coronavirus vaccine. For now, she is still getting used to her new appearance.

"This face looks very different than my first one and I can appreciate that. It's a different person," she said, adding the new face allows her to "fit in a little better, don't get stared at so easily."

"It is strange. I am not going to lie," she added. "I'll have to get used to it. My sister will have to get used to it. It takes a while for my friends and family to get used to what I look like now."

— AP

SHORT TAKES

Svitolina, Bertens
out of US Open

New York: Two more top-10 women — Elina Svitolina and Kiki Bertens — will miss the U.S. Open, joining No. 1-ranked Ash Barty in skipping the Grand Slam tennis tournament during the Coronavirus pandemic. The U.S. Tennis Association also announced on Friday that Barbora Krejčíková withdrew. The fifth-ranked Svitolina, a Ukrainian who was a semifinalist at Flushing Meadows a year ago, posted Friday on social media that she doesn't "feel comfortable to travel to US without putting my team and myself at high risk."

No. 7 Bertens, who is Dutch, wrote on Instagram that one of her concerns is the need to be quarantined upon returning to Europe after the U.S. Open, which runs from Aug. 31 to Sept. 13 and will not have any spectators. The French Open — where Bertens reached the semifinals in 2016 — is scheduled to begin Sept. 27. She also wants to play on the clay-court tournament in Rome before heading to Paris for the Grand Slam. — AP

Tokyo Olympics
OC member +ve

Tokyo: Two employees of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee have tested positive for Covid-19, officials said Saturday. That brings to three the number of employees of the committee who have tested positive since the pandemic began. Organisers said a man and a woman had tested positive but gave few details. They said the man was in his 20s and the woman in her 30s, and that both were now working from home rather than at the headquarters located near Tokyo Bay. Many of the organizing committee's employees have been working remotely though some have returned to office work in the last few months. The organising committee has a staff of 3,500. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics have been put back to July 23, 2021 due to the pandemic. The original closing ceremony was to have been Sunday, August 9. Japan has reported just over 1,000 deaths from Covid-19. Like the country, Tokyo has been largely spared. — AP

Akhil to race in
French GT4

Bengaluru: India's Akhil Rabintra, the only Asian in the Aston Martin Racing (AMR) Driver Academy, is all set to start his 2020 season August onwards with the French FFSA GT4 Championship, one of Europe's strongest National GT Championships. Akhil will be driving an Aston Martin Racing V8 Vantage GT4 for the AGS Events Racing team, across five rounds of the six round Championship. The disruptions to sporting calendars all over the world because of the Covid-19 pandemic, had delayed the resumption of his 2020 season. Akhil now finally kicks off his season on August 21, at the Circuit Paul Armagnac de Nogaro in Southwestern France.

TESTING DAY
FOR REPSOL
HONDA TEAM

Brno: One lap pace eludes Alex Marquez in Brno as Stefan Bradl gains more speed during a busy day, the Repsol Honda Team pair ready to fight forward on Sunday. It was a day of contrasts for MotoGP rookie Alex Marquez, the 2019 Moto2 race-winner was pleased with his race pace but continued to search for one-lap speed. Having cut 1.2 seconds off his best time from Friday to Saturday morning, Alex ended Free Practice 3 just 1.298 seconds off first but down in 19th and would enter Q1 as a result. After a few minutes of running in Free Practice 4, Alex Marquez suffered a fall at Turn 8. Unharmed, Alex re-joined the session and showed strong race pace throughout. A difficult Q1 session saw the rookie struggle to put together an ideal lap, he will line up on the seventh row of the grid for Sunday's race as a result but is prepared to be aggressive off the line and show his pace. **LIVE ON EUROSPORT, HD FROM 2.15 PM**

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FAST & FURIOUS

Dhoni will retire when he is outrun: Manjrekar

Mumbai, Aug. 8: Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar on Saturday revealed Mahendra Singh Dhoni had told him he would consider himself fit for international cricket as long as he is "beating the fastest sprinter in the team."

Manjrekar, a well-known commentator, said he had a chat with the two-time World Cup-winning former captain regarding his future in international cricket during India skipper Virat Kohli's wedding in 2017.

"During Virat Kohli's wedding, I had a little corner time with him and he said as long as 'I am beating the fastest sprinter in the team, I am going to consider myself fit enough to be playing international cricket or playing high-level cricket'," Manjrekar said.

"People like Tendulkar, Dhoni, these are champion cricketers. Once they are on public stage, you will never see Dhoni ever on a public stage, like a cricket field, looking slightly unfit or unable to sprint or run..." he said on a sports show.

Dhoni's last outing in competitive cricket was the 2019 World Cup semifinal against New Zealand.

Manjrekar also reckoned Dhoni would come good in the IPL, saying the presence of "only four-five" good bowlers in the league is not enough to trouble the seasoned campaigner.

"He is going to be very good and one of the reasons he is so successful and consistent in IPL as a batsman as opposed to international is that he knows that there are about four to five bowlers to handle," Manjrekar said.

"So, as a batter, with MS Dhoni in the IPL, I don't see much difference," he added. — PTI



Cricketers Hardik Pandya (left) and M. S. Dhoni run during a training session in this file photo.

Biggies off the blocks for kit

New Delhi, Aug. 8: German sports apparel and footwear major Puma could be the frontrunner in bagging the Indian cricket team's kit sponsorship rights while rival Adidas could also enter the fray.

However, it couldn't be confirmed whether Nike would re-bid after refusing BCCI's scaled down bid offer from their ₹370 crore (plus 30 crore royalty), which they paid from 2016 to 2020.

"I can confirm you that Puma has bought the ITT (Invitation to Tender) document worth ₹1 lakh. While buying bid document doesn't mean one is bidding, Puma has shown genuine interest in submitting a bid," a senior BCCI official said. It is learnt that Adidas

● **German sporting brand Puma is one of the frontrunners to bag the kit sponsorship for Indian cricket team. Rival brand Adidas may enter the race while current sponsor Nike is still undecided.**

too has shown interest but whether it will be bidding for the sponsorship rights is still not known. Even though some feel that the German giant could independently bid for merchandise products, which will be a separate tender.

Selling of exclusive merchandise products depends on how many exclusive stores a company has along with the point of sales (shops that sells your company's products).

While Puma has over 350 exclusive stores, Adidas has more than 450 outlets

which makes these two companies the most sought after.

A senior industry insider explained the whole sponsorship issue in these turbulent times of economic slowdown.

"Don't be surprised if the new rights holder pays something around 200 crore for a five-year deal which will be significantly less than what Nike paid during previous term," the industry veteran explained.

"Look BCCI offered Nike the first right of refusal and that too a scaled down

offer which they declined. This could mean two things. Either they are not interested or may submit a bid which is even more scaled down than what BCCI offered," he said.

As far as Puma is concerned, it has had an increased interest in the Indian market over the years especially through IPL but now it also has India captain Virat Kohli as its brand ambassador along with KL Rahul.

"Puma has been a part of IPL for some years now and with Virat in their roster, it would only enhance their presence in Indian market," he added.

The BCCI in its new bid has kept a base price of Rs 61 lakh per match compared to the Rs 88 lakh during the last cycle. — PTI

FORMULA | ONE

Bottas barges to pole for top race

Silverstone (United Kingdom), Aug. 8: Valtteri Bottas outpaced his Mercedes teammate and world championship leader Lewis Hamilton by the finest of margins on Saturday to claim a dramatic pole position for the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix.

The Finn clocked a fastest lap in one minute and 25.154 seconds to beat the six-time world champion by only 0.063 in the final seconds of an enthralling qualifying session.

It was the Mercedes team's 67th front row lock-out in Formula One.

"It feels good," said Bottas who was securing the 13th pole of his career 48 hours after signing a new contract to keep him at Mercedes next season.

He added: "We have improved the set-up and the car since last week. Mentally, when you start on pole, you can only aim to win the race — and the starting point is good! It is

so nice to drive this amazing car."

Hamilton explained his unexpected 'slip' to second. "I wasn't that great, but Valtteri did a great job and he deserves pole."

Nico Hulkenberg, standing in for coronavirus victim Sergio Perez with the Racing Point team, was third, securing his spot with an impressive performance only 10 days after receiving a late call-up after eating a pastry in a Cologne caf. "It's been a crazy last week," he said.

He failed to start last Sunday's British Grand Prix at the circuit after an engine problem.

Max Verstappen took fourth for Red Bull ahead of Daniel Ricciardo of Renault, Lance Stroll in the second Force India, Pierre Gasly of Alpha Tauri and down in eighth Charles Leclerc in the leading Ferrari. Alex Albon was ninth in the second Red Bull and Lando Norris 10th for McLaren. — AFP

CHAMPIONS | LEAGUE

City, Lyon blast big guns away

Manchester, Aug. 8: Manchester City took advantage of two shocking mistakes by Raphael Varane to beat Real Madrid 2-1 in their Champions League last 16 second leg on Friday and advance to the quarterfinals as Pep Guardiola came out on top in his duel with Zinedine Zidane.

But Madrid had been left with a mountain to climb in this tie after throwing away the lead to lose 2-1 in the first leg in Spain in February, before the coronavirus forced the competition into hibernation.

An identical defeat at an empty Etihad Stadium means it is City who advance 4-2 on aggregate.

Varane was dispossessed inside the box in the ninth minute allowing Raheem Sterling to put City ahead, and his poor headed back-pass attempt gifted Gabriel Jesus another goal midway through the second half.

Before that second goal the tie had been in the balance with the in-form Karim Benzema having scored for the visitors just before the half-hour mark.

Meanwhile, Lyon also qualified for the quarterfinals of the Champions League despite losing 1-2 in Turin, on away goal advantage.

Lyon squeezed past the Italian champions thanks to Memphis Depay's 12th-minute penalty which put Rudi Garcia's side two goals ahead in the tie and left Juve with a mountain to climb.

Needing to score three unanswered goals in order to go through, Cristiano Ronaldo tried his best to drag the Italian champions over the line.

He levelled the scores on the night with a penalty of his own with two minutes left in the opening period before crashing a second home on the hour mark.

SARRI GETS THE BOOT
AS JUVE MANAGER

Juventus fired coach Maurizio Sarri on Saturday after his first season in charge ended with the team's Champions League exit.

Despite winning the Italian title, Sarri paid the price for the Round-of-16 loss to Lyon on Friday.

Sarri also left Chelsea last year after only one season in charge — despite winning the Europa League with the London club. While he led Juventus to a record-extending ninth straight Italian title, the team never really adapted to his quick-passing style. — Agencies



Indian cricketer Yuzvendra Chahal is all smiles with his fiancée Dhanshree Verma, a dentist from Mumbai.

Indian spinner
Yuzi is engaged

**BIPIN DANI
MUMBAI, AUG. 8**

Rahul Dravid is not the only Indian cricketer who is married to a dentist. Another Indian cricketer and a chess player Yuzvendra Chahal's fiancée is also a dentist.

Team India's 30-year-old leg spinner Chahal has checkmated Mumbai dentist Dhanshree Verma.

The roka ceremony was performed in Mumbai, Chahal's father Krishan Kumar confirmed to this reporter.

"Dhanashree Verma is a dentist in Andheri (West). Both met on social media but met each other person-

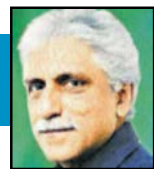
ally for the first time today. We all came from Delhi in the afternoon today and performed the roka ceremony," Kumar confirmed.

"Engagement will be done one day before the marriage. Because of Covid-19, the marriage will not happen soon", mother Sunita Devi said.

"Yes, my son will head to UAE for the Indian Premier League matches. Dhanshree will not be accompanying him," the mother added.

Chahal's family headed to Dhanshree's grandmother's house in the evening for dinner. Chahal's family will leave for Delhi on Sunday morning.

Decision to play IPL in UAE is a big deal



**Ayaz Memon
Over The Top**

The central government last week gave clearance for the IPL to be held, albeit outside India, ending months of suspense. The BCCI had been on tenterhooks since late March, when the league was first indefinitely suspended.

Several lockdowns because of Covid 19 almost scuttled prospects of the tournament being played this year. As weeks flew by, the powers-that-be in the

Indian cricket establishment were left wringing their hands in anxiety.

Finally, it came to the stage where the only possibility for IPL2020 to be played this year was if the T20 World Championship, scheduled in Australia in October this year, was scrapped. Not an easy matter considering the strained relations between the ICC and BCCI.

Strong behind-the-scenes negotiations over a pro-

tracted period of time finally forced the ICC and Cricket Australia to take this decision which opened up the window of opportunity for the IPL between late September and early November.

While the fact that IPL2020 will be played is major relief to the BCCI, it has come accompanied with complications. To conduct a tournament of this magnitude overseas (UAE) in such a short time and in the times of Covid is a logistical nightmare. And that's only one of several problems.

Largely, these are to do with money. Last week, title sponsor Vivo pulled out of the tournament following a backlash in India

over the face-off with China at the LOC in Ladakh. The BCCI was receiving a whopping Rs 440 crore per year from the Chinese cellphone maker over a five-year deal.

Interestingly, the BCCI put out an official release stating Vivo would not be associated with the IPL for this year only. This leaves the gate open for the Chinese company to return as title sponsor next year, which has raised eyebrows in several quarters.

Insiders in the cricket establishment and those from industry claim this was a decision taken jointly by the BCCI and Vivo. Neither wants to lose out. The money is excellent for

the former, while the latter would be loathe to surrender a hot property like the IPL.

Both parties will likely test the waters in the coming months.

If the current acrimony between India and China cools off, Vivo should be back within seven-eight months when the next edition of the IPL is due. For the moment, though, the BCCI has to make a last-minute scramble for finding a title sponsor.

Given the bleak economic outlook which has forced deep financial setbacks to companies, it seems extremely difficult that a substitute sponsor would cough up ₹440 crore. That said, finding a spon-

sor at a discounted rate should not be very difficult considering the allure of the IPL.

Money matters have also made relations between the BCCI and IPL franchisees fraught currently. With the tournament being played in the UAE and in stadia spectatorship either non-existent, or vastly reduced if permitted, gate money will take a big hit.

So too team sponsorships and merchandise sales. Usually, companies would queue up to sponsor IPL teams, but this time around its lukewarm at best: due to the late call to play the tournament, as well as company balance sheets lacking hefty

because of the pandemic.

Lower disposable income will also mean merchandising will take a hit. Taken together, this means less income for the franchisees. This has led to some grievances, and disagreements with the BCCI on share of profits and distribution.

From a wider perspective, however, a recalcitrant approach — on both sides — is unwarranted. The broadcast fee itself is so high that in itself it leaves profit for the BCCI and franchisees. While the overall income will undoubtedly reduce, both parties still stand to make decent money.

In such hard times, this is a big deal!