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NEARBY



Over 4K new COVID cases push tally to 2.38 lakh

NEW DELHI
The Capital has recorded 4,127 COVID-19 cases and 30 deaths in the past 24 hours, taking the tally to 2,38,828 and the death toll to 4,907. Over 61,000 tests were also conducted in a single day.

CITY ▶ PAGE 3

ASG opposes plea to transfer Jamia probe

NEW DELHI
Additional Solicitor General Aman Lekhi on Friday opposed before the Delhi High Court pleas to transfer the probe into the December violence at Jamia Millia Islamia, saying they were "misconceived in law".

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

'10 patrolling points in eastern Ladakh blocked by Chinese'

Many areas have become out of bounds for Indian troops now, says official

VIIJA SINGH
NEW DELHI

There are at least 10 patrolling points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh that have been blocked by Chinese troops, a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday that face-offs with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) happened because "patrols were interrupted".

'Perception overlap'

There was no commonly delineated LAC, and there was an overlap with regard to the LAC's perception in many areas, he noted.

The patrolling points



Supply route: Tankers meant for the defence forces getting filled near Leh en route to the border. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

(PPs) are the end points along the undefined LAC, up to which Indian troops patrol after starting from their base camps.

Since April, Indian troops

have been denied access to PPs number 9, 10, 11, 12, 12A, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 17A. The blocked PPs span from the Depsang plains in the north to Pangong Tso (lake) in the

south. In all, there are more than 65 PPs from the base of Karakoram to Chumar.

"Since the LAC is undefined, the PPs are the best way to assert territorial claims. With that access blocked by the Chinese and as per the disengagement plans in the past few months when buffer zones were created, many areas have become out of bounds for Indian troops as of now," said the official.

Another official said in the past, Chinese commanders had made untenable demands that India vacate an administrative post in Pangong and some heights near the Kurang nala.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Schools in Capital to remain closed for all classes till October 5

Centre had given option of partial reopening from September 21

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Friday said all schools in the Capital will remain closed for all classes till October 5. The announcement put to rest speculation about

schools in the city being allowed to open for students between Class 9 and 12.

While several restrictions have been eased in different phases of 'Unlock' since June 8, educational institutions continue to be closed.

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare however, as a part of the 'Unlock' measures, has permitted the partial opening of schools from September 21 on a voluntary basis for

students in Classes 9-12 so that they can take guidance from their teachers.

The Ministry has also

come up with a set of guidelines that include specific measures to be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

It said students would be allowed to visit subject to written consent of their parents/guardians and that during such visits, teacher-student interactions must be organised in a staggered manner.

The Delhi government said that online teaching and learning activities will

continue as usual and heads of schools are authorised to call teachers/staff as per requirement for smooth conduct of online classes, teaching/learning activities and any other work.

Universities and schools across the country have been closed since March 16 when the Centre announced a nationwide classroom shutdown as part of measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Media should not target minorities: SC

Court looks at plea for ban on TV show

We want a cohesive nation. We, as citizens and judges, are concerned about national security but we are also equally concerned about protecting human dignity
JUSTICE D.Y. CHANDRACHUD, SUPREME COURT

These attacks will marginalise people who want to come into mainstream... You may end up driving them into the wrong hands. Every community strives to have a voice in the bureaucracy. What is wrong in that?
JUSTICE K.M. JOSEPH, SUPREME COURT

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

A message needs to go out to the media that it cannot make a religious minority the target of its attacks, the Supreme Court said on Friday. The dignity of a community is as important as journalistic freedom, it noted.

"We want a cohesive nation. We, as citizens and judges, are concerned about national security but we are also equally concerned about protecting human dignity..." We, as a court, know what happened in the Emergency. So, we want a free flow of ideas. But we are also equally conscious about the right to dignity of a community," Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a three-judge Bench, observed.

The court was hearing a plea for pre-telecast ban on a programme partially aired

by Sudarshan TV on "UPSC Jihad".

The show, anchored by its editor-in-chief, Suresh Chavhanke, claims that members of the Muslim community are attempting to infiltrate the civil services. It raises questions about several organisations, such as the Zakat Foundation, which are run by Muslim community members.

The show questions their funding and even accuses them of facilitating the "infiltration" of people with terror links into the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

Senior advocate Shyam Divan said the programme, *Bindas Bol*, was based on a "fact-based investigation" into these organisations. The court should take a holistic view of the intent of the programme.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Paytm back on app store after Google rap

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Google on Friday restored the listing of Paytm on its application store, a few hours after it pulled down the popular financial services platform for violating its policies related to gambling.

In a blogpost, Paytm said it had recently introduced the 'Paytm Cricket League' on its consumer app, where users receive player stickers after each transaction, collect them and receive Paytm Cashback. It was because of this feature that Google had removed the application from its Play Store.

While assuring users that their account balance was safe, Paytm, which competes with Google's digital payments application GPay in India, said all activities on Paytm are completely lawful. It added that, however, it had temporarily removed the cashback component to meet the Play Store policy rules.

"Today afternoon, we received communication from Google that they are suspending our app because they believe this to be a violation of their policies on gambling. The Paytm Android app has thus been unlisted from Play Store and is temporarily unavailable," Paytm said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Delhi HC steps in to bridge digital divide

Court tells city schools to provide poor students free access to online classes

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday directed both private and government schools in the Capital to provide gadgets and Internet package free of cost to poor students for attending online classes, a verdict aimed at narrowing the COVID-19 pandemic-induced digital divide.

A Bench of Justices Manmohan and Sanjeev Narula said if a school decides to opt for online mode as a medium of instruction, it will have to ensure that students belonging to the economically weaker section (EWS) and disadvantaged group (DG) category also have access and are able to avail of the same.

"To separate the EWS/DG students from others in the same class due to non-availability of a gadget/device would generate a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the class that may affect their

hearts and minds unlikely ever to be undone (sic)," Justice Manmohan said.

"We must also acknowledge that because of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there could be a tendency amongst the underprivileged children to abandon education for work," Justice Narula said in a concurring verdict.

"This likely fallout needs to be immediately addressed, otherwise the gap between the learning experiences of children from economically

weaker sections and the relatively privileged children will widen," Justice Narula said.

The High Court said schools are erecting a financial barrier for EWS/DG category students by not providing the required equipment, preventing them from pursuing their elementary education as the pandemic rages.

This, the court said, was in violation of Sections 3, 8, 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education Act, 2009.

'Digital apartheid'

Intra-class discrimination, especially between the 75% fee-paying students and the 25% EWS/DG students, upsets the level playing field and "amounts to discrimination as well as creates a vertical division, digital divide or digital gap or digital apartheid in addition to segregation in a classroom which is violative of RTE, 2009, and Articles 14, 20 and 21 of the Constitu-

tions", the court said. The Bench said private unaided schools will be entitled to claim reimbursement of reasonable cost for procurement of the gadget and Internet package from the government under Section 12(2) of the RTE Act.

Committee formed
The court also ordered the formation of a three-member committee, including the Central and Delhi Education Secretaries, within a week to expedite and streamline the process of identifying and supplying the gadgets to poor and disadvantaged students.

The High Court's direction came on a public interest litigation filed by NGO Justice for All through advocate Khashgosh B. Jha, seeking direction to authorities to supply free laptops or mobile phones with high-speed Internet to EWS/DG students so they could attend online classes.

Farmer outfits call for 'Bharat bandh' on Sept. 25

Organisations plan intensified agitations, including road and rail blockades



Members of various farmers' organisations during a protest against agriculture-related Bills, in Patiala on Friday. ■ PTI

completely stop government procurement of crops, ending price security for peasants as private 'mandis' will be set up and price and trade regulation of all cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onion and potato will be removed from coverage under essential commodities," said Jagmohan Singh, general secretary of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Daikunda) in Punjab, which is a part of the AIKSCC.

"The working group of the AIKSCC has decided to go ahead with its opposition to the Bills and on September 25, we will hold a 'Bharat bandh,'" said Rakesh Bains of the BKU.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (Daikunda) in Punjab, which is a part of the AIKSCC.

Garwan Singh Pandher of the Kisan Mazdoor Sang-

To the brim



Children filling up containers with water from a Delhi Jal Board tanker near Geeta Colony in Delhi on Friday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

Rajasthan sets price cap on COVID-19 treatment, tests

RT-PCR test at ₹1,200, daily hospital charges ₹5,000-₹9,900

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan government has set a price cap on the diagnostic tests and treatment of COVID-19 at private hospitals and laboratories, while listing various medicines, investigations and other services and incorporating the charges for personal protective equipment (PPE) kit in the treatment packages.

The Lower House's nod for these Bills amid ongoing protests has also invited sharp opposition from political parties, including the Shiromani Akali Dal, hitherto one of the oldest alliance partners of the BJP.

Garwan Singh Pandher of the Kisan Mazdoor Sang-

fixed on the basis of accreditation of hospitals by the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL).

According to a notification which has replaced a previous order of June 20, the charges for treatment have been kept at ₹5,000 to ₹9,900 per day. The treatment cost includes ₹1,200 for a PPE kit.

Medical & Health Minister Raghu Sharma said here that the decision was taken amid reports that private hospitals were charging an exorbitant fee for treatment. While the rate of RT-PCR tests at private laboratories for diagnosis of COVID-19 was fixed at ₹1,200, the cost of treatment was

leading to confusion about the packages offered in the private hospitals. The new rates had been fixed to remove confusion, he said.

The treatment for comorbidities, including intervention procedures such as central line, chemoport, biopsy, bronchoscopy and ascitic and pleural tapping, will be provided at rates not exceeding those fixed in the Central Government Health Scheme.

The State government has exercised powers under Section 4 of the Rajasthan Epidemic Diseases Ordinance, 2020, to fix the maximum costs of treatment for common diseases under the protocol prescribed for patients in the private hospitals.

HC tells M.P. to free man held under NSA

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

The Indore Bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court has quashed an order of the Indore District Magistrate invoking provisions of the National Security Act (NSA), 1980 based on "media trial" on a former corporator for reportedly organising a Muharram procession.

A Division Bench of Justices S.C. Sharma and Shailendra Shukla on September 15 directed the State government to set former Corporator Usman Patel, 60, free along with three other persons detained under similar charges.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 11



A ND-NDE

JMI violence: ASG opposes petitions to transfer probe

'Police reaction preceded by repeated pleas to crowd to go back'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aman Lekhi on Friday opposed before the Delhi High Court pleas to transfer investigation in the Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) violence case of December last from the police, saying the pleas was "misconceived in law".

Mr. Lekhi, appearing for the Delhi Police, said: "Investigation can be transferred where there is want of fairness, honesty and credibility. This is an exception of the law. It is only where it is imperative in interest of justice that the court should do it."

'Lack of credibility'

"This is a case where the chargesheet has been filed and a court is seized of the matter. This is a case of the person accused not being before the court. There is no basis to suggest or allege want of fairness or



lack of credibility," the senior law officer said.

The National Human Rights Commission [NHRC] has dealt with it...The NHRC has not ordered compensation.

I have pointed out that an independent agency has examined it and has not found any of the allegations made as true. And in this background, the transfer of investigation is completely unwarranted," Mr. Lekhi said.

The High Court was

hearing a batch of petitions, moved by lawyers, students of JMI, residents of Okhla in south Delhi, seeking setting up of a judicial commission to look into the Jamia violence and registration of FIRs against the erring police officers.

The Delhi Police had earlier defended its decision to enter the campus of the varsity during the violence that occurred in December last year, saying it was done to control the "aggravated form of unlawful assembly".

Mr. Lekhi had said the police's reaction was "preceded by repeated pleas to the crowd to exercise restraint and go back, and after informing the crowd that they are part of an unlawful assembly".

Next hearing
The High Court will hear the case again on October 1.

Slum dwellers demand rehabilitation from government before their eviction

Unemployment and ongoing pandemic concerns, they say

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Slum dwellers across the city on Friday held a National Day of Protest, demanding proper rehabilitation from the Delhi government before being evicted.

Many of them said after having settled in the jhuggis for over three decades, it would be difficult to reconstruct houses and build their lives from scratch. Deepak Tandekar, a resident of a jhuggi at Anand Vihar said: "Our parents have lived all their lives here and have worked hard to build these homes. It is impossible for them to restart their lives at this point. There is unemployment all around and despite being a graduate, I have no job."

The 21-year-old added, "We had to struggle a lot during the lockdown to even arrange for food. My father, a carpenter, is also out of work. If the roof over our head also goes now, how will we survive? All



Slum dwellers protesting in the city on Friday.

■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

kinds of promises are made to us only before elections."

A proper plan

While on August 31, the Supreme Court had directed removal of 48,000 jhuggis that were present along railway tracks in the city, on Monday the Centre informed the apex court that no slum will be demolished till a proper plan is in place.

Widespread unemployment, the ongoing pandemic and concerns over children's education were the primary reasons behind their demand to be relocat-

ed in the vicinity, slum dwellers said.

A 48-year-old, resident of a slum cluster near Mansarovar Park, Roopchand, said: "Promises like Jaahna Jhuggi Wahan Makaan and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao schemes were made to us. But here it seems like we are at a threat of losing our homes."

The father of three daughters asked, "How are we to save our daughters and educate them if we do not have jobs ourselves or even houses?"

Neelesh Kumar, a social worker said, "The residents have been living in the areas for decades and are not changing like politicians change every five years. When people have worked hard and built houses how can that be called illegal?

Jhuggis are the first to be removed as they belong to the poor and weak. But now the government needs to rehabilitate us and ensure the DUSIB policy is followed."

Anna Nagar residents again told to relocate

'Exams to be held in their temporary shelter'

HEMANI BHANDARI

NEW DELHI

Anna Nagar residents, whose houses were washed away on July 19, lost the roof over their heads once again when a school asked them to leave their temporary shelter to make way for CBSE exams.

K.C. Kotiyal, a member of one of the 12 families who lost their houses, said they were asked to leave the school on Wednesday. "We were told that CBSE exams will be conducted here and we have to relocate to some other place for 10 days.

Initially, we were told by authorities that we have to shift to our relatives' houses and then we were told that they will either shift us to a night shelter in Sarai Kale Khan or in another school in Vikram Nagar," he said, adding that the residents had no idea about the exams.

Another resident, who didn't wish to be named, said they didn't want to move to the night shelter because of the poor living con-

ditions there but were fine with shifting to another school till they are allotted their own houses. The residents said they had met MLA Praveen Kumar regarding the matter on Friday.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Kumar said allotting the houses will take time but the talks are under way and the matter is being expedited. "They will be shifted either to the night shelter or to the school by Saturday," he said.

Twelve houses were washed away after a heavy downpour on July 19 in Anna Nagar near ITO. The residents were first moved to tents installed near the metro station and subsequently to a school on Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg where they had been living till Friday morning.

SC allows registration of BS-IV diesel vehicles

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday allowed the registration of BS-IV emission norms' compliant vehicles purchased on or before March 31, 2020 by the Municipal Corporations to carry out essential public utility services like garbage clearance in Delhi.

Further, these vehicles which are purchased before March 31 should be with the e-Vahan portal of the government to establish the date of purchase. All these registrations will be scrutinised by the Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA). The EPCA will submit a report to the apex court. Public utility and essential services vehicles purchased by the Delhi municipal bodies after April 1, 2020 can be registered if they are compliant with the updated BS-VI emissions norms.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde allowed registration of all CNG vehicles. "Insofar as CNG vehicles are concerned, there cannot be any valid rejection to the vehicles, as the emission from these vehicles is within the limits. Therefore, we direct that these vehicles may be registered," the court ordered.

Jamia Hamdard Chancellor asks UGC to probe 'irregularities' by V-C

Hasnain refutes allegations of financial and administrative anomalies, says university cannot be treated like an asset of the Hamdard family

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Jamia Hamdard Chancellor Hamid Ahmed has written to the University Grants Commission (UGC) asking to set up a committee to inquire into the alleged financial/administrative irregularities committed by Vice-Chancellor Seyed. E. Hasnain.

Mr. Ahmed, in his letter, alleged that during the administration of the current V-C, who was appointed in 2016, a culture of fraud and mismanagement has developed in the university with considerable financial implication.

Mr. Ahmed, who was appointed Chancellor by Hamdard National Foundation

(HNF), which is the sponsoring body of the university, said that he would like to invoke Clause 10.12.2 E of the UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations 2019, for removal of the V-C on the grounds of procedural violations and impropriety.

Taking loans

The Chancellor said that Jamia Hamdard was taking loans to meet basic expenses like salaries and electricity and it is only a matter of last resort that the sponsoring body was approaching the UGC as per regulation. He added that in the present circumstances, due to the

breakdown of trust with the Vice-Chancellor, HNF was withholding its financial contributions.

The Chancellor said that the issue was also discussed at length at the Board meeting of HNF and feedback was received from the Board of Management (BOM) and Finance Committee of Jamia Hamdard and it was unanimously resolved to approach the UGC with facts.

"The sponsoring body has attempted to counsel the V-C to resolve the irregularities. However, he has continued to take arbitrary decisions inconsistent with the rules and regulations governing Jamia Hamdard," the letter

says. It added that the conduct of the V-C to the members of the sponsoring body has also been unsavoury.

Responding to the allegations, Mr. Hasnain said that these allegations are being levelled because of the university's resolute resistance to the family's (Hamdard) pressure to take steps that are in contravention of UGC's applicable regulations for Deemed to be University-2019.

"We oppose any partitioning of the university that is impermissible by law. On September 2, 2020, the university has sought the Delhi High Court's intervention by filing an appeal against the

family settlement pertaining to the university. The university was set up by the Hamdard family, but now it cannot be treated like an asset of the family ever since it was declared a deemed university by the UGC," the V-C said.

Not paying

On the allegation that the university was taking loans to meet basic expenses, the V-C said that the sponsoring body is committed to pay a certain amount every year, which it has not been for the last four years since the dispute in their family crystallised.

"The university has been told that it would have to

cooperate in division of the university in two factions in order to get the funds expeditiously. As per UGC regulations 2019, there is no requirement to take approval from the HNF as the BOM is the empowered body to take all financial decisions," Mr. Hasnain said.

HNF member

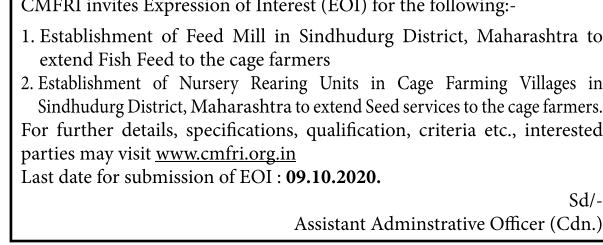
On the appointment of the Chancellor, Mr. Hasnain said that Jamia Hamdard Memorandum of Association (MoA) is clear that the Chancellor shall neither be a member of the Hamdard National Foundation nor a close relative of the HNF president and will be appointed

by a search committee. This time the president has appointed his son as the Chancellor which is against the MoA, the V-C said.

Leave request

The Chancellor has asked the UGC to send the Vice-Chancellor and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor on leave for three months till the UGC inquiry committee gives its findings and necessary orders to restore public confidence in the university and ensure fair and transparent administration for the sake of the students, faculty and staff of Jamia Hamdard.

The UGC did not respond to queries regarding the allegations.



F No 17-1/2020-Cdn. Dated 18.09.2020

INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

CMFRI invites Expression of Interest (EOI) for the following:-

1. Establishment of Feed Mill in Sindhudurg District, Maharashtra to extend Fish Feed to the cage farmers

2. Establishment of Nursery Rearing Units in Cage Farming Villages in Sindhudurg District, Maharashtra to extend Seed services to the cage farmers.

For further details, specifications, qualification, criteria etc., interested parties may visit www.cmfri.org.in

Last date for submission of EOI : **09.10.2020**.

SD/- Assistant Administrative Officer (Cdn.)

JHARKHAND BIJLI VITRAN NIGAM LIMITED

(CIN : U40108JH2013SGC001702)

Engineering Building, HEC, Dhurwa,

Ranchi - 834004, Email: - ccr2018@gmail.com

3rd TIME EXTENSION

NIT No. 27/PR/JBVNL/2020-21

For Selection of "Consultancy Firm for Supporting JBVNL in Monitoring and Implementation Support at HQ Level for Metering, Billing and Collection (MBC) Related Systems & Processes, Continuous Assistance in Commercial related System Improvement & Continuous Regulatory Assistance in all Regulatory Matters"

Time lines for participating in the all the above e-tender is detailed below :

Sl. No. **Event** **Timelines**

I Last date & time of receipt of bid documents (Online) Up to 28/09/2020 at 18:00 Hrs.

II Last date of physical submission of Tender Fee & EMD (Online Payment also allowed up to 27/09/2020 against Tender Fee & EMD) Up to 30/09/2020 at 18:00 Hrs.

III Due date for opening of Technical Bid (Part-I) 01/10/2020 at 15:00 Hrs.

Bid uploading/opening will be through e-tendering norms only. The tender documents can be downloaded through website www.jharkhandtenders.gov.in. Bidder may contact help desk of e-Procurement system at the following web address: www.jharkhandtenders.gov.in.

Note: Due to unavoidable circumstances, time extension is being Provided.

Contact Officials-

General Manager (Revenue) - 8987504018

Electrical Executive Engineer (Revenue) - 9661842194

Call Center 24 x 7 18003456570 / 18001238745 Centralized Complaint No. 1912

PR No. 232604 General Manager (Revenue)

PR.NO.233010 Jharkhand Bijlee Vitran Nigam Ltd(20-21):D

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA CORRIGENDUM

SR. NO. NAME OF BOARD CORP./AUTH

OLD REFERENCE/NIT NO.

NATURE OF CORRIGENDUM

WEBSITE OF THE BOARD CORP./AUTH

NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL

1 HPGCL, PANCHKULA 2020-HBC-138008-1 NIT NO:02/CE/ADMN/2020 DT:30.07.2020 CORRIGENDUM-II DUE DATE OF BID SUBMISSION 30.09.2020 UP TO 15:00 HRS OPENING IS 05.10.2020 (15:00HRS) CARRYING OUT PHOTOSTATS WORK OF VARIOUS OFFICES OF CHIEF ENGINEER/ADMIN., HPGCL, CORPORATE OFFICE PANCHKULA TECHNICAL DIVISION, BID PAN NO. & GST REGISTRATION NO.

2 MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, KAITHAL TENDER ID: 2020_HRY_143028_1 NIET NO. 08/TS/FBD/2020-21 DATED 10.08.2020 THE DATE OF TENDER SUBMISSION EXTENDED UPTO 13:00 HRS ON DATED 22.09.2020 AND OPENING DATE UPTO 15:00 HRS. ON DATED 23.09.2020

3 HVPNL, FARIDABAD QDP NO.1250 NIT NO. 1133 DATED 29.07.2020 THE LAST DATE OF ONLINE BID SUBMISSION IS EXTENDED UP TO 05.10.2020 UP TO 17:00 HRS.

4 HVPNL, PANCHKULA QDP-1247 (NIT NO. 1130 DATED 15.07.2020) CORRIGENDUM-3/EXEMPTION OF DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION UPTO 01.10.2020 17:00 HRS

Capital's virus tally stands at 2,38,828 with 4,127 new cases

61,037 tests conducted in past 24 hours; positivity rate is 6.76%: govt. bulletin

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Capital recorded 4,127 new COVID-19 cases on Friday, with 30 deaths and 3,568 recoveries in the past 24 hours, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government.

The bulletin said that 61,037 tests were conducted in the past 24 hour. The death rate based on data from the past 10 days was 0.69%. The total positivity rate stands at 6.76% and the fatality rate at 2.05%.

The total number of cases now stands at 2,38,828, out of which 2,01,671 patients have recovered. There are 32,250 active cases at present.

The number of containment zones in Delhi has increased to 1,751 and there are 18,701 patients under home isolation.

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said that over 500 extra ICU beds are now available for COVID-19 patients following an order issued recently to several private hospitals to ear-



A man undergoing a rapid antigen test in New Delhi.

FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

mark designated percentage of such beds.

"As per the Corona app, over 500 extra ICU beds are now available for COVID-19 patients," he said. Mr. Jain said that numbers were rising as the government had increased testing and added that there will be a dip in figures soon.

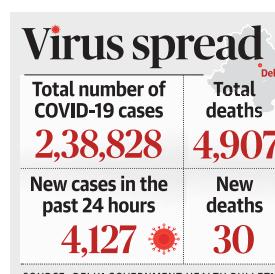
Meanwhile, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal met representatives of gym associations where he was thanked for allowing gyms to open.

Mr. Kejriwal appealed to all gym operators and the

public to follow safety protocols. Gym owners, he said, should also ensure that all the SOPs issued by the Centre are properly followed.

L-G chairs meeting

Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal also chaired a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) to review the COVID-19 situation in the Capital with the CM; V K Paul, member, NITI Aayog; Randeep Guleria, AIIMS Director; Balram Bhargava, DG, ICMR, and other experts



and senior officers of the Delhi government.

Mr. Baijal advised officials and experts to jointly prepare a blueprint for re-strategising the containment zone policy to reduce positivity and mortality rate. He also emphasised on an aggressive publicity campaign, particularly in vernacular languages, to engage stakeholders.

The L-G also interacted with DMs, DCPs and Municipal Commissioners and advised field officials to intensify surveillance, early detection, implementation of protocols for home isolation along with strict enforcement of protective and preventive measures to fight against the virus.

MPD-2041:
DDA, housing societies to meet next week

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) will conduct an online meeting on September 23 with residents of group housing societies pertaining to the preparation of the Master Plan for Delhi-2041.

This will be the third such meeting that the urban body is holding as part of a series of discussions that it is conducting in the run-up to the MPD-2041.

"As part of the process, a series of consultations are being carried out with various stakeholders and civil society groups to seek inputs from the people of Delhi that will help drive the agenda for the new master plan," DDA officials said.

Residents of group housing societies in Mayur Vihar, Vasant Kunj, Alaknanda, Paschim Vihar and other areas will be a part of the meeting.

"The objective of this meeting is to understand the issues faced by residents living in group housing colonies and discuss possible planning solutions," the urban body said.



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V.R. Venkataachalam

(Chancellor, Sri Ramachandra Deemed University)

and

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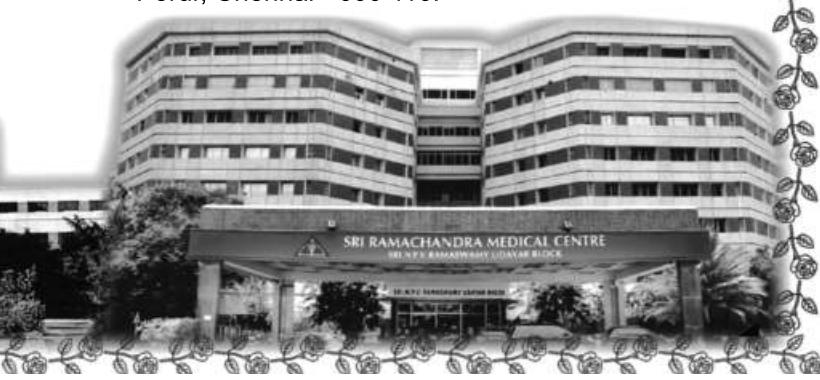
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SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Friday said it has registered a case on the complaint of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) about a suspected malware attack after one of its staffers faced difficulty in accessing his official email account on a computer.

An email was sent to the official ID of an NIC staffer and when the receiver clicked on the link, it appeared that the malware had

set in on that particular computer, a senior police officer said, and claimed that there is no loss of NIC data.

An FIR was registered in the first week of September on the complaint of the NIC, following which Delhi Police investigated the matter and identified the source, he said. However, the police said they cannot disclose the source yet as they are proceeding further in their investigation.

The reports being carried in certain sections of the me-

dia about widespread cyber intrusion involving high offices are unsubstantiated and do not reflect the current stage of investigation, the police said in a statement.

In a statement, Additional PRO of Delhi Police Anil Mittal said: "It was found by the NIC that there was an attempted breach by unidentified cyber actors – a kind of regular activity over cyberspace – which was, however, detected by its robust cyber-security systems."

the said project was put for e-auction by the creditor company. Aggrieved allottee Deepak Chaudhary approached the Authority. The Authority on hearing the matter on urgent basis stayed the e-auction proceeding as prior written approval of the Authority and 2/3 allottees was not taken and any such transfer through e-auction would have jeopardised the interest of 950 allottees who have invested a total amount of ₹328.19 crore in the project.

However, M/s Supertech Ltd. failed to repay the loans taken and hence became a defaulter. Consequent upon

iced recently in the real estate sector that promoters mortgaged their project land/structure, as well as all receivables from the sold/unsold inventory to lending organisations/financial institutions/banks/creditors to get bank loans to fund the construction for developing projects. However, when these promoters failed to repay the loans, the financial institutions auctioned the residential or commercial properties that had been pledged with them to recover loans from borrowers by invoking the SARFAESI Act, 2002.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

He writes to RS Chairman, gets endorsement of 37 MPs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

his New Delhi address, charged him under IPC 124 A, 153 A (promoting enmity between classes), and 153 B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration) besides others mentioned.

Independent probe

Mr. Singh has written a letter to Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu demanding an independent probe into the matter. In the letter written in Hindi, Mr. Singh said he has been slapped with charges of being an "anti-national" after he exposed the ongoing corruption and killing in the State. "In Uttar Pradesh, I raised my voice against injustice and crime. I raised my voice against the corona scandal. Hence, a case of sedition has been filed against me," he said.

DCP, Central Lucknow, Somen Barma said a case was registered against unknown persons and in the process of investigation Mr. Singh's name surfaced, for which he was served a notice to explain his standpoint. "Only when evidence was collected, his name came to the fore," said the officer when asked about Mr. Singh's allegations.

Asked if Mr. Singh could be arrested, he said it was "too premature to comment on that".

Delhi Police registers case after NIC complains of suspected cyberattack

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

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However, M/s Supertech Ltd. failed to repay the loans taken and hence became a defaulter. Consequent upon

Allottees' rights not subservient to bank's: real estate body

HARERA issues order in a case on e-auction of project by a creditor company

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Pronouncing judgment in a case pertaining to e-auction of a project by a creditor company, the Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority (HARERA) has ruled that the rights of the allottees are not subservient to those of the bank.

The order emphasised that in case of failure of the banks to ensure that the funds were applied for the purpose they were granted, banks cannot be allowed to supersede the rights of the allottees.

The matter pertained to M/s Supertech Limited, who

is neither the licensee nor a collaborator, approaching PNB Housing Finance Ltd. for a construction loan for the project 'Supertech Hues', which was duly advanced to M/s Supertech Limited with M/s Sarv Realtors Pvt. Ltd. as the confirming party by way of equitable mortgage of the project land measuring 33.33 acre by deposit of the title deeds along with receivables from the mortgaged properties.

Chairman of HARERA Gurugram, K.K. Khandelwal, said a peculiar trend was not

iced recently in the real estate sector that promoters mortgaged their project land/structure, as well as all receivables from the sold/unsold inventory to lending organisations/financial institutions/banks/creditors to get bank loans to fund the construction for developing projects. However, when these promoters failed to repay the loans, the financial institutions auctioned the residential or commercial properties that had been pledged with them to recover loans from borrowers by invoking the SARFAESI Act, 2002.

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Timings

SATURDAY, SEP. 19
RISE 06:08 SET 18:21
RISE 07:56 SET 19:58
SUNDAY, SEP. 20
RISE 06:09 SET 18:20
RISE 09:04 SET 20:38
MONDAY, SEP. 21
RISE 06:09 SET 18:19
RISE 10:12 SET 21:22

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	38	28
Safdarjung	38	28
Palam	38	28

Delhi Palam Today
37°C Weather would remain very warm and dry with partly cloudy sky some times.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
36°C Dry weather with warm and humid day condition. Light winds likely with partly cloudy sky.

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U.P. govt. backtracks on detention centre move

Decision comes after Mayawati's tweet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GAZIABAD

The Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday night withdrew its decision to start a detention centre for foreigners illegally staying in India at the Ambedkar SC/ST hostel in Ghaziabad.

Said to be the State's first such facility, it was carved out of the hostel's women's wing. The centre, located on the Nandgram area of Ghaziabad, was expected to house 100-120 persons.

The decision came after Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati described the move as "anti-Dalit". In a tweet, she said this was another proof of the government's anti-Dalit style of functioning. Ms Mayawati further said the move to turn the hostel, built during BSP rule, into a detention centre was "extremely sad and

condemnable".

Ghaziabad District Magistrate Ajay Shankar Pandey confirmed to local media that the government had taken back its decision and said if an alternative proposal was sought by the government, the district administration would suggest another option.

However, on Friday, he didn't respond to *The Hindu's* messages. Official sources said the administration was waiting for the orders to come. Officials in the Lucknow secretariat also refused to comment on the issue.

Rajesh Pandey, who took over as the district social welfare officer on Friday, after his predecessor met with an accident, said he came to know about the withdrawal from media reports. "I am yet to receive any official communication in this regard," he said.

Conspiracy to destroy farmers: Amarinder

'Farm legislations are being forced upon the nation'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Friday said farm legislations are being forced upon the nation as part of the 'Destroy Farmers, Destroy Punjab' conspiracy of the BJP-led NDA, of which the Akalis continue to be a part.

"I don't know what enmity the BJP and the Akalis have with Punjab and why they are out to destroy us," said the Chief Minister, launching the Virat Kisan Mela of the Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana.

'May lead to unrest'

Cautioning again that the legislations would lead to growing angst among the people in the border State, thus giving Pakistan the op-



Punjab CM Amarinder Singh

portunity to stoke the fire. Captain Amarinder said the laws would undo the sacrifices made by Punjab and its farmers over 65 years to make India self-sufficient in food.

Claims rejected

Rejecting the BJP and the SAD claims that Punjab was in the loop on the farm ordinances, the Chief Minister made it clear that the issue of any such ordinances or new laws on agriculture was never discussed at any of the meetings in which his government was represented.

(with PTI inputs)

Shift to renewable energy mooted for Rajasthan

Report calls for 'retiring' thermal assets

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

An effective transition from coal-based power to renewable energy, with an emphasis on infrastructural issues, has been recommended for Rajasthan by an expert report which has taken into account the factors such as aggregate commercial and technical losses, efficiency of network and resource mobilisation.

The report titled "Transforming Rajasthan's electricity sector: An opportunity to power a green recovery", authored by the experts at the Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), was released at a virtual event here on Thursday.

The State government's Energy Department has appointed a committee to address infrastructural issues plaguing the power sector. A discourse at the tri-junction

of consumer, economic and environmental aspects has been promoted by the government to resolve the issues of quality, performance and energy security.

Model-based approach
IEEFA's research analyst Kashish Shah, highlighting the findings on Rajasthan's power sector transition, recommended the adoption of a demand forecasting and energy modelling-based approach for meeting the additional demand through renewable energy sources and by "strategically retiring" the thermal assets.

Ajith Sharma, Principal Secretary (Energy), said the renewable energy had become cheaper and its installed capacity was about 45% of the total power generation in the State, though it met only 14% of the current electricity demand.

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DONATE EYES-GIFT SIGHT

Bhopal college students connect COVID-19 patients with families

Their helpline received 296 calls from Aug. 28 to Sept. 13

SIDHARTH YADAV BHOPAL

Days after a 72-year-old man contracted COVID-19 he was admitted to the intensive care unit of the Hamidia Hospital here, and intubated as his condition worsened. Separated by the disease with no link inside the ward, his son had just one wish: to see his father just once, tell him how much he loved him.

He immediately dialled the Samvad COVID-19 helpline, being operated by a bunch of social sciences college students from a decrepit room inside the hospital compound, which set up a five-minute video call between them. Although his father died the next day, the man was grateful for having seen him in his last moments.

Nine students of the Bhopal School of Social Sciences aided by Rachna Dhingra, who works for Bhopal gas tragedy survivors, are helping connect critical and moderate COVID-19 patients with their family members at the government-run hospital and updating them constantly about the status of their kin's health.

From August 28 to September 13, the helpline had received 296 calls with family members asking them about

bed availability at hospitals as well as seeking clarification on medical prescriptions, and organised 28 video calls between patients and family members.

"During video calls, we ask relatives to be only encouraging to the patients," said Ayesha Anees Ahmed, 19, a volunteer who studies psychology.

"Often, relatives didn't understand the medical jargon used by doctors and approached the helpline instead for clarifications," explained Phil John Sam, 26, a student of social work.

To call the helpline, dial 0755-4004633.

Gorkhas laud Meghalaya CM for supporting Statehood

He had written to Amit Shah to consider Gorkhaland demand

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI

The Bharatiya Gorkha Parishad (BGP) has lauded Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma for supporting the demand for a separate Gorkhaland State.

Mr. Sangma had on September 4 written to Union Home Minister Amit Shah saying the Gorkhas deserve their "Bas Bhoomi" (homeland) and their "just and legitimate demand" should be considered.

"The BGP welcomes the support extended to the Gorkhaland demand by Mr. Sangma. In his letter to Union

Home Minister Amit Shah, he has batted for a homeland of the Gorkhas and highlighted the contributions made by the Gorkhas in the nation-building process," Assam-based BGP leader Nanda Kirti Dewan said.

The BGP is the highest body of the Gorkhas in India.

Huge expectation'
About 10.5 million Gorkhas will now have a huge expectation from the Meghalaya CM and his National People's Party regarding our homeland demand," Mr. Dewan said.

Mr. Sangma's letter to Mr. Shah read: "Sir, you are

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PUBLIC NOTICE
This is for notice of the general public that a political party is proposed to be registered by the name of "RASHTRIYA JANAYAN JANTA PARTY" The office of the party is at R-3284/37, TUGHLAQABAD EXTENSION NEW DELHI-110010. This party has submitted application to the Election Commission of India, New Delhi for its registration as Political Party under Section 29A of the Representation of People Act 1951 Name /address of the office bearers of the party are as follows:-
President : Arvind Kumar Kumar, R-37, Gaurikunj, Sector 10, Noida, UP.
General Secretary : Arvind Kumar Kumar, S-1, Sukhdev Nagar, R-37, Tughlaqabad Extension, Delhi.
Treasurer : Mahtab Alam S/o Sh. Alam, R/o At Chehara Kala, Dist. Vaishali, Bihar.
In case of objection to the registration of "RASHTRIYA JANAYAN JANTA PARTY" they may send their objection with reasons thereof, to the Secretary, Election Commission of India, New Delhi-110001 within 30 days of the publication of this notice.

THE HINDU

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South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) invites Open Tenders under Two Bid System from the eligible applicants/reputed contractors/firms/companies who fulfill qualification criteria for the work as per details given below:-

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Ex Engineer (Pr-J)WZ



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

Forecast for Saturday: Heavy/heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over south Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, central Maharashtra, Marathwada, Konkan & Goa, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Telangana, Rayalaseema, coastal & south interior Karnataka, Kerala, Mahe and Andaman & Nicobar Islands

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

Agartala	32.4	34.4	26.0	Kozhikode	52.1	29.4	23.6
Ahmedabad	0.4	33.2	26.8	Kurnool	1...	30.1	23.6
Aizawl	...	28.2	20.6	Lucknow	...	37.0	27.6
Allahabad	...	37.2	27.8	Madurai	38.7	25.2	
Bengaluru	...	28.4	21.0	Mangaluru	0.4	28.3	22.6
Bhopal	...	34.5	25.0	Mumbai	1.7	28.8	25.0
Bhubaneswar	...	34.6	26.7	Mysuru	...	29.0	21.1
Chandigarh	...	36.6	26.2	New Delhi	...	38.0	27.8
Chennai	...	33.6	27.7	Patna	...	38.8	26.4
Coimbatore	...	31.8	23.1	Port Blair	35.2	29.4	23.6
Dehradoon	0.3	33.6	24.2	Puducherry	...	33.0	26.2
Gangtok	13.9	19.6	18.1	Pune	...	29.3	22.9
Goa	84.3	26.4	22.7	Raipur	...	36.0	27.4
Guwahati	10.6	34.0	23.7	Ranchi	19.3	33.2	23.0
Hubballi	...	27.0	22.0	Shillong	0.4	24.0	16.6
Hyderabad	32.4	32.8	22.5	Shimla	...	28.7	18.9
Imphal	...	30.3	19.1	Srinagar	...	30.4	12.2
Jaipur	...	37.0	28.8	Thiruvananthapuram	3.8	30.8	24.7
Kochi	8.8	27.6	24.0	Tiruchi	...	35.7	25.4
Kohima	5.8	24.0	17.5	Vijayawada	4...	35.0	26.9
Kolkata	...	36.4	28.4	Visakhapatnam	...	33.8	27.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

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Bengaluru	11	32	46	...112	...	ORANGE
Chennai	35	32	47	80	...	GREEN
Delhi	7	32	11	94	175	RED
Hyderabad	44	31	25	56	57	GREEN
Kolkata	...	15	14	46	54	GREEN
Lucknow	5	64	38	220	194	RED
Mumbai	26	21	22	52	79	GREEN
Pune	19	8	49	15	16	GREEN
Visakhapatnam	11	42	20	62	79	GREEN

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

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

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 pm on Saturday, Patna recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 183 indicating a moderate level of pollution. In contrast, Kozhikode, Kerala recorded a healthy AQI score of 10

Ajit Pawar moots restrictions on public movement in Pune

Residents have suffered enough through lockdowns: BJP MLA Siddharth Shirole

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

With the rise in COVID-19 cases in Pune district, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Friday said the district administration should implement restrictions on people's movement only after discussions with elected representatives.

"The number of COVID-19 patients is increasing at an alarming rate in Pune district. The administration can take a decision to discourage assembly and movement of people in consultation with elected representatives of Pune district and the Mayors of both Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad civic bodies," said Mr. Pawar, Pune's Guardian Minister, after his weekly review meeting.

Mr. Pawar said ensuring uninterrupted supply of oxygen in hospitals was the need of the hour. He directed the district administration to take note of the rise in COVID-19 patients with coronary heart diseases. The district has been witnessing daily spikes of more than 4,500 cases and 50 deaths on an average for the past three weeks. The total case mark has crossed the 2.50 lakh mark with over 42,000 active cases and nearly 5,400 deaths so far.

However, Mr. Pawar's suggestion was met with fierce criticism from Siddharth Shirole, Bharatiya Janata Party MLA from Shivajinagar. He objected to any intimations of a 'lockdown' or a 'quasi-curfew'. "Any restriction on public movement or lockdown at this stage will not be accepted by the people of Pune. They have suffered



Need of the hour: Ajit Pawar has directed authorities in Pune to ensure uninterrupted supply of oxygen in hospitals. ■ FILE PHOTO

enough already through lockdowns imposed by the district administrations which were steamrolled only to hide the incompetence of the authorities and the failures of the government," he said.

Mr. Shirole asked why Mr. Pawar and the authorities were contemplating such a move when Pune's residents had given the administration enough time to bolster its medical infrastructure.

Ample time given'

"The taxpayers of Pune, with infinite patience, had permitted the administration an ample six-month period to set up mega facilities in the city. However, thanks to the complete ineptness and lack of coordination between authorities, the jumbo hospitals have come up only now.

Even then, they are not being operated at full capacity," he said.

Mr. Shirole said barely 40% of the 1,100 beds in the city's jumbo facilities were functional. He said it was unfair to impose restrictions on the pretext of breaking the

ties, allegedly built with state-of-the-art equipment to serve critical care needs?" Mr. Shirole said.

'Won't tolerate laxity'

Meanwhile, Mr. Pawar reiterated his warning that no negligence on part of the authorities would be tolerated if there were any lacunae in measures to check the spread of the contagion. "The administration should be very careful in planning and making the beds available to the patients and the general public with updated information in the computer system," said Mr. Pawar.

Stating that there was an immediate need to drastically reduce the morbidity and mortality rates in urban as well as the rural areas of Pune, Mr. Pawar assured that the Maha Vikas Aghadi government will provide adequate funding to establish and enhance medical facilities to prevent the spread of the virus.

Thanks to the ineptness and lack of co-ordination between authorities, jumbo hospitals have come up only now

SONDARTH SHIROLE
BJP MLA from Shivajinagar

virus chain when more than 60% of Pune's infected populace had quarantined themselves at home.

"More than half of the COVID-19 patients are treating themselves at home. But the administration cannot even take care of the rest, of whom critical cases are even fewer. Then, pray, what is the use of these jumbo facilities," he said.

Mr. Pawar urged authorities to work hard to ensure timely delivery of oxygenated beds and proper treatment to patients. "Adequate health facilities and medical equipment should be provided in rural hospitals for the treatment of patients in rural areas," he said.

How many farmers benefited from loan waiver scheme? HC

State directed to file reply in 3 weeks

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Friday directed the Maharashtra government to furnish details about the number of farmers who have benefited from the Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Shetkari Karjyuktika Yojna (MJPSKY), which was announced in December last year.

A Division Bench of Justices K.K. Tated and N.R. Borkar was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Ashish Shelar through senior advocate Rajendra Pai. The petition said as per the scheme, farmers who had taken bank loans of up to ₹2 lakh between April 1, 2015, and March 31, 2019, and had not repaid these loans till September 30, 2019, are eligible for a waiver on the entire amount.

The plea said around 35 lakh farmers were eligible to seek benefits under the scheme. It stated, "There were more than one crore farmers across the State and only around 15 lakh farmers have benefited so far, while loans of the majority of others are not yet waived."

In his plea, Mr. Shelar said he wished to know why all eligible farmers had not got the benefit of the scheme. The MLA said he had raised this question several times in the State Assembly, but he did not receive a satisfactory answer. Left with no other option, he decided to approach the High Court, seeking directions for implementation of the scheme, the plea said.

Additional government

pleader Geeta Shastri, appearing for the State government, said since the petitioner is a MLA, he could have easily obtained information on the number of beneficiaries of the scheme from department concerned or by filing an application under the Right to Information Act.

Based on news reports' Ms. Shastri said, "The PIL was based on news reports and did not show any actual figures of the number of beneficiaries, which were available with the concerned department."

The court told Mr. Pai that he should have also done some research of his own. The Bench asked the State government to inform the court "why only some farmers" had received the benefit of the MJPSKY scheme. The Bench then directed the State to file an affidavit in reply to the petition within three weeks and Mr. Shelar to file a rejoinder.

The matter has been posted for further hearing on October 22.

Dismiss actor Kangana's plea, impose fine, BMC tells HC

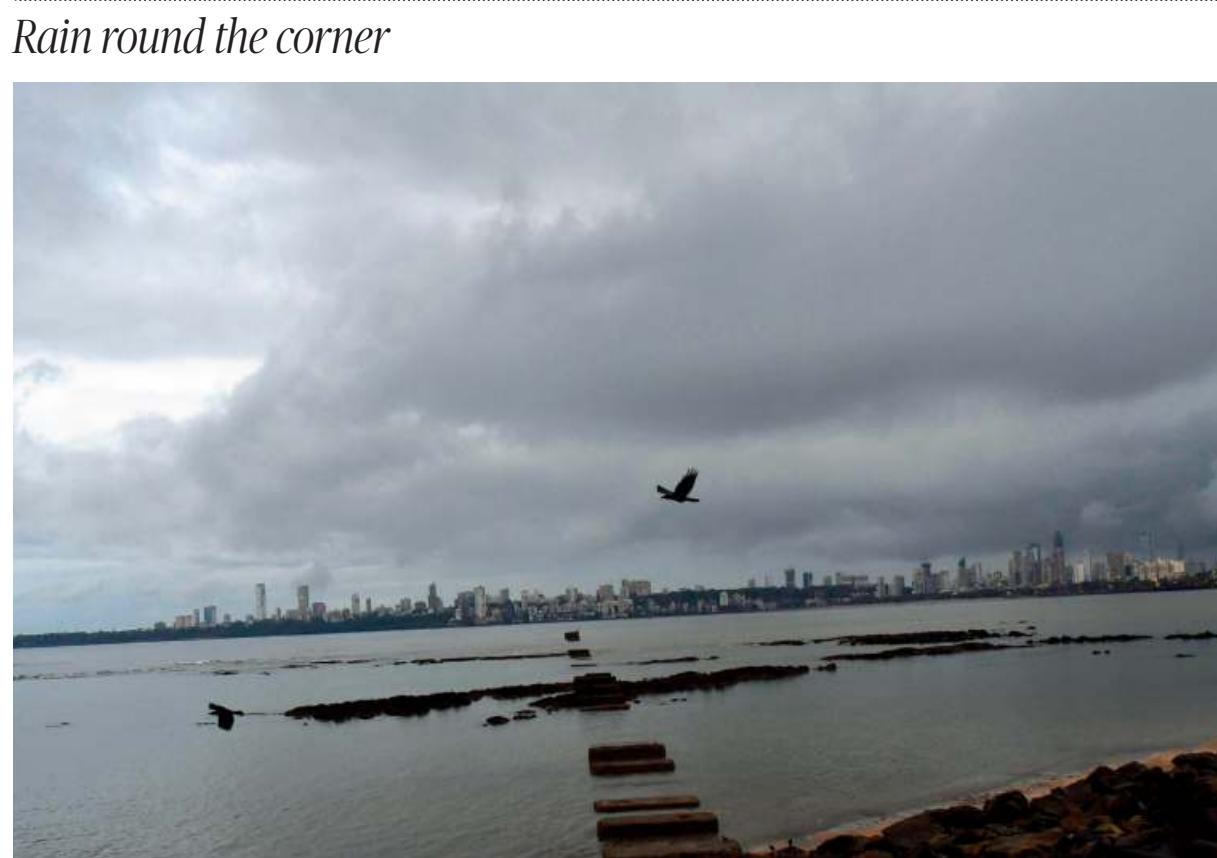
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in an affidavit on Friday urged the Bombay High Court to dismiss actor Kangana Ranaut's petition seeking ₹2 crore in damages for demolition of illegal alterations at her bungalow and impose a fine on her for filing such a plea.

Responding to the actor's plea, the BMC said it was an abuse of the process of law. "The writ petition and the relief sought constitute an abuse of the process. The petition should not be entertained and should be dismissed with costs," the BMC said.

In its reply, the BMC alleged that Ms. Ranaut falsely claimed the alterations were as per a permission granted by it. "Ms. Ranaut used the property as an office space and made substantial alterations in violation of the sanctioned building plan," it said.

Ms. Ranaut cannot argue that the demolition should not have been carried out during the lockdown, for if she was carrying out alterations during this period, she was liable to face action, the BMC said. The next hearing is slated for September 22.



Overcast: Dark clouds gather over Mumbai on Friday morning as the Southwest monsoon approaches its fag end. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

Special buses for women govt. staff

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI The Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) will operate special buses for women government employees in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region from Monday, Transport Minister Anil Parab said on Friday.

Mr. Parab, who is the chairman of MSRTC, said a special bus will be run from Panvel, Virar and Dombivli on an experimental basis and more services will be added depending upon the response.

The MSRTC had started operating its buses with 100% passenger capacity, instead of the earlier 50%, from Friday morning.

MSRTC is expecting an increase in ridership.

Stone laying of Ambedkar statue put off

Postponement comes after several State leaders were not invited for ceremony

ALOK DESHPANDE

MUMBAI

The Bombai High Court on Friday postponed the foundation stone laying ceremony of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue in Indu Mills compound in central Mumbai after only 16 dignitaries being invited for the event led to discontent in political circles.

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and Social Justice Minister Dhananjay Munde were not informed about the event till late on Thursday, resulting in both of them remaining at their respective districts, Pune and Beed. While they had left for Mumbai, none of the other Cabinet colleagues, including former chief minister Ashok Chavan, and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) State president Jayant Patil, were informed about the event.

Apart from Mr. Thackeray, Mr. Pawar and Mr. Munde, the 16 invitees included

nisters Balasaheb Thorat, Eknath Shinde, Chhagan Bhujbal, Varsha Gaikwad, Nitin Raut, Aslam Sheikh, Aaditya Thackeray; the Mumbai Mayor; the local MLA; two local corporators; the chief secretary; and the principal secretary of the Social Justice Department.

NCP president and Rajya Sabha MP Sharad Pawar, who had reviewed the memorial along with Mr. Munde and Mr. Pawar just days after the Maha Vikas Aghadi government came to power, was not invited for the programme. Leaders of the Opposition in the State Assembly and the Council, Devendra Fadnavis and Pravin Darekar respectively, were not invited despite them being in Mumbai. The Central government had handed over the land at Indu Mills for the



Market failure

New deal for agriculture needs good regulated markets ahead of private competition

The ambitious initiative of the Narendra Modi government to bring about far-reaching reform in agriculture has run into severe weather, mainly over fears that the free market philosophy at its core could spell the end of MSPs for produce that has so far been centrally procured by the government. An allied party's Minister, Harsimrat Kaur Badal (Akali Dal) has resigned in protest, and there is a strong pushback from farmers against three Bills that seek to replace ordinances issued in June, on key aspects of the farm economy – trade in agricultural commodities, price assurance, farm services including contracts, and stock limits for essential commodities. The opposition to the Bills, particularly on trade, flows from the position, articulated by Punjab, that agriculture and markets are State subjects, and there should be no tinkering with the MSP and Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC), that form the backbone of existing trading arrangements. Several States have already liberalised agricultural marketing, amending their APMC Acts, and some have allowed regulated private commerce including direct marketing. Yet, provisions in the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, providing for unfettered commerce in designated trade areas outside APMC jurisdictions without levy of any fee, and more generally, empowering the Centre to issue orders to States in furtherance of the law's objectives, have alarmed States. A challenge has been mounted by Rajasthan, declaring central warehouses as procurement centres under its APMC Act, and therefore required to pay a market fee to the State.

Mr. Modi has characterised the arguments as misleading, promising that the MSP system will continue. This is welcome, but the new dispensation cannot bring cheer to small farmers, who form the majority and whose access levels to markets under the APMC system are at the rate of one for an area of 434.48 sq. km on average – well below the recommendation of the National Commission on Farmers (NCF), at one market for 80 sq. km. There is evidence also that mere liberalisation does not lead to private investment in new markets. When Bihar removed the APMC system, markets suffered loss of fee revenue, with no significant private investments in the sector. If the Centre's intent is to strengthen competition, it should massively fund the expansion of the APMC market system, removing trade cartels, and providing farmers good roads, logistics of scale and real time information. Rather than opt for heavy centralisation, the emphasis should be on empowering farmers through State Farmers Commissions recommended by the NCF, to bring about a speedy government response to issues. Without strong institutional arrangements, *laissez-faire* policy may harm lakhs of unorganised small farmers, who have been remarkably productive and shored up the economy even during a pandemic.

Continuity in change

India is hoping that under PM Suga, Japan will not steer away from the course set by Abe

Less than a month after his sudden announcement that he would step down due to health reasons, Japan's longest serving Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, 65, has passed on the baton to his long-term associate, Yoshihide Suga, 71. Mr. Suga promises continuity rather than change as he takes the reins. His choice is itself an indicator of that continuity: he has been Chief Cabinet Secretary since 2012, as well as the top spokesperson and a key implementer of Mr. Abe's policies. An elected MP since 1996, Mr. Suga was Minister of State for Internal Affairs and Communications during Mr. Abe's previous tenure in 2006-07. In his press conference after winning the leadership of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party this week, Mr. Suga said his goal is to continue with Mr. Abe's policies and complete his goals, particularly the tasks of reviving the economy and controlling the COVID-19 pandemic. He has also retained Mr. Abe's key cabinet choices which include the Finance, Foreign and Environment Ministers. Despite his best intentions to stay the course, he has taken charge at a crucial moment in a rapidly changing world and will need to steer through the outcome of the U.S. elections in November, China's growing aggressiveness, and a worldwide economic downturn. A main challenge will be to ensure the success of the Tokyo Olympics, now rescheduled for July 2021 due to the pandemic.

For India, Mr. Abe's exit is a loss, given his game-changing moves on India-Japan ties, which included upgrading the relationship to a Special Strategic and Global Partnership, instituting the annual Prime Ministerial summits from 2006, spearheading both versions of the Quadrilateral with the U.S. and Australia, and personally moving the India-Japan civil nuclear partnership through the Diet (parliament), Japan's first with a non-NPT country. One of his last meetings as Prime Minister was a telephonic summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, announcing the signing of the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, a significant step in defence cooperation. His close personal relationship with Mr. Modi, both seen as "strongmen" leaders, built on his earlier partnership with former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, with whom he shared his famous "three arrows" economic strategy called "Abenomics". Mr. Suga would be well aware of the big shoes he must fill and the importance of the relationship with India for Japan. It is significant that one of the new government's first engagements is likely to be the Foreign Minister-level meeting of the Quad countries in Tokyo next month, which will also give New Delhi insight into how much has changed and how much will stay the same in Japan's view of the world with the change at the helm.

Another Afghan peace push and a role for India

New Delhi's engagement after America's exit must build on its resonating vision of a stable and plural Afghanistan



RAKESH SOOD

Last week, on September 12, the much awaited intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the Afghan High Council for National Reconciliation opened in Doha, Qatar, 19 years after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. that stunned the world and marked the beginning of the U.S. war in Afghanistan against al Qaeda and the Taliban, its local sponsors. The initiation of intra-Afghan talks was a key element in the U.S.-Taliban peace deal signed in Doha on February 29 between the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, and the Taliban deputy leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. Originally planned to begin on March 10, the process had to overcome many hurdles along the way providing a small glimpse of the difficult road that lies ahead.

Dynamics of negotiations

The Trump administration soon realised that its 2017 policy of breaking the military stalemate by a small increase in U.S. troops was not working and reverted to seeking a managed exit. As the former Defence Secretary James Mattis put it, "The U.S. doesn't lose wars, it loses interest." Political optics demanded a relabelling of the withdrawal.

Direct negotiations with the Taliban began two years ago with Ambassador Khalilzad's appointment as Special Envoy. Actually, it became a three-way negotiation. The Doha track was with the Taliban, a second track was with Islamabad/Rawalpindi to cajole the Pakistan Army to lean on the Taliban to get them to the negotiating table, and the third was with Kabul

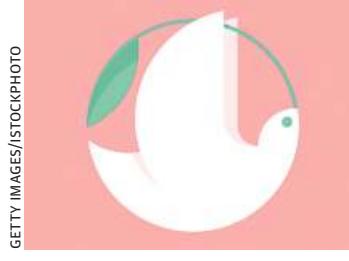
to ensure that the Afghan government would accept the Doha outcome.

Originally Ambassador Khalilzad had spelt out four objectives: an end to violence by declaring a ceasefire; an intra-Afghan dialogue for a lasting peace; the Taliban cutting ties with terrorist organisations such as al Qaeda, and U.S. troop withdrawal. Within months, the Taliban had whittled these down to just the last one with some palliatives regarding the third. Instead of an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled reconciliation, it had become a U.S.-led and Taliban-controlled process with nobody claiming ownership or responsibility. Timelines were fixed for the U.S. drawdown by mid-June (followed by complete withdrawal by April 2021) and for removal of Taliban from the UN Security Council sanctions list by end-May. The Taliban have released 1,000 members of Afghan security forces and the Afghan authorities have freed over 5,000 Taliban from their custody. This process took longer than originally foreseen but has now been completed. The two elements that remained open ended in the U.S.-Taliban deal are the ceasefire declaration and the intra-Afghan talks.

The Taliban factor

By end-June, the U.S. had reduced its troop presence to 8,600 as promised and in early September, Central Command (CENTCOM) commander Gen Kenneth McKenzie indicated that by November, the numbers would be down to 4,500. Despite two brief day truces in May and August for Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha, the levels of violence showed no respite.

Speaking the Doha at the opening session, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council regretted that more than 12,000 Afghans had been killed and another 15,000 injured since end-February. The number of attacks on government security forces



and installations averaged over 80 a week.

A report by the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) issued in July covering the second quarter of 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3hJqvpa>) assessed that "The Taliban is calibrating its use of violence to harass and undermine the ANDSF [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces] and [the Afghan government], but remain at a level it perceives is within the bounds of the agreement, probably to encourage a U.S. troop withdrawal and set favorable conditions for a post-withdrawal Afghanistan." The report expressed scepticism about whether the Taliban had cut ties with al Qaeda and stated that "the Islamic State-Khorasan maintains the ability to conduct mass casualty attacks". A UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team report concerning the Islamic State and al Qaeda (also issued in July) concluded that "Al Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent continues to operate under the Taliban umbrella in Nimroz, Helmand and Kandahar provinces" with reportedly 400-600 fighters in the country (<https://bit.ly/3hLjO0N>).

Challenges ahead

Perhaps nothing reflects the challenges facing the intra-Afghan negotiations more starkly than the title of the U.S.-Taliban Doha deal (<https://bit.ly/3hLk2Lk>) - "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan Between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Which Is Not Recognized by the United States as a State and Is Known as the Taliban and the United States of America". This awkward phrase

is repeated more than a dozen times in the Agreement. The leader of the Haqqani Network, Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is also the second-in-command of the Taliban happens to be on the U.S. wanted list with a reward of \$10 million for information leading to his capture or death. All this is difficult to reconcile with the notion that the U.S. considers the Taliban a partner in counter-terrorism operations against the IS and other terrorist groups.

In an op-ed in *The Washington Post* on August 14 (<https://wapo.st/3mAFV2H>), Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani wrote that "the Afghan people want peace" and that is why the government "made the decision to take another risk for peace". Calling on the Taliban to sit across from Afghan representatives to arrive at a political resolution, he added that "we acknowledge the Taliban as part of our reality" and urged that "the Taliban must, in turn, acknowledge the changed reality of today's Afghanistan".

The current reality is that 74% of Afghan population is below 30 and has lived, for most part, in a conservative but open society. However, the Taliban continue to maintain the Kabul administration as an imported western structure for continued American occupation. Senior members of the Afghan government continue to be targeted including Vice President Amrullah Saleh who narrowly escaped an IED attack on his motorcade on September 9, even as 10 innocent Afghans lost their lives.

Evolving Indian stand

Addressing the opening session of the Doha meeting, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar reiterated that the peace process must be "Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled" but Indian policy has evolved from its earlier hands-off approach to the Taliban. Speaking to Indian media a few months ago on separate occasions, both Ambassador Khalilzad

and Russian Special Envoy to Afghanistan Ambassador Zamir Kabulov bluntly pointed out that if India had concerns regarding anti-India activities of terrorist groups, it must engage directly with the Taliban. In other words, if India wanted to be invited to the party, it must be prepared to get up and dance.

Major powers, finite interest

The reality is major powers have limited interests. For the U.S., the peace talks provide U.S. President Donald Trump an exit opportunity weeks before his re-election bid. The European Union has made it clear that its financial contribution will depend on the security environment and the human rights record. China can always lean on Pakistan to preserve its security and connectivity interests. For Russia, blocking the drug supply and keeping its southern periphery secure from extremist influences is key. That is why no major power is taking ownership for the reconciliation talks, but merely content with being facilitators.

A report issued last month by the Heart of Asia Society, a Kabul-based think tank observes that "the prospect for peace in Afghanistan depends on regional consensus to support the peace process as much as it depends on actual progress in the intra-Afghan talks". India's vision of a sovereign, united, stable, plural and democratic Afghanistan is one that is shared by a large constituency in Afghanistan, cutting across ethnic and provincial lines. A more active engagement will enable India to work with like-minded forces in the region to ensure that the vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal does not lead to an unravelling of the gains registered during the last two decades.

Rakesh Sood is a former Ambassador to Afghanistan and currently Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation

On the GST issue, the Centre holds the baton

A large borrowing programme is inevitable; data and economic uncertainties show that States cannot handle the matter



ARUN KUMAR

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council meeting has now been deferred to the first week of October due to sharp disagreement between the States and the Centre, the result of the unprecedented revenue shortfall faced by them. By July-end, the Centre's fiscal deficit had reached ₹8.2-lakh crore, 103% of the full year's target and 15.23% of the lower GDP. The States face a similar situation.

The Centre had brought the States on board GST by promising higher revenue collection. Producing States such as Gujarat were sceptical because GST is a last point tax which is collected proportionately more in consuming States such as Bihar. States were lured by the promise of 14% annual growth in GST revenue over the base year of 2015-16. Any shortfall from this (for five years) was to be compensated by levying a cess on luxury and sin goods.

States have been reminding the Centre of this promise of compensation for five years. Last year, because of the slowdown in the economy and a shortfall in revenues, the transfer to States was finally

made by July 2020. The transfers due since April 2020 have been withheld.

In the last GST Council meeting held on August 27, the Centre gave the States two options. First, they could borrow ₹97,000 crore (the shortfall in the GST revenue compensation) from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under a special window at a low rate of interest. Second, borrow ₹2.35-lakh crore (the total compensation shortfall) from the market with the RBI facilitating it. The burden of repayment would be borne by the future collections from the compensation cess. It was proposed that this cess which was to end in June 2022 could be extended to facilitate the repayment of the debt.

Clearly, the Centre is reneging on its promise to the States. The implication is that the States are on their own – cooperative federalism is a casualty.

Accuracy of estimates
What is the guarantee that the cess would continue beyond 2022? If the statutory provision of 14% increase is being given up, then how sacrosanct will something that is not even a part of the GST Act be? Adverse economic circumstances may continue given the great uncertainty about the duration of the downturn.

Given the uncertainty, how accurate are the estimates of ₹97,000 crore and ₹2.35-lakh crore offered to the States? How



are they arrived at when the Ministry of Finance is refusing to give a figure for 2020-21?

Budgetary calculations

The Union Budget presented on February 1, 2020 assumed a nominal growth of 10%. But, given that the economy is still at around 60% of last year's level, very optimistically it is likely to contract for the year 2020-21 by at least 10%. So, optimistically, the Centre's budgetary calculations will be off by at least 20%.

Revenue will fall by much more than 20%. Corporate sector profits will fall sharply. Some sectors such as fast-moving consumer goods, or FMCG, and e-commerce will do well. But companies in sectors such as airlines, hotels and consumer durables will show losses and, therefore, pay little tax. Thus, corporation tax collection will fall sharply – much more than 20% compared to the budget estimate.

Similarly, income tax collection will fall since a large number of workers have lost employment and/or have faced salary cuts. Ma-

ny private firms are also likely to incur losses. So, income tax collection will also be short by much more than 20%. The direct tax/GDP per cent may be expected to fall from 5.5% last year to less than 4% this fiscal.

If GDP falls by 10% over last year, instead of being ₹224-lakh crore, it will be about ₹184-lakh crore. Using the lower tax/GDP ratio, direct tax revenue will be short by ₹5-lakh crore compared to the budgeted amount. This is an optimistic guess. The States' share of all taxes collected by the Centre is 42%, so they will lose ₹2-lakh crore.

Greater shortfall

GST collection will also be short by much more than 20%. The production of luxury and sin goods has been severely impacted and they pay the high rate of tax – 18%, 28% and cess on top. The essential production which is affected less by lockdown either pays 0%, 5% or 12%. Due to a drastic fall in imports, the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) and customs duties will also decline. The extra tax collected on petroleum products will help counter the decline to an extent.

Consequently, the indirect tax/GDP ratio can be expected to fall from 10.5% to 8% resulting in a drop of ₹7 lakh crore. About 60% of this loss will be from GST and half of that would be the loss of States. About half of the remaining

part (₹2.8-lakh crore) will also be a loss of States.

The States' GST shortfall would be about ₹2.1-lakh crore. On top of this, they will lose 42% of the shortfall in the Centre's collection – so another ₹88,000 crore. The GST collection figures are gross; input credit remains to be paid back. So, the shortfall is likely to be greater than implied by the April to August figures.

Thus, at an optimistic guess, if the economy declines by only 10%, the total tax collection will be down by about ₹12-lakh crore in 2020-21. The States will lose ₹6.4 lakh crore. The States GST revenue will be short by ₹3-lakh crore which should be compensated by the Centre. Subtracting from this the expected collection of ₹65,000 crore from cess we get the figure of ₹2.35-lakh crore.

Even if the States take the loan of ₹2.35-lakh crore they would have an uncovered deficit of ₹4-lakh crore. Further, as many predictions are that the economy will be down by much more than 10% used in the calculations above, the revenue shortfall is likely to be far greater. This points to the dire position of the Centre (and the States) and the inevitability of a large borrowing programme. Only the Centre is in a position to do such massive borrowing.

Arun Kumar is Malcolm Adiseshiah Chair Professor, Institute of Social Sciences, and the author of "Ground Scorching Tax"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Advice to India

I am much troubled by the strong negative reaction in the article, "Reject this inequitable climate proposal" (Editorial page, September 18). The UN Secretary-General is absolutely right in what he has said. The temperature now is expected to increase probably near 4°C by the end of this century unless we stop burning coal and releasing much of the greenhouse gases now. Isn't the unprecedented forest burning across Siberia, western U.S., Brazil, Australia, multiple cyclones/tropical storms from warming oceans, melting of polar ice and ocean rise much faster than expected,

migrating wildlife and humans and vast biodiversity loss, enough to make us sweat at night for our children?

Almost the only 'action' is adaptation to climate change as in agriculture, coastal zones, transport, and so many other sectors. We cannot wait for different country expectations and arguments. India must today start plans for 'carbon neutrality' within a few years as many other countries are doing. Yes, this is extremely difficult and disruptive for India. But our children will judge us by this more than anything else.

CLARENCE MALONEY,
Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu

It would be inappropriate to bluntly reject the proposals made by the UN Secretary-General, especially with India being a part of Sustainable Development Goals. It is our responsibility too to minimise emissions and there must be a concerted effort to shift to renewable energy solutions.

MAHIMA VERMA,
New Delhi

nature, but have no qualms about abusing the very same creature in flesh and blood. It is not uncommon to see people chasing away street dogs or their benevolent feeders citing strange reasons. The same Constitution that guarantees personal liberty and other rights also holds us individually accountable to show compassion towards animals. We, Indians, have consistently shown that we can be tamed only if laws and punishments are made more stringent. People should come together for voiceless creatures (OpEd page, "For the welfare of animals", September 18).

ANAND ARAVAMUDHAN,
Chennai

Indians, who observe a culture of veneration of nature, are straying from the path of compassion for animals in their quest for prosperity. Indians will visit places of worship to make offerings to different representational forms of

Cracking the world of make-believe

The Bengaluru Central Crime Branch arrested two actors while chasing a drug syndicate in the Kannada film industry. The police say there is a serious drug problem while the Opposition sees an attempt to divert attention from more pressing issues. **K.V. Aditya Bharadwaj** and **Imran Gowhar** piece together the details

The death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput in June in his home in Bandra, Mumbai, and the recent arrest of his girlfriend, actor Rhea Chakraborty, for allegedly procuring drugs, has had ramifications not just in Mumbai, but in Bengaluru too. The gaze of the police turned to the Kannada film industry and to high-profile parties where socialites and actors allegedly mingle with drug dealers to procure and consume narcotics.

With two female actors arrested and more being questioned for their alleged links to a narcotics syndicate, the Kannada film industry is in the midst of an unprecedented drug scandal. This has led to a prolonged media trial that has come under severe criticism for not only its sensationalism but also misogyny.

The 'scandal' has had political ramifications too, with Opposition leaders accusing the State government of diverting public attention away from real problems such as the pandemic, rising unemployment, and floods that have affected parts of Karnataka.

A can of worms

The Bengaluru Central Crime Branch (CCB) police's investigation into the drug racket followed raids in Bengaluru conducted by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), which is also investigating alleged narcotics use by people associated with the Rajput case. The NCB busted a drug ring in Bengaluru, and in doing so opened a can of worms.

During the raids in the last week of August, the NCB arrested three peddlers in Bengaluru for dealing with synthetic drugs like ecstasy pills and LSD blots. At the time, NCB Deputy Director (operations) K.P.S. Malhotra said in a media statement that "preliminary investigation has revealed that the accused used to supply drugs to affluent sections of society, including prominent musicians and actors as well as to college students and youngsters."

The same week, the CCB of the Bengaluru Police arrested Ravi Shankar, a second division clerk at an RTO office in the city, after "surveillance and ground work on him for three months" for his alleged role in drug peddling. His interrogation led to the revelation of more names and the arrests of Bengaluru-based multilingual actors Ragini Dwivedi and Sanjana Galrani.

Actor-couple Diganth and Aindrita Ray have also been questioned. The two together have acted in many successful Kannada films and also made brief forays into Bollywood. Another high-profile accused in the case, whom the police were still tracking down at the time of going to press, is Aditya Alva, the son of the late Minister Jeevaraj Alva and brother-in-law of Bollywood actor Vivek Oberoi. His luxurious farmhouse in Hebbal, allegedly the venue of many of these parties, was raided earlier this month.

Sandeep Patil, Joint Commissioner (Crime), leading the CCB, said the investigation had for the first time unravelled "an ecosystem of lavish parties for the rich in the city, whose organisers ensured narcotics was freely available... The actors we have arrested have consumed drugs and promoted these events."

The CCB has made 14 arrests in the case till date, which includes a few business acting as sub-peddlers. "There are three pillars: party organisers, drug peddlers who supplied narcotics to these parties, and celebrities who participated in and promoted these events, all of which we have been able to crack in the case," he said.

Investigations have identified three persons – noted socialite and event manager Viren Khanna, Aditya Alva, and Sheikh Fazil – as party organisers. So far, only Khanna has been arrested, while the other two are on the run.

Khanna's parties, held at pubs, microbreweries and star hotels, were popular among the city's elite for many years. Venues used to vie to host his Holi parties every year, sources in the industry said. He was even a police informer. He provided information on rave parties where narcotics use was rampant. That information led to several raids. But while he gave information about his competitor party organisers, he ensured that his own parties went under the radar, sources said. "Efforts are on to arrest Aditya Alva and Sheikh Fazil," a senior official said.

These party organisers used to host after-parties at dedicated apartments or sometimes in their own homes till the wee hours. These after-parties, where substance abuse was high, were hosted for a close circle of individuals. Many of the actors being probed now were regular at these after-parties as well, sources said.

Two dealers, both foreign nationals from Africa, have also been arrested for supplying drugs to these parties. How they sourced them is being investigated.

Star power

In the midst of these revelations, Kannada filmmaker Indrajit Lankesh an-



Actors Ragini Dwivedi and Sanjana Galrani arrive for medical tests at a hospital in Bengaluru on September 14. They were both arrested by the Bengaluru Central Crime Branch Police. (Below): Actor-couple Diganth and Aindrita Ray after an interrogation by the CCB. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT / K. MURALIKUMAR



nounced that he was aware of the nexus between the film industry and drug dealers, claiming that ₹4 crore worth of drugs were sold during the lockdown. Though he was summoned by the CCB, he could not provide any evidence for his claims.

The police claim that the actors under scrutiny were not mere bystanders or users. "Some of those questioned were not only regulars at some of these parties, but also promoted them to attract crowds. They were paid for the same as well. Party organisers made their money through the cover fee, while the venues made money from food and alcohol bills," a senior officer said.

Ragini and Sanjana have been booked for peddling drugs, not just consumption. This is quite similar to actor Rhea Chakraborty from whom no drugs were recovered. However, with no significant recoveries made from them either, several doubts have been raised over their alleged role. CCB officials said they have made these arrests based on a huge cache of electronic evidence, and after analysing call detail records and messages from instant messaging apps that allegedly show they were in constant touch with a known drug peddler and were sourcing narcotics for others as well. Sleuths said they are confident that the evidence they have amassed will be enough to get a conviction.

All the actors have denied these allegations. Ragini's parents have alleged that she has been falsely implicated.

Attention diversion

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has tried to build a campaign around the enforcement saying it is striving for a "drug-free Karnataka". The State police have made several seizures of narcotics, especially marijuana, across Karnataka in the last two weeks, including a big haul of 1.3 tonnes of marijuana from Kalaburagi. Not a day has gone without drug busts and seizures of marijuana in the last two weeks. However, many have argued that this only points to lax enforcement before and a concerted cam-

aign that "for the first time this government has given the police a free hand to act against the drug mafia. The BJP will ensure a drug-free Karnataka".

However, this has also backfired against the party. After she was arrested, videos of Ragini campaigning for the BJP candidate in the K.R. Pet bypolls in 2019, for which Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa's son, B.Y. Vijayendra, was in charge, went viral. The BJP was quick to distance itself from her and issued multiple statements claiming that it was neither accountable nor answerable to the actor's activities in her personal and professional life.

Since the onset of the case, almost every day, photographs of prominent politicians from across the political spectrum, including incumbent Ministers, with those allegedly linked to the narcotics syndicate are surfacing in the local media. Police officials said they are going strictly by evidence and photographs are no proof of anyone's involvement.

The non-stop media coverage fuelled by allegations from "activists" known to be close to the BJP claiming that Opposition politicians have links to the narcotics trade has been met with outrage in many quarters. Social activist Prashanth Sambaragi, who also jumped into the fray, claimed to have evidence against Congress MLA B.Z. Zameer Ahmed Khan. "Both he and Indrajit made several allegations without providing any evidence for their claims," said CCB officials.

Opposition leaders have accused the government of employing a "diversionary campaign to escape accountability for the failures of the government", as Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly Siddaramaiah termed it. Noted media critic Krishna Prasad, who edits *Indian Journalism Review*, said there was a sense of déjà vu with the coverage coming amidst the spotlight on the Sushant Singh Rajput case that also smacks of an attempt to divert people's attention from more pressing issues.

Former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy alleged money from dance bars and the drug mafia was used to poach MLAs from the Janata Dal (Secular)-Congress coalition resulting in the toppling

of his government, a charge vehemently denied by defectors who are now Ministers in the BJP government. Siddaramaiah has demanded a judicial probe into the scandal.

Media trial and moral policing

The media has also been criticised for moral policing and misogynist overtones in the coverage. "Nashe Raniyaru, Drugginiyaru (queens on a high, drug queens)" are some of the names sections of the media have given the two actors arrested in the case, who have remained the prime focus of coverage, even though the police say their attention is on the party organisers and peddlers who are the source of the narcotics.

Kannada writer and critic M.S. Ashadevi has been critical of the misogynist tone of the media coverage on the case. "I am not condoning drug abuse. Let the guilty be punished. But it is evident that these women have become convenient symbols of a larger malaise in society. The language used in the media is extremely patriarchal, laced with innuendos, and objectifies them. This extreme misogyny and gender bias seem to be as dangerous as drug abuse," she said. This may only help the bigger culprits to escape scrutiny, she added.

Krishna Prasad said the coverage of the case smacks of a philistine view prevalent in the Kannada media. "The coverage clearly shows a lack of understanding of the drug scene, nightlife in the city and even the film industry. It not only smacks of misogyny but has slowly turned xenophobic as most of those arrested are not native Kannadigas," he said.

There have been muted protests from the film industry, echoing sentiments expressed by noted actor Jaya Bachchan in the Rajya Sabha recently, that the entire industry was being tarred with the same brush. D.R. Jairaj, president, Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce, said the media was unfairly tarnishing the image of the film industry for the acts of a few, which were also yet to be proven. "I have been interacting with the government seeking help to restart film shoots and reopen theatres to salvage a bleeding industry. Following the media coverage tarnishing the industry,

I felt embarrassed to talk to the government and seek help," he said.

Noted filmmaker Kavitha Lankesh said she had never come across drug abuse in the many decades she has been part of the industry. Even if there are stray cases, it is like any other industry, she said. "There is a clear tone of moral policing especially targeted at women in the industry, branding them and resorting to character assassination," she said. Filmmaker K.M. Chaitanya said even if there was drug abuse in the Kannada film industry, it was similar to any other film industry or any other industry in the State. "There is something amiss here as a few individual cases are being picked up and extrapolated to tarnish the entire industry," he said.

Cryptocurrency comes in handy

The investigation has also drawn flak for allegedly "scratching the surface and not netting the big fish". "For all the claims of uncovering a larger nexus of parties and narcotics trade among Bengaluru's affluent elite, it is surprising that not a single person from the families of politicians and industrialists of the city, known to have such a lifestyle, have been questioned. Even those arrested from the film industry are outsiders, not entrenched in the industry establishment," said a former top police officer, who did not wish to be named.

Dismissing allegations that the investigations are selective, City Police Commissioner Kamal Pant said the investigators were given a free hand. All arrests were based on evidence and no one who is found to be involved will be spared, he said.

However, the former top police officer said the drug menace in Bengaluru was worsening by the day and posing new challenges. It was affecting youngsters from affluent families with easy money, he said. "Over the years, there have been multiple accidents and brawls involving those from the families of politicians and even from the film industry that raised strong suspicion of narcotics abuse. But investigation into these instances has glossed over this aspect," he alleged.

One reason why the drug menace is worsening is because there is easy access to synthetic drugs via the dark net. These are paid for using cryptocurrency. Recently the local police investigated a case involving a gang led by a young college graduate. He allegedly imported ecstasy and LSD from other countries through the dark net, paid for them with cryptocurrency like Bitcoin, and then used app-based delivery services to courier the shipped consignments to clients in Bengaluru.

Narcotics hub

When Pant took charge as Bengaluru Police Commissioner, he said taking action against the drug menace would be a priority. Speaking to *The Hindu*, when he took charge just over a month ago, he said, "It is a commitment to our children." At least three of his immediate predecessors promised that putting a check on the narcotics trade would be a

top priority during their tenure.

"Narcotics trade not only harms our youngsters but also generates sinful employment, easy money and promotes other crimes like rowdyism apart from brawls and accidents. Working purely on a demand-supply dynamic, the narcotics situation in the city has been worsening over the years. It cannot be seen purely from a crime enforcement angle. Its high prevalence is linked to the burgeoning growth of the city, its booming economy, easy money and stressed lifestyles," a former Bengaluru Police Commissioner said. He added that he was unhappy with how little he could do to check the menace during his tenure. "Anti-narcotics operations need focused and patient hard work. We have to collect intelligence and later carry out investigations that result in convictions. Rarely does being Police Commissioner of a city like Bengaluru offer such time," he said.

Bengaluru is often described as the hub of narcotics in south India. Marijuana remains most widely used due to its affordability and easy availability. The city gets a bulk of its supply of marijuana by road from the forests near Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. Multiple coordination meetings have been held with the police forces of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha over the issue, sources said.

A tangled web

However, the more lethal and pricier synthetic drugs are fast gaining ground. "Like all other metro cities the trend has been towards synthetic drugs like MDMA/ecstasy pills, LSD and cocaine in the city. We have observed that the availability of narcotics was not greatly affected even during the lockdown. We have found several cases during the pandemic as well," said Amit Ghawate, Zonal Director, NCB, Bengaluru.

A section of middle class professionals, especially those working in highly stressful and competitive environments like the Information Technology and start-up sectors, with high pay scales make for a significant section of the clientele for synthetic narcotics in the city apart from the rich with easy money. The preferred poison of the poor working class has remained marijuana, said sources in the City Police.

"Synthetic drugs are mostly sourced from abroad. They are smuggled into the country predominantly through the air route hidden in cargo, in person or through postal services or couriers. And they are increasingly being procured via the dark web," Ghawate said.

For instance, the Customs at the Kempegowda International Airport seized ₹1 crore worth of ecstasy pills hidden inside foot massage machines on September 10. City police are now rearing a dedicated dog squad trained to sniff out narcotics to be deployed at the Kempegowda International Airport.

The City Police have recently cracked three cases where narcotics were being procured through the dark web, including a racket where a group of Disc Jockeys (DJs) at the city's prominent pubs were peddling synthetic drugs so procured. The kingpin of this racket is still at large. Investigations had then revealed that the same drug would be sold at ₹2,000-₹10,000 as the night progressed and the particular network was supplying narcotics to other DJs in Mumbai, Kerala and Goa as well.

Most of these peddlers procuring drugs from the dark web have an understanding with the postal/courier personnel to deliver the parcels without raising any suspicions and ensure that the person taking the final delivery is not identified. Police have also arrested five postal personnel in connection with such a case in the city in February earlier this year.

"We have been able to enter the dark web networks. A constant surveillance of peddlers has paid us dividends. But what has remained a challenge is to bring to book the suppliers as they are stationed abroad. Many have masked their locations as well. We have cracked cases where narcotics came from diverse locations in Central and Eastern Europe and Canada," said Sandeep Patil, Joint Commissioner (Crime), Bengaluru. "NCB being the nodal agency can work with other international enforcement agencies and can go to the source of the narcotics in other countries. We will work in co-ordination with the local authorities as well," Ghawate said.

The ongoing investigation has unravelled only one of the several unconnected nodes of the narcotic network in the city, the police said. "But we hope a crackdown like this instils the fear of enforcement and has a chilling effect on other networks as well. We expect the party circuits that are breeding grounds for narcotic trade to be down for another year at least, even as we intend to expand our probe," said a senior police official.

With inputs from Shilpa Sebastian R. and Aparna Narrain in Bengaluru and Girish Pattanshetti in Hubballi



FROM PAGE ONE

'10 patrolling points in Ladakh blocked by PLA'

As per the disengagement plan agreed between the Corps Commanders of India and China on June 30, the two sides agreed to pull back from all the friction points and decided that "depth areas" such as the Depsang plains in the north, where China has amassed troops, will be looked into. However, so far the Chinese transgression at Depsang has not been discussed and in none of the government statements it finds a mention.

After the Foreign Ministers of both countries - S. Jaishankar and Wang Yi, met in Moscow on September 10 and agreed on a five-point solution to ease the border tension, there has been no clarity on when the Corps Commanders will meet.

Since June, the Corps Commanders have met on five occasions - the latest one took place on August 2. The north and south banks of Pangong have witnessed firing in the air on multiple occasions since August 30, a first of its kind escalation since 1975.

On June 15, 20 Indian soldiers were killed in violent clashes with the Chinese.

Media should not target minorities, says SC

Justice Chandrachud said the court did not have a problem with Sudarshan TV exercising its journalistic privilege to investigate an organisation's funding in public interest but the channel had no business to make sweeping comments about the entire Muslim community.

It crossed the Rubicon when it implied that civil services aspirants from the community had terror links.

Not every child can afford to enrol for elite UPSC coaching classes. They may be helped by organisations to enter civil services. These students may also be from other religious communities... "Is it right to imply they have infiltrated UPSC and have terror links," Justice Chandrachud asked.

'Plainly hurtful'
Justice Indu Malhotra said such content was "plainly hurtful". The Sudarshan TV show has smeared an entire community.

The court said it would not have stepped in and ordered an injunction on the Sudarshan TV show recently had there been a strong self-regulatory mechanism.

Justice Chandrachud said, "A pre-telecast injunction is like a nuclear missile. The court would not have intervened had the government, regulatory bodies had a viable mechanism for self-regulation."

The court agreed that a pre-telecast ban is an "extreme recourse".

Justice Chandrachud said, "We are very conscious of the fact that pre-publication, pre-telecast ban by us is a matter of extreme recourse. We do not do it easily. It could take us down a slippery slope..

This court is circumspect about clamping down on any news/opinions. Only in certain narrow range of issues is it [pre-telecast ban] done, like child sexual abuse cases, gender violence or cases regarding matrimonial or even any personal relationship."

Paytm back on app store after Google rap

Paytm Founder and CEO tweeted, "Thanks everyone for your support! Paytm App is back, live in Play Store. We launched a UPI CashBack campaign this morning. Our app got suspended by Google for this. India, you decide if giving cash back is gambling."

Ahead of the start of Indian Premier League, Suzanne Frey, Vice President, Product, Android Security and Privacy at Google, said the company does not allow online casinos or support any unregulated gambling apps that facilitate sports betting.

"This includes if an app leads consumers to an external website that allows them to participate in paid tournaments to win real money or cash prizes, it is a violation

of our policies," she said.

She added that these policies are there to protect users from potential harm. When an app violates these policies, Google notifies the developer of the violation and removes the app from Google Play until the developer brings the app into compliance, Ms. Frey said.

Ms. Frey added, "Google Play is designed to provide a safe and secure experience for our consumers while also giving developers the platform and tools they need to build sustainable businesses. Our global policies have always been designed with that goal in mind, considering the good of all our stakeholders. We have the same goals for our gambling policy."

Karnataka reports 179 deaths in highest daily toll

Kerala records 4,000 plus cases for second day; test positivity rate in A.P. dropping; Telangana cases hover around 2,000

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Thirissur 326, Malappuram 297, Alappuzha 274, Palakkad 268, Kottayam 225, Kasaragod 145, Pathanamthitta 101, Idukki 100 and Wayanad 68 cases.

Telangana reported 11 more deaths on Thursday, pushing up COVID-related deaths to 1,016, an official bulletin said on Friday. There were 2,043 positive cases. A total of 50,634 samples were tested of which 22,279 were from primary contacts of patients.

While 1,16,932 patients were asymptomatic, 30% showed symptoms. Data showed 61.83% of positive cases were men, and those in the 21-30 age group made up 24.24%, followed by the 31-40 age group (23.51%). Greater Hyderabad continued to record the highest number of cases at 314 on September 17. Rangareddy had 174, Medchal Malkajgiri 144, Nalgonda 131, Siddipet 121 and Karimnagar 114.

COVID-19

ber of samples tested increased to 47,723.

There were 35,724 active cases under treatment.

Official data said 501 people had succumbed to COVID-19 so far. On Friday, 12 more deaths which occurred between September 9-15 were added to the list.

Kozhikode, where cases rose recently, reported 404 cases, Kollam 355 cases, Ernakulam 348, Kannur 330,

Rigorous check

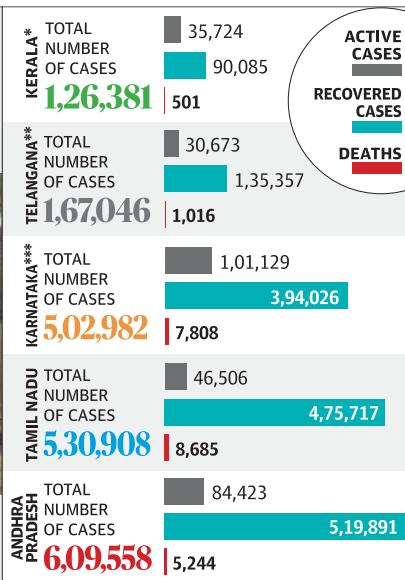
To keep the spread of the virus under check, State governments have increased testing across the country. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States



Unending process: A health worker collecting swab samples at a health centre in Secunderabad on Friday. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

*Kerala has a mismatch of 71 cases due to unaccounted deaths, missing persons | **Telangana numbers are as of 8 p.m. on Thursday

***Karnataka has 19 non-COVID deaths



Tamil Nadu's overall tally of COVID-19 cases climbed to 5,30,908 with another 5,488 persons testing positive for the infection on Friday. As many as 5,525 persons were discharged, and 67 more persons died.

In Chennai, a total of 989 persons tested positive for COVID-19 and 16 persons died.

The cases remained high in Coimbatore - 543 (including an imported case). Four districts had 200-plus cases - Salem (288), Chengalpattu (265), Tiruvallur (258) and Cuddalore (254).

The number of active cases in the State stood at 46,506 of which Chennai accounted for 9,946 persons and Coimbatore had 4,034 persons. Till now, a total of 4,75,717 persons were discharged in the State, while the toll climbed to 8,685.

(With inputs from Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Bengaluru and Chennai bureaus)

Kerala Minister named a 'person of interest' in Customs offences

They pertain to alleged conspiracy to evade duty

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOCHI



K.T. Jaleel

people who want to come into mainstream... You may end up driving them into the wrong hands. Every community strives to have a voice in the bureaucracy. Every community wants to have a slice of power. What is wrong in that?"

Though calling media regulatory bodies such as the News Broadcasters Association "toothless", the court asked them and the government to suggest measures to strengthen media self-regulation.

The court said it would not have stepped in and ordered an injunction on the Sudarshan TV show recently had there been a strong self-regulatory mechanism.

Justice Chandrachud said, "A pre-telecast injunction is like a nuclear missile. The court would not have intervened had the government, regulatory bodies had a viable mechanism for self-regulation."

The court agreed that a pre-telecast ban is an "extreme recourse".

Justice Chandrachud said, "We are very conscious of the fact that pre-publication, pre-telecast ban by us is a matter of extreme recourse. We do not do it easily. It could take us down a slippery slope..

This court is circumspect about clamping down on any news/opinions. Only in certain narrow range of issues is it [pre-telecast ban] done, like child sexual abuse cases, gender violence or cases regarding matrimonial or even any personal relationship."

Customs Commissioner Sumit Kumar said the offences pertained to "conspiracy to evade Customs duty by fraudulently claiming exemption".

The Customs Department

ditions are violated.

"The consignments of 18 tonnes of palm dates, which were stated to be for personal consumption, and 4.5 tonnes of the Koran were eventually handed over to others without paying Customs duty. Doesn't this amount to bypassing the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act norms?" asked the officer.

Ideally, either permission should have been sought from the government of India or duty paid for the freight, he said.

The Customs Department, the official said, was looking into the 12 instances of exemption granted to a diplomatic mission is conditional, and it no longer remains valid when the con-

sultant is.

According to a senior official of the Customs Department, duty exemption granted to a diplomatic mission is conditional, and it no longer remains valid when the con-

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will now probe the role of the officials of the Consulate in the alleged conspiracy.

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Chautala meets Khattar over protests

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Amid the ongoing protests over the agriculture reform Bills, Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala, whose Janayak Janata Party (JJP) is part of the coalition government, on Friday met Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar to discuss the issue, even as the Congress mounted pressure on him to step down.

JJP leader and Indian National Students Organization national president Digvijay Singh Chautala said the party's coalition with the BJP in Haryana was on strong footing. He added that there was no pressure on the party to leave the alliance in the backdrop of resignation of Harsimrat Kaur Badal of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has cleared the doubts of the farmers on the farm ordinances and the country must trust him," he said.

Farmers being misled: PM

'Govt. committed to helping farmers get fair prices'

AMARNATH TEWARY
PATNA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asserted that some people in the country were trying to mislead farmers over agriculture Bills.

"Misinformation is being spread in the country today by some people that farmers will not be getting right prices of their produce but our government is committed to helping farmers get fair prices...now they can sell their produce anywhere in the country without any restrictions", he said, inaugurating and flagging off railway projects worth ₹2,700 crore in Bihar.

Referring to the new farm Bills, the Prime Minister said, "The farmers of the country will get freedom from middlemen and they will get more options and opportunities to sell their produce... these Bills have come as a *raksha kawach* [protection safety] for them. But some people are spreading misinformation over farm bills... these people who have been in power for decades and have spoken so much about farmers and agricultural issues have



Narendra Modi

done nothing for them", he said in an oblique reference to the Congress.

"My government is committed to giving right MSP to farmers... there are arrangements that farmers of the country get the right MSP... Our government has been continuously trying to remove each and every problem of farmers... through Pradhan Mantri Kisan Kalyan Yojna, ₹1 lakh crore has been directly transferred to the accounts of 10 crore farmers of the country.... I want to convey to you [farmers] that you should not be misled by anyone..." he stated.

The Lok Sabha has passed The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020; the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020; and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

Shiromani Akali Dal leader and its lone representative in the Union Cabinet, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, resigned over the Bills pushed by the government.

Cong. exhorts BJP allies to take a stand

Contentious farm Bills to come up in RS next

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In protest, Congress members walked out of the House. When Speaker Om Birla asked the Minister to stop, Mr. Thakur said that he needed more time to bring out the real face of the Opposition. Amid the din, BJP member from West Bengal Locket Chatterjee also made some remarks that were opposed by Trinamool Congress members.

Some Congress members entered the Well of the House raising slogans.

The Speaker first adjourned the proceedings for 30 minutes till 4.20 p.m., and later from 4.20 p.m. to 5 p.m., and from 5 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., and then till 6 p.m.

'Cong. responsible for farm Bills'

Akali Dal walks a tightrope on ties with BJP

VIKAS VASUDEVA
NISTULA HEBBAR
CHANDIGARH / NEW DELHI

A day after Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) quit the government over three agriculture sector Bills, pushed by the NDA government, the party has decided to "expose" the Congress party, which it accused of adopting 'double-speak' on the issue.

At meeting of its core committee on Friday, the party discussed the different aspects of the alliance with the NDA, but the focus remained on sorting out the challenges that have currently come to the fore in the backdrop of farm legislations. Senior party leader Prem Singh Chandumajra told *The Hindu* that at the core committee meeting, party members analysed the entire situation in the backdrop of the Ms. Badal's resignation. Mr. Chandumajra said the ruling Congress go-



Tough spot: Shiromani Akali Dal President Sukhbir Singh Badal, left, speaking to the media on the Parliament premises in New Delhi. ■ ANI

vernment was directly responsible for amending the State APMC Act (Agriculture Produce Marketing Act) in 2017 immediately after coming to power in the State, to include all the provisions of the Farming Produce Trade and Commerce Ordinance 2020.

"Not only, this the Congress government is also partly to the passing of the Farming Produce Ordinance as it participated in the consultative process to enable implementation of the Bills. Congress stands completely exposed and we will now tell people about Congress's double-speak," said Mr. Chandumajra.

Deflecting threat

Responding to speculations surrounding the SAD's departure from the NDA, Mr. Chandumajra said the Assembly election in Punjab, which is due in 2022, are far away. "Our first priority is to sort out the challenges that

have currently come to the fore,"

Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda, however, kept up the rhetoric on how the three farm bills to which the SAD objected were important reforms in the agricultural sector.

The SAD soft-peddling on withdrawing from the NDA, and the BJP's support for the farm Bills does not augur an easy resolution to the issue within the alliance.

LS erupts over Thakur's remark on 'Nehru-Gandhi' family

Speaker Om Birla adjourns the House four times

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Friday was adjourned four times as Treasury and Opposition benches sparred in the House over certain remarks made by the Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur, specifically with regard to the Nehru-Gandhi family.

The disturbance began during the introduction of the Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation and Amendment of Certain Provisions) Bill, 2020. After speaking for some time during the procedure for the introduction of the bill, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said



Anurag Thakur

that her deputy Mr. Thakur would talk about the PM-CARES Fund. Opposition members had raised concerns about the fund. While speaking, Mr. Thakur said the PM National Relief Fund had not been registered till date, and also stressed that the alleged misuse of funds needed to be looked into. When Congress members protested, Mr. Thakur said that "the names of the Nehru-

ru and Gandhi family should be taken" and alleged that the "Gandhi family had ruined the country".

In protest, Congress members walked out of the House. When Speaker Om Birla asked the Minister to stop, Mr. Thakur said that he needed more time to bring out the real face of the Opposition. Amid the din, BJP member from West Bengal Locket Chatterjee also made some remarks that were opposed by Trinamool Congress members.

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Contentious farm Bills to come up in RS next

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A day after the exit of Akali Dal leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal from the Narendra Modi Cabinet, the Congress exhorted all other BJP allies to decide their stand on the three agriculture-related Bills. The Bills will come before the Rajya Sabha next on Sunday, where the Opposition does not have enough numbers.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala told reporters on Friday that Bihar Chief Minister and JD (U) president Nitish Kumar, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, the YSR Congress Party, the AIADMK and all other

parties would have to take a stand on the issue. "They will have to decide on whose side they like to stand. Are they with the farmers or against them?" he said.

The BJP is the single largest party in the Rajya Sabha with 86 members. The gap between the Congress (40 MPs) and other like-minded parties and the NDA allies is big. The thin attendance, mostly, in the opposition benches, adds to this difference.

Hooda demands special House session on farm Bills

Congress leader submits memorandum to Haryana Governor

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Leader of the Opposition in the Haryana Assembly Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Friday led a delegation of party MLAs and submitted a memorandum at the office of Governor Satyadev Narayan Arya here, demanding a 'special session' of the House to reject the Centre's agriculture sector-related Bills, on the lines of Punjab.

The former Chief Minister said the State farmers were facing an existential crisis due to the three "anti-farmer black laws", which the Union government brought in Parliament.

They would take away the protection provided to farmers,

he alleged.

"The situation demands a political consensus and it's important that all parties raise their voice in the interest of the State's farmers. A special session of the Assembly should be called and these three laws should be rejected outright, on the lines of Punjab. These laws should be discussed in the House so that people will know which party and member stands with the farmer and who is against them," he said.

A resolution should be passed in the Assembly against the Bills because the agriculture and market systems were in the jurisdiction of the State and the House had the legal and moral right to discuss this and voice the will of people, he stated.

'Not acceptable'

"Laws that dismantle the existing market system and take away the MSP [Minimum Support Price] guarantee are not acceptable to the State's people and farmers. Also, a Bill should be brought in the Assembly in which farmers should be guaranteed MSP under the M.S. Swaminathan C2 formula. The provision of MSP with C2 benefits should be added. If a private agency buys a crop of the farmer for less than the MSP, then it should be ready for the legal consequences," he added.

Sitharaman rebuts Oppn. criticism on 'act of God' remark

There is no vaccine for the virus and the government did not wish to raise money through more taxes, she says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

As Opposition MPs slammed the Centre's handling of COVID-19, the economic crisis, the GST stand-off with States and the lack of data on migrant worker deaths and job losses in the Lok Sabha on Friday, speaker after speaker poured special scorn on Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement terming

the impact of the pandemic an "act of God".

In response, Ms. Sitharaman said those criticising her "act of God" statement were acting with condescension towards a woman Minister, noting that it had the same meaning as the "force majeure" clause repeatedly invoked in legal arguments.

Given that there was no cure or vaccine for the virus,

and the government did not wish to raise money through heavier taxation, the Centre was taking all steps to deal with the situation and move the country towards stability and recovery, she said.

MPs were discussing the first batch of supplementary demands for grants for 2020-21, with the Lok Sabha finally approving a gross additional expenditure of ₹2.35 lakh

crore, including net cash outgo of almost ₹1.67 lakh crore.

'Pandemic as excuse'

"This government has got

COVID-19 as a blessing in disguise. The government can

now blame all its policy failings on this act of God. But

people shouldn't forget that

the failure of a once-promising economy is not an act of god but an act of bad govern-

mentance," said BSP MP Ritesh Pandey.

Trinamool Congress MP Saugata Roy also noted that "the economy was in a downward spiral even before the pandemic struck", and asked the government to allocate more money to demand-side interventions like the MGNREGA scheme and recognise that unemployment is the biggest problem

at the current time, rather than wasting its time on selling off airports and PSUs.

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury called for a scheme for migrant workers.

Ms Sitharaman also refuted criticism that the Centre was withholding money from the States, noting that the total transfer to States, was higher than last year.

Central Vista project comes in for criticism

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Bill to reduce the salaries of parliamentarians by 30% for one year to meet the exigencies arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic was cleared by Rajya Sabha on Friday even as the government came under a sharp attack from the Opposition for not cutting down on "luxuries" like the Central Vista redevelopment project and construction of a new Parliament building.

Lok Sabha had passed the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020 bill earlier this week. It will replace the Salary, Allowances And Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020, that was cleared by the Cabinet on April 6 and promulgated the next day.

Congress MP from Maharashtra Rajeev Satav said he fully supports the Bill and was willing to work for ₹1 if



An illuminated Parliament House during the Monsoon session on Friday.

that would aid COVID-19 response. But he pointed out that while the government wants to save ₹8,000 cr by suspending MP Local Area Development (MPLAD) Fund, it is willing to spend more than ₹20,000 on the Central Vista redevelopment project.

Many older buildings

Mr. Satav also said the government's claim that the present Parliament building is old is wrong. Across the world, parliaments of many nations are functioning out of buildings older than the Indian Parliament like the Dutch Parliament built in the

13th century, the Italian Parliament in the 16th century, the French Parliament in the 17th century, the U.S. Senate in the 1800s and the British Parliament in 1840.

"Our Parliament is less than hundred years old," he said. The government could have pushed the project by another four to five years, till the COVID-19 fight is done with, Mr. Satav added.

DMK MP P. Wilson said that in 2012 the then Parliamentary Affairs Minister had said the expenses incurred for conducting Parliament per session is ₹2.5 lakh per minute.

The savings due to the introduction of the bill is roughly around ₹4 crore rupees in one year. However, the money spent by us in considering and passing this Bill is around ₹6 crore since it is going to occupy four hours in both Houses to pass this Bill. Thus, this Bill doesn't cut down expenses but has created loss to the exchequer to the tune of ₹1.4 crore," he said. At the same time, he said, his party was not opposed to the pay cut.

He added that perhaps it

is time to tighten the purse strings by shedding other expenses by the government.

"It is extraordinary that the Centre has turned to the MPLAD scheme to generate funds, when vanity projects like the ₹20,000 crore Delhi Vista project, which is useful to none, are still on the table. The government owes about ₹1.47 crore to Air India for the travel of VVIPs. It has also spent ₹5,200 crores in advertisements since 2014-15," Mr. Wilson said.

RJD MP Manoj K. Jha also echoed the sentiments by saying that a new Parliament building and a redeveloped Central Vista is a "luxury" that the country can't afford at this time.

Replying to the debate, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said the Opposition's criticism about the Central Vista project is contrary to its demand that the government should initiate public spending to revive the economy.

Mr. Joshi also addressed Mr. Wilson's criticism. "The saving from the bill is not ₹6 crore, but ₹5.83 crore," he said.

He added that perhaps it

Oppn. parties call for a shorter session

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Three Opposition parties – Trinamool Congress, NCP and DMK – have approached the government, calling for a shorter session owing to the rising COVID-19 cases. However, sources said the government is in no mood to curtail the session till all the 11 ordinances are cleared.

The parties conveyed to Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi that the longer Parliament runs, the greater will be the exposure for MPs. So far, three MPs have died of COVID-19 – two from the Lok Sabha (Tirupati MP Balli Durga Prasad and Kanniyakumari MP H. Vasanthakumar) and one from the Rajya Sabha (Ashok Gasti). According to sources, Trinamool's Derek O'Brien, NCP's Praful Patel and DMK's Tiruchi Siva met Mr. Joshi on Friday, a day after BJP MP Vinay Sahasrabuddhe tested positive.

Replying to the debate, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said the Opposition's criticism about the Central Vista project is contrary to its demand that the government should initiate public spending to revive the economy.

Mr. Joshi also addressed Mr. Wilson's criticism. "The saving from the bill is not ₹6

IN BRIEF



Yogi moots ordinance against 'love jihad'

LUCKNOW Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has asked officials to formulate a strategy and "bring an ordinance if required to prevent religious conversions in the name of love", an official said on Friday. In Kanpur, the police had recently set up a SIT to look into reports of "love jihad".

Fashion designer Sharbari Datta dead

KOLKATA Well-known fashion designer Sharbari Datta was found dead at her residence in Kolkata on Friday morning under mysterious circumstances. She was 63. The body was discovered in her bathroom. A case of unnatural death was registered.

Maharashtra sees highest single-day recoveries

PUNE Maharashtra added 21,656 new COVID-19 cases on Friday and recorded its highest single-day recoveries to outweigh the case surge as 22,078 patients were discharged. As many as 440 deaths – of whom 398 were reported on Friday – pushed the total fatalities to 31,791.

336 railway employees died of COVID-19, Goyal tells RS

'No special compensation was given to kin of the deceased'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Over 300 railway employees have lost their lives due to COVID-19, the government said on Friday, adding that no special compensation was given to the families of those deceased.

As per the data shared by Railway Minister Piyush Goyal in the Rajya Sabha, the total COVID-19 cases among the railway employees stood at 14,714, while the deceased was 336.

A maximum of over 2,200 infections were reported by the South Central Railway, followed by 1,323 cases in the Central Railway, 1,307 in the Northern Railway, 1,445 in the Southern Railway and 1,013 cases in the East Central Railway.

Asked whether any special compensation was given to the families of those deceased due to COVID-19, Mr. Goyal replied in the negative. "Compensation to the family of deceased railway servants who die during performance of their bona fide duties is granted in the form of ex gratia payment as per the guidelines of the Department of Pension and Pensions Welfare. However,

Pak. shelling makes villagers flee in panic

Befitting response given, says Srinagar-based Army spokesman

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

A heavy exchange of fire and mortars was reported along the Line of Control (LoC) in north Kashmir's Bandipora district on Friday, as Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Gen. M.M. Naravane concluded his two-day visit to J&K and left for Delhi.

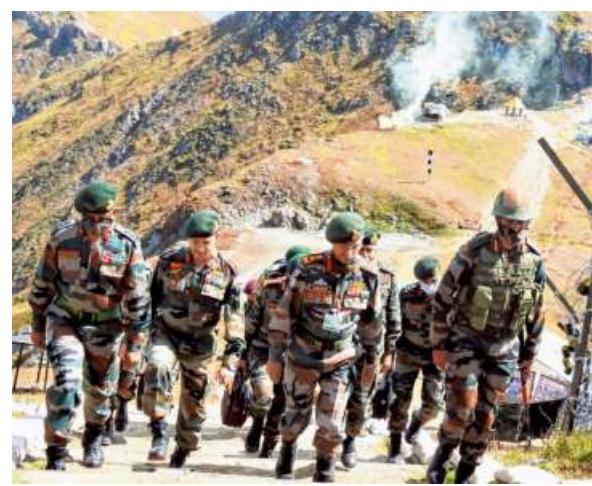
"Pakistan initiated an unprovoked ceasefire violation along the LoC in Kanzalwan, Gurez Sector, Bandipora, on Friday morning by firing mortars and other weapons. A befitting response was given," a Srinagar-based Army spokesman said.

An official said many forward defence locations were targeted by the Pakistani Army in the Bagtore Sector. "There were no reports of casualties," he said.

The shelling started around 11 a.m., according to locals. Scores of villagers fled in panic, especially those living in the Bagtore Sector.

"Necessary steps are being taken to shift the locals to safer locations," the officials said.

Around 4.30 p.m., the Pakistan Army also fired from small arms and launched



Taking stock: Chief of the Army Staff Gen. M.M. Naravane during his two-day visit to J&K. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

mortar shelling in Poonch's Sharakot Sector, an Army official said.

An Army spokesman said Gen. Naravane had a "first-hand assessment of the situation along the LoC" on Thursday.

'Effective management'

An official spokesman said Gen. Naravane also met Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and "discussed issues related to effective management of internal and external security".

'Can't quash FIR against Dua if offence is made out'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government on Friday argued in the Supreme Court that a sedition First Information Report (FIR) against senior journalist Vinod Dua could not be quashed even if one of the offences listed against him is made out.

The FIR was registered against Mr. Dua for his YouTube broadcast allegedly blaming the government for its COVID-19 preparedness and making personal allegations against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Appearing before a Bench led by Justice U. Lalit, Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju submitted that even an attempt to disobey an order promulgated by a public servant (Section 188 IPC) or giving provocation with intent to cause a riot (Section 153 IPC) amounts to a cognisable offence.

An official said Gen. Naravane, during his visit, commended the use of technology to ensure effective day and night surveillance across the LoC, "which has resulted in many successful operations to foil infiltration bids from Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK)".

M.P. hospital accused of negligence

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Groups working with survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy have accused the Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Centre (BMHRC) of negligence, reportedly causing the deaths of six COVID-19 patients in 16 days.

In a letter to the Supreme Court-appointed monitoring committee, the groups, while sharing details of the patients who reportedly died from September 1 to 16, claimed there was no full-time doctor posted at the isolation ward, and no treatment for COVID-19 was being administered to them at the Indian Council of Medical Research-run institute.

"Keeping in view the vulnerability of gas survivors, the BMHRC should have prepared for this crisis. We are hoping the committee directs it to start a 40 ICU [intensive care unit] and HDU [high dependency unit] bed unit to cater to survivors suffering from COVID-19 at the earliest," said Rachna Dhingra of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action.

The BMHRC's director and public relations officer didn't take calls. Meanwhile, 87,472 active

other items. "An average expenditure of approximately ₹7,000 has been incurred per patient in the COVID care coaches," he added.

The Minister told Parliament that as on date, 813 coaches had been provided as requisitioned by State governments. These include 503 coaches in Delhi, 270 in Uttar Pradesh and 40 in Bihar.

"As per the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, these special coaches are to be used by the State governments only after they have exhausted their own medical facilities, including oxygen cylinders and

Central team for Jammu as cases rise

87,472 active COVID-19 patients recovered, discharged in past 24 hours: Ministry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With 9,428 confirmed COVID-19 cases, of which 6,115 are active ones, and 117 deaths in Jammu, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday that it had decided to depute a team to Jammu to support the efforts to strengthen containment, surveillance, testing and efficient clinical management of positive cases.

The team shall also guide in effectively managing the challenges related to timely diagnosis and follow-up.

"The total cases one week ago was 6,878. Jammu has been reporting doubling time of 15.4 days. The team will comprise S.K. Singh, director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC); and Vijay Hadda, professor, Dept. of Pulmonary Critical Care, AIIMS, Delhi," said a release issued by the Ministry.

The team, it said, would interact with the Collectors and health officers and visit hospitals in Bakshinagar and Gandhinagar.

"These teams interact with the State/UT authorities and get a first-hand understanding of the challenges and issues being faced by them so as to strengthen their ongoing activities and remove bottlenecks, if any," said the Ministry.

Meanwhile, 87,472 active

HC asks Gunjan Saxena for her view on Netflix biopic

Plea by MoD and IAF says movie 'completely distorts facts'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday asked former Flight Lieutenant Gunjan Saxena, based on whose life Netflix movie *Gunjan Saxena - The Kargil Girl* was made, to give her stand on the allegations that the movie depicted the Indian Air Force (IAF) in a bad light.

Justice Rajiv Shakdher asked Ms. Saxena, who was represented by senior advocate Dayan Krishnan, to respond if she agreed with what had been shown in the film.

"I want to know your [Ms. Saxena's] assessment of the film," Justice Shakdher said, further asking Ms. Saxena if there was any violation of her agreement with the producers of the film. The court posted the case for hearing on October 15.

During the brief hearing, senior advocate Krishnan said his instructions from Ms. Saxena were that she had seen the film and, in fact, she felt it glorified the IAF. "That's all I can say," Mr. Krishnan said, adding that he would provide a proper response to the High Court's specific queries.

The Ministry of Defence and the IAF, in the suit filed

Real vs reel: Gunjan Saxena, left, with Jahnvi Kapoor on the sets of *Gunjan Saxena - The Kargil Girl*. ■ FILE PHOTO

through the Central government's standing counsel Gaurang Kanth, has claimed that facts had been "completely distorted" in the film to give an impression to the public at large that the IAF practices gender bias and discrimination.

It said the IAF "has always provided equal opportunities to meritorious officers irrespective of their gender, caste, region, religion, etc."

Dharma Productions, the producers of the film, had previously stated that the movie was only "inspired" by Ms. Saxena's life.

The High Court had in previous hearings refused to stay the streaming of the movie, as sought by the Defence Ministry.

Viral tracker

With 88,336 COVID-19 cases recorded on Friday, India's tally stood at 53,01,766. As many as 1,195 deaths were added. Nearly 1.3 lakh fewer samples were tested on September 17 compared to the previous day, according to the ICMR

NEW CASES AND DEATHS

CASES 88,336	7 DAY-CHANGE -2.8%
DEATHS 1,195	7 DAY-CHANGE +11%

The graphs depict the new cases and deaths in the last 14 days in select States. If average cases and deaths in the last seven days are higher than the previous seven days, then the cases and deaths are rising ■; if they are lower, then dropping □; if they are similar, then cases and deaths are flattening ▲ in that State

cases have recovered and discharged in the past 24 hours from home/facility supervised care and hospitals. The total recovered cases thus stands at 41,12,551, said Ministry data.

Cases in 5 States

The five States with high active caseload were also the ones that were now reporting a high recovery rate.

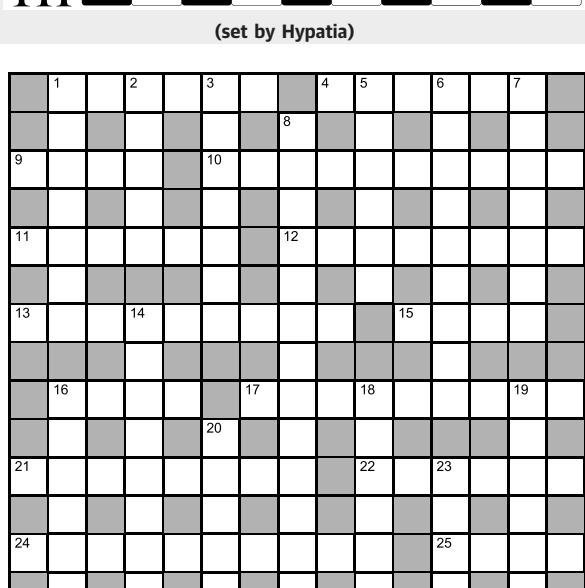
Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh were re-

porting 59.8% of the active cases. They were also contributing to 59.3% of the total recoveries. Ninety % of the new recoveries were reported from 16 States and UTs, the Ministry said.

"India has also allowed for rational use of 'Investigational Therapies' such as Remdesivir, convalescent plasma and Tocilizumab and adopted measures such as use of high-flow oxygen, non-invasive ventilation, use of steroids and anti-coagulants to aid in recoveries. Supervised home isolation, improved services of ambulances have enabled seamless and efficient patient management," noted the Ministry.

TH CROSSWORD + 13045
(set by Hypatia)

Get your brain out of lockdown mode!
Try solving a puzzle today!
@ <https://argo.page.link/jjpTn>



ACROSS

- Counter assists checking at match venues (6)
- Withdraws deposits (6)
- President stuck in evil state (4)
- One appealing charge in Little River (10)
- Case of wide getting bowled at start of play, say (6)
- Delivery pouch in a manila envelope (8)
- Do cursory pants or jeans, say (9)

- 15 Discover tender traded only with India (4)
16 Gore turning crazy (4)
17 Stun offering packs of snacks (5,4)
21 What makes 22 capable? (3,5)
22 Player's derby (6)
24 Subdues gangster and hangs after temperature drops (10)
25 Daughter remains in race (4)
26 Relaxing ending, short of century (6)
27 Mark putting two together in a compound? (6)

■ DOWN

- Also Pran, occasionally camouflaged high-pitched voice (7)
 - Recall say, Hazare briefly with full stomach (5)
 - She assigns Indian to replace company PC (7)
 - Need guts to sacrifice second Queen (6)
 - Breach by six switching sides in speech (9)
 - Attendant drinking a bit of rum, terribly wasted (7)
 - Spooner's collaborative site's tags for awkward situations (6,7)
 - Puts finishing touches after cooking, to set dish (4,3,2)
 - One way to inform out of touch readers? (7)
 - Simple to accept management graduates for a consultate (7)
 - Senator organised crime against state (7)
 - Secure power at home with charge (6)
 - Measurement encompassing daughter alongside (5)
- Clue for 4 Down – 'Soldiers give up fresh rasmalai for sausages (6)' – in puzzle 13043 by Gussulfz, published on 17/9/20, was inadvertently omitted in the print version. Error is regretted. Visit our interactive site to solve online.

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13044

S	W	I	T	C	H	E	D	V	E	R	S	U	S
A	N	O	A	R	P	A							
R	E	C	A	N	E	A	S	T					
C	I	S	I	A	S	C	E						
A	S	S	E	T	R	E	T						
S	O	R	R	T	R	E	T						
T	H	R	E	A</									

HC directs M.P. to free man held under NSA

DM's opinion formed on the basis of media trial, says court

STAFF REPORTER

BHOPAL
The Indore Bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court has quashed an order of the Indore District Magistrate invoking provisions of the National Security Act (NSA), 1980 based on "media trial" on a former corporator for reportedly organising a Muhamarr procession.

A Division Bench of Justices S.C. Sharma and Shailendra Shukla on September 15 directed the State government to set former Corporator Usman Patel, 60, free along with three other persons detained under similar charges.

The court observed, in the case of Mr. Patel, "The District Magistrate has formed his opinion on the basis of media trial. It is unfortunate that media trial has become very common these days and now the adjudicating authorities are delivering their judgments based on media trials. Resultantly, there appears to be



People taking part in a Muhamarr procession in Bhopal. ■ A.M. FAROUKI

total non-application of mind on the part of the District Magistrate".

District Magistrate Manish Singh, in his order, while referring to news reports in Hindi dailies *Nai Duniya*, *Dainik Bhaskar*, *People's Samachar*, invoked the NSA against Mr. Patel, claiming he had reportedly provoked members of the Muslim community to take part in droves in the procession, thereby violating prohibitory orders and physical distancing norms.

The judges observed the detention order of Mr. Patel had been passed only because he had participated in a procession and "that itself is certainly not a ground" for detaining him under the NSA.

No longer in force
The court, while hearing four petitions together, further held that as the detention orders were not confirmed by the State government within 12 days, they were no longer in force, according to Sub-Section 4 of Section 3 of the NSA.

While hearing the petition by Tanveer Patel, son of Mr. Usman Patel, the Justices wondered how an opinion was formed by the District Magistrate merely on the basis of newspaper clippings, in the absence of any other cogent material.

Earlier, Mr. Patel had quit the BJP after protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, before joining the Congress.

Maoists kill CAF jawan in Chhattisgarh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BIJAPUR
A Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) jawan, who had been missing, was killed by Naxals in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Friday.

The body of constable Mallu Ram Suryawanshi, 38, who had been missing from his camp since last week, was found on the Bijapur-Gangloor road near Padeda village on Friday morning, a police official said.

A police team later shifted the body to a hospital for post-mortem, the official added.

Pamphlet recovered
A pamphlet was recovered from the spot. The Gangloor area committee of Maoists claimed responsibility for the jawan's murder, he said.

Suryawanshi, a native of Bilaspur district in the State, was attached to the 17th Battalion of the CAF. He was posted in the Battalion's pioneer company which handles construction work, including setting up police camps in the interior areas, the official said.

Cause of death
Prima facie, it seems the jawan was killed with sharp-edged weapons but the exact cause of the death will be known only after the autopsy, the police official said. A search operation has been launched to trace the assailants, the official added.

With this, eight people – three policemen, a forest official and four civilians – have been killed in separate Naxal-related incidents in Bijapur district in the last one month, he said.

Powers under AFSPA exceeded in Shopian'

Probe into encounter complete: Army

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR
The Army on Friday said it has concluded the inquiry ordered into the Shopian encounter of July 18 and suggested that the powers vested under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) were "exceeded during the operation".

"During the operation, the powers vested under the AFSPA, 1990, were exceeded and the do's and don'ts of Chief of Army Staff [COAS] as approved by the Supreme Court have been contravened," a Srinagar-based Army spokesperson said.

The spokesperson said the inquiry has brought out "certain *prima facie* evidence". "Consequently, the competent disciplinary authority has directed that disciplinary proceedings be initiated under the Army Act against those found *prima facie* answerable," the Army said.

The families of the three missing youth claimed that they spoke to them just a day before the Shopian operation was conducted jointly by the police and the Army.

spokesperson said.
The evidence, collected during the inquiry, has *prima facie* indicated that the three unidentified terrorists killed in Amshipora in Shopian on July 18 were Imtiyaz Ahmed, Abrar Ahmed and Mohammad Abrar, all labourers who hailed from Raipur in the Pir Panjal Valley.

Earlier, the security forces had claimed all the three killed were "unidentified militants" and were buried in a graveyard in north Kashmir.

"Their DNA report is awaited. Their involvement with terrorism or related activities is under investigation by the police," the Army said.

The families of the three missing youth claimed that they spoke to them just a day before the Shopian operation was conducted jointly by the police and the Army.

Bengal govt., experts spar over NGT order

Tribunal refuses to entertain petition to open lake for Chhath Puja

SHIV SAHAY SINGH

KOLKATA
The West Bengal government and some environmentalists from Kolkata are all set for a showdown in the Supreme Court over allowing one of the biggest water bodies in the heart of the city to be used for Chhath Puja celebrations.

The development comes after the National Green Tribunal (NGT) refused to entertain a review petition of the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Agency (KMDA) to allow Rabindra Sarobar, a park and water body in south Kolkata, for Chhath Puja. KMDA, an agency un-



Green concerns: Migratory birds perched on the branch of a tree at Rabindra Sarobar in Kolkata in 2019. ■ PTI

"We wanted the NGT to allow the park for one day, but unfortunately, the NGT did not allow us. We will approach the Supreme Court,"

der the State's Urban Development and Municipal Affairs Department, is the custodian of the Rabindra Sarobar.

Death of two sloth bears worries Nandankanan zoo authorities

Samples sent for testing; remaining bears kept in separate cells

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR
Authorities at the Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP) are concerned over the back-to-back deaths of two sloth bears at the park.

A total of three bears have died in the Nandankanan zoo since August 30. One of them was a Himalayan black bear and the death was said to be age-related. But the deaths of two sloth bears is said to be a cause for worry.

"On Wednesday, a male

sloth bear named Debasish, which was rescued in 2013, died. It was only seven years old. It probably died due to irreversible neurological disorders," said NZP Deputy Director B.P. Acharya here.

Haemorrhages found
On Thursday, a female sloth bear called Aarti died with similar symptoms at the NZP. Sources said multiple haemorrhages were detected in both bears.

In 2019, four out of the eight elephants in the park died within span of one month due to Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpesvirus.

with 14 bears. Suspecting some kind of viral infection, the authorities have kept the bears in separate cells. Blood samples have been sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bareilly, to assess the cause of death. The zoo authorities are also trying to get in touch with national experts on sloth bears to prevent further deaths.

In 2019, four out of the eight elephants in the park died within span of one month due to Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpesvirus.

SC seeks response to plea to ban ART in livestock

The Artificial Reproduction Technique is cruel and contrary to the principles of law, says petition

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday asked the government to respond to a plea to ban Artificial Reproduction Technique (ART), including Artificial Insemination (AI), used on livestock and other animals.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde issued notice to the government, the Animal Husbandry Department, the Animal Welfare Board of India, and the National Biodiversity



In captivity: The petition said ART performed on livestock/animals without any proven biomedical need was illegal.

Authority. The petition was filed by Madurai resident Dr. S. Venkatesh.

The petition said ART performed on livestock/animals without any proven biomedical

need was cruel, illegal, *mala fide* and contrary to the established principles of law. It said invasive techniques were used on animals which were not even anaesthetised to the pain but merely restrained physically.

"Reproduction is a basic natural and biological need as well as urge of all living beings... No authority can arbitrarily trample or destroy the rights or needs of any living being, including animals, by means of policy or practice, which in itself against

nature and natural principles," the petition said. By-passing and preventing natural mating, and artificially reproducing as a principle/policy is by itself cruel, not to mention the cruelty or pain inflicted by the artificial process and the methods of reproduction in animals, it said.

The petition said ART is violative of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, the Biological Diversity Act and the Environment (Protection) Act.

VAIBHAV to be held online from Oct. 2

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI
The Department of Science and Technology and the Defence Research and Development Organisation will be organising a month-long session of webinars and online discussions involving non-resident Indian (NRI) scientists. The event will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 2.

The Vaishwika Bharatiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Summit, as it is called, is being organised to help develop a "comprehensive road map to leverage the expertise and knowledge of global Indian researchers for solving emerging challenges. By bringing the Indian overseas and resident academics/scientists together, a structure of association will be evolved," says the programme website. Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, told *The Hindu* that several eminent researchers would be participating in the summit. "The end product will be a road map and broad direction on the kind of research that will benefit India in the future."

Key areas of discussion will include: quantum technologies, artificial intelligence and machine learning, electronics and semi-conductor technologies, communications technologies, photonics, computational and data sciences and aerospace technologies among others.

Nature's fury



Ravaged site: An area damaged by the flash floods in Arunachal Pradesh's Lepa Rada district. Flash floods in several rivers and rivulets of central Arunachal Pradesh in the last couple of days have claimed two lives. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

'Bamboo shoots can be among cheapest immunity boosters'

They contain 17 amino acids, 8 of which are essential: experts

RAHUL KARMAKAR

GUWAHATI

The tallest grass on earth at its smallest could be among the cheapest immunity boosters for increasing the human body's resistance to viral attacks, experts have said.

The bamboo, considered the grass of life in the northeast, takes care of almost every requirement from birth to death. But the focus of more than 25 experts from 11 countries who converged digitally to mark 'World Bamboo Day' on Friday was on the nutraceutical bamboo shoot.

In a 2017 order, the NGT had strictly prohibited "performance of any Puja, community picnic or organisation of other social events in and around Rabindra Sarobar".

"We wanted the NGT to allow the park for one day, but unfortunately, the NGT did not allow us. We will approach the Supreme Court,"

der the State's Urban Development and Municipal Affairs Department, is the custodian of the Rabindra Sarobar.

though he was in isolation after testing positive for COVID-19. Sources said the raid pertained to his alleged involvement in the ₹578 crore Seashore chit fund scam, especially the Mahanadi Boat Project at Cuttack.

The CBI officers also raided other properties related to Mr. Mishra at Cuttack, Bhubaneswar and Narasinghpur.

"The case has been continuing since 2013 and the CBI knows all papers," said Mr. Mishra. "The papers are with the Tourism Department. I was merely a Minister. The CBI had already been handed over all papers," he said.

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The term 'nutraceutical' is used to describe medicinally or nutritionally functional foods, while bamboo shoots are the edible sprouts of the perennial grass.

"Bamboo shoots are emerging as high-value and safe edibles and growing in utility globally along with all other value-added bamboo products. The protein content in fresh bamboo shoots, considered as nutraceutical, can range between 1.49-4.04%. They also contain 17 amino acids, eight of which are essential for the human body," said Syam Vishwanath, director of the Kerala Forest Research Institute.

Global market
The present global market of bamboo shoots is around \$1,700 million. More than 3 million tonnes of bamboo shoots are consumed across the earth annually, but the shoot production and consumption in India are confined mostly to the northeastern States.

Bamboo has been a key ingredient in new antimicrobial soaps and hand mists developed by Filipino scientists to fight the novel coronavirus.

According to the National Bamboo Mission, India has the highest area (13.96 million hectares) under bamboo and is the second richest country after China in terms of bamboo diversity with 136 species. The annual production of bamboo in India is 14.6 million tonnes and the bamboo-rattan industry in the country was worth ₹28,005 crore in 2017.

Data with the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) say China exports 68% of the world's bamboo and rattan products valued at \$1,112.

proposed in 2009 during his stint as the president of the World Bamboo Organisation.

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CBI searches properties of BJD MLA in chit fund scam

Raids on even as Debiprasad Mishra is in home quarantine

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

After a hiatus, the Central Bureau of Investigation probe into the chit fund scams in Odisha saw renewed activity on Friday with searches at the official residence and other properties of senior Biju Janata Dal MLA Debiprasad Mishra.

The CBI team spent three hours at Mr. Mishra's house

though he was in isolation after testing positive for COVID-19. Sources said the raid pertained to his alleged involvement in the ₹578 crore Seashore chit fund scam, especially the Mahanadi Boat Project at Cuttack.

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Global market

The present global market of bamboo shoots is around

Samples sent for testing; remaining bears kept in separate cells

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR
Authorities at the Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP) are concerned over the back-to-back deaths of two sloth bears at the park.

A total of three bears have died in the Nandankanan zoo since August 30. One of them was a Himalayan black bear and the death was said to be age-related. But the deaths of two sloth bears is said to be a cause for worry.

"On Wednesday, a male

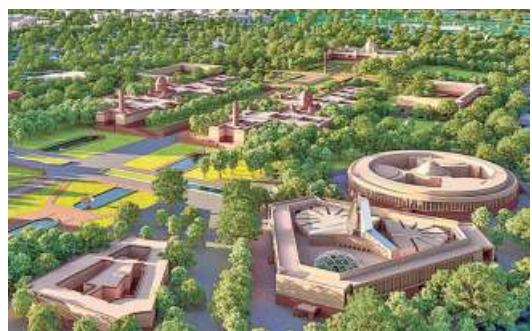
sloth bear named Debasish, which was rescued in 2013, died. It was only seven years old. It probably died due to irreversible neurological disorders," said NZP Deputy Director B.P. Acharya here.

Haemorrhages found
On Thursday, a female sloth bear called Aarti died with similar symptoms at the NZP. Sources said multiple haemorrhages were detected in both bears.



Instapick

Instagram Freeze: On Wednesday, stars like Kim Kardashian West and Mark Ruffalo announced that they would protest Facebook's inaction against hate speech by freezing their Instagram accounts for 24 hours. This was done in concert with civil rights coalition Stop Hate for Profit, but drew flak for being a "publicity stunt" with no real meaning, much like #BlackoutTuesday.



Talking point

India's New Parliament: The much-criticised move to build a new seat of power in New Delhi continues to gain momentum, with Tata Group being awarded the construction bid. At an estimated cost of ₹861.9 crore, it is set to be built in a timeline of 21 months. Let's hope the spiking coronavirus cases, migrant worker crisis, and crashing economy will get some attention too.

SPIT TAKE

A slight Modification

An *idli* by any other name would taste just as political

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI

As a die-hard fan of our leader, I can't say, surprising though it may seem, that I'm too happy with the recent developments in the southern town of Salem. I speak, of course, of the newly-introduced 'Modi *Idli*', the initiative of a fellow PM-admirer.

I have my reasons. Foremost is the fact that it is a tad disrespectful to our leader. I think no one, *not even our leader himself*, refers to our leader by just his surname. The correct way to address him is, has been, and will always be Modiji. So, I most humbly request the makers to change the name of the *idli* to 'Modiji *Idli*'.

I know that this alteration somewhat spoils the mellifluous nature of the two rhyming, two-syllabled words 'Mo-Di' and 'Id-l'i' that sit so neatly together. But I have a solution for that. Add a 'ji' to the *idli* for balance. Modiji *Idlijji*. You can't deny it has a certain ring to it.

Next, kindly standardise the

spelling of *idli*. In several of your posters and publicity material, the dish has been spelt 'idly'. That is somewhat blasphemous if you ask me. Modiji works 18 hours a day. What do you mean Modi Idly? Our leader is never idle.

Thirdly, with some research, I have come across this alarming historical fact. According to two well-known food historians, the *idli*, far from being a South Indian culinary innovation (which is bad enough in itself) came to our ancient land either from Indonesia or from the Arab traders of yore. You see where I'm going with this? I don't need to elaborate on Indonesia. But imagine if the *idli* came from Arab traders. That means it would have come to Kerala first. Do we want to be associated with such a dish then?

I think we should find a more pristine dish, a delicacy that has its origins right here, in our ancient, beautiful, all-knowing, Hindi-



■ SREEJITH R KUMAR

speaking land, if you ask me. Like, say, *poha*, for instance. Imagine Modiji *Pohaji*. All over Tamil Nadu. Now *that* would be good.

Except for a couple of tiny glitches. One is that the stubborn Tamils, somewhat lacking in good taste, may not take to *poha*. Two, '*poha*' doesn't exactly rhyme with our leader's name. Fear not, I

might have a solution for that, too. Just make *idli-shaped poha*. And call it Modiji *Idlijji*. And as a footnote, add 'by *idli* we mean *poha*' in fine print on all the publicity material. South Indians will be none the wiser. Lo!

I hear that the makers of this dish have assured the public that

they would be cooked with pure and clean water and that their unit would be making 1,800 *idlis* every six seconds.

A couple of suggestions here. Use water from our sacred Ganga. Just imagine how that would go with our devoted public. As our river-linking is already happening on a war footing, I'm sure that wouldn't be too difficult. Otherwise, we could have a bullet train introduced in TN exclusively to bring the required water.

Secondly, instead of publicising it as 1,800 *idlis* for every six seconds, say you will be providing over 15 crore *idlis* per annum. See how impressive that sounds. Beats the *raita* out of the six lakh *biryani*s ordered on Swiggy last year.

I see only one problem, though: Ms Kangana Ranaut. Kanganji is the biggest fan of our leader. But she is currently playing *Puratchi Thalaivi* in an upcoming biopic. We need to get some clarification from her about who her vote goes to: Modi *Idli* or Amma *Idli*?

Krishna Shastri Devulapalli is a satirist. He has written four books and edited an anthology.

Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other events you just can't miss.



Cheers to DB5
If you like Bond's grand tourer, here is a drink to match. **Bowmore Islay Single Malt Scotch Whisky** and **Aston Martin**'s first collab is the **Black Bowmore DB5 1964**. The limited edition of 25 bottles – featuring a genuine DB5 piston – come in a handcrafted box with brass hardware and nickel plating to represent the car. Expect flavours of mango, passion fruit and acacia honey with coffee and tobacco smoke, and creme caramel on the nose from this 31-year-old whisky. At approximately ₹47.64 lakh. Details: Bowmore.com



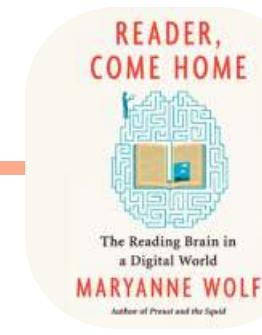
New singles in town
Ace **DJ David Guetta** has had a busy lockdown, with two Guinness World Records and now a collaboration with pop star **Sia**. The new single, '**Let's Love**', is a feel-good anthem and features Sia's signature vocals with Guetta's chart-topping beats. On YouTube, indie artiste and designer behind SGBG Atelier, **Surya Giri**, has launched a new single, '**You are not alone**', with Sid Sriram and Shilpa Rao. The first of six tracks slated to release in the coming months, it explores themes of resilience and new beginnings. On YouTube.



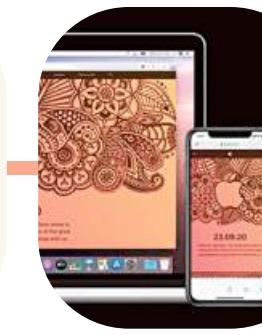
Armani sportswear alert
While the future of luxury fashion remains uncertain, sportswear is where all the action is right now. So this is the right time for **EA7 Emporio Armani**, Giorgio Armani's sportswear brand, to open their first standalone store in India. There is e-commerce too, with Reliance Brands Limited. The technical sportswear line has Training, Water, Tennis, Club, Speed, Basket and Mountain categories, in the distinctive Armani style. At Select City Walk, New Delhi and AJIO.com.



Blossoms and Spike Lee
Maker of luxury writing instruments, **Montblanc**, has been busy this season. Three weeks after they launched their **What Moves You, Makes You** global campaign – featuring filmmaker **Spike Lee**, who incidentally writes all his scripts by hand – they rolled out the **Meisterstück Maki-e Calligraphy Tribute to Kyoto Fine Craftsmanship Limited Edition 88**. A kimono adorned with delicate blossoms is engraved into the handcrafted nib made of Au 750 solid gold. On pre-order at Montblanc boutiques.



Reader, Come Home
The fourth edition of **Neev Literature Festival for Children** promises to be a year-long affair, thanks to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. The online sessions, starting this week, will have Indian and international reading experts and psychologists talking about what happens to the human brain when we read, among other topics. Their Book Club – primarily for parents and educators – will begin with the book **Reader, Come Home**, by **Maryanne Wolf**, @neevliteraturefestival on Instagram.



Add Apple to cart
Starting September 23, users in India can shop for the full suite of **Apple** products on a dedicated **online store**, with free delivery within 24 to 72 hours. This long overdue move comes 33 years after the tech company first stepped into online retail. Expect packaging and counselling sessions, financing options, online support in English, and phone support in Hindi and English. Customisation options include Macs built with personalised configuration, engraving on iPad, Apple Pencil and Air Pods.



Saris plus vintage fashion
Amethyst brings **Raw Mango** to Chennai with 30% to 50% off on handwoven *chanderi* and Banarasi silk saris, petticoats in brocades, silks and cotton. From ₹2,350. 11 am to 7.30 pm. #733889176. Sujala Newar of **The Local Vintage** in Mumbai has curated a collection of blouses, accessories, scarves and bags from family friend Gulnar Soli Bharucha's closet. These eclectic pieces from the 60s to the 90s, collected from her travels across the world, will be available via Instagram @shopthelocalvintage

E-STORE EDIT

Homegrown gifts and a Punya Box

Dastkar goes virtual. Plus, a platform for products created by NGOs



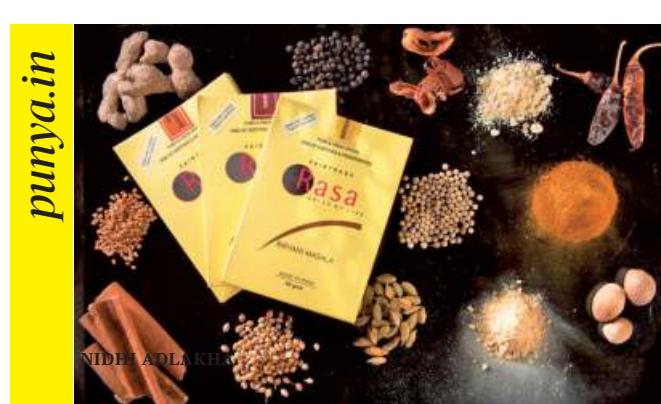
NIDHI ADLAKHA

With bustling venues and platforms for the country's crafts going silent during the pandemic, Dastkar's Instagram handle has been eagerly tracked for updates on its new e-store: [handsondastkar](#). When it finally did go live last weekend, the selection of handloom saris (woven, printed, embroidered, painted), fabric masks, Madhubani, Gond and other folk art, bags and home decor generated interest. In three days, the platform had 2,155 virtual visitors and billed orders worth ₹41,146, though founder Laila Tyabji promises "this is just the beginning". In the past, they had decided against going virtual as 'touch' is integral to buying craft. "There was the question of how Dastkar, without resources or a warehouse, could undertake such a vast venture. So we concentrated on selling craft through bazaars, exhibitions and other platforms, including other e-portals. Some worked, others didn't. The pandemic and ensuing lockdown made it clear that it was necessary for us to have our own marketing platform," says Tyabji, who made the site's first sale: a Madhubani sari. To the artisans,

the online platform comes just in time. "It is interesting that folk art, which doesn't necessarily sell very well at bazaars [difficult to display], does very well online as it photographs well," says Tyabji, adding, "It is the exact opposite of a [offline] bazaar! There, people love to pick up little knick-knacks and gift items, and only go for the more pricey things like saris later. Online, they feel it is not worth going through the hassle for smaller items." As for the initial glitches, buyers will need to be forgiving. After all, the site was developed in-house, and sourcing clean-cut, e-commerce-ready images from craftspeople during a pandemic can't be easy. For an outfit that has organised bazaars for 40 years, this is a whole new game. With the craftspeople's stories going live, Tyabji hopes we understand that "craft is more than just a product and that [handsondastkar.com](#) will be more than just a marketing device".

₹550 - ₹41,000 at [handsondastkar.com](#)

Up next: More variety, with masks, Madhubani paintings, woven bed covers, kantha embroidered stoles, etc.



We've had the fast fashion virtual sales, luxury closets going online and support initiatives for India's weaving communities. Now, homegrown initiatives by NGOs across the country are in the limelight with Rohan Garg and Anant Kapoor's new e-store, Punya. Unlike platforms like iTokri (handmade artisanal products) and Shunya (recyclable stationery, tableware) that are limited to a particular genre, Punya features everything from masalas to handwoven stoles.

What sets the platform apart from others is that all the products have been crafted by their NGO partners (who receive 95.5% of the sales proceeds), including Kilmora that supports makers in Uttarakhand's

Kumaon region, GranMade, that employs elderly women who are out-of-work, and Naz Foundation that works on HIV/AIDS and sexual health.

Launched in July, the neatly categorised e-store also features organic body and home care products, and edibles like Himalayan jams. Don't miss the stationery section, with gold-plated bookmarks and notebooks with bright Madhubani covers.

Garg, 23, explains how it started when they noticed people gift each other kilos of sweets (which eventually went to waste) every Diwali. Their Punya Box, launched in 2019, had sweets ideal for a family of four. "We partnered with six NGOs, and the money saved went to a charity of the donor's choice," says Lucknow-based Garg. Realising how professional marketing and after-sales support could help NGO-made products, they decided on an exclusive marketplace.

From ₹45 to ₹1,200.

Up next: New partnerships and, in a few months, hyperlocal virtual markets that will tie up with local NGOs in your city.

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Chasing butterflies

Virtual walks, workshops and a hunt for our national butterfly, as this month is dedicated to the winged creature

NIDHI ADLAKHA

In March, we observe World Wildlife Day. Come July and the 29th is dedicated to India's national animal, the tiger. We have exclusive days for birds, elephants and even trees, so why not the butterfly? It was this very thought that got naturalists, experts and wildlife enthusiasts together this lockdown to commemorate the first-ever Big

1. Start counting
To participate in the ongoing Big Butterfly Count Week (Sept 14-20), download one of the three apps: inaturalist, ifoundbutterflies and India Biodiversity Portal, create an account and simply click and upload pictures of the winged creatures you spot in your backyard or on your morning walk.

2. One-day course
Can't identify that butterfly in your front yard? Sign up for this one-day certificate course by Coimbatore-based Act for Butterflies and the famed Tropical Butterfly Conservatory in Trichy. With theoretical and field components, it will cover 100 species found in Tamil Nadu.

Priced at ₹200 (digital certificate) and ₹300 (printed certificate and butterfly booklet). Details: aeonct.org or call 9843511233. There's also 'Butterflies for Beginners', from Sept 25 to Oct 30, by India's Butterfly Man, Isaac Kehimkar. For queries, call 9820165525 or email info@inaturewatch.org

3. Vote for India's national butterfly

This lockdown, several butterfly enthusiasts and researchers started the process of choosing India's national butterfly. Seven species have been shortlisted and an online public poll is on until October 7. Details: National Butterfly Campaign on Facebook.

Read the full story online at [weekend.thehindu.com](#)



Butterfly Month: India 2020.

Co-ordinated by Goa-based Foundation for Environment Research and Conservation (FERC), the programme brings together over 30 organisations working in the field of biodiversity conservation in the country.

To continue until September 20, the initiative has various activities such as online workshops, photography and videography contests, and a butterfly count. Here are a few highlights to keep track of:



Playing the wrong hand

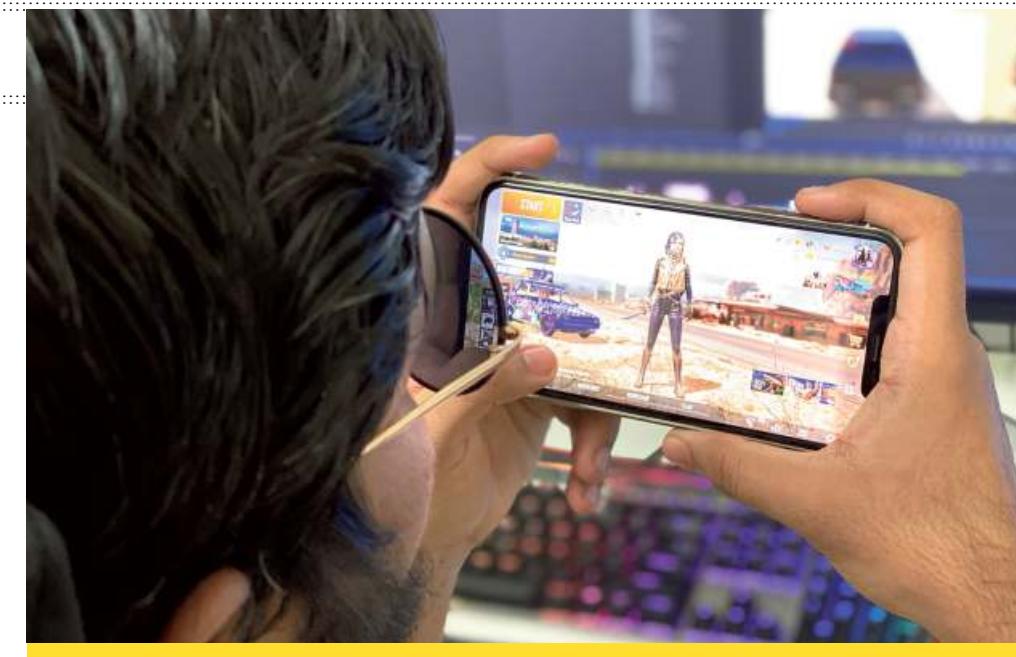
Blurred lines when it comes to defining esports is a problem in India. "People call games like Teen Patti, Poker and Rummy as esports. Just competing with each other is not esports [which requires skill and training]," says Suji, of Esports Federation of India. Games that fall under the categories of first-person shooter (Call of Duty), multiplayer online battle arena (League of Legends) and sports (Asphalt), to name a few, qualify as esports. Moreover, the regulation of esports is linked with its recognition as a legitimate sport category. "It is important to have domestic tournaments and nationals, so that they not only compete in a more meaningful manner but there's also a systematic structure of ranking and recognition," he adds.

LESLEY SIMEON

"I remember going blank. I had no other source of income and my future looked very bleak." Rishab 'Encore' Katoch, a 23-year-old Delhi-based gamer, was one of thousands who, 17 days ago, woke up to the news that the Indian government had banned PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG to the rest of us), along with 117 other Chinese apps, over privacy and security concerns. The multiplayer battle royale mobile game – a genre that blends survival and last-man-standing gameplay – was not only an arena for intense virtual matches, but also a revenue generator (players live stream their game via YouTube channels and Facebook watch parties). A professional gamer can earn anywhere between ₹50,000 and ₹2 lakh a month.

Once Katoch calmed down, however, and spoke to fellow gamers, he realised he could diversify his sources of income. As it turns out, those with well-established YouTube channels, where they played a larger selection of games such as Grand Theft Auto V (GTA 5) and survival shooter Garena Free Fire are better off after the PUBG ban. "I can't concentrate on only one source of income; something like this can happen again," says the engineering graduate. The impact of the ban on the gaming community has been swift and devastating (prior to the ban, PUBG had around 40 million monthly active users in India).

Here's one example: Megastars, among the top seven professional teams in India that competes globally, has disbanded. Just a



The aftermath of the ban isn't all bad news. Streaming is picking up, game developers are pushing #MakeInIndia and Indian storylines, and we can expect esports training academies soon

Life after PUBG

Before the ban

Gaming in India has moved from being a pastime to establishing itself as a robust industry. "Esports has been around for more than a decade. It is just of late that it has got mainstream attention," says Lokesh Suji, Director, Esports Federation of India. In the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, Tirth Mehta won a bronze in the bronze in the Hearthstone event, while Karan Manganani placed fourth in another event.

But it was PUBG that brought esports to the masses. Mobile gaming is easily accessible and, thanks to operators cutting their costs, it has caught on in tier-2 and tier-3 cities too. Tournaments such as Mobile Lite Championship and Mobile Professional League see prize pools running into lakhs of rupees. Post lockdown has also witnessed an increase in participation – Gurugram-based Nodwin Gaming's ESL India Premiership saw a 300% increase in registrations this year, as compared to 2019.

The Indian narrative

Indian gaming companies such as Nazara Technologies, Octro,

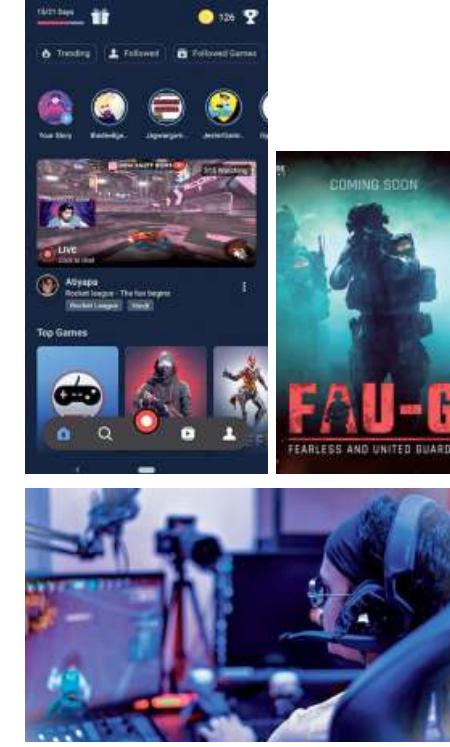
Dream 11, Hitwicket Games and Gamezop are upping the ante with new offerings. The most recent to join the block is Bengaluru-based nCore Games' Fearless and United: Guards, or FAU-G. Announced a couple of weeks ago by Bollywood star Akshay Kumar, it will follow a storytelling mode, where gamers will learn about Indian soldiers and battles as they clear levels.

"Call of Duty is based on the two World Wars. We wanted to build a game that Indians could have a strong emotional connect with," says co-founder Vishal Gondal. The first edition, set to release sometime next month, will feature the Galwan Valley and multiplayer mode.

Storytelling that draws on Indian mythology – such as 2018's Asura, from Hyderabad-based Ogre Head Studio (the first Nintendo Switch game made in India, which fuses Hindu myth with combat play) – or even the recent border skirmishes (as inspiration for combat games) could be the future. But first, we need to encourage more game development. "The fact is that monetisation of games has remained poor until recently," says Gaurav Agarwal, co-founder of Gurugram-based Gamezop, a multigame platform. "Ad revenues from Indian users is low and users do not spend to buy in-game goods." But the scenario is changing, with real money gaming and mobile esports (a recent article on Quint, the news website, put game developers in India at 250, up from just 25 in 2010).

Looking at streaming

Streaming platforms and apps are also set to get bigger. "Casual games [like poker and chess] can easily turn into esports when played competitively," says Parth Chadha, founder of nine-month-old EWar Games, another Bengaluru-based start-up. Currently, the EWar app – with games like Call of Duty and Clash Royale – is available in eight regional languages, including Hindi, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. Gamers can also stream on it. Similarly, one-year-old Bengaluru-based Rhee offers a dedicated channel (Rhee Studio) for streaming. Co-founder Saksham Keshri says, "This is specifically for users to watch streamers and chat with them. If you want to stream, just log in, select your game and sync your mobile to our server."



(Clockwise from top left) Akshay Kumar with nCore Games' co-founder Vishal Gondal, Ishan Khedkar playing a mobile game, Rhee Studio, Fau-G poster and a gamer at play



Monetisation of games has been poor. Ad revenues from Indian users is low and they do not spend to buy in-game goods. [But things are changing] with real money gaming and mobile esports

Gaurav Agarwal (right), Gamezop

including the Esports World Convention held in Paris last year. "Every gamer's dream is to represent their country. What's the point in just playing among ourselves?"

The need of the hour is acceptance, especially as a career option. In the West, professional video game tournaments fill 50,000-seat arenas and sponsorships run into millions. "Even at 22, you've already lost your prime time [for gaming]," says Sharma.

"Children in China, Europe and the US get into gaming at 13 and 14." Access to esports training academies (which we have none at the moment) is imperative. Nodwin Gaming is making a start. "We're looking to work with key stakeholders such as teams, schools, colleges and governments to build academies," says Akshay Rathee, co-founder, who hopes to have three academies set up in the next couple of years.



RAHUL VERMA

Among all that I miss in this never-ending pandemic is the food of Café Lota. I still remember my visit there. A friend had told us about the restaurant that had then just opened by the Crafts Museum at Pragati Maidan. I went there one evening and was fascinated by the menu – and the food.

I'd had a chat with Rahul Dua, one of the men running the kitchen, and he told me how they had sourced recipes from various regions. But Dua left the café soon thereafter. And then, a couple of weeks ago, I got an elaborate menu from him.

He has now started a delivery service called Bhawan. It includes an interesting street food component, with dishes from all corners of the country. I happily pored over the menu and zeroed in on a variety of dishes that I thought would make for a snappy lunch or dinner.

We asked for a plate of gol gapas (nine with each plate, and your choice of filling and flavoured water), a plate of ka-

FOOD SPOT

Street food comes home



Happiness is... A mithai box (above) and karela chaat and bhel puri (below) from Bhawan ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Bhawan brings us small plates from across India, even as travel seems difficult

ter had a nice tangy taste and the gol gapas were large and crisp. Bhawan has on offer atta, suji, and ragi golgapas, with various kinds of flavoured water and filling.

I then had the aloo dum dahi vada, an Odia special that I am greatly fond of, and thoroughly enjoyed the dish of rich and spicy aloo dum eaten with soft, yoghurt-doused dahi vadas. I had never eaten karela chaat before, and I thought the fried bitter gourd - and the thin and crispy okra - made for a delightful chaat, doused with the sweet-and-spicy yoghurt mix.

The palak chaat, however, was a bit too thick and hard. It could have been done with a thinner batter.

Now let me tell you about the Surti khawasa. This is a popular street food dish of Surat, and I

can understand why: It's wholesome and filling. The dish consists of a fragrant coconut milk-based broth and rice noodles. We added some papad pieces to it and then topped it with garlic chutney. The flavours and textures – the sweetness of the coconut milk and the fierceness of the chutney, the crunchiness of the papad and the softness of the noodles – complemented one another.

Rahul tells me that they had thought of opening a restaurant but dropped their plans because of the coronavirus lockdown. The delivery business is being run from Chhattarpur, and they supply everywhere in Delhi-NCR, except in Faridabad (Bhawandehli.com; 8178539537 for orders).

The menu includes samosas and kachoris with moong dal, onions or -- hold your breath -- bacon and cheddar. It has baked khichri, kathal biryani, bedmi puri and saag meat. There are all kinds of sweets – mawa jalebis with rabri, aamchoor ladoos, coconut passion fruit barfi and so on.

My bhapa doi cheesecake, a creamy dish of sweetened and steamed hung curd, was really nice, but nothing really beats my late mother-in-law's bhapa doi, steamed on a platter over a pot of boiling water. I think the dish I loved the most was the lukhmi – it had a delightfully crispy casing and a nicely spicy chicken keema filling.

Bhawan is good news for those of us who've been missing the delights of roadside food but haven't stepped out. We may have been banished from the streets, but I am happy that the streets are coming to us.

The writer is a seasoned food critic



Every dish was lip smackingly good. We had asked for aloo Pindi channa filling and gondhoraj lime flavoured water for the gol gappa. The lemony wa-

ter had a nice tangy taste and the gol gapas were large and crisp. Bhawan has on offer atta, suji, and ragi golgapas, with various kinds of flavoured water and filling.

I then had the aloo dum dahi vada, an Odia special that I am greatly fond of, and thoroughly enjoyed the dish of rich and spicy aloo dum eaten with soft, yoghurt-doused dahi vadas. I had never eaten karela chaat before, and I thought the fried bitter gourd - and the thin and crispy okra - made for a delightful chaat, doused with the sweet-and-spicy yoghurt mix.

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Now let me tell you about the Surti khawasa. This is a popular street food dish of Surat, and I

Girl power in Kodai

Feminist icons Maya Angelou, Frida Kahlo and Kalpana Chawla turn into striking playmates in writer Smriti Lamech's initiative, The Smritsonian

VANGMAYI PARAKALA

In early 2020, the only tailor Smriti Lamech could find near her cottage in Kodaikanal was a grocer who also had a sewing machine in one corner of his shop. She wanted to convert some unused fabric into cushion covers for the house she had temporarily moved into, to be closer to her pre-teen children in boarding school.

Then Lamech, 41, chanced upon Prowess, a women's self-help group (SHG) with 16 seamstresses and gave them her order. By the time she returned to collect it a couple of months later, the SHG was reopening after the nation-wide lockdown. The



menu includes samosas and kachoris with moong dal, onions or -- hold your breath -- bacon and cheddar. It has baked khichri, kathal biryani, bedmi puri and saag meat. There are all kinds of sweets – mawa jalebis with rabri, aamchoor ladoos, coconut passion fruit barfi and so on.

On their website's homepage, Prowess introduces their team with a photograph of the women in shiny pattu saris who 'produce a wide array of toys, puppets, furnishings and accessories, most of which are made with 100% cotton or silk fabrics'. That's when it struck Lamech. This was as good an opportunity as any to do one of the things she had been meaning to try out – rag dolls, but of feminist icons. Her first set (out now) includes Indian-origin astronaut Kalpana Chawla, American poet and activist Maya Angelou, Indian educationist and social reformer Savitribai Phule, and Mexican painter Frida Kahlo.

Nifty with fabric

Of the memories she has of her childhood with an eclectic, fabric-collecting mother, Lamech has one that stands out. The family was travelling by road from Delhi to then-Madras, when they spotted a group of Lambani women on the highway. They pulled over and her mother went to speak to them. A few minutes later, the Lambanis were pulling out spare cholis (blouses) and other embroidered materials from their bags, as her mother

took out cotton kurtas from her suitcase. They swapped the clothes and, a few moments later, cash was exchanged for a few pieces of their iconic silver jewellery. Her mother also ran one of the only boutiques in the 1990s in Allahabad, where they were based. So Lamech has always had an eye for spotting fabric of aesthetic value.

Using this experience, and her working knowledge of Tamil, she began spending time with the women at Prowess in early May to come up with a set of four long-limbed rag dolls, under the initiative The Smritsonian. They have no detailed faces – no eyes or nose – but each carries one distinguishing feature of these women. Chawla comes in her NASA orange spacesuit with a helmet



Faces of feminism A doll and Smriti Lamech ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and boots by a different crochet artist known to Lamech; Angelou has thick dark locks of hair and a removable turban; Phule has her trademark horizontal bindi; and for Kahlo, it is her unibrow.

Feminism for children

Owing to Tamil Nadu's state-wide ban on plastic, the dolls come snuggled in seersucker sleeping bags, along with a letter addressed to the receiver, introducing themselves in first person. "I always wanted feminist dolls for my daughter and son, not battery or plastic dolls," says Lamech over a call from Kodaikanal, where she remains during the pandemic. "I did buy them a lot of Channapatna toys when they were growing up, but I also want my child to recognise a Kalpana Chawla or a Frida Kahlo at this age. My generation didn't hear about them till we were in our teens – things are, of course, different now with the Internet – but these are women who deserved to be introduced to our lives much earlier," she concludes.

The collection is priced between ₹300 and ₹1,800. To order, call 9873344651

Developers to the fore

To fill the PUBG-sized hole, Indian gaming companies are keen on churning out #MakeInIndia content. EWar Games is welcoming game entries. So far, they've received around 200 submissions, of which seven have been published and 10 are in the pipeline. The most recent was Air Strike, which saw 32,000 gameplays within three weeks of launch. Three weeks back, education start-up, Avalon Meta, launched a year-long online course for game developers. The curriculum combines aspects of coding, designing and storytelling, and has 300 students already. Working in teams of six, they will have to come up with two mobile games and one VFX film. For co-founder Varun Mayya, the ultimate goal is to create a Silicon Valley equivalent for gaming in India. "I hope game development does not go the app development way, where the ecosystem became fragmented and everyone started working in silos," he says.

China sends fighters towards Taiwan

18 war planes crossed the mid-line of the Taiwan Strait even as island was hosting top U.S. official

ANANTH KRISHNAN

While tensions remain high and a military build-up continues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, China has ratcheted up tensions on its eastern front, with 18 Chinese fighters and bombers crossing the mid-line of the Taiwan Strait and flying towards Taiwan in a major show of military force.

The combat drills on Friday were aimed to coincide with the visit to Taiwan of U.S. Undersecretary for Economic Affairs Keith Krach, the most senior official to visit the island in four decades.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command said in a statement on Friday that "combat-ready patrols and joint air-sea exercises in the Taiwan Straits" were held "to test the joint operations capability of multiservices".

"The relevant moves are necessary measures to deal with the current situation across the Taiwan Strait and will help enhance the capability of troops under the PLA Eastern Theater Command to safeguard the national unity, territorial sovereignty and security," said PLA Air Force Senior Colonel



Domineering tactics: A Chinese PLA H-6 bomber flying near the Taiwan air defence identification zone on Friday. ■ AP

Zhang Chunhui, spokesperson for the Eastern Theater Command, adding that the PLA would "thwart any attempt by any person or force to carry out 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities in any form."

Military muscle-flexing

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said 18 PLA aircraft had crossed the mid-line of the Taiwan Strait and entered its Air Defence Identification Zone. These included two H-6 bombers, eight J-16 fighters, four J-10 fighters and four J-11 fighters. The Ministry said the Taiwan air force had scrambled fighters in response to intrusions.

The Taiwan moves under-

up collusion with the U.S.," Reuters reported. "Trying to use Taiwan to control China or rely on foreigners to build oneself up was wishful thinking and futile," he said. "Those who play with fire will get burnt."

Preparation for attack'

The news agency quoted Hu Xijin, the editor of the hawkish Communist Party-run *Global Times* newspaper, as saying "the drills were preparation for an attack on Taiwan should the need arise, and that they enabled intelligence-gathering about Taiwan's defence systems."

"If India is dealing with a two-front situation, China is now dealing with four or five fronts," he said. "From Ladakh to the South China Sea issue, East China Sea with Japan, and Taiwan. There is also another western front, if you look at their internal problems in Xinjiang."

In Beijing, the Defence Ministry spokesperson and PLA Senior Colonel Ren Guoqiang blamed the U.S. for the tensions, and accused the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of stepping

people believe [India's] current government did a major adjustment of traditional Indian foreign policy, and the non-alignment principle has already been given up and abandoned." "India has a strong motivation to become an ally of the U.S.," he said. "From Chinese eyes, we think currently non-alignment principle is just a cover or policy to making alliances for India."

Those moves, however, may only be reinforcing closer India-U.S. ties, said Joshua Eisenman, senior fellow for China Studies at the American Foreign Policy Council. "It is India that is on the frontline, on the razor's edge, and if it wants a strong coalition to deal with China, it will have to sign on to the Quad big time," he said at a recent discussion held by the U.S. Consulate in Chennai, referring to the India-U.S.-Japan-Australia grouping.

"This is the moment where, from Canberra and Tokyo to Delhi and Washington, whether we like it or not, we have to do it," he said, referring to scaling up the grouping, including beyond military cooperation.

Existing TikTok users may not be able to use app after Nov. 12

U.S. to ban WeChat & TikTok, cites privacy, national security

Dealing with threats: The U.S. said it will "combat China's malicious collection of American citizens' personal data". ■ AP



Dealing with threats: The U.S. said it will "combat China's malicious collection of American citizens' personal data". ■ AP

Dance Ltd., the Chinese company that owns TikTok, would maintain access to information on the 100 million TikTok users in the U.S., creating a security risk.

Like most social networks, TikTok collects user data and moderates users' posts. It grabs users' locations and messages and tracks what they watch to figure out how best to target ads to them.

Similar concerns apply to U.S.-based social networks, but Chinese ownership adds an extra wrinkle because the Chinese government could order firms to help it gather intelligence.

Chinese access to data
Some security experts have raised concerns that Byte-

tech giant Oracle's recent deal to take over U.S. operations of TikTok, a requirement by the Trump administration for the app to continue operating in the U.S.

Details of the Oracle-TikTok deal were sketchy at best. Oracle didn't refer to the deal as a sale or acquisition, instead saying it was chosen as TikTok's "trusted technology provider." It's unclear at this point what assets, if any, Oracle would actually acquire.

The government said its order will "combat China's malicious collection of American citizens' personal data."

The order also raises questions about California

Queen strips Weinstein of U.K. honour

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Britain on Friday stripped disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein of an honour recognising his contribution to the U.K. film industry.

Weinstein, 68, was given the honour in 2004. The 68-year-old former Hollywood producer was convicted earlier this year of rape and sexual assault against two women and sentenced to 23 years in prison.

Accusations by dozens of women in 2017 led to the end of his career and helped spur the #MeToo movement — a global movement demanding that powerful men be held accountable for their sexual misconduct.

"The Queen has directed that the appointment of Harvey Weinstein to be an Honorary Commander of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, dated January 19 2004, shall be cancelled and annulled and that his name shall be erased from the Register of the said Order," according to a notice in *The Gazette*, the U.K.'s official public record.

Chinese hackers stole data from Spanish vaccine labs: report

ELSEWHERE



Forrest Gump author Winston Groom dies

WASHINGTON
Winston Groom, author of *Forrest Gump*, the 1986 American novel that inspired the classic film, has died aged 77, said the Mayor of Alabama, where he lived. ■ AFP

infected 30 million.

It was not clear what information was taken, when it happened, nor how important it was, with the paper citing sources privy to the attack.

'Virulent campaign'
Quoted in the article, Spain's secret service chief Paz Esteban said hackers had mounted "a particularly virulent campaign targeting laborato-

ries working on the search for a vaccine" not only in Spain but elsewhere.

Speaking to journalists on Thursday, Ms. Esteban who heads the CNI intelligence services, said there had been a "qualitative and quantitative" increase in attacks during lockdown, with hackers targeting "sensitive sectors such as healthcare and pharmaceuticals".

Such attacks had multi-

plied in other countries involved in efforts to develop a vaccine, prompting an exchange of information between their respective spy services, she said.

Most attacks were carried out by hackers from China and Russia, often from state organisations, but also by criminal organisations and universities who trade in hacked data, security sources said.

But the attack in which Spanish data were stolen was launched by Chinese hackers, they said.

The CNI was not immediately available to comment on the report.

In July, a court in the US state of Washington charged two Chinese nationals with stealing terabytes of data from hundreds of computer systems all over the world, in some cases on behalf of Chi-

nese government agencies.

The hacking, which took place over a decade, had more recently involved looking for vulnerabilities in the systems of firms developing Covid-19 vaccines, testing technology, and treatments, the US justice department said.

Spain was one of 11 countries named in the indictment as being targeted by the attacks.

To boost trade, Pak. plans to set up markets on Afghan, Iran borders

Of the 18 projects, three will start operations by Feb. 2021

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan will set up 18 markets along its border with Afghanistan and Iran to simultaneously boost trade with the both its neighbours, according to a media report on Friday.

It also plans to curb the menace of smuggling that has dented the economies on both sides, said the report.

According to a decision taken at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday, initially

the government would set up three markets — two in Balochistan and one in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — as pilot projects, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Curbing smuggling

"Pakistan will set up 18 markets along its border with Afghanistan and Iran to boost trade with the two nations and curb the menace of smuggling. Initially, three pilot projects would be functional," the report said.

The three markets will start operation by February

next year.

The meeting, which was also attended by Pakistan Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and other high officials, decided that stern steps would be taken to check smuggling.

Pakistan has been fencing its border with Afghanistan and Iran to curb the movement of militants and smuggling of goods.

However, it has been setting up border crossings at designated points to promote lawful movements of persons and goods.

But her short video message, in a rare urgent debate

Balarus and several allies tried on Friday to block a video message from opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya at the UN Human Rights Council, where she urged "the strongest" international response to Minsk's abuses.

Ms. Tikhanovskaya demanded "immediate international attention" for her country as it reels from a brutal crackdown on protests over the disputed re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko.

But her short video message, in a rare urgent debate

curred objections and insisting her words had "no relevance on the substance... on the events that are taking place today."

He was overruled by council President Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger.

The debate on the rights situation in Belarus, requested by the European Union, focused on violations and the crackdown on the unprecedented demonstrations which broke out after disputed August 9 elections.

Russian support
Mr. Lukashenko, who has ruled the ex-Soviet state for 26 years, claimed to have de-

feated Ms. Tikhanovskaya with 80% of the vote.

The leader, who on Thursday warned of a possible "war" with some neighbouring countries, has refused to step down and has turned to Russia for support. His security forces have detained thousands of protesters. Several people have died.

Ms. Tikhanovskaya, who has taken shelter in Lithuania, insisted that the country's violation of its international obligations to respect "human dignity and basic human rights... means the international community has a right to react in strongest terms."



The political solution, which is a historic demand of the Tamil people, did not materialise by way of a new Constitution that was promised

fiercely defended, and the 13th Amendment that you have sought to build upon have come under threat. How will this impact national politics and Tamil interests in particular?

The present government, in trying to get back to office after suffering a defeat in

2015, appealed to narrow communal forces among the majority community, igniting fears about others who are numerically in the minority. Unfortunately, this is a political game that is often resorted to by politicians of the majority [Sinhalese] community.

Naturally, having come to power, the government is now seeking to appease those forces and deliver their promise to their core constituency. They have promised a new Constitution, but as an immediate delivery they brought forward the 20th Amendment Bill to show that the President, or the Executive, will be a strong Sinhala-Buddhist ruler who will keep everybody else in the country in check and assure that the rights and safety of the majority community will be ensured.

As for the 13th Amendment, although the Provincial Councils were set up in 1987 as a solution to the Tamil national question, it didn't satisfy the Tamil side for one, who continuously

claimed it is insufficient and not meaningful sharing of powers. While the Tamil side has been clamouring for more powers to the provinces, hardliners among the Sinhalese have been resisting that, claiming that it will lead to a division of the country. In order to assuage the feelings of that constituency, we are seeing rhetoric from the government side that they will keep that under control either by removing the provincial council system in its entirety or at least by reducing its powers.

What is the scope of your engagement with the Rajapaksas now and the real prospects for a political solution?

The Rajapaksas, when they were in office previously, repeatedly assured the world that there will be a proper settlement of the Tamil question in this country.

After the war ended, asuring India at least three times, the Rajapaksa government agreed to implement

the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in full and also build upon it. Now, again a Rajapaksa regime seeking to give the country a new Constitution cannot forget those repeated assurances given to the world at large, in very specific terms, and try to travel in the opposite direction. We, on our part, will cooperate fully as we did with them in 2011, when we had 18 rounds of talks, and as we did later with the other government for about three years in the constitutional assembly process. We will continue to constructively engage in the processes.

On the TNA's campaign trail, many candidates invoked India while referring to the pending political solution. Realistically, what do you think India, or the international community, can do?

Sri Lanka is physically an island, but metaphorically no country can be an island. In today's world, we must all live adhering to certain un-

IVERSAL values and respect each other's concerns. Sri Lanka's foreign relations have always been mindful of that. As its closest neighbour, India's concerns over political stability in this island is something that all Sri Lankans appreciate and value very much. So, that is why in 1983, when PM Indira Gandhi offered her good offices, that was gratefully accepted by the Sri Lankan government.

The conflict in this island has had its impact on India as well, with over 1 lakh refugees having to be sheltered in India for three decades of war. It is foolhardy to say that conflicts in this island have no bearing on India or other countries in the world for that matter. That is why successive Sri Lankan governments engaged with India and the rest of the international community and gave these assurances in the past. To that extent, India's continuing good offices will be necessary and will be appreciated by all parties in finally resolving this conflict.

Rajapaksas must honour their past commitments to India and the world'

INTERVIEW | M.A. SUMANTHIRAN

'Rajapaksas must honour their past commitments to India and the world'

TNA spokesman says the alliance must pursue its objective of a dignified solution to the Tamil national question and provide better economic lives to people

MEERA SRINIVASAN

Sri Lanka's Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which chiefly represented the Tamils living in the north and east in the post-war decade, suffered a huge setback in the August general election, losing six seats in Parliament. With the Alliance's presence in the legislature having weakened and the Rajapaksas back in power at the Centre, what are the prospects for TNA's long-standing demand for a political solution? Alliance spokesman and Jaffna MP M.A. Sumanthiran weighs in...

What are the TNA's reflections on the recent poll setback?

■ It is a very serious setback. We have been reduced from 16 to 10 seats in Parliament. One of the primary reasons is that we supported the [Sri-sena-Wickremesinghe] government in office from 2015 to 2019. The expectations of the people were very high then.

The political solution, which is a historic demand of the Tamil people, did not materialise by way of a new Constitution that was promised... though we made great progress. Secondly, our party has been mainly, or one could say solely, looking for a political solution. We

emerge, we must win over at least a sizeable section of the majority community. The other is, even as a political party, we need to get involved in providing better economic lives for our people.

What about justice questions?

The justice question is linked to the political solution. Questions of justice and accountability arose because of the ethnic conflict. Whenever we asked for our legitimate political rights, we suffered violence and the struggle ended up in a full-scale war. Sometimes, it is better to solve the root cause of the problems first and then look at the justice issues that had come up in the interim. This is something we learnt in South Africa — to secure the future before looking at the past. I think that is the more sensible way of addressing these issues.

Both the 19th Amendment, in trying to get back to office after suffering a defeat in

fiercely defended, and the 13th Amendment that you have sought to build upon have come under threat. How will this impact national politics and Tamil interests in particular?

MARKET WATCH

	18-09-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	38,846	-0.34
US Dollar	73.45	0.29
Gold	52,672	0.40
Brent oil	43.40	2.79

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	357.85	11.75
Asian Paints	2028.40	20.45
Axis Bank	443.35	0.45
Bajaj Auto	3050.95	31.75
Bajaj Finserv	5888.45	-118.55
Bajaj Finance	2474.80	2.85
Bharti Airtel	494.55	15.55
BPCL	412.05	-3.55
Britannia Ind	3797.50	-18.15
Cipla	806.25	54.75
Coal India	123.65	-0.65
Dr Reddys Lab	5333.35	506.10
Eicher Motors	2152.95	7.50
GAIL (India)	92.10	1.35
Grasim Ind	745.00	20.30
HCL Tech.	810.60	2.30
HDFC	1724.45	-20.35
HDFC Bank	1057.30	-26.30
HDFC Life	585.10	-6.75
Hero MotoCorp	3112.65	51.65
Hindalco	179.50	3.65
Hind Unilever	2098.70	-29.50
ICICI Bank	369.55	0.55
IndusInd Bank	613.20	-4.15
Bharti Infralet	199.35	2.95
Infosys	1002.15	-8.85
Indian Oil Corp	80.70	-1.10
ITC	179.10	0.50
JSW Steel	287.70	0.85
Kotak Bank	1277.10	-28.00
L&T	900.70	-5.60
M&M	654.15	17.35
Maruti Suzuki	6964.75	-121.10
Nestle India Ltd.	16087.05	-34.30
NTPC	90.55	1.90
ONGC	74.30	1.15
PowerGrid Corp	171.90	3.60
Reliance Ind	2305.70	6.95
State Bank	192.60	-2.85
Shree Cement	19520.95	-367.45
Sun Pharma	523.35	11.35
Tata Motors	147.90	0.25
Tata Steel	395.50	-3.20
TCS	2449.90	-11.05
Tech Mahindra	804.65	17.70
Titan	1163.60	-18.80
UltraTech Cement	4002.60	33.65
UPL	537.30	6.75
Wipro	316.50	4.80
Zee Entertainment	220.30	-0.80

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar.....	73.25	73.57
Euro.....	86.85	87.26
British Pound	95.13	95.56
Japanese Yen (100).....	70.14	70.45
Chinese Yuan.....	10.84	10.89
Swiss Franc.....	80.61	81.01
Singapore Dollar.....	54.00	54.24
Canadian Dollar.....	55.64	55.90
Malaysian Ringgit.....	17.77	17.87
Australian Dollar.....	53.51	53.78

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Apple to unveil India online store on Sept. 23

NEW DELHI

Apple on Friday said it would unveil its online store in India on September 23, offering its full range of products to customers across the country for the first time, a move that will help the firm cash in on festive demand. In February, CEO Tim Cook had said Apple would launch its online store in India later this year, while its first physical retail store would open in the country in 2021. REUTERS

Forex reserves decline \$353 mn to \$541.7 bn

MUMBAI

After touching a life-time high in the previous week, the country's foreign exchange reserves declined by \$353 million to \$541.66 billion in the week ended September 11, according to Reserve Bank data. The fall in the reporting week was due to a decline in foreign currency assets, which decreased by \$841 million to \$497.5 billion. PTI

DHL Express announces increase in charges

MUMBAI

DHL Express has announced a 6.9% increase in India prices, effective January 1. The surcharge for Overweight Pieces and Non-Stackable Pallets will be to ₹7,250 per piece and ₹15,000 per pallet, it said in a statement. Country Manager R.S. Subramanian said the price adjustments helped build the firm's aviation and ground network, and improve facilities.

Govt. mulls reducing AI's debt to woo buyers

NEW DELHI

The Centre is considering reducing Air India's debt further and delaying its disinvestment process in order to woo buyers, senior officials said on Friday. The debt of Air India as on March 31, 2019, was ₹58,255 crore. Later in 2019, ₹29,464 crore of this debt was transferred from Air India to a government-owned special purpose vehicle called Air India Assets Holding Company Limited. PTI

Country-of-origin: onus is on importers

From Monday, proof of value addition must; norms to bar Chinese goods gaining from ASEAN FTA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Importers will have to do their due diligence from Monday to ensure that imported goods meet the prescribed 'rules of origin' provisions for availing concessional rate of customs duty under free trade agreements (FTAs), the Finance Ministry said.

The Customs (Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements) Rules, 2020 (CAROTAR, 2020), notified on August 21, shall come into force from September 21, the Ministry said in a statement on Friday.

This follows completion of the 30-day period that was given to importers and other stakeholders to familiarise themselves with new provisions. "An importer is now required to do due diligence



Setting boundaries: Minimum information that the importer must provide has also been laid down in the rules. ■PTI

before importing the goods to ensure that they meet the prescribed originating criteria. A list of minimum information, which the importer is required to possess, has also been provided in the rules

along with general guidance. "Also, an importer would now have to enter certain origin related information in the Bill of Entry, as available in the Certificate of Origin," the Ministry added.

Ministry sources said the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) FTA allows imports of most items at nil or concessional basic customs duty from the 10-nation bloc. Major imports to India come from five ASEAN countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.

The benefit of concessionary customs duty rate applies only if an ASEAN member country is the country of origin of goods.

This means that goods originating from China and routed through these countries will not be eligible for customs duty concessions under the ASEAN FTA.

The new rules will support the importer to correctly ascertain the country of origin, properly claim the concessional duty and assist

customs authorities in smooth clearance of legitimate imports under FTAs, the Ministry said.

'Protect local industry' In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had mentioned the need to protect domestic industry from misuse of free trade agreements.

CAROTAR 2020 supplements the existing operational certification procedures prescribed under different trade agreements.

India has inked FTAs with several countries, including Japan, South Korea and ASEAN members.

Under such agreements, two trading partners significantly reduce or eliminate import/customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them.

E-way bill generation in Aug. tops ₹13.85 lakh cr.

Value stood at ₹13.66 lakh cr. in July

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

More than 4.87 crore e-way bills, valued at over ₹13.85 lakh crore, were generated by businesses and transporters in August, reflecting a pick up in economic activity, GSTN data show.



In February, before the COVID-19 lockdowns, 5.63 crore e-way bills were generated, valued at ₹15.39 lakh crore.

GSTN, which manages the technology backbone of GST, said businesses can now download e-way bill data for the past one-month from the e-way bill portal run by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

Drone insurance must be on lines of aviation liability'

IRDAI panel against extending motor TP norms to drones

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD



the Motor Vehicle Act, the working group said "this is not in line with international practices. Creating a solatium fund, similar to motor vehicles, for hit and fly / hit and crash drones is unthinkable as there is little opportunity for the drone insurance segment to generate such funds."

Noting that international markets have considered insurance options for drones under aviation lines of business and not in the traditional lines of business, the report said it recommended third-party liability insurance to be in line with aircraft/aviation liability.

sought to differ with the draft Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2020, notified by the Civil Aviation Ministry, on the issue of third-party compensation.

Noting that the draft rules suggest that the compensation should be on the lines of

Angel Broking announces ₹600-cr. IPO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Angel Broking Ltd. has announced an initial public offering (IPO) of equity shares to raise ₹600 crore.

While ₹300 crore would be raised through an offer-for-sale by selling shareholders, an additional ₹300 crore would be raised by the company through the fresh issue of shares.

The IPO will open on September 22 and close on September 24. Anchor investors can bid from September 21.

The price band of the offer has been fixed at ₹305 to ₹306 per equity share.

Bids can be made for a minimum of 49 shares and in multiples thereof.

Make tariff plans easy to understand, telcos told

TRAI rules aim to ensure transparency

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on Friday issued revised rules for publication and advertisement of tariff plans by telcos to ensure transparency for subscribers.

The regulator has directed telcos to publish service area wise, within 15 days, each tariff plan for postpaid and prepaid subscribers.

Telcos will also have to transparently inform subscribers about upfront cost along with details like advance rentals, deposits, connection fee for postpaid services as well as top up, tariffs vouchers and others.

It added that "clear, un-

ambiguous and easy to understand" disclosure has to be made on the validity period of tariff plan and last date of bill payment.

On tariff ads telcos should prominently highlight additional conditions and provide a link to the norms for each of the offering within the next 15 days, TRAI said.

China's Huawei reiterates commitment to India

Presence in India, most localised, says India CEO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI



However, the Ministry of Electronics and IT informed Parliament there was no proposal to exclude Chinese players from 5G contracts.

Pointing out Huawei's presence in India was its largest overseas and most localised, it said the carrier, consumer and enterprise business groups were serving varied needs, from infrastructure to handsets.

E-commerce to grow 40% to \$38 bn in 2020, says Redseer

COVID-19 spurring rural residents to buy online

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU



Video and WhatsApp-based shopping would be new additions to the festive landscape.

line adoption by the people in the villages would lead to an acceleration of this theme which would finally reach a tipping point of sorts, the consulting firm surmised.

Also, the rise of new shopping models owing to the changing customer demographics, including video-based and WhatsApp-based shopping, would be a new addition to the festive landscape,

