

IN BRIEF

Delhi govt to set up 30K oxygen centres

New Delhi: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, on Monday, held a conversation via video conferencing with state convenors of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to discuss the opening of 'Oxygen Jaanch Kendra' in villages across the country. Mr Kejriwal had, on Sunday, announced that the Delhi government will now set up 'Oxygen Jaanch Kendra' in 30,000 villages to combat Covid-19 and the village youth will be trained and provided with oximeters to set up these kendras. In July, the Delhi government started providing pulse oximeters to asymptomatic and mild symptom corona patients undergoing home isolation. The Kejriwal government urged people to donate oximeters to AAP members so that the devices can be provided to the villages. Mr Kejriwal had, on August 15, said that all the governments are performing well and suggested that they follow the Delhi Model of home isolation. Delhi, on Sunday, reported 652 new cases and eight deaths, taking the total number of cases to over 1.52 lakh and more than 4,100 deaths. As of Sunday, there were 10,823 active Covid-19 cases in the national capital.

Brother of gangster Sundar Bhati held

New Delhi: The brother of gangster Sundar Bhati was arrested from Delhi on Monday in connection with an extortion case, the Gautam Buddh Nagar police said. Sahdev Bhati was most recently wanted for demanding an extortion of ₹45 lakh from a Greater Noida resident and has been named in at least one-and-a-half dozen FIRs, the police said. He was held from Ghassi Garden area in Mayur Vihar following raids at his house in Greater Noida on a tip-off, according to officials. "Sahdev Bhati, the real brother of Sundar Bhati, has been arrested. His name had cropped up in an extortion case registered at the Surajpur Police Station. The case involved an extortion demand of ₹45 lakh," additional deputy commissioner of police, Central Noida, Ankur Aggarwal said. According to police records, Sahdev Bhati's criminal history goes back to 2004, when he was first named in an FIR on charges of rioting, murder attempt and murder.

Unidentified body found in Gr Noida

Noida: An unidentified body of a man was found along a canal in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida on Monday morning, police said. The body was spotted near Kot Nahar in Dadri area by locals who alerted the police, officials said, adding the deceased appears to be around 30 years of age. "Efforts are underway to ascertain the identity of the dead man and the cause behind the incident. The local police have contacted nearby villages for any relevant lead in the case and we will soon come out with details," additional deputy Commissioner of Police, Greater Noida, Vishal Pandey said. The deceased, around 5 ft 10 inches tall and wearing a black shirt paired with blue denim jeans, had a rubber band with "Mahakaal" inscribed on it on his right hand, the officials said. The body has been sent for postmortem and further proceedings were underway, the police said.

NGO sets up helpline for stressed women

New Delhi: On the occasion of 74th Independence Day, Aambra Foundation launched 'She Speaks' helpline project and a national campaign "Lend an Ear and Extend a Hand" on Saturday, in its 9th Edition of its triannual seminar. The toll-free helpline will provide counselling and emotional support to adolescent girls and women affected by violence as well as those facing stress. The helpline was e-launched by Dr Dnyaneshwar Mulay, former secretary to government of India and member of National Human Rights Commission of India. The helpline will also provide empathetic counselling to the women and girls with special needs besides focusing on case studies of domestic violence victims and Covid survivors for future learnings and preparedness.

■ **Virus found active in patients who have recovered 39-40 days ago**

Recovered patients returning with Covid recurrence : Docs**Decision on reopening hotels, gyms likely at DDMA meeting**

New Delhi, Aug. 17: A decision on whether hotels, gymnasium and weekly markets should be allowed to reopen in the national capital is likely to be taken at a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on Tuesday, officials said on Monday. The Arvind Kejriwal government had earlier this month resent a proposal to L-G Anil Bajjal about reopening hotels and weekly markets in view of the current Covid situation in Delhi. Mr Bajjal had previously

According to Dr BL Sherwal, medical director of the Delhi government-run hospital, unless the virus is cultured or gene sequencing done, it will be difficult to determine whether it is a different strain of the virus that has infected the person the second time. "There can be a relapse.

overturned a similar decision of the AAP dispensation. An official said the DDMA meeting on Tuesday, to be chaired by the L-G, is likely to see the participation of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, health minister Satyendar Jain, AIIMS director Randeep Guleria and other top officials. "In the meeting, a decision on whether or not hotels, gymnasium, yoga institutes and weekly markets should be allowed to reopen is expected to be taken," the official said.

— PTI

The virus can be isolated from the body particularly from the sputum. We have the evidence that after ninth or tenth day the virus becomes non-infectious and the patients are not tested again," he said. "However, the virus has been reported to be living in patients who have recovered around 39 to 40 days

back," he added.

Dr Chandragouda Dodagoudar, director of medical oncology at Aakash Healthcare in Dwarka, shared the case of a 65-year-old patient who had stage 2 lymphoma. The patient first visited the health facility in March and was advised chemotherapy but was very apprehensive due to the coronavirus disease.

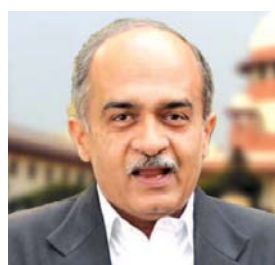
"The patient delayed the treatment for two and a half months and took alternative medicines and when that medication did not work and she started having pain, she visited the hospital. She had contracted Covid by then and the lymphoma had progressed from Stage 2 to Stage 4. We could not administer chemotherapy while she was undergoing Covid treatment," he said.

The doctor said after the patient recovered from virus, she was administered a slight dose of chemotherapy and became better and was discharged. But after a month, she had a relapse of Covid and ended up in a critical condition and succumbed last month.

— PTI

'Verdict on Bhushan to have chilling effect on free speech'

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, AUG. 17



Prashant Bhushan

Thirteen former Supreme Court and high courts judges on Monday came out against the top court judgment convicting lawyer Prashant Bhushan for criminal contempt of court for lowering the dignity and authority of the top court by his two tweets.

The judges who signed the statement included former judges of the top court - Justice Ruma Pal, Justice B. Sudershan Reddy, Justice G.S. Singhvi, Justice Aftab Alam, Justice Madan B. Lokur, Justice Gopala Gowda. Besides the former Chief Justice of Delhi and Madras high courts Justice A.P. Shah, Chief Justice of Kerala and Karnataka High Courts Justice N.K. Sodhi, other High Court judges who signed the statement include Justice Anjana Prakash - former Judge, Patna high court, Justice Chandru, former judge, Madras high court, Justice Kannan, former Judge, Punjab & Haryana High Court, and Justice V. S. Dave, former Judge, Rajasthan high court.

The statement has also been signed by 166 retired bureaucrats, educationists

and eminent personalities. Several prominent lawyers and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative of India (CHRI) have issued separate statements criticising the Supreme Court for finding senior advocate Prashant Bhushan guilty of contempt of court.

CHRI said that the verdict is a sign of the "current deterioration in the state of free speech in the country". It said that even if Bhushan's tweets, for which he was found in contempt, are "uncharitable or inappropriate", by passing the judgment, the SC has sent a chilling message about the cost of criticism.

In a separate statement, 41 senior lawyers of the top court have said that what Bhushan has said in his tweets is "what is routinely expressed about the

court's working in recent years by many on public fora and on social media."

The statement says that even some retired judges of the Supreme Court have expressed somewhat similar views.

Pointing out that an independent and independent judiciary does not mean that judges are immune from scrutiny and comment, the statement has said, "This judgment does not restore the authority of the court in the eyes of the public. Rather, it will discourage lawyers from being outspoken."

Expressing disappointment with the judgment, the senior lawyer recalled that from the days of the supersession of judges and the events thereafter, it has been the Bar that has been the first to stand in defence of the independence of the judiciary.

"A bar silenced under the threat of contempt, will undermine the independence and ultimately the strength of the Court. A silenced bar, cannot lead to a strong court," says the statement issued by a lawyer including Lalit Bhasin, Shekhar Naphade, Arvind Datar, Raju Ramachandra, Kamini Jaiswal, and Sanjay Hagde.

FB executive alleges threat to life amid row over report

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 17



The Delhi Police on Monday registered a case against Facebook India executive Ankhi Das based on a complaint by senior Facebook India executive Ankhi Das that she has been receiving "violent threat to her life", officials said. Ms Das, who is Facebook's director, Public Policy, India, South and Central Asia, had filed the complaint on Sunday, they said.

Based on the complaint, a case has been registered under relevant sections of the law on Monday and investigation has been taken up by the cyber cell of the Delhi Police, said Anil Mittal, addl PRO (Delhi Police). A Facebook spokesperson said, "We take the safety and security of our employees seriously and care for their well-being. However, we do not comment on individual employee matters."

In her complaint, Ms Das alleged that several people were issuing "threats, making sexually coloured remarks and defaming her" through online posts. According to the complaint, the threats are in relation to an article dated August 14, 2020 published in the Wall Street Journal. In her complaint, Ms Das stated she has been receiving threats ever since. "The content, which even includes my

Delhi Assembly panel to summon Facebook officials

New Delhi, Aug. 17: A Delhi Assembly panel on peace and harmony said on Monday that it will summon Facebook officials over complaints about the social media platform's alleged "deliberate and intentional inaction to contain hateful content" in India. The development comes in the backdrop of a report published in the Wall Street Journal on Friday, citing interviews with unnamed Facebook insiders to claim that one of its senior India policy executives intervened in internal communication to stop a permanent ban on a BJP MLA from Telangana after he allegedly made communally charged posts.

— PTI

photograph is evidently threatening to my life and body and I fear for my safety as well as that of my family members. The content also maligns my reputation based on a news article and I am subjected to name-calling, cyber bullying and eve-teasing online," she said.

Ms Das alleged that she was intentionally vilified by the accused due to their "political affiliations" and are now engaging in online & offline abuse, subjecting her to "criminal intimidation.

787 new cases take Delhi's Covid tally to 1.53L

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

The number of coronavirus tests in Delhi has gone down in August as compared to July, with the government attributing it to the decrease in Covid infections in the national capital.

The authorities conducted over 2.58 lakh Covid tests in Delhi between August 1 and 15, whereas the figure stood at over 3.13

lakh in the same period in July. Between July 16 and 31, over 2.96 lakh tests were conducted in Delhi.

"It is wrong to say that the number of tests in Delhi has dipped in the last few days. We are doing sufficient number of tests in Delhi. There can be fluctuations over short time periods, but overall we have been consistently doing 19,000-20,000 tests daily for months now," an official said.

▶ **AS MANY as 787 new cases and 18 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours. Of the total 1,53,367 cases in the city, 10, 852 are active and 1,38,301 patients have recovered.**

As many as 787 new cases and 18 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours. Of the total 1,53,367 cases in the city, 10, 852 are active and 1,38,301 patients have

recovered. The virus-related fatalities has gone up to 4,214. The official said the number of tests was low on some days in August due to festivals and celebrations such as Rakshabandhan, Janmashtami and Independence Day.

According to the official, people do not go out for Covid test during festivals unless and until it is absolutely necessary. Also, testing is lower on Saturdays and Sundays.

IMD warns of another spell of heavy rains

Monsoon clouds hover in the sky above the Raisina Hill during rains in New Delhi on Monday. Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the regional forecasting center of the India Meteorological department, said the monsoon trough has once again shifted towards north and will remain close to the national capital over the next three days which could lead to moderate rains till Thursday. Also, there are chances of one or two spells of heavy rains.

— PTI

Nomination process ends for Delhi Waqf Board election

New Delhi, Aug. 17: AAP's Okhla legislator Amanatullah Khan is set to become the member of Delhi Waqf Board, the nomination process for which concluded on Monday.

Except Khan, no other legislator has filed nomination for election on the post of member - MLA. The election for the post is due on August 25.

"No other MLA except Amanatullah Khan filed nomination as the process ended today. Now, the scrutiny of nomination paper will take place," said a senior government official associated with the election process said.

With this, Mr Khan is likely to return as chairman of Delhi Waqf Board for third time in a row.

Scrutiny of the nomination paper will be conducted on Tuesday and last date of withdrawal of nomination is August 19, stated a notice.

The ruling AAP has five Muslim MLAs, but the member-MLA has always been elected unopposed, officials said.

The seven-membered Waqf Board includes four elected members — an MLA, a current or former Member of Parliament, mutawalli (manager or custodian) and a Bar Council member.

The remaining three are nominated members, including a Delhi government officer (which is also vacant), a social worker and a Muslim scholar, officials said.

After election of member (MLA), chairman of the Board will be elected. The members of panel elect one of them as the chairman.

The post of member (MLA) fell vacant due to Assembly elections earlier this year.



Amanatullah Khan

12 city forests ready, 4 more soon: Gopal Rai

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Twelve city forests have been developed in the national capital and four more will be ready soon, environment minister Gopal Rai told the Centre on Monday.

Five of the 12 city forests are spread in an area of over 10 hectares — the Centre mandates developing Nagar Van (city forest) spread in an area between 10 to 14 hectares.

The five mentioned by the Delhi government have been developed at Nasirpur (28 hectares), Alipur (19.50 hectares), Mitraon Pocket B (35.15 hectares), Taj Enclave (56 hectares), and Hauz Rani (28 hectares), according to the minister.

Work is underway to develop four more city forests at Mamoorpur, Ayanagar, Jaunpur, and Dera Mandi, the minister said during a meeting of states and Union Territories called by Union



environment minister Prakash Javadekar.

Mr Rai said the Delhi government will work together with the Centre and neighboring states to find solutions to environmental problems.

He also said the city government has set a target of planting 31 lakh saplings by March 31 next year. "The Centre has set a target of planting 15 lakh saplings in Delhi. Our target is 31 lakh. We launched

a pakhwara recently and planted 10 lakh saplings. I think we will be able to achieve our target by March 31," he said. The objective of the plantation drive is to increase the national capital's green cover from 325 square kilometres at present to 350 sq km by 2021, he said. As many as 29.37 lakh saplings were planted in Delhi in 2019 against the target of 24.18 lakh, he said.

— PTI

Fight between 2 groups lead to vandalisim, firing in N. Delhi

New Delhi, Aug 17: Tension gripped north Delhi's Kucha Mohtar Khan area after around 12 men allegedly entered a locality, fired in the air and vandalised vehicles to exact revenge from another group with whom they had a quarrel, police said on Monday.

The incident was reported late on Sunday night. Three men have been arrested in connection with the incident so far, police said, adding that raids are being conducted to nab the remaining culprits.

At least three local residents received minor injuries in the incident, police said. According to the police, a group of locals had a quarrel with a man named Lalit Yadav and his brother-in-law.

Following the quarrel, Yadav called up his associates, who then reached the locality with arms to take revenge from the locals. They vandalised several vehicles and went into

every lane of the locality in search of the group of men, with whom they had a fight.

However, the locals had allegedly fled the spot soon after the quarrel.

Yadav alias Pongi, declared a "Bad Character" by the Model Town police station, is wanted in connection with a case registered against him there under section 323 (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt) and 452 (house-trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint) of the Indian Penal Code, police said.

After the case was lodged, Lalit came and hid at in-law's house in the locality in Kucha Mohtar Khan area. During his stay at the locality, he had a fight with the locals.

On Monday, when a team from Kashmiri Gate police station reached the locality, they found three to four cars damaged while several bikes had fallen on the ground.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Girl's body found in UP, rape suspected

Azamgarh, UP: The body of a 16-year-old girl who is suspected to have been raped was recovered from a pond on the outskirts of a village here on Monday, police officials said. The teen, whose family had returned from Mumbai during the lockdown, had been missing since Saturday. A youth has been detained for questioning and the case will soon be solved, SP (city) Pankaj Pandey said. He said the complaint was filed after the teen went missing on Saturday and her body found two days later from a pond in Mubarakpur area. "Family members have lodged a complaint of murder after committing rape. A case has been registered in this regard," he said. The incident comes a day after news of a 13-year-old girl being raped and murdered in the state's Lakhimpur Kheri district. — PTI

BJP pick Nishad elected to RS

Lucknow: BJP candidate Jai Prakash Nishad was declared elected to Rajya Sabha unopposed from Uttar Pradesh on Monday. Mr Nishad was the lone candidate to file nomination for the byelection and Monday was the last date for withdrawal of candidature. Mr Nishad has been declared elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha, election officer Brij Bhushan Dubey told PTI. He was also handed over the certificate declaring his election, Mr Dubey said. Mr Nishad filed his nomination for the Rajya Sabha byelection on Thursday. The byelection was necessitated following the death of Samajwadi Party MP Beni Prasad Verma. His tenure was till July 4, 2022. Mr Nishad is a former Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) MLA who joined the BJP a few years ago. — PTI

CBI books firm for ₹1,530cr bank fraud

New Delhi: The CBI has booked Ludhiana-based SEL Textiles Ltd and its directors for allegedly cheating consortium of banks to the tune of ₹1,530 crore, officials said on Monday. The directors of the conglomerate — Ram Sharan Saluja, Neeraj Saluja and Dhiraj Saluja — have also been named as accused in the CBI FIR along with unidentified others, they said. The probe agency acted on a complaint from the Central Bank of India, which alleged that the company and its directors indulged in criminal conspiracy to defraud the banks and divert loan funds with an intention to misappropriate them between 2009-13, causing a loss of ₹1,530 crore to 10 public sector banks of the consortium, they added. — PTI

Duo attacked over post on equal rights

Bengaluru: Enraged over sharing in Whatsapp the recent Supreme Court order about women's rights on ancestral property, four youth allegedly attacked their uncle and aunt, the police said on Monday. M. Shashikala lodged a complaint that the sons of her brothers Dhanaraj and Mohan attacked her and her hotelier husband Muttu on August 12, the police said. She stated that Muttu had in the family WhatsApp group posted the court order saying women too have equal rights on the property of their parents, they said. On night of August 12, Dhanaraj's sons Vaishak, Vaibhav and Vaishnav and Mohan's son Varun went to Muttu's hotel and attacked him with sticks and stones. When Shashikala went to the rescue, she was also attacked. — PTI

MP shaves head to end TMC 'misrule'

Kolkata: Vowing to end the corruption and misrule of Trinamul Congress in West Bengal next year, BJP MP of Bishnupur Soumitra Khan has tonsured himself. He also announced of distributing Trishul to 90,000 Yuva Morcha activists for their protection which has however triggered a controversy with the Trinamul Congress demanding action against him. Clad in a saffron attire Mr Khan performed yajna along with the party workers at Sreshwar Mahadev temple in Bankura on Monday.

Violence over move by admin to abolish Poush Mela 4K-strong mob vandalises Visva Bharati varsity in WB

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, AUG. 17

Visva Bharati (VB), a world famous Central university founded by great poet Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan in Birbhum of West Bengal, has been shut down for an indefinite period hours after a 4000-strong mob, allegedly led by a TMC MLA, stormed and vandalised it on Monday morning to protest the VB's recent decision to abolish the traditional festival: Poush Mela, held in every winter on its campus, and erection of a boundary wall surrounding the fair venue on a ground against encroachment.

Susovan Banerjee, a VB executive council member, said, "There is nothing wrong in trying to stop encroachment on the VB property by constructing a wall. We have written to the HRD ministry and Union home ministry about the unprecedented

Don't want any construction on ground: Didi

Kolkata, Aug. 17: Amid the mayhem at Visva-Bharati University over the erection of a boundary wall at its Pous Mela ground, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said she doesn't want any construction to take place there, and asked the police to convene a meeting with the stakeholders in this regard.

Underscoring that



with the governor regarding Monday's violence on the Pous Mela ground and told him that the state government's role in the matter was "limited". Trouble erupted at Visva-Bharati in West

Bengal's Birbhum district on Monday as a large number of people ransacked the university's properties to protest the construction of a boundary wall at the Pous Mela ground.

Sources said that university authorities had decided to build a fence around the ground, where the "Pous Mela" (winter fair) is held every year.

— PTI

incident. We have also drawn the attention of West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee and Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on the incident. The university will remain closed till normalcy returns to the campus." The decision to shut down the VB was taken at its EC meeting after the violent attack.

Calling Poush Mela a

heritage and integral part of Bengal, the attackers vandalised two temporary offices, destroyed construction materials and used a payload, brought for work, in bulldozing one of the gates of the VB. A VB spokesperson alleged that neither the police came for rescue nor the district magistrate responded despite contact.

While TMC MLA of Dubrajpur Naresh Bauri was seen present during the rampage, the violent mob included local traders who did their business over the years at the handloom, handicraft and folk musical fair, a brainchild of Tagore's father late Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore to celebrate the Bengali month of Poush.

Road caves-in amid heavy rains in Jammu



Residents attempt to pull a vehicle as a portion of a road caves-in following heavy rainfall in Jammu on Monday.

— PTI

Curbs in J&K amid tensions over Hindu activist remarks

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, AUG. 17

Curfew-like restrictions were imposed on communally sensitive Kishtwar district of Jammu region on Monday "as a precautionary measure" in view of heightening tensions over a Hindu activist's using insulting remarks against Prophet Muhammad a day ago.

Jammu's inspector general of police Mukesh Singh said that the accused Satpal Sharma and his colleague Deepak Kumar were arrested on Sunday itself after a video of his (Sharma's) using derogatory words against Islam's prophet went viral on social media.

"We immediately took cognisance of this unfortunate incident, registered a case under relevant sections of the IPC against the accused. No one will be allowed to vitiate the communal harmony in Jammu," he said and warned that strict action would be taken also

VHP hits out at Aamir Khan over meet with Erdogan's wife

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

As netizens slammed Bollywood actor Aamir Khan for meeting Turkey's first lady Emine Erdogan, the VHP on Monday criticised the actor, saying "feeling proud of meeting Turkey's first lady indicates so many things".

The actor's meeting with Turkey's first lady came at a time when India-Turkey relations have been frosty and Turkey has been siding with Pakistan over Kashmir issue and had criticised India over



abrogation of Article 370 and a m e n d e d Citizenship Act and justified cross border terrorism practiced by Pakistan. Turkey's first lady herself uploaded photographs of her meeting with the Indian actor which has created a major controversy.

Angry netizens started #BoycottAamirKhan on Twitter while some recalled his remarks made in 2015 over "rising intolerance" in India, over which the actor had to face severe flak.

against those found circulating further the controversial video clip.

On Sunday another video showing a group of so-called cow vigilantes

thrashing a local Muslim after his teenage son had driven cows of a Hindu community away from his pasture went viral, adding to the tensions.

Merger of 6 BSP MLAs: SC defers plea hearing

New Delhi, Aug. 17: The Supreme Court on Monday deferred to August 24 the hearing on a plea of a BJP MLA seeking a stay on the Rajasthan Speaker's decision that had allowed six BSP MLAs to merge with the Congress.

A bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra, in a hearing conducted through video conferencing, was apprised of the fact the Rajasthan high court, which has been hearing the politically sensitive dispute, has been closed till Wednesday.

It has been reported that the Chief Justice of the high court has tested positive for Covid-19 and the functioning of the HC has been postponed till August 19.

The bench, which also comprised Justices B.R. Gavai and Krishna Murari, took note of the submissions of lawyer Sunil Fernandes that the High Court had started dictating its order in the dispute on Friday but it could not be completed.

— PTI

Largest tribal institution uses tech to cope with Covid crisis

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, AUG. 16

The Covid-19 crisis may have crippled many educational institutions; both private and government, to function normally as lockdown restrictions were imposed and guidelines were put in place by the Centre and state governments to contain the pandemic. However, it has not dented much the operations of the world's largest tribal educational establishment — Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences

Ready to work with India to enhance trust: China

'Right path for 2 sides is to respect, support each other'

Beijing, Aug. 17: China on Monday said it is ready to work with India to enhance political mutual trust, properly manage their differences and safeguard the long-term development of bilateral ties.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said this at a regular briefing when a Western media journalist sought China's reaction to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks that the Indian armed forces have given a befitting reply to those challenging the country's sovereignty.

Mr Modi, in his 74th Independence Day address to the nation from the ramparts of Red Fort, said the armed forces have given a befitting reply to those challenging the country's sovereignty "from LoC to LAC", in a veiled reference to Pakistan and China.

"From LoC (Line of Control) to LAC (Line of Actual Control), anyone who casts an eye on the sovereignty of the country, the armed forces have responded in the language they understand," Mr

THE SOUND development of bilateral ties not only serves the interest of the two peoples but also stability, peace, prosperity of the region and the whole world, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said

Modi said. Mr Modi's comments came amid India's bitter border row with China along the LAC in eastern Ladakh and rise in incidents of ceasefire violations along the LoC with Pakistan in the last few months.

Responding to the question, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao said that he have noted Prime Minister Modi's speech.

We are close neighbours, we are emerging countries with over one billion people. So, the sound development of bilateral ties not only serves the interest of the two peoples but also stability, peace, prosperity of the region and the whole world, he said.

The right path for the two sides is to respect and

support each other as this serves our long-term interests, Mr Zhao said.

So, China stands ready to work with India to enhance our political mutual trust, properly manage our differences, step-up practical cooperation and safeguard the long-term development of bilateral ties, the spokesman added.

In his speech, Prime Minister Modi also said that "whether it is terrorism or expansionism, India is fighting both with determination."

Referring to the Galwan Valley clashes in eastern Ladakh in June, the PM said respect for India's sovereignty is supreme and the world has seen in Ladakh what its brave jawans can do to maintain this resolve.

"I salute all those brave soldiers from the Red Fort," Mr Modi said, adding the whole country is united in protecting the sovereignty of the country.

Twenty Indian army personnel were killed during the clashes on June 15. — PTI

India wants UAE to invest in key sectors

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sought to further strengthen their close strategic partnership on Monday, with New Delhi "inviting further investments from UAE in key sectors of the Indian economy such as infrastructure including logistics, food parks, highways, ports, airports, renewable energy and defence" at the meeting and the UAE side "expressing its willingness to further strengthen links in energy and food security".

The foreign ministers of both nations co-chaired their 13th bilateral Session of the Joint Commission Meeting on Trade, Economic and Technical Cooperation in a Virtual format. Just days after India "welcomed the full normalisation of relations between the UAE and Israel" last week, New Delhi on Monday said "both sides (India and the UAE) also discussed the regional issues pertaining to their

neighbourhood and cooperation at the United Nations and other multilateral fora".

New Delhi also said that "wide-ranging discussions were held in a friendly, frank and constructive atmosphere, reflecting the strong bilateral ties between the two strategic partners" and "close political relations" as per their "Comprehensive Partnership", adding that both sides "agreed to strengthen cooperation in ongoing areas and also to explore cooperation in newer areas reflecting the changing times".

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar chaired the meeting from the Indian side while UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan chaired the meeting on behalf of the UAE. The developments show how politically close India and the UAE have grown in the past few years. India had also been briefed last week on Friday by the UAE on the subject of its full normalisation of relations with Israel.

HC rejects plea for CBI probe against Deora, Rana, Priyanka

New Delhi, Aug. 17: The Delhi high court on Monday refused to entertain a plea seeking direction to the CBI and the ED to take action against Congress leaders Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Milind Deora and Yes bank co-founder Rana Kapoor for alleged cheating and fraud.

Justice Vibhu Bakhru dismissed the petition filed by an NGO alleging that Vadra sold a painting of former PM Rajiv Gandhi to Mr Kapoor for ₹2 crore even though it was the property of the Congress. The plea alleged that Mr Deora had pressurised Mr Kapoor, who is lodged in jail in another fraud case, to buy the painting.

This court does not consider it apposite to entertain the writ petition, the judge said.

The SC in a number of cases has held that it is necessary for a complainant to exhaust all the remedies available to it before approaching the high court. — PTI

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that a person namely **Salim S/o Unknown R/o Footpath Near Samuday Bhawan, Jal Bord Road, Ashok Nagar, Delhi** about 50 years of age had been found dead at Jal Bord Ashok Nagar Samuday Bhawan, Delhi. In this regard a vide has been registered with **DD No: 33-A dated 28.07.2020 at P.S. Jyoti Nagar, Delhi**. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to identify the deceased person but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the UIDB is as under: **Name: Salim, Gender: Male, Age: about 50 years, Height: 5'7", Complexion: Wheatish, Build: Thin, Wearing: White colour kurta and black colour pant.** If anyone has any information about his relatives, kindly inform the SHO/Jyoti Nagar, Delhi.



Salim

E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639

DP/204/NE/2020

SHO
P.S. Jyoti Nagar, Delhi.
Ph. No. 011-22810525, 22810524

Music legend Pt Jasraj dies at 90

Classical vocalist would sometime wake up in night to compose a 'bandish'

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Mozart, Beethoven, Pavarotti and Jasraj are up there in the skies somewhere, planets all in a cosmos of stars big and small. On Monday, Pandit Jasraj died in his New Jersey home, the voice that soared and swooped for over eight decades to touch a chord with music lovers the world over, falling silent forever. He was 90.

It was only last year in September that the International Astronomical Union named a minor planet after Jasraj, an honour that was previously only reserved for classical greats like Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven,

Luciano Pavarotti — and then Pandit Jasraj.

The Hindustani vocalist, the first Indian to be honoured so, was considered a great stalwart of classical Indian music. With a voice range that travelled 3.5 octaves, Pandit Jasraj appealed to the most fastidious aficionado looking out for the smallest nuance as well as the untutored fan who just sat back and enjoyed the music flow over her.

Jasraj, who was from the Mewati gharana, belonged to the league of great vocalists such as Bade Gulam Ali Khan, M.S. Subbulakshmi and Bhimsen Joshi.

The Haryana born Jasraj made classical music accessible to all

1930 - 2020



with his soulful renditions of "khayal mixed with thumri".

It was not just about the voice but also perfect diction, clarity in "sur and gayaki". Such was his command over ragas that Pandit Jasraj would sometime wake up in the middle of the night to compose a "bandish". He

is credited with creating new ragas such as "abiri todi and patdeepki" besides introducing a new style of "jugalbandi, the Jastrangi". It was never just about the purists. Awarded the Padma Vibhushan, the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Shri, Pandit Jasraj also popularised semi-classical music like haveli sangeet and reached out to devotees with his bhajans, a particular favourite for his fans being *Om Namo Bhagavate* in praise of Lord Krishna.

He clearly had a feel for Urdu too. The music legend, who celebrated his 90th birthday in January this year, also had great love for ghazals.

— PTI

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MECHANICAL HOSPITAL AND CENTRAL HEATING DIVISION SRINAGAR					
(Tele-fax No: 019-2496089, e-mail id: xenmhchdk@yahoo.co.in) (Short-Term)(Fresh) GIST of E -NIT NO: MHCHD/TS /2020-21/52/e-tendering					
Dated:-11.08.2020					
For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor, J&K State e-tenders are invited from registered/reputed/experienced firms with J&K State Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments for the below mentioned work:-					
Name of work	Est. Cost (Rs. in Lacs)	Cost of T/Doc. (In Rupees)	Earnest Money (In Rs)	Time of completion (in days)	Position of funds
1	2	3	4	5	6
Supply Installation Testing and Commissioning of centralized Medical oxygen system along allied works at Govt. SMHS Hospital, Srinagar	15.00	1000	30000/-	10	Available as communicated by intending Department
1. The Tender document Consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in from 12.08.2020 (10.00 hrs).					
2. The bidders shall deposit their bids in electronic format on the above web site from 12.08.2020 (10.00hrs) to 19.08.2020 (14.00 hrs) in two (02) cover.					
3. The bids uploaded on the website up to due date and time will be opened on 19.08.2020 (16.00 hrs) or any date convenient to the department in the office of Executive Engineer, MHCHD, Srinagar.					
DIP/K-4090 Dated 17.08.2020					Executive Engineer, MHCHD, Srinagar

SHORT TAKES

Bus seats quota for transgenders

Kolkata: In a novel move, a private bus operators' association in West Bengal has decided to reserve two seats for transgender commuters in buses affiliated to it, an official said. Joint Council of Bus Syndicates general secretary Tapan Banerjee said two seats in every bus associated with the organisation will be marked as "Tridhara".

He claimed that around 35,000-40,000 buses in the state are affiliated with the association. "It is not just about earmarking two seats but to recognise transgender people and create awareness among commuters to treat them as equals," Mr Banerjee said. He said the process of marking the seats has already begun in a couple of routes in the city and will be done in all buses associated with the council. He urged the state transport undertakings and other private operators to join the syndicate. — PTI

Parl session may start Sept. 1st week

New Delhi: The monsoon session of Parliament may begin from the first week of September and is unlikely to see the two Houses assembling simultaneously as one is expected to use both the chambers for its sitting in view of the coronavirus pandemic, sources said. Parliamentary affairs minister Pralhad Joshi visited the chambers of both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on Monday to reviewed the preparations for the session and the modifications made in view of the outbreak of the viral disease. To maintain social distancing, a new sitting plan is expected for both the Houses. This is the first time in the history of Indian Parliament since 1952 that such an arrangement will be in place, where 60 members will be seated in the chamber and 51 in the galleries of Rajya Sabha and the remaining 132 in the chamber of Lok Sabha. — PTI

Protests in Assam over CAA, draft EIA

Guwahati: Thousands of protesters hit the roads across Assam on Monday, demanding the repeal of the CAA and the draft Environment Impact Assessment Notification 2020. Assembled under the aegis of Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad (AJYCP), the agitators warned of more intense protests in the future. The AJYCP supporters also demanded the release of Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti leader Akhil Gogoi, who is in jail and is being probed by the NIA for his alleged role in the violent anti-CAA protests that rocked the state last year. In Dibrugarh city, hundreds of protesters were detained by police as they assembled to form a human chain, an official said. — PTI

Susanta 1st Odisha minister to test +ve

Bhubaneswar: Odishas rural development and labour minister Susanta Singh said he has tested positive for Covid-19. The MLA from Bhatli assembly constituency is the first minister in Odisha to have been infected with the virus. "I have tested positive for Corona and I am stable now. Those who have come in contact with me recently are requested to stay isolated and get tested," the minister tweeted. Mr Singh was the chief guest at the Independence Day celebrations in Balasore district. Earlier, five MLAs had tested positive for the virus. They are Khandapadas MLA and editor of Sambad Soumya Ranjan Patnaik, Polasara MLA Srikanth Sahu, Remuna MLA Sudhanshu Sekhar Parida, Nilgiri MLA Sukanta Kumar Nayak and Salepur MLA Prasant Behera. — PTI

3 quakes hit parts of Saurashtra area

Ahmedabad: Three earthquakes of low to moderate intensities hit parts of Jamnagar and Kutch districts in Gujarat's Saurashtra region on Monday. No casualty or damage to property was reported. An earthquake of 3.1 magnitude having its epicentre 28 km south-south-east of Jamnagar was felt at 1.38 pm, the Institute of Seismological Research (ISR) in Gandhinagar said. On Sunday also, a quake of 2.4 magnitude was reported at 10.09 pm in Jamnagar district. — PTI

'Should Jio pay RCom's AGR dues,' SC asks govt

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre whether the outstanding dues of RCom towards the adjusted gross revenue (AGR) could be recovered from Jio which is using its (RCom's) spectrum. The Jio, however, asserted that it could not be saddled with the RCom liabilities facing proceedings under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

"Can Reliance Jio be held liable for dues if earning revenue through shared spectrum", the court said and asked, "the DoT to place its stand on recovering RCom's AGR dues from Rjio".

The poser from Justice Mishra, heading a three judge bench also comprising Justices B.R. Gavai and Krishna Murari, came during the hearing of the Centre's application seeking court's nod for staggered payment of the AGR dues by the telcos over a period of 20 years.

"How can you avoid liability of paying AGR dues? We catch hold of you (Jio) and make you pay. The person using spectrum must pay. Why should we not treat the (2016) deal as effectuated?" asked the bench.

The hearing, which will continue on Tuesday, also saw solicitor-general Tushar Mehta telling the court that the spectrum is owned by the nation, held by govt in trust and can't be sold.

The court was told that DoT feels that spectrum can't be subjected to IBC proceedings as telcos don't own spectrum, and the contract only allows them to use it.

Sabarimala opens



Melshanathi A.K. Sudheer Namboothiri, along with other priests, perform rituals for the opening of the Sabarimala temple on the first day of the holy Malayalam month of Chingam in Pathanamthitta district on Monday.

— PTI

Ex-CM urges PM Modi to order inquiry Chandrababu accuses Jagan govt of illegal phone-tapping

Amaravati, Aug. 17: Alleging that the ruling YSR Congress in Andhra Pradesh was resorting to illegal tapping of phones to further its political gains, Telugu Desam party president N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting that the Centre order an inquiry by a competent body to check the illegal acts.

He alleged that the YSRC was illegally tapping phones of Opposition parties, advocates, media persons and social activists.

"It appears that the ruling YSRC has now even targeted judiciary, the third pillar of the democracy, as it is facing hurdles from the judiciary," the TDP president alleged in the letter, a copy of which was also marked to Union communications and law minister Ravishankar Prasad.

Alleging that some private persons were also illegally tapping phones using cutting-edge tech-



Chandrababu Naidu



Narendra Modi

▶ **TDP CHIEF** claimed the state government has not followed any due procedure of law in tapping the phones

▶ **HE ALLEGED** that the YSRC was illegally tapping phones of Opposition parties, advocates, media persons and social activists

nology and tools, Chandrababu Naidu apprehended that if such illegal phone tapping went unchecked, it would "pose a serious threat to the integrity and security of the nation."

He said the tapping was being done using "illegal software and unlawfully."

"The people of AP are facing a grave threat under the rule of YSRC. Ever since the YSRC came to power, there has been a systematic and concerted attack on the democratic institutions in the state.

Initially, the process of governance was completely derailed by attacking the investors and policies

of previous regimes. This was followed by attack on institutions like State Election Commission and Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APSPSC)," he said.

Concomitantly, the YSRC has been attacking and threatening leaders of opposition parties, advocates, media persons, and social activists among others through various deceitful means, he alleged.

The Leader of the Opposition claimed the state government has not followed any due procedure of law in tapping the phones of people from various walks of life. — PTI

JDU suffers big blow ahead of Bihar polls

State's ex-minister Shyam Rajak joins RJD

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, AUG. 17

Bihar industry minister Shyam Rajak on Monday resigned from the JD(U) over differences with party leadership and joined the Opposition RJD.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, along with other senior leaders, was present during the occasion. JD(U) sources told this newspaper that he has been upset over being "marginalised" in the party and was also not getting much prominence as a minister.

"This is an emotional moment for me," Shyam Rajak said, adding that he would continue his fight for the cause of social justice under the leadership of RJD Chief Lalu Yadav.

While criticising the Nitish Kumar government for its stand on CAA, NRC and other issues, he said, "I can never compromise on my ideology and happy to join RJD." Hinting that others in the JD(U) may quit the party ahead of polls, he said, "You will see what will happen in the coming days".



▶ **SHYAM RAJAK**, a sitting MLA from reserved Phulwarisharif seat, is considered a strong dalit face. Political experts claim that Mr Rajak also has strong backing from a sizeable Muslim population in his constituency.

Shyam Rajak, a sitting MLA from reserved Phulwarisharif seat, is considered a strong dalit face. Political experts claim that he also has strong backing from a sizeable Muslim population in his constituency. Reports suggest that the JD(U) had started promoting a dalit leader Arun Manjhi from the constituency. "Shyam Rajak quitting NDA is unfortunate," the statement released by LJP said.

On Sunday, after Mr Rajak announced his decision to quit, he was expelled from the JD(U) and sacked from the ministry by the governor on the advice of the chief minister.

Before joining the JD(U) in 2009, Mr Rajak was with the RJD. During the Lalu-Rabri regime before 2005, he had also served as

a minister.

Shyam Rajak was made the industry minister when Nitish Kumar returned to NDA fold in July 2017.

Several political parties also raised questions on the timing of his decision to quit JD(U) and join the opposition camp.

"The People of Bihar are wise enough to understand who their actual well-wisher is. The socio-economic growth of sub-altern community, including dalits, took place because of Nitish-led NDA government's policy. The 2005 onward politics of Bihar has shown that it is not the RJD brand rhetoric of social justice but the policy initiative which has brought a big change in the lives of dalits in Biha." BJP spokesperson Nikhil Anand told this newspaper.

Bihar extends lockdown till. Sept. 6

Patna, Aug. 17: The Bihar government on Monday extended the lockdown till September 6 in view of the prevailing COVID-19 situation in the state, as per a notification.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Crisis Management Group chaired by chief secretary Deepak Kumar.

Restrictions will remain in place in the district headquarters, sub-divisional headquarters, block headquarters and

all municipal areas in the state, according to the notification issued by the home department.

Strict measures will be enforced in the buffer and containment zones, it said. All religious places will remain closed and no congregation will be allowed. Besides, all social and political gatherings will be barred, it said.

Parks and gymnasiums will remain closed and night curfew, restricting the movement of people

between 10 pm and 5 am, will be in place, it added.

Inter-state and inter-district bus services will also remain suspended though transportation of goods will be allowed without any hindrance.

The state has so far reported over 1 lakh cases of Covid-19, a 10-fold rise within a period of a month and a half. The government has attributed the sharp spike in cases to a higher number of tests. — PTI

Sharad Pawar in quarantine as 12 staff test Covid +ve

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 17

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar will remain in home quarantine for next few days after five persons working at his Mumbai residence tested positive for Coronavirus. Mr Pawar's test results have come out negative.

Informing about Mr Pawar's isolation at home, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope said, "Mr Pawar is not showing any symptoms of the Coronavirus infection. He also underwent Covid tests at the Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai and his reports have come out negative. But we will ask him not to go on a state tour for the next few days."

As a precautionary measure, tests of nearly 100 people are being conducted, including personal assistants, secretaries and other officials working daily with Mr Pawar, who came in contact with these persons in the last couple of days, informed an official from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Mr Pawar returned from Pune on Sunday.

'100 leaders have written to Sonia for leadership change' Jha's letter claim rattles Congress

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

The internal strife of the Congress once again came to the fore with suspended Congress leader Sanjay Jha tweeting about several leaders writing a letter to the party chief Sonia Gandhi. However, the party was quick to rubbish the claims and alleged that the "non-existent letter" was an attempt to divert attention from the Facebook controversy and was being circulated by "BJP stooges".

Insiders claim that sev-



▶ **IT IS** estimated that around 100 Congress leaders (including MP's), distressed at the state of affairs within the party, have written a letter to Mrs Sonia Gandhi, Congress President, asking for change in political leadership and transparent elections in CWC

— Sanjay Jha, Congress leader

eral leaders have been in consultations about raising "leadership issues" in the party. They further claimed that ad-hoc leadership in the Congress does not auger well for the party.

Speaking to this newspa-

per on the condition of anonymity a leader said, "We are in the process of writing a letter to the Congress president. The letter presently is in the possession of one of the top most leader." He also claimed that they require

clarity in the leadership either Mrs Gandhi should continue as the party chief or there should be elections to the working committee. Then the elected Working Committee should select the party chief. He added that the interference from Rahul Gandhi and his office should cease "either he becomes a full fledged President or stop controlling from backseat". Last month in a virtual conference of Rajya Sabha MPs, only five out of 45 MPs demanded that Rahul be made the president again.

Pranab Mukherjee's health remains critical: Hospital

New Delhi, Aug. 15: Former Indian President Pranab Mukherjee continued to remain on ventilator support on Saturday morning, Army Research and Referral Hospital in the national capital said, adding that his vitals are stable and being monitored by a team of specialists.

"The condition of Pranab Mukherjee remains unchanged this morning. He continues to be on ventilator support. His vital and clinical parameters remain stable and are being closely monitored by a team of specialists," the hospital



Pranab Mukherjee

said in a statement.

The health condition of Mukherjee had also remained unchanged on Friday, according to the Army hospital, which had also said the former President was under intensive care and con-

tinues to be on ventilator support. Sharmistha Mukherjee, daughter of Pranab Mukherjee, had said yesterday that while his health condition continues to remain very critical, it hasn't worsened. She had said there is a little improvement in his eyes' reaction to light.

Earlier, Sharmistha had refuted rumours about the health of her father.

Mr Mukherjee, 84, was admitted to Army Research and Referral Hospital in Delhi Cantonment for emergency surgery of brain clot. Later he also tested positive for Covid-19.

Move seen as familiarisation exercise with saffron netas Scindia visits Indore, Cong shows black flags

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, AUG. 17

Senior BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia on Monday visited Indore to interact with local party leaders ahead of upcoming byelections to 27 Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, scheduled to be held by end of September this year.

This was Mr Scindia's first visit to Indore after he switched over to BJP



▶ **OF THE 27** Assembly constituencies that are going to polls in the coming days, 18 were represented by his loyalists who resigned from the Assembly, leading to fall of 15-month-old Kamal Nath government.

from Congress in March this year.

Of the 27 Assembly constituencies that are going to polls in the coming days, 18 were represented by his loyalists who

resigned from the Assembly, leading to fall of 15-month-old Kamal Nath government. Four more former Congress MLAs had resigned from the Assembly since then and

joined the BJP along with 18 other MLAs.

Mr Scindia was greeted by state ministers Tulsi Silawat and Usha Thakur and BJP's Indore MP Shankar Lalwani on arrival in Indore.

Several Congress leaders and workers were arrested while staging a black flag demonstration to protest Mr Scindia's visit.

The protesting Congress leaders blamed Mr Scindia for the collapse of Kamal Nath government.



THE ASIAN AGE

18 AUGUST 2020

Misuse of social media a threat to democracy

Democracy and the life it seeks to assure its stakeholders are under increasing threat of being undermined by the reckless use of social media by vested interests. The threat includes the issue of external forces making a charade of the electoral process. Allegations ran thick and fast about how such media undermined the 2016 United States presidential elections. There are also instances of violence breaking out based on misinformation or deliberate and provocative messages, claiming lives and disrupting normal life of unsuspecting innocent people. The recent riots in Bengaluru is the latest example.

It is against this background that the demand of the Congress party for a joint parliamentary committee to investigate the allegations that social media platform Facebook has been violating its own policy to favour the rabble-rousers and hate-mongers of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gains relevance. The allegation is based on a report that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* which alleged a "broader pattern of favouritism" towards the BJP by Facebook. The report named BJP leaders who posted hate-filled messages against Muslims on several occasions, including before the Delhi riots. The company's top public-policy executive opposed the application of the hate speech rules of the company against at least four BJP leaders and groups who were "flagged internationally for participating in violence", saying it "would damage the company's business prospects in the country". The report said the company "acknowledged that the official had raised concerns about the political fallout that would result from designating the BJP leader a dangerous individual".

The business model of social media is directly and instantly proportional to the reach of their contents. This will be best served by pandering to and often engaging extremist elements in society and polity who will ensure such stuff gets widest publicity. With little checks and balance in place, the social media has the power to break into smithereens the social fabric that has been woven for decades or even centuries.

The allegation, though denied by Facebook, is not about partisan politics; it's about the sanctity of the country's democracy and democratic processes, which should be a matter of concern for the government as well as the Opposition. The response of the government, however, has been less than forthright. Instead of addressing the issue, Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has sought to level personal allegations against former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and advance a whataboutery that the Opposition was in the dock during the Cambridge Analytica scandal. This denial is not enough. Mr Prasad and the government must understand that no mature democracy would allow outsiders to violate the law and manipulate systems. The heads of social media organisations, including Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, had been hailed up before the US congressional committee for alleged unethical business practices. India, priding itself to be a global leader, must do whatever it takes to protect the sanctity of the democratic process. Giving in to the Opposition demand would reinforce our democratic processes and enhance the national prestige.

Covid strikes cricket

Cricket, cricket administrator and politician Chetan Chauhan has created a distressing record as the first Test player to die of Covid-19. The death of a son of an Indian Army doctor is illustrative of the insidious power of the coronavirus to inveigle itself into the human body despite all the precautions a person of knowledge might take against it. His case is a tragic reminder that the battle against Covid-19 is far from over in India and that complications the virus creates in multiple organs in some people, especially in the most vulnerable 70-plus section of the population, are not easily fought off even with specialised medical care.

Born just a few weeks before independence was attained, Chauhan became famous as the diligent yet stodgy other half of an opening partnership with the world record breaking Sunil Gavaskar that helped erase the memories of eras symbolised by the retreating back foot in the face of hostile fast bowling, without the benefit of protective gear of course. Chauhan was the unglamorous but sincere second fiddle who was reluctant to stage the walkout in Melbourne in 1981 just because Gavaskar was given out Leg Before Wicket (LBW), perhaps wrongly. India went on to stage a remarkable comeback victory in the Melbourne Test to square the series.

Having experienced life in Australia for a few years, Chauhan felt the tug of his homeland and returned to daringly step into the politics of Delhi cricket, which is a kind of crash course before real politics of the electoral kind. With his engaging quality of having time to listen to everyone, Chauhan fared well as an MP and became a UP minister too. He may have helped overturn the belief that there is no place for a decent man in the quagmire of UP politics. To serve in public life was Chauhan's credo. As a batsman he was a cricket tragic in the sense that he never managed a Test century, 97 being his best. But he tried for India in every sense under all the hats he wore.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Kishwar Desai
London Diary

Of 'staycations' & cheap meals: Will Christmas be merry again?

Only those who were sensible enough to opt for a staycation did not get their holidays wrecked. Oh, to think that just a year ago we could fly endlessly around the globe. And now taking even a short holiday is like a complicated military manoeuvre, where every possibility has to be measured and prepared for. Just a fortnight ago, people were told to travel abroad to European countries with which the UK had "air bridges". As holidays typically end by the beginning of September, Brits rushed off to Italy, Greece, Spain and France. Now comes the ruling that France is a no-go, as is Spain, which has seen a second wave of infections. If you have been or are in France and get delayed in returning, then you face a fortnight of quarantine at home upon return.

This means kids will miss opening days of school. That is, in case the schools open at all. The Teachers Union is not sure if their members or their pupils will be safe. But not to worry. Pubs are open and restaurants have been cheered up by Rishi Sunak's scheme of meals at half-price if you eat out. As the old rock

The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh headed off to Balmoral, their castle in Scotland.

song said: "We need no education". Cheap meals is all we need! But whether this will be enough to ensure that restaurants will survive is difficult to say - as the subsidies cannot last for too long.

Each society has its own way of dealing with Covid-19. In India we have families bonding even more and the sale of noodles and pasta is shooting up as people home-cook. And many feel it is time to bring back the joint family. But in London it is difficult to keep anyone at home while the pubs continue to overflow.

Like others, the royal family too have opted for a staycation. The Queen, 94, and the Duke of Edinburgh, 99, headed off to Balmoral, their Scottish castle where the weather is, if anything, more severe than in Windsor, where they were isolating themselves. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has also chosen Scotland for his holidays

but that is more because he knows that there is yet again a rising demand in Scotland for independence. Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish First Minister (like chief minister) managed the Covid episode much better than Boris did for England and is likely to win the elections in Scotland. So we are bracing for yet another referendum on Scottish independence.

Even so the government in Scotland did not do better than England when it came to exam results of school leavers waiting to go to universities. Teaching was disrupted due to lockdowns. Schools tried teaching online but as usual the private schools did better than state funded schools. Proper examinations could not be held. So they had mock exams in many parts of the country. The students also have teachers' assessments to send forward with their university applications. With no proper exams, what would the final grades be?

If anything worse than the pandemic policy can be imagined, we have had it. The Scottish Education Authority used an "algorithm" which resulted

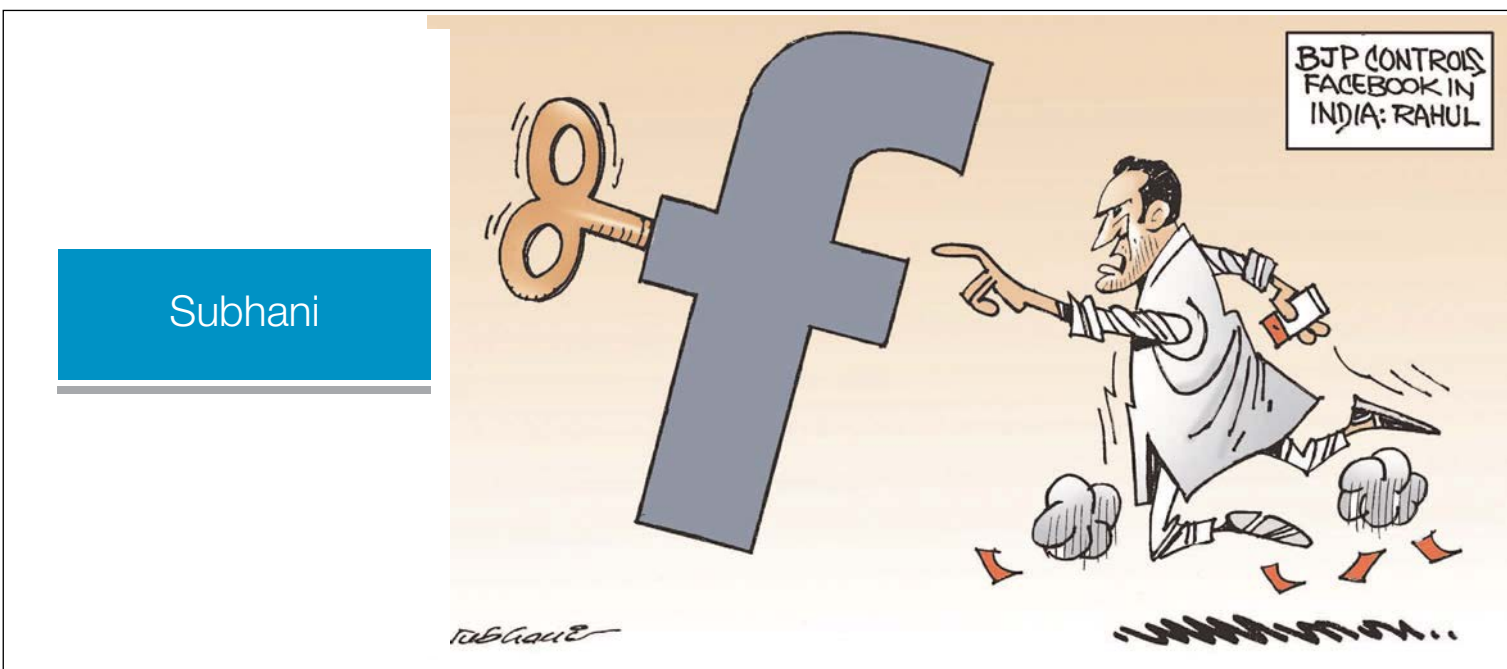
in massive downgrading of students. There was such a furore that the minister had to apologise and rescind the results. Better decisions are awaited and students feel cheated and angry. So they will appeal. With only four weeks left before the university admissions are decided, an unhappy holiday is what students can look forward to. For young people all over the world, 2020 has brought huge uncertainty.

There are many reasons to celebrate or commemorate August 15 - which is also Victory over Japan (VJ) Day, but it gets celebrated much less than the Victory in Europe (VE) Day. In India it is rarely mentioned, though one of the most crucial land battles, that in Kohima, took place in India, which Japan lost and then retreated from Southeast Asia. It means a lot in Australia and New Zealand but not in other places which should commemorate it.

The one good news among many sad ones is that theatres are about to reopen. In a dramatic gesture, Andrew Lloyd Webber volunteered to be a test case for the

Covid-19 vaccine because like many, he thinks that until there is a vaccine the problem of social distancing will trouble theatres. He had to close the long-running Phantom of the Opera (which I saw it for the first time 20 years ago), but no doubt he will rebound with something else. But even with their capacity reduced to one-third of normal, venues like Bridge Theatre and the National will open in the autumn. Bridge would show a new play by David Hare and later it will revive Talking Heads by Alan Bennett. The National will open only the Olivier Theatre with a new one-person play Death of England: Delroy. It is an unusual play about racism written by two black playwrights. Art galleries are also reopening. Tate Modern has opened as has the National Gallery. The British Museum and the British Library are back but with limited capacity. Perhaps by Christmas, life may, finally, be merry again.

Kishwar Desai is an award winning author.



Mohan Guruswamy

The so-called Naga peace talks are now floundering. National Socialist Council of Nagaland leader Thuingaleng Muivah reiterated on August 14 from New Delhi that going by the 2015 Framework Agreement signed between his outfit, the NSCN (I-M), and the Government of India: "Nagas can co-exist with India, but will not merge with it. We are not asking (for a) Naga national flag and constitution from the Government of India. Recognise them or not, we have our own flag and constitution. Flag and constitution are ingredients of our recognised sovereign entity and the symbols of Naga nationhood."

Not long ago I had a conversation with an RSS figure conversant with the Naga issue. He was confident Narendra Modi would soon find a "creative solution" to this vexed problem. I asked him if it meant the dismemberment of Manipur, as the dominant Tangkhul faction of the NSCN (I-M) was mostly based around Ukhrul in Manipur? And the dismemberment of Arunachal Pradesh as the Konyak Nagas, who mostly owe allegiance to the NSCN's Khaplang faction, are mostly in Tirap and Changlang divisions of that state? He didn't answer, except saying wait and see - Modiji has a "creative solution".

Whatever it was, the "creative solution" is now clearly unravelling. The NSCN (I-M) has now demanded that Prime Minister Modi's longtime Naga interlocutor R.N. Ravi, now Nagaland's governor, must be removed from the talks. The severely ailing 86-year-old Isak Muivah is now in New Delhi for health reasons and is also in talks with the powers that be. What can they

now offer him after scrapping Article 370 and dismembering J&K and putting Jammu and Kashmir under Central rule as a Union territory? How far removed is Article 371 from Article 370?

The Naga quest for a separate identity independent of India burst into an armed conflict in January 1956 when A.Z. Phizo assumed full control of the Naga National Council, which was championing the Naga cause. Immediately after Phizo took over, the Naga Hills was declared a disturbed area and put under the Indian Army's control.

At that time eminent Indians like Jayaprakash Narayan chastised Jawaharlal Nehru for sending the Army to "pacify" the Naga Hills. Nehru assured critics that the Army would be in the area for just a few months. The Indian Army is still deployed in the region and 3 Corps is permanently headquartered in Dimapur. From time to time news would filter out that the contours of a settlement were visible, but nothing of consequence came out. On August 3, 2015 the Narendra Modi government announced that an agreement was concluded and that its details would be kept secret. Why the details of the accord must be secret is best known to it, and what exactly it is has been the subject of much speculation.

While the details of the "historic agreement" are still shrouded in secrecy, it is believed the immediate deal only covered the territory of Nagaland. It seemed agreed that the question of the other areas of "Greater Nagalim" would be resolved consensually via dialogue with Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. It was thought the deal will pave the

The Naga quest for a separate identity independent of India burst into an armed conflict in January 1956.

way to an election where the NSCN (I-M) or a successor political party would be facilitated to secure power through polls, as done in Mizoram.

In a paper published on March 30, 2017 in a widely read blog "Indian Security Affairs" maintained by Maj. Gen. P.K. Mullick (Retd), Lt. Gen. J.R. Mukherjee (Retd), a former corps commander with extensive experience and connections in Assam and the Northeast, wrote: "Unauthenticated leaks from reliable sources indicate that points agreed are: A separate constitution? Flag for Nagaland, separate currency and passports for Nagas. Nagaland would have a UN representative, foreign affairs and defence will be a joint subject; a pan-Naga government to cover all Naga-inhabited areas." This is why Manipur is agitated, as it will leave it with just the Imphal Valley. The unabashed misuse of the office of governor following the recent elections to install a BJP-led government lends credence to a certain urgency to implement the deal, as the talks have been going on for almost two decades.

We constantly worry about the Chinese hand at play since the days when Mowu Angami went to Yunnan. But what we need to worry more about is the American hand at work. The first missionaries went there in 1836, when Rev. Miles Bronson set up a mission in Namsang, now in Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap subdivision. But the real impetus to Christianity came after the advent of an American Baptist missionary, Rev. E.W. Clarke. The Baptists never looked back since then and now maintain over 800 churches and have a majority of Nagas

under their fold. While it must be acknowledged the missionaries played a pioneering role in establishing modern health-care and educational facilities, we must not remain unaware of the Baptist Church's role in creating a new awareness and sense of oneness among the Naga tribes.

While the armed forces may have learnt from their experience, our political and bureaucratic leadership never seemed to have learnt anything, or worse, forgotten anything. We have since Nagaland's formation in December 1963 lurched from one compromise after another. Consequently, the Naga Hills region - Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal - have had the most uncaring and corrupt state governments with little to show on the ground despite India's highest per capita development expenditures.

India's long-term security interests, and the steady expansion of Chinese influence in Myanmar in the areas abutting our borders, equally require our military and administrative presence in the Naga Hills as it does a general stability. The answers to these can only be found in new and innovative political and administrative arrangements that factor not just the culture of Naga tribes but the geography of the Naga Hills. Article 371A of the Constitution does offer some safeguards, but clearly these do not satisfy the Nagas.

But a separate constitution, flag, currency and UN membership might be going a bit too far. Will this not have consequences in other parts of the country like Jammu and Kashmir, where a secessionist war is raging, and even in states like Tamil Nadu where regional nationalism is extremely strong?

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

DHONI RETIRES

True to the way he played his cricket, former Indian skipper M.S. Dhoni served up yet another surprise by announcing his retirement from international cricket with a cryptic message on Instagram. This came on a day when he completed his first practice season with Chennai Super Kings following a five-month hiatus. Dhoni hanging up his boots marks the end of an era for Indian cricket. True, his prowess as a powerful batsman who finished games had waned over the last few years. But his time as player and captain for the national squad certainly transformed the game in India. Mahendra Singh Dhoni, the 'great jewel of the country', should be honored with the Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian honour.

B.O. Chango
West Bengal

GOOD MOVE

TO BRING Punjab's economy back on track, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, in his August 15 speech, announced welfare measures for the people, including the facility of 6 lakh jobs for the youth over the next two years. He also announced a virtual mega job fair next month with the goal of hiring 50,000 youth in the private sector. This is a commendable step because many people have lost their jobs due to the pandemic and unemployment has increased. Many companies have closed down, many are running in losses, so this move will have a good impact on the economy of both the state.

Neha Jamal
Punjab

CONFUSED CONG

WHILE PRIME Minister Modi very clearly stated that the government responded befittingly to all challenges from LAC to LOC, the Congress called for a clear answer. As pointed out by mediapersons, his message was directed at China and Pakistan. It seems Congressmen can do or say no good for India.

N. Mahadevan
Chennai

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

IN BRIEF

Putin, Erdogan discuss conflicts

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the conflicts in Libya and Syria with his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan in a telephone call on Monday, the Kremlin said in a statement. The Kremlin said the call's main focus was on the crisis in Libya, highlighting the need to make real steps towards a sustainable ceasefire.

US choppers attack Syrian army post

Amman: Two US helicopters on Monday attacked a Syrian Army checkpoint in northeastern Syria near the Kurdish-held city of Qamishli, killing one soldier and injuring two others, state media said. The incident happened shortly after a US patrol was prevented from passing by an Army checkpoint in the area, state media said.

China welcomes Putin's proposal

Beijing: China welcomed on Monday to Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposed summit of world leaders to avoid "confrontation" over a US threat to trigger a return of all UN sanctions on Iran. The United States lost a bid on Friday to extend a UN arms embargo on Iran. Russia and China opposed extending the weapons ban, which is due to expire in October under a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the world powers. Eleven members abstained, including France, Germany and Britain, while the United States and the Dominican Republic were the only two votes in favour.

Japan PM leaves hosp post check-up

Tokyo: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe underwent a medical check-up in hospital on Monday, a government source said, amid concern voiced by a top official that the premier was suffering from fatigue from handling the Coronavirus pandemic. Abe, Japan's longest-serving prime minister, left hospital after the examination, *Jiji news agency* said. He had the check-up at Tokyo's Keio University Hospital, the source familiar with the situation said.

16 killed in hotel attack in Somalia

Mogadishu: At least 16 people were killed in an attack on Sunday by al Shabaab on a seaside hotel in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, a government spokesman said, as the Islamist group launched a similar assault on a Somali military base. Sunday's toll includes 11 victims and five assailants, Ismail Mukhtar Omar said in a tweet late on Sunday, adding: "Security forces lost one, 18 people were injured." Militants stormed the high-end Elite Hotel in Lido beach, detonated a car bomb and then opened fire with assault rifles, the latest attack by al Shabaab, which has been battling the country's central government since 2008. Al Shabaab wants to topple the central government and establish its own rule based on its own strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law.

PROTESTOR CHALLENGES THAI MONARCHY

Bangkok, Aug. 17: The deafening cheer for Anon Nampa at Thailand's biggest demonstration in years underlined the bookish human rights lawyer's emergence at the forefront of a youth protest movement with his taboo-breaking call for reforms to the monarchy. "He looks quite harmless," Rangsiman Rome, a former activist who is now an opposition member of parliament, said. "But once he gets the microphone and gets on stage or starts working, he becomes a different, serious person." Although the protest movement has no single leader, Anon's August 3 call for curbs on the power of the monarchy shook Thai politics in a way not known in living memory and made him a hero for some and a hate figure for others. His open challenge put Anon at risk of arrest under "lese majeste" charges, which can mean 15 years in jail. "I think there is a need for everyone to be able to talk about the monarchy openly and constructively," Anon said. "I think society is becoming more open about this."

Freedom in the air

Women in masks to help curb the spread of the Coronavirus participate in a tug-of-war game during the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the country's independence in Medan, Indonesia, on Monday.

—AP

Biden in spotlight as polls near

Four-day convention will be held online due to Covid-19 pandemic

Milwaukee, Aug. 17: As Democrats on Monday open an unprecedented virtual convention, the party's disparate factions are projecting a united front behind Joe Biden, brought together by their common determination to oust Donald Trump in November's election.

"It is absolutely imperative that Donald Trump be defeated," Bernie Sanders, a former Biden rival and a keynote speaker on the event's opening night, said on Sunday. Adding to the drama, the four-day convention — originally planned for the Midwestern city of Milwaukee but forced online by the Covid-19 pandemic — takes place amid a furor over Trump's efforts to limit mail-in voting.

The president, insisting without proof that mail-in voting fosters fraud, has threatened to block extra funding that Democrats say is urgently needed to allow the US Postal Service to process millions of ballots.

In normal election years, nominating conventions are a raucous scene, attended by tens of thousands of party faithful and designed to inspire the party's base and lure independents and the undecided.

Democrats had picked Milwaukee for its location in the important swing state of Wisconsin. The city had spent millions in preparation.

But planners have been struggling to find virtual replacements for the usual roaring applause, circus-like atmosphere and balloon drops.

Viewers are expected to be treated to live feeds from several Democratic "watch parties," some even live-streamed from drive-in theaters or featuring erstwhile Biden rivals

Don will get dirty: Kamala

Washington, Aug. 17: Indian-American Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee Kamala Harris has said that President Donald Trump and his campaign will "engage in lies" and "dirty tactics" to distract from the real issues that are impacting the American people.

She was responding to President Trump's promotion of the conspiracy theories about her eligibility to serve as the vice president and president.

On Saturday, Trump said that he would not be "pursuing" questions about Harris' eligibility, but did not dismiss the conspiracy theories as false. Trump on Thursday said he heard on "social media" that Harris could be ineligible. "I heard today that she doesn't meet the requirements,"

Trump said, referring to John Eastman, the lawyer and Chapman University professor who raised the

like Senator Amy Klobuchar.

The experimental format will allow speakers to address American voters unfiltered — largely shorn of the usual overwrought stagecraft and screaming delegates. Or, some fear, it could make for a more boring show.

Biden enters the convention with significant but tightening poll leads over Trump and amid signs that his history-making pick of Senator Kamala Harris as his running mate — the first woman of colour on a major party's presidential ticket — is widely popular among Democrats.

—AFP

● **RESPONDING TO Trump's remarks, Harris, 55, said on Sunday that the President and his campaign will engage in deception.**

issue in a Newsweek op-ed, as "very highly qualified."

Responding to Trump's remarks, Harris, 55, said on Sunday that the president and his campaign will engage in deception. "They're going to engage in lies. They're going to engage in deception. They're going to engage in an attempt to distract from the real issues that are impacting the American people. And I expect that they will engage in dirty tactics. And this is going to be a knockdown, drag-out. And we're ready," she said.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden scripted history on Wedn-

nesday by selecting Harris, an Indian-American and an African-American, as his running mate in the election on November 3. Born to a Jamaican father and an Indian mother, California Senator Harris, if elected, would be the first woman Vice-President ever for the country.

"What's at stake right now is that we've had over 160,000 people die in the last few months and many of them needlessly ... tens of millions of people who have lost their jobs ... we're in the midst of a hunger crisis in our country. The media isn't covering it so much," she said.

"I'm prepared to fight because this is a fight that is for something, not against something. This is a fight for where we need to be ... We need to focus on what can be unburdened by what has been," Harris said. Harris is no stranger to accusations about her race.

—PTI

FEARS RISE OVER UNFAIR U.S. PREZ ELECTION

Washington, Aug. 17: With less than 80 days to go before the US presidential election, it looks like Democratic nominee Joe Biden's race to lose.

Yet, as Democrats nationwide gather online this week to nominate him as their party's choice to challenge President Donald Trump on November 3, many fear Biden may just do that — for factors almost entirely out of his control.

The former Vice-President and his allies have every reason to feel bullish. Polls show Biden has built an expansive lead in nearly every battleground state that Trump won narrowly in 2016, as the Republican's approval numbers tumble amid the Coronavirus pandemic. For the first time in a decade, retaking the Senate — and full control of Congress — is within sight.

—Agencies

Harris picks Indo-American as her press secy for V-P rally

Washington, Aug. 17: Senator Kamala Harris has roped in Indian-American Sabrina Singh, who previously was the spokeswoman of two Democratic presidential candidates, as press secretary for her Democratic Vice-Presidential campaign.

Singh, 32, headed the press shop of New Jersey Senator Cory Booker and former New York mayor Mike Bloomberg. Last

week, Democratic presumptive presidential nominee Joe Biden, 77, picked 55-year-old Indian-origin Harris as his running mate.

Singh was earlier spokesperson of the Democratic National Committee. She is the granddaughter of Sardar J.J. Singh of the India League of America, a non-profit organisation which champions the interests of Indian-American commu-

nity in the US.

In the 1940s, J.J. Singh along with a small group of fellow Indians mounted a nationwide campaign against racial discriminatory policies of the US. This culminated in the then president Harry Truman signing the Luce-Celler Act on July 2, 1946. It allowed a quota of 100 Indians to immigrate to the United States per annum.

—PTI

Pak Army chief visits Saudi to revive ties

Riyadh, Aug. 17: Pakistan's Army chief arrived in Saudi Arabia on Monday amid a row between the two countries that has threatened Riyadh's financial lifeline to Islamabad. General Qamar Javed Bajwa's visit was "primarily military-affairs oriented," a Pakistani Army spokesman said. But Pakistani military

and government officials have said that Gen. Bajwa would use his good offices to try to calm the situation that if not reversed could badly hurt Pakistan's central bank foreign reserves.

A traditional ally, Saudi Arabia gave Pakistan a \$3 billion loan and \$3.2 billion oil credit facility to help its balance of payments crisis in

late 2018.

Irked by Islamabad demands for Riyadh to convene a high-level meeting to highlight archival India's alleged human rights violations in the disputed Kashmir region, Saudi Arabia has forced Pakistan to pay back \$1 billion prematurely and is demanding another \$1 billion of the loan.

Riyadh has also not responded to Pakistani requests to extend the oil facility, military and finance ministry officials said.

The head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), General Faiz Hameed, was accompanying Bajwa, a Pakistani military source said.

—Agencies

feedback" until August 28. Swinburne University senior lecturer on media Belinda Barnet described the Google letter as a "cynical exercise" designed to "scare Google users." "I see no merit in any of the arguments," she said.

"One of the most ironic arguments is that they're going to have to hand over some data to news organisations — for example which article people have read and how long they

may have read it for — and this coming from the world's major privacy violator and certainly the world's largest data aggregator is a bit rich," Barnet added.

Google has been battling the Australian consumer watchdog on two fronts. Last month, the watchdog launched court action against Google for allegedly misleading account holders about its use of their personal data.

—AP

WEB ALERT

Tech giant's warning in 'Open letter to Australians' after draft law to make it pay for news

Aussies could lose free search services, warns Google

Canberra, Aug. 17: Google warned on Monday that the Australian government's plans to make digital giants pay for news content threatens users' free services in Australia and could hand users' data to media organisations.

The US-based company's warning, contained in what it called an "Open letter to Australians," comes a week before public consultations close on Australian draft laws that

would make both Google and Facebook pay for news siphoned from commercial media companies.

"A proposed law... would force us to provide you with a dramatically worse Google Search and YouTube, could lead to your data being handed over to big news businesses, and would put the free services you use at risk in Australia," Google Australia and New Zealand managing director Mel Silva wrote.

Google owns YouTube, a video-sharing platform. Both Google and Facebook have condemned the proposed legislation, which was released last month and aims to succeed where other countries have failed in making them compensate media businesses for news content.

Australian competition watchdog Rod Sims, chair

of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, which drafted the laws, said Google's letter "contains misinformation."

Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, the minister responsible for the consumer watchdog, said in a statement that the draft law "remains open for consultation, providing an opportunity for media companies and digital platforms to provide

Aussies for the use of its free services such as Google Search and YouTube, unless it chooses to do so," Sims said in



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,050.78	0.46
Nifty 50	11,247.10	0.61
S&P 500*	3,382.57	0.29
Dollar (₹)	74.88	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.97	-0.09
Euro (₹)	88.62	0.21
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	53,611,340	0.63
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	45.03	0.23
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.975	0.010
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.688	-0.021

* As of 9:30 PM IST

GDP contracted 16.5% in June quarter: Ecowrap

SBI's research report Ecowrap expects India's GDP to have contracted by 16.5 per cent during April-June (Q1). In May, it had estimated Q1 GDP contraction of over 20 per cent. It said degrowth in corporate GVA (better results of firms) has been significantly better than revenue degrowth. So far, around 1,000 firms have reported their Q1 results, which indicate over 25 per cent fall in top line and over 55 per cent fall in bottom line.

Seafood exports in FY20 pegged at 12,89,651 mt



India shipped 12,89,651 mt of seafood worth Rs 46,662.85 crore (\$6.68 billion) during 2019-20, largely cushioning the adverse impact of the pandemic, the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPE-DA) said in Kochi. Frozen shrimp remained the major export item in both quantity and value followed by frozen fish while the USA and China were the major importers. Exports improved in rupee term by 0.16 per cent.

Aarti Drugs board to consider bonus issue

Aarti Drugs said its board will meet later this week to consider a proposal to issue bonus shares. The firm, which manufactures bulk drugs and chemicals, did not divulge more details. The next meeting of "the board of directors of the company is scheduled to be held on Thursday, August 20, to consider a proposal for issue of bonus shares," Aarti Drugs said. Shares of Aarti Drugs rose 10.03 per cent on the BSE.

Muthoot, Kotak arm tie up to offer Covid cover

Muthoot Finance said it has tied up with Kotak Mahindra General Insurance to offer Covid-19 insurance cover of up to Rs 1 lakh against gold loan. Muthoot Finance Ayush Gold Loan scheme will provide complimentary cover to customers taking gold loan under the Super Loan scheme. Muthoot Finance MD George Alexander Muthoot the initiative is part of the firm's ongoing customer loyalty programme and social commitment.

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Disbursements dip 90% in April-June MFIs take a hard knock in first qtr

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 17

Micro-finance disbursements dropped by 90 per cent in the June quarter to all-time low levels and the gross loan portfolios of all micro-lenders shrank by 2.42 per cent compared to the March quarter. However, collection rates, which had fallen to all-time low of 35 to 40 per cent in March, have started picking up.

All the microlenders together disbursed Rs 6,235 crore in the lockdown-hit June quarter, which was down 91 per cent from Rs 72,528 crore in the March quarter and 88 per cent below the disbursement of Rs 54,127 crore in June 2019 quarter, according to the data from Sa-Dhan.

The share of NBFC-MFIs, in quarterly disbursement, fell to a dismal 97.5 per cent to Rs 529 crore from Rs 21,927 crore in the March quarter. Though banks accounted for a major share of the disbursements at Rs 4,233 crore, it was still 88 per cent down from the March quarter disbursement of Rs 35,194 crore. Small Finance Banks too saw 88 per cent decline from Rs 10,746 crore in the March quarter to Rs 1,281 crore in the June quarter.

"During the lock-down we were not contemplating disbursements. We started disbursements only after the June first week. Our strategy has been to disburse to exist-



ing clients and not to new clients," said S. V. Raja Vaidyanathan, MD of Asirvad Microfinance.

Lower disbursements dragged down the combined gross loan portfolio of micro-lenders in end-June to Rs 2,24,595 crore from Rs 2,30,165 crore in the March quarter.

The overall collection rate in April had fallen to an all-time low of 35-40 per cent, which was lower than the repayment rate during demonetisation. By May it improved to 45-50 per cent and in July to 65-70 per cent. Sa-Dhan expects that collection rates will move up to 80-85 per cent by August-September.

"By September, when the moratorium ends, there will be a jump in collections as the 20 per cent customers who have availed of moratorium, will start repaying. By the end of the year, collection rates should return to pre-Covid levels," said Vaidyanathan.

Collections rates were 99.08 per cent in the March quarter and 98.11 per cent in June 2019.

The overall write off ratio, which stood at 0.52 per cent in the March quarter and 0.90 per cent in June 2019, shot up to 2.57 per cent in the last quarter. Uttarakhand recorded a write-off ratio of 10.31 per cent, Delhi 8.35 per cent, Maharashtra 5.88 per cent, Gujarat 5.53 per cent and Uttar Pradesh 4.72 per cent. Industry-wide portfolio at risk-30 days deteriorated to 1.89 per cent from 1.78 per cent in March.

"Nationwide lockdown and extension of moratorium led to lower repayments in April, however after relaxations and opening up of the economy, now the repayment rate is at 65-70 per cent and is expected to increase to 80-85 per cent in August and September," said P Satish, Executive Director, Sa-Dhan.

US law firm Rosen plans to sue HDFC Bank over misleading info

New Delhi, Aug. 17: US-based Rosen Law Firm on Monday said it is planning to investigate potential securities claims against HDFC Bank following allegations of sharing "materially misleading business information" with investors.

HDFC Bank said it was not aware of any lawsuit and prima facie it looked "frivolous as we believe we have been transparent in our disclosures".

"Rosen law firm is preparing a securities lawsuit on behalf of HDFC Bank shareholders," the global investor right law firm said in a statement on its website.

Citing some news reports about alleged unfair business practices and the lender missing analysts' estimates on profits for the June quarter, Rosen Law Firm said it is preparing a securities lawsuit.

The HDFC Bank American Depository Receipt share price fell by 2.83 per cent following the report, it added.

The bank's ADRs are listed on the NYSE.

The law firm said it will



investigate "potential securities claims on behalf of shareholders of HDFC Bank Ltd resulting from allegations that the bank may have issued materially misleading business information to the investing public".

Last year, Rosen Law had prepared a similar class-action suit against IT giant Infosys after a whistleblower had alleged malpractices by a few key management personnel. The suit was dismissed in May this year.

The law firm quoted media reports about allegations of improper practices and conflict of interest in HDFC Bank Ltd's

vehicle financing operations, which involved its former unit head.

"If you purchased securities of HDFC Bank please visit the firm's website...to join the securities action," Rosen Law Firm said.

The largest Indian private sector lender had posted a 22 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit at Rs 6,927 crore in April-June quarter of the current fiscal year 2020-21.

Commenting on the development, HDFC Bank said: "We were unaware of any such development (class action lawsuit) till we heard about it from the media a little earlier today. We are getting details of it. We'll examine it and respond to it as appropriate. Prima facie it does look frivolous as we believe we have been transparent in our disclosures".

The bank said it is an interim response.

The lender in July launched a probe on vehicle finance lending practices following allegations against the conduct of a key executive in the auto lending business.

—PTI

Taxpayers don't have to report big transactions

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Taxpayers will not be required to mention their high-value transactions in their income tax returns, officials in the know of the development said.

"There is no such proposal to modify income tax return forms," an official said, responding to reports of a proposal to expand reportable financial transactions to include hotel payments over Rs 20,000, life insurance premium payment over Rs 50,000 and health insurance premium payment over Rs 20,000, donations and payment of school/college fees over Rs 1 lakh a year.

Any expansion in reporting under the statement of financial transactions (SFT) will mean that such reporting of high-value transactions to the I-T department will be done by financial institutions, they said.

Only third parties would report high-value transactions to the I-T department as per the Income Tax Act. Such information would be used to identify people who are not paying up due taxes.

"There is no such proposal to modify income tax returns forms," an official said. "The taxpayer would not need to mention his/her high-value transactions in his/her return."

—PTI

Retail investors play the market in June quarter

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, AUG. 17

BUYING UP

- Retail holding rises in 1,018 companies in Q1
- HNI holdings in NSE firms rise to 1.84%
- Insurers holdings up 25.28% to ₹7.02 L cr
- FPI holdings fall to 21.05% from 21.17%
- In top 10 firms, FPIs have 52.29% stake, DIIs 38.64% and MFs 36.05%

Retail investors have entered the stock market in a big way during the lockdown period, as evidenced by a rise in their stake in more than 1,000 companies during the April-June 2020 quarter.

"Retail holding went up in 1,018 companies listed on the NSE in the last quarter. The average stock price of these companies in the same period increased by 60.28 per cent. On the other hand, retail holding went down in 545 companies. The average stock price of these companies too increased by a slightly higher 61.08 per cent," according to Prime Database.

"Unlike seen in previous quarters and years wherein retail would typically buy at the peak and sell at lows, the last quarter saw heavy buying by retail making use of the steep fall in share prices due to the coronavirus pandemic," said Pranav Haldea, managing director, Prime Database Group.

Holdings of high net worth individuals (HNIs)—individuals with more than Rs 2 lakh shareholding—in companies listed on the NSE also increased to 1.84 per cent by value as on June 30, 2020 from 1.78 per cent as on March 31, 2020.

Among the domestic institutions, holdings of insurance companies, in absolute value terms, went up by 25.28 per cent from the March quarter to Rs 7.02 lakh crore as on

June 30, 2020. Life Insurance Corporation of India's holding—across 292 companies where its holding is more than 1 per cent—stood at Rs 5.40 lakh crore in the June quarter, an increase of 26.93 per cent over the previous quarter.

The holding of private promoters in companies listed on the NSE reached an all-time high of 44.43 per cent by value, increasing from 44.25 per cent in March. Private promoter ownership has been steadily increasing for the last 11 years, having increased from 33.61 per cent in June 2009.

While Indian private promoters' holding has gone up from 26.45 per cent to 34.86 per cent over the last 11 years, foreign promoters' holding has gone up from 7.16 per cent to 9.57 per cent.

On the other hand, the holding of the government in companies listed on the NSE hit an all-time low of 6.36 per cent as on June 30, 2020, down from 6.56 per cent as on March 31, 2020.

"Since June 2009, hold-

ing of government has been steadily declining, from 22.71 per cent as on June 30, 2009, due to the government's divestment programme, not enough new listings as also lacklustre performance of many CPSEs relative to their private peers," according to Haldea.

Holdings of domestic mutual funds in companies listed on the NSE reduced to 7.81 per cent by value in June from 7.96 per cent in March.

Holdings of foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) also fell from 21.17 per cent in March to 21.05 per cent in June 2020, despite net inflows of Rs 29,516 crore during the quarter. FPI ownership stood at Rs 28.60 lakh crore as on June 30, 2020.

FPIs are the largest non-promoter shareholders in the Indian market and their investment decisions have a huge bearing on the stock prices and overall direction of markets. It is thus time that complete details of all their holdings are made mandatory to be disclosed in India, Haldea said.

"Institutional money continues to incrementally get more concentrated to the top 10 per cent companies by market cap, reflecting a heightened risk-off environment," Haldea said, adding, "The top 10 per cent companies by market capitalisation accounted for 52.29 per cent of overall FPI holding, 38.64 per cent of overall DII holding and 36.05 per cent of overall mutual fund holding."

Insurers set to offer transit cover for Covid-19 vaccine

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

With more than 170 Covid-19 vaccine candidates in the works globally, insurers and reinsurers are looking to offer transit cover for the vaccines to be transported from one country to other parts of the world. Insurance companies, which aim to provide comprehensive risk mitigation services to support the development, manufacturing and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines, are likely to start writing business from October 1.

Lloyd's, the world's specialist insurance and reinsurance leader, recently announced the creation and in-principle approval of its programme, Syndicate 1796, set up to insure the storage and transportation of Covid vaccines to the emerging economies.

Indian insurers are also keen to tap the evolving market for transportation of vaccines. Sanjay Datta, chief underwriting and claims, ICICI Lombard, said, "We are already providing marine cover for transportation of pharmaceutical products. How-

BIOLOGICAL E BUYS AKORN INDIA

Hyderabad, Aug. 17: Biological E. Limited (BE), a city-based pharmaceuticals and biologics company, on Monday announced the acquisition of Akorn India Limited, a subsidiary of Akorn Inc, USA, for an undisclosed sum. By this strategic acquisition, BE will be able to enhance its manufacturing capabilities of its vaccines and injectable medicines, a BE release said. BE is in the process of developing a Covid-19 vaccine and may be able to use Akorn's facilities at Paonta Sahib plant in Himachal Pradesh for manufacture of the vaccine. —PTI

ever, when it comes to providing the end-to-end cover for transportation of Covid-19 vaccines, we are watching the ongoing developments in this regard. Accordingly, we will decide about the

launch of such a product, as the government is making special arrangements for its transportation right from the laboratories to the end-consumers."

Syndicate 1796 is developed by insurance technology firm Parsyl in tie-up with various partners, including vaccine alliance Gavi. The Syndicate forms the foundation of the new global health risk facility (GHRF) at Lloyd's. The GHRF will offer All Risk cargo coverage for transit and storage risks on all global health products related to Covid-19 and any other infectious disease control programmes. The creation of a public-private syndicate to address a global health emergency is the first in Lloyd's history.

It is expected that those eligible for coverage will include manufacturers, procurement agents, logistics companies, ministries of health and other public agencies. "This unique partnership is a real demonstration of the value and ingenuity the Lloyd's market can bring to help address a global health emergency," said John Neal, CEO, Lloyd's.

NFRA FINDS LAPSES IN KPMG ARM'S FY18 AUDIT OF IFIN

New Delhi, Aug. 17: The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) has found various lapses in the statutory audit of IL&FS Financial Services Limited for 2017-18 done by BSR & Associates LLP.

NFRA has issued the Audit Quality Review Report (AQRR) of the statutory audit for the year 2017-18 of IL&FS Financial Services Ltd (IFIN).

However, BSR said the audit quality review did not give "due consideration to all the facts and circumstances", adding that it was reviewing the report and would respond later.

"The instances of failure to comply with the requirements of the Standards of Auditing (SAs) by BSR are significant," a release issued by the corporate affairs ministry said on Monday. NFRA comes under the ministry. BSR & Associates is an affiliate of KPMG.

As per the ministry's release, BSR did not have adequate justification for issuing the audit report.

NFRA found that the IT processes/ platform used by BSR have deficiencies that are systemic and structural in nature. —PTI

RENAULT BRINGS NEW DUSTER 1.3 TURBO PETROL

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, AUG 17

The French car maker Renault on Monday launched the all-new Duster turbo petrol variant starting at Rs 10.49 lakh. The top-end is priced Rs 13.59 lakh at pan-India showroom. The company will continue to sell the existing BS6 Duster 1.5 petrol variant.

Renault claims the new 1.3-litre turbo petrol engine to be the most powerful SUV in its segment.



SHORT TAKES

Alex grabs points at Austrian GP

Spielberg, Austria: A trying day at the Red Bull Ring with a red-flag interrupted race, but Alex Marquez salvaged points to continue his top 15 run in the MotoGP. Stefan Bradl's participation in next week's Styria GP is now confirmed as Marc Marquez continues his recovery.

Weather forecasts were once again proven wrong as glorious sunshine beat down for the fourth MotoGP race of the year.

Both Repsol Honda Team RC213Vs shot off the line, Alex and Stefan Bradl immediately gaining positions and joining the group battling for the top ten. But a red flag for a dramatic crash at Turn 3 saw the race stopped, restarted and run over 20 laps. Alex made another strong start from 13th on the grid with the restart, immediately moving into the top 10 as the field roared through the opening corners. The fighting was fierce in the first laps and the rookie found himself shuffled down the order after his lightning start. But Alex's consistency saw him stay free of trouble afterwards and benefit from the mistakes of others, moving back into the points.

Nagal in Prague pre-quarterfinal

Prague: India's Sumit Nagal advanced to the pre-quarterfinals of the Prague Challenger tennis tournament after his opponent Jay Clarke of Britain retired hurt here on Monday.

Nagal, ranked 127 in the world, was leading 6-3, 5-7, 4-1, when Clarke decided to call it quits in the second round match after playing for over two hours.

The 22-year-old Indian, playing his first competitive match since his Davis Cup encounter against Croatia's Marin Cilic in March, had received a bye in the opening round.

Nagal, seeded sixth in the tournament that also features three-time Grand Slam winner Stanislas Wawrinka, will face local favourite Jiri Lehecka in the Round of 16.

Other Indians in the fray include Divij Sharan and N. Sriram Balaji, who will be competing in the doubles events with separate partners.

Sharan will partner Dutchman Robin Haase and they were seeded number one. Balaji will join hands with Belgium's Kimmer Coppejans. — PTI

Hero sets the stage for return of T20

New Delhi: Hero MotoCorp is set to bring the exciting cricketing action back with Hero Caribbean Premier League (Hero CPL), popularly known as the 'Biggest Party in Sport', starting from Monday.

Marking the return of the electrifying Twenty20 format of the game in the 'New Normal', the tournament will be conducted in a bio-secure environment to meet the safety and social distancing protocols. In a first for a cricket premier league, the matches would be played in stadiums without any spectators, with the objective to maintain social distancing.

"Hero has always believed in supporting and promoting sporting action across the world and we are glad to be leading the efforts towards the resumption of top sporting event in the Caribbean. The CPL T20 marks the gradual return of live action sports after a gap of nearly four months," Pawan Munjal, chairman and CEO of Hero MotoCorp, said.

The tournament will see 33 games played at two venues in Trinidad and Tobago. Guyana Amazon Warriors will take on Trinbago Knight Riders in the opening match.

Live on TV

CARIBBEAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Trinbago Knight Riders vs Guyana Amazon Warriors from 7.30 pm; Barbados Tridents vs St Kitts & Nevis Patriots from 3 am (Wednesday). Both matches on Star Sports 1, 2, HD

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEMIFINAL

Paris-Saint Germain vs RB Leipzig from 12.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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United they fall again
Manchester lose another semifinal, this time in Europe

Cologne (Germany), Aug. 17: Manchester United made it an unwanted hat-trick of semifinal defeats this season after losing 2-1 in the Europa League to Sevilla.

After losing in the last four of the FA Cup and EFL Cup, United failed to convert a string of chances before Luuk de Jong scored the winning goal for Europa League experts Sevilla.

The Spanish club has won all five of the finals it's reached in Europe's second-level cup competition. Sevilla has the chance to win a record-extending sixth title on Friday in Cologne when its opposition will be either Inter Milan or Shakhtar Donetsk, who play Monday.

Sevilla goalkeeper Yassine Bounou kept his team in the semifinal at 1-1 with crucial saves either side of halftime, before de Jong won it.

With the game at 1-1 and heading for extra time, Sevilla substitute de Jong made the breakthrough in the 78th minute. A cross by Jesus Navas fell kindly for the tall Dutch forward to score his first European goal of the season from close range.

United had taken the lead in the ninth minute with yet another penalty in a season packed with them. Diego Carlos tangled with Marcus Rashford as the United forward had his shot saved, and then Bruno Fernandes stepped up to send the penalty into the top-left corner.

— AP



Sevilla players celebrate after Suso (second from left) scored their first goal during the Europa League semifinal against Manchester United in Cologne, Germany, on Sunday. Sevilla won 2-1. — AP

Paris giants train guns on Leipzig

Lisbon, Aug. 17: The similarities between Paris Saint-Germain and Leipzig end with both clubs trying to reach the Champions League final for the first time.

The French powerhouse will head into Tuesday's semifinal match with its high-profile squad, while the German club comes with a team of mostly untested players.

At the Stadium of Light in Lisbon, it will be

Neymar, Kylian Mbapp and his teammates taking on a Leipzig squad with little Champions League experience.

Leipzig have almost nothing to lose. For PSG, anything short of the title will feel like a disappointment for a club where a priority aim has been to break through with the European title after years of dominance in France.

Leipzig reached the Bundesliga in 2016 and

the Champions League a few years later. In their second

Champions League appearance, the German club eliminated Tottenham in the Round of 16 and Atletico Madrid in the quarterfinals. PSG, managed by German coach Thomas Tuchel, got past Borussia Dortmund in the Last 16 and Atalanta in quarterfinals.

PSG enter the semifinals with the feeling that this finally could be the time

they triumph in Europe.

PSG was eliminated in the Round of 16 in the last three seasons, and in the quarterfinals four straight times before that. Its last semifinal appearance was 25 years ago, when they lost to AC Milan.

"We don't talk about history, we live at the moment. We are here because we played a great Champions League season," Tuchel said. — AP

CHAUHAN LAST RITES WITH FULL HONOURS

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Former India cricketer and Uttar Pradesh cabinet minister Chetan Chauhan, who died of Covid-19 related complications, was on Monday cremated with state honours in Garhmukteshwar, Hapur.

Chauhan was 73 and breathed his last at a Gurugram hospital after battling the dreaded infection for over a month. His body was first taken to his residence in Mayur Vihar before the last rites were performed in Garhmukteshwar.

Chauhan was serving as the Minister of Sainik Welfare, Home Guards, and Civil Security in the Uttar Pradesh cabinet. He is survived by his wife and son Vinayak, who lit the pyre after arriving from Melbourne on Sunday.

"He was cremated with full state honours. The funeral was attended by several bureaucrats and a sizeable crowd gathered to pay their last respects," a Delhi and Districts Cricket Association official, who attended the funeral, said.

Chauhan was the legendary Sunil Gavaskar's longest serving opening partner and together the duo scored more than 3,000 runs, including 12 century stands.

He played 40 Tests for India and was the first Test cricketer to finish his career with over 2,000 runs but without a century.

He became the second UP minister to succumb to Coronavirus. — PTI

RAINA TOLD BCCI HE QUIT, A DAY LATE

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Suresh Raina communicated his retirement decision to the BCCI a day after he made it public, the Board said on Monday, lauding the former India all-rounder for being a key player in the limited-overs format.

Minutes after the iconic Mahendra Singh Dhoni announced his international retirement on August 15, 33-year-old Raina followed his mentor in doing the same, surprising many.

"Attacking left-hand batsman Suresh Raina officially communicated to BCCI on Sunday about his decision to retire from international cricket," said the BCCI in a statement.

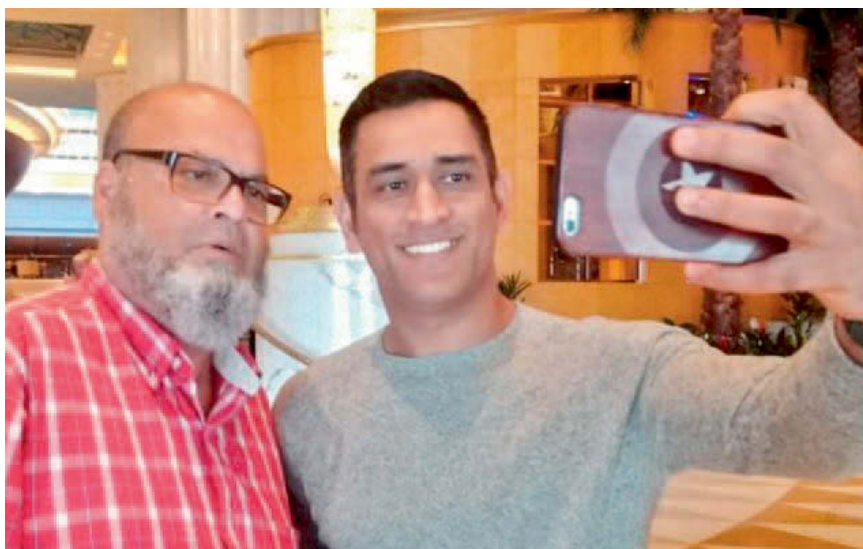
The usual norm is players informing the BCCI before announcing retirement.

Raina represented India in 18 Tests, 226 ODIs and 78 T20Is in an international career spanning 13 years. He also had the honour of captaining the team briefly.

"Under his captaincy, India registered a 3-2 series victory in West Indies and a 2-0 win over Bangladesh in ODIs and a 2-0 T20 International series win in Zimbabwe," the statement added.

Raina, who scored a century on debut in Tests, is also the first Indian to slam hundreds in all three formats of the game and his centuries were scored outside India.

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah paid a glowing tribute to the southpaw. — PTI



Former Indian cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni clicks a selfie with Mohammad Bashir Bozai, his Chicago-based Pakistan-born fan, in this file photo.

Dhoni's fan from Pakistan will quit watching cricket

New Delhi, Aug. 17: In Karachi-born Mohammad Bashir Bozai's vow to give up watching India-Pakistan play at ICC events, obsessive fandom follows Mahendra Singh Dhoni into retirement, adding to things like jersey number and disciples such as Suresh Raina.

Travelling the world to watch the arch-rivals in action doesn't make sense anymore to Bashir, aka 'Chacha Chicago', who endured abuses from Pakistani fans while cheering for Dhoni.

The well-known *chacha*, instead, plans to visit Ranchi to meet the man whose sphere of influence spreads far and wide.

"Dhoni has retired and so have I. I don't see myself travelling for cricket again with him not being around. I loved him and he loved me

Dhoni has retired and so have I. I don't see myself travelling for cricket again with him not being around.

— MOHAMMAD BASHIR BOZAI
M. S. Dhoni fan

Dhoni arranged it for the 65-year-old, enough for him to "unconditionally love" the World Cup-winning captain for life.

For someone who survived three heart attacks and cris-crossed the globe to see Dhoni in flesh and blood, cricket will never be the same. Now that he is done attending live games, his next stop is Ranchi. "I will go to his house in Ranchi when things get normal (post Covid-19 pandemic). That is the least I can do to wish him all the best for the future. I will also ask Ram Babu (another super fan, from Mohali, to come with me). I would have travelled to see him in the IPL but there are travel conditions and with my heart condition, it is not safe to do so," said Bashir, whose wife hails from Hyderabad (India). — PTI

Marksman MS may just shoot a surprise

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Enquiring about importing a rifle, he once sent a mail at 2 am, got it delivered at his Ranchi home, went to the range and did what he does in anything he tries his hand at.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni hit the bull's eye, fuelling an interest that would see him visit innumerable shooting ranges in the country over the next few years and display his skills in the sport.

The Walther rifle imported by Dhoni, who retired from international cricket on Saturday, is the

same model (LG300XT Walther Carbonec) which Abhinav Bindra had used to win a historic gold medal at the Olympics.

This was 10 years ago, when Indian shooters were starting to dominate on the world stage and Dhoni, who is now also a life member of National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), was bracing up for what would culminate into his second World Cup title triumph.

Recently, during an interaction with cricketer Suresh Raina, shooter Manavadiya Singh

● **A life member of National Rifle Association of India, M. S. Dhoni owns a LG300XT Walther Carbonec, the model Abhinav Bindra had used to win gold at the 2008 Olympics.**

Rathore, who is the son of Olympic silver-medallist Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, revealed that Dhoni is a pro when it comes to shooting as well. Manavadiya recalled

how impressive Dhoni was when the cricketer visited his house. "He has a lot of interest in shooting also. I think he hit the target all the time," Manavadiya had said.

Dhoni has exhibited his shooting skills in the past. In 2017, when a team training session was cancelled due to rain in Kolkata, Dhoni headed to the Kolkata Police Training School and tried his hand at pistol shooting. "His accuracy is breathtaking," Kolkata Police was quoted as saying at the time.

He had also shared a clip of him trying his hand at pistol shooting in 2018.

"He has had love for guns and shooting since a very long time. Now that he is done with cricket, shooting could be his next sport. I have seen many professional athletes shifting to shooting after retiring from their sport and go on to become Olympic champions. Unlike other sports shooting and golf can be played till a very long time," Shimon Sharif, a top importer of equipment for leading shooters, said. — PTI

COVID | SCARE

Simona says no to Grand Slam

New York, Aug. 17: Wimbledon champion Simona Halep will skip the US Open, saying she is putting her health first and prefers to stay in Europe amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

Halep, a former top-ranked player who is currently No.2, won the title in Prague on Sunday.

"After weighing up all the factors involved and with the exceptional circumstances in which we are living, I have decided that I will not travel to New York to play the (at)usopen," Halep wrote on Twitter.

"I always said I would put my health at the heart of my decision and I therefore prefer to stay and train in Europe," she wrote.

Six of the top eight women in the WTA rankings won't play in New York. No.1 Ash Barty and defending champion Bianca Andreescu have also withdrawn from the tournament. Other women who won't be playing include No.5 Elina Svitolina, No.7 Kiki Bertens and No.8 Belinda Bencic.

Rafael Nadal, the men's defending champion, has also withdrawn from the tournament, but Novak Djokovic has said he will play. The US Open is scheduled to start at Flushing Meadows on Aug. 31.

Irina Khromacheva of Russia will replace Halep in the main draw, according to the United States Tennis Association. — AP

NISHIKORI TESTS POSITIVE FOR VIRUS

New York, Aug. 17: Japan's Kei Nishikori, the 2014 US Open runner-up, said he has contracted Covid-19 and has withdrawn from an ATP event in New York with this year's US Open only two weeks away.

World number 31 Nishikori said he took the test and received the positive result on Sunday in Florida and will isolate himself despite few symptoms. He and his team plan more tests.

"I have some unfortunate news. This morning, while still in Florida, I got tested for Covid-19 and tested positive," Nishikori said in a statement posted on social media.

Boxer Sarita Devi is Covid positive

Back in India, former world champion boxer L. Sarita Devi on Monday tested positive for Covid-19 along with her husband Thoiba Singh but both of them are asymptomatic. The couple are based in Imphal. "Me and Sarita have tested positive. We are right now moving to a Covid-19 care facility in Imphal. Both of us have no symptoms at all," Thoiba said. — PTI

FAN FRAME



Ravindra Sharma (centre) took this photo with former Indian cricket captain Gundappa Viswanath (left). Viswanath scored 6,080 runs in the 91 Tests he played between 1969 and 1983, scoring 14 centuries and 35 half-centuries in 155 innings.

BRADY BAGS BRAGGING RIGHTS AT LEXINGTON

Lexington (Kentucky, USA), Aug. 17: Wearing a pandemic-appropriate mask, Jennifer Brady walked over to accept the first WTA trophy of her career, making sure to apply hand sanitizer before raising the new hardware overhead.

Brady claimed her initial tour-level title at the Top Seed Open on Sunday, overcoming some shaky serving and using a five-game run to seize control for a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Jil Teichmann in the final.

It was the first professional tennis event in the United States since the start of the Coronavirus outbreak, and no spectators were allowed. The unusual circumstances did not bother Brady at all.

She did not drop a set throughout the hard-court tournament and ceded only 24 games in all. It was a perfect way to prepare for the US Open, which begins August 31 in New York. — AP

Bucks, Lakers in focus at playoffs

Miami, Aug. 17: An NBA season unlike any other shifts into high gear with the start of the playoffs in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

In a season reshaped by the Coronavirus pandemic, home court advantage is just a memory.

Fans are banned from the campus where the league has so far successfully operated without a positive Covid-19 test. But the price is that players know that the deeper their teams' playoff run the longer they remain isolated from their families and friends.

"This is going to be the toughest championship you could ever win," Milwaukee Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo, the reigning Most Valuable Player, had said.

Antetokounmpo's Bucks arrived at the bubble virtually assured of the top seed in the Eastern Conference and own the best record in the league as they head into a first-round meeting with the Orlando Magic.

The Bucks beat the Magic in all four of their regular season games, but they've produced a lacklustre 3-5 record in the restart.

The Los Angeles Lakers have also gone an unimpressive 3-5 in seeding games. LeBron James, Anthony Davis and company will be up against battle-hardened Portland Trail Blazers, who won four straight down-to-the-wire games—including an extra play-in game against Memphis Grizzlies — to seize the final playoff berth in the West. — AFP