

SHORT TAKES

3 held for trying to extort ₹10L from businessman

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

A 28-year-old man was arrested and two juveniles were apprehended for allegedly posing as members of gangster Neeraj Bawana gang and trying to extort ₹10 lakh from a businessman in west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh, police said on Friday. The two juveniles are school friends and together they created a profile on Instagram in the name of Sahil shooter and followed criminals on the social media platforms through the alleged profile, they said. Police said the duo came in contact with accused Rohit Bhardwaj over Instagram and started chatting with him. He shared details of the victim with them and hatched a conspiracy to extort ₹10 lakhs from the victim by posing themselves as members of gangster Neeraj Bawana gang. On Tuesday, the victim, who runs an IT company in Paschim Vihar was in his office when he got a call through VoIP from one of the accused who introduced himself as a member of Neeraj Bawana gang and demanded ₹10 lakh as ransom, according to police. The accused also threatened that if the victim failed to arrange the amount, he would be shot by the evening, police said. After returning home, he lodged a complaint with Punjabi Bagh police station in west Delhi.

3 arrested for kidnapping, killing man in Mundka

New Delhi: Three persons have been arrested by the Delhi Police for allegedly kidnapping and killing a man in outer Delhi's Mundka area. The accused persons have been identified as Naveen who is a history sheeter, Charanjeet and Nitin. Two Pistols with 03 live cartridges, axe, two cars used in commission of crime and to escape from the crime spot have been recovered from the accused. During interrogation it was revealed that Naveen wanted take revenge on the victim as he did not save the accused from beating when he had a scuffle with boys of his village and had also conspired this attack on him, the police said. The body of the victim was later on recovered along with the weapons and vehicle used in crime, they added.

Cop on duty shoots self with service pistol, dies

New Delhi: An on-duty sub-inspector of Delhi Police allegedly shot himself dead with his service pistol at a police station here on Friday, the officials said. The deceased, Rahul Singh, belonged to Agra district in Uttar Pradesh and lived with his family here, they said. "The 31-year-old went to the terrace of Pandav Nagar police station, where he was posted, and killed himself", said Priyanka Kashyap, Deputy Commissioner of Police (East). No suicide note was recovered from the spot, the police said. His body has been sent for post-mortem and investigation in the case was on to ascertain the reason behind him taking such an extreme step, they added.

'Delta variant counted for 60% of Delhi cases in April'

New Delhi, June 4: The rapid surge in cases during Delhi's fourth Covid-19 wave was mainly driven by the Delta variant—which likely has immune-evasion properties — and counted for 60 per cent of the cases in April, according to a new study.

The Delta variant, B.1.617.2, is 50 per cent more transmissible than the Alpha variant, B.1.1.7, first discovered in the UK, say researchers from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the CSIR Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB).

Prior infections, high seropositivity, and partial vaccination are insufficient impediments to the spread of the Delta variant, found the scientists. They traced the factors contributing to the scale and speed of the fourth wave that started in April in Delhi and compared them to the preceding three waves last year. "We find that this surge of SARS-CoV-2 infections in Delhi is best explained by the introduction of a new highly transmissible variant of concern (VOC), B.1.617.2, with likely immune-evasion properties," the researchers noted.

The variant may have led to insufficient neutral-



A Shaheed Bhagat Singh Sewa Dal worker inside an advanced life support ambulance donated by Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

ising immunity in people, despite high seropositivity, and social behaviour may have augmented the surge by promoting transmission, they added.

Neutralising immunity consists of naturally occurring antibodies that play an important role in the immune system.

To determine whether SARS-CoV-2 variants may be responsible for the April 2021 outbreak in Delhi, the researchers sequenced and analysed community samples from Delhi from the previous outbreak in November 2020 until May 2021 and related it to effective reproductive number, Rt(t).

The effective reproduc-

tive number is the expected number of new infections caused by an infectious individual in a population where some individuals may no longer be susceptible.

The yet-to-be-published paper, posted on the preprint repository medRxiv, on Thursday, noted that the incidence of the Alpha variant was minimal in Delhi in January, rapidly increasing to 20 per cent in February and 40 per cent in March.

However, the rapidly spreading Alpha variant was overtaken in April by the Delta variant, first found in Maharashtra, the authors of the study noted. — PTI

IWPC welcomes SC order on sedition charges against scribes

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

The Indian Women's Press Corps (IWPC) has welcomed the Supreme Court order that says journalists are protected under the Kedar Nath Singh judgment against sedition charges and that criticism of the government, even if brutal, cannot be termed as sedition.

In January 2021, IWPC founder member Mrinal Pande and some other journalists were booked for sedition for tweets relating to the farmers' protest. Another journalist and Kerala Journal of Working Journalists' office bearer Kappan Siddique has been in jail facing sedition and other charges like UAPA since October 2020.

In its June 3, 2021, order on sedition, the apex court has said, "Commenting in strong terms upon the measures or acts of government, or its agencies, so as to ameliorate the condition of the people or to secure the cancellation or alteration of those acts or measures by lawful means, that is to say without exciting those feelings of enmity and disloyalty which imply excitement to public disorder or the use of violence, is not sedition."

In a press statement, the IWPC said: "We laud the SC judgement and hope that the Central and state governments will now refrain from using such means as an attempt to silence the media. We also hope that this judgment will provide immediate relief to journalists who are in jail under sedition charges."

Death of 21 Covid patients at Jaipur Golden Hospital: CBI probe sought

4-member panel to look into deaths due to O2 shortage

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

The Delhi government has set up a panel of medical experts to look into cases of death of patients reportedly due to a shortage of oxygen during the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said on Friday. If the panel ascertains that death of a patient had occurred due to shortage of oxygen, then the Delhi government will give a compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the families of the deceased, he said.

In an online briefing, he said the file has been sent to Delhi Lt Governor Anil Bajjal and the panel will start functioning once the L-G approves it. During the second wave of coronavirus, there was a "massive oxygen crisis" in Delhi, and there were reports that oxygen shortage led to deaths at some hospitals, Sisodia said.

"We took the issue seriously and took a decision to form a four-member committee to look into the matter. It is a committee comprising medical experts. We have sent the file for the L-G's approval," he said.

"This committee will meet twice a week and will look into each case and decide whether the death happened due to the short-

1,18,78 Remedesivir vials were black-marketed: BJP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

The Delhi BJP on Friday alleged that of the 1,69,007 Remedesivir injections provided by Centre, 1,18,78 were sold in black, hence chief minister Arvind Kejriwal should give account of ₹392 crore. City BJP chief Adesh Gupta claimed that, on one hand Mr Kejriwal's government kept pretending about oxygen shortage while on the other, AAP's agents were indulged in its black marketing.

Even Delhi high court had to intervene in the matter but CM cared neither for it nor heard the

grieving voices of Delhiites. In fact, state government's nodal officers, drug controller and even retailers of medicines were found to be in league with the Mr Kejriwal administration and this could be gauged from the fact that the police registered 303 cases in this regard and 153 people were arrested, BJP alleged.

Mr Kejriwal's nodal officers were hand in glove with private hospitals in black marketing of oxygen, beds, ICU beds, ventilators beds and he must answer this, said Delhi Leader of opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri.

age of the life-saving gas," he said. The panel of four members will inspect claims of all those families who have lost their loved ones due to oxygen scarcity, and thereafter if validated, the process to disburse ₹5 lakh financial assistance to each family will begin, Sisodia said. A senior official said people who died at a hospital or in transit would be covered under it. Starting mid-April, scenes of distressed

family members scrambling around in the city to get oxygen cylinders or concentrators for patients had become very common.

The Delhi High Court on Friday sought the stand of the Centre and the city government on a plea seeking a CBI probe into the death of 21 Covid patients at the Jaipur Golden Hospital here in April allegedly due to oxygen shortage.

Justice Rekha Palli issued a notice to the



An autorickshaw packed with passengers plies near Kaushambi bus terminal amid ongoing Covid-19 pandemic in Ghaziabad on Friday. — PTI

Farmers to protest outside houses of BJP lawmakers

Ghaziabad, June 4: Farmers protesting the contentious farm laws will hold demonstrations outside the residences of BJP lawmakers across the country on Saturday, a Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) office-bearer said on Friday. The protest outside the residences of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MPs and MLAs is to mark the one year of the promulgation of these laws as ordinances by the Centre, the official said.

"The protestors will burn the copies of the legislations outside the residence of BJP MPs and MLAs across the country as a symbolic protest against the Centre," BKU media in-charge Dharmendra Malik told PTI. "In districts where there

associations and unions which are camping on Delhi borders since November 2020.

Hundreds of farmers are encamped at Delhi's borders demanding that the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 be rolled back and a new law made to guarantee minimum support price for crops.

However, the government, which has held multiple rounds of formal dialogue with the protestors, has maintained that the laws are pro-farmer. — PTI

Full fee-waiver for DU students left orphaned by Covid-19

New Delhi, June 4: The Delhi University will provide full fee waiver to students who lost one or both parents to the coronavirus infection, officials said on Friday. The university has written to its colleges to conduct a survey and prepare a list of such students.

"The Delhi University has written to its colleges to conduct a survey of students who have lost their parents due to coronavirus. We have sought a report in the matter by Monday," Dean of Colleges, Balamram Pani, told PTI.

The fee waiver, which will be 100 per cent, will be applicable for students who have lost either of the parents or both to the virus in both the waves of the pandemic. They won't even be charged examination fees.

"At the varsity level, we know about the staffers whose wards are studying here and they would be given a fee waiver. At the college level, the college governing bodies will have to implement it. They will have to ask for certain documents which would prove it," an official said.

According to officials, there are three types of colleges under the Delhi University — colleges maintained by trusts; those maintained by the university; and the colleges fully or partially funded by the Delhi government.

There are 28 colleges fully or partially funded by the Delhi government, including 12 that are fully funded by the city dispensation. — PTI

HC dismisses Juhi's suit against 5G, imposes ₹20 lakh fine

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

Imposing a heavy cost of ₹20 lakh on actor Juhi Chawla, the Delhi High Court on Friday dismissed her civil suit against the rollout of 5G technology in India as "defective and not maintainable". The court also ordered action against people who had interrupted a virtual hearing on Wednesday using a link the actor had shared on social media and sang popular songs from her Bollywood movies.

In his order, Justice G R Midha noted: "Vexatious allegations were made... They (plaintiffs) have abused and misused process of law. Plaintiffs are directed to deposit cost of 20 lakh within one week... DSLSA (Delhi State Legal Services Authority) to utilise it for cause of victims of road acci-

dents. If any proceedings are instituted, this judgement be produced before the court."

When Juhi Chawla's lawyer Deepak Khosla asked for the order to be put on hold, arguing that the costs were without any legal basis, the court snapped: "The matter is over. You have your legal remedies. Counsel should know his limits."

The court held that the plaintiffs' suit was valued at Rs two crore for jurisdiction, therefore, the valuation had to be the same for court fee. "Over Rs one lakh should have been paid. Challenge to the Court Fee Act is not permitted under CPC."

"It appears the suit was for publicity. Juhi Chawla circulated a link of the hearing on social media," the court said, asking the Delhi Police to identify and take action against the rogue singers. On Wednesday, the court's



Juhi Chawla

virtual hearing was repeatedly interrupted by fans who logged on and sang hits from Juhi Chawla's movies, infuriating the judge. When the hearing started, someone started singing the song "Ghoonghat ki aad se" from actor's 1993 movie "Hum Hain Rahi Pyar Ke". "Please mute," the judge said the first time. A little later, he ordered another

singer be removed from the hearing. When it happened the third time, the judge directed that the person be identified and a contempt notice be issued against him.

In her lawsuit, the actor had sought a direction to the authorities to certify to the public at large that how 5G technology is safe to humans, animals and every type of living organism, flora and fauna. During the first hearing, the judge had termed the lawsuit as 'defective' and said it was filed for 'media publicity'. He had also questioned the actor for filing the suit without giving any representation to the government on her concerns related to the technology. The court had said that the actor and others were required to first approach the government for their rights instead of approaching it. In his order, the judge held

that the plaintiffs have failed to make out a case for leave to institute the suit or to sue in representative capacity. "Therefore the plaint is defective and not maintainable."

The counsel, appearing for the Centre, said that the 5G policy did not fall in the category of public nuisance and it was obviously not prohibited in law. The counsel representing private telecom companies said that launching of 5G technology is a policy of the government and as it is a policy, it cannot be a wrongful act.

Juhi Chawla's counsel had argued that if the telecom industry's plans for 5G come to fruition, no person, animal, bird, insect and plant on earth will be able to avoid exposure, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to levels of RF radiation that are 10x to 100x times greater than what exists today.



SHORT TAKES

TN: Lioness in TN zoo dies of Covid

Chennai: For the first time in Tamil Nadu, a lion has died of coronavirus while nine others in the pride have tested positive for the infection at a zoo near here, an official said on Friday. "It is for the first time that the big cats have tested positive for the virus in Tamil Nadu," the official said. The nine-year-old "Neela", a lioness, which was in the safari area, succumbed to the virus on Thursday while nine of the 11 in the park tested positive for Covid, said officials of the Arignar Anna Zoological Park at Vandalur. The park, spread across 602 hectares at Vandalur about 35 kms from the city, had remained shut due to Covid. One of the major attractions in the city surrounded by dense flora and fauna, the park is home to several species of wildlife including star-tortoise, reticulated python, estuarine crocodile, cobra, sambar, common otter, lion-tailed macaque, Asiatic lions and elephants, and chimpanzees. — PTI

Assam fixes rates for Covid treatment

Guwahati: Assam government on Friday fixed the rates of private super speciality and general hospitals ranging from ₹4000 to ₹15,000 for treatment of Covid patients to ensure no discrepancy in charging patients for health care services in private hospitals, Minister for Health and Family Welfare Keshab Mahanta said. The charges in private Super Speciality and general hospitals have been fixed for Covid patients considering the bed occupied in general ward, paying cabin and ICU (with and without ventilators), Mahanta announced at a press conference here. In the case of super speciality hospitals, the daily rates for the general ward will be ₹5,000, for shared cabin it will be ₹6,500, ICU (without ventilator) Rs 10,000 and for ICU (with ventilator) the charges have been fixed at ₹15,000. —PTI

J&K child mauled to death by leopard

Srinagar: A four-year-old girl was mauled to death by a leopard in Budgam district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said. Adha Shakil went missing from the lawn of her house in Ompora Housing Colony on Thursday evening, they said, adding remains of her body were found in a nearby forest area during a search operation on Friday morning. Deputy commissioner Shahbaz Mirza called a meeting with senior police officers and officials of the forest and wildlife departments to decide on a slew of measures to prevent such incidents in the future. These include immediate removal of fallen material and other cultural operations in Ompora forests and other risk areas. — PTI

ASSAM RANKS SECOND LAST IN NITI AAYOG'S SDG

Guwahati: The BJP led alliance may have returned to power this year in Assam but it remains at the bottom of the list of the states in the quest for Sustainable Development Goals with a score of 57 little above Bihar with a score of 52 followed by Jharkhand 56. Kerala yet again bagged the No.1 slot among 'front runner' states, bettering its score from 70 in 2019 to 75 in 2020. Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh are number two, Chandigarh claimed the top slot among UTs with a score of 79, which is an increase over its 2019 score of 70. Encouragingly, the report showed that in 2019-20, 10 states and UTs belonged to the category of 'front runners', but now 12 more — Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Punjab, Haryana, Tripura, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, J&K and Ladakh have graduated from 'performers' to join this category. The Niti Aayog's development index (DI) has triggered a political reaction in Assam with regional party—Rajior Dal headed by jailed MLA Akhil Gogoi on Friday said that the report has unveiled the true picture of the state. The party while referring to the DI pointed out that currently, Assam holds the highest maternal mortality rate in the country. Assam also ranks as the lowest state in the country in terms of development.

Kerala announces ₹20Kcr Covid package

Balogopal: ₹1,000cr would be utilised for providing free Covid vaccination for all above 18 years of age

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JUNE 4

The Pinarayi Vijayan government, which came to power for the second time in Kerala after the recent polls, has presented its maiden Budget, on Friday, which comprised a ₹20,000 crore special package to deal with the huge crisis triggered by the second wave of Covid-19.

While presenting the Budget in the state Assembly, Kerala's new finance minister K.N. Balagopal announced that as part of the package ₹2,800 crore would be spent on addressing health emergency situations.

The minister said ₹8,900 crore would be pumped into the market through various social welfare measures including social welfare pensions. This would, in turn, help people who have been plunged into grave crisis due to loss of livelihood. Besides, ₹8,300 crore has been set aside for interest subsidy on loans granted for reviving the economy.

The minister said all community health centres and taluk and district hospitals will have 10 isolation beds each. Each medical college will have separate blocks for dealing with epidemics. An oxygen plant with a capacity of 150 metric tonnes would be set up.

Mr Balagopal said ₹1,000 crore would be utilised for providing free Covid vaccination for all above 18 years of age.

The minister announced that ₹500 crore would be spent on providing infrastructure facilities including equipment for mass vaccination drive. The government has set aside ₹5 crore for children who lost their parents due to Covid. Each orphaned child would be given ₹3 lakh.

Mr Balagopal said the emphasis of the new Budget was on ensuring health and food for all, especially during the pandemic period. With the state still fighting the second wave, the current challenges posed by the pandemic are also adversely impacting the state's development, he

Kerala reports 16,229 new cases of Covid

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JUNE 4

Kerala reported 16,229 new cases of Covid on Friday even as 25,860 people recovered from infection.

The number of active cases in the state fell to 1,74,526. During the last 24 hours 1.09 lakh tests were carried out in the state and the test positivity rate was 14.82. The state also reported 135 Covid deaths on Friday.

As of now, 6.93 lakh people are under observation across the state including 6.57 lakh under home or institutional quarantine.

The state government has announced that additional restrictions would be put in place in the state from June 5. Only shops selling essential commodities and the units which supply raw materials for various industrial establishments would be allowed to function.

The restrictions are being imposed with the objective of preventing the third wave in the state.

added.

He said the government was also gearing up to face the challenges that the third wave might pose.

While sparing the people of additional tax burden, the minister said this was not the right time to impose taxes. However, he said that considering the 18.7 per cent dip in the state's revenue due to Covid crisis, it would be difficult to move forward without an increase in tax and non-tax revenues.

The minister announced a special package for the state's coastal areas which witnessed widespread destruction due to recent cyclones and rains.

A special loan package of ₹2,500 crore had been announced for farmers and ₹1,000 crore loans through Kudumbasree.



Toshika Naidu, an 8th class student, along with her brother Srinivas G.R. Naidu show the pictures of their parents who died due to Covid at Ranjhi in Jabalpur on Friday. — PTI

Shivraj govt threatens to invoke ESMA if docs don't call off strike

3,500 jr docs quit en masse in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JUNE 4

Hours after Madhya Pradesh high court declared their strike illegal, around 3500 junior doctors in five medical colleges in the state resigned en masse on Thursday night. The striking doctors gave no sign of relenting on the sixth day of their stir on Friday, even as the 24-hour deadline set by the MP high court to resume duty ended in the evening.

"We are planning to move the SC against the HC order", Madhya Pradesh Junior Doctors Association (JDA) president Arvind Meena said on Friday.

He said the junior doctors would continue their stir till all their demands were met by the state government. The move by the MP medical science university to cancel the enrolment of 468 students for third year PG in the five government medical colleges in the wake of the MP high court declaring their strike illegal has upset the junior doctors, the association said. "The state government has already cancelled our enrolment for third-year PG denying us to sit

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, JUNE 4

All the 52 districts in Madhya Pradesh have emerged out of the red zone, bringing the coronavirus pandemic in the state under control, chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Friday. Reviewing the pandemic situation in the state, Mr Chouhan said no district in the state is in the red zone now and all the districts in the state have been reporting a positivity rate below 5 per cent for the past 1 week.

gal has upset the junior doctors, the association said. "The state government has already cancelled our enrolment for third-year PG denying us to sit

The review meeting has indicated that 30 out of 52 districts in the state have been reporting positivity rate below one percent since last one week, while the other 22 have been maintaining 1-5 per cent positivity rate since the last seven days. 3 districts, Alirajpur, Jhabua and Katni have reported no fresh positive case on Friday, while four districts, Bhand, Mandla, Singrauli and Tikamgarh, recorded only one fresh positive case each on the day. Only 3 districts in the state, Indore (287), Bhopal

for examinations", Dr Meena said. The state government has already announced to enhance their stipend by 17 percent. Meanwhile, state medical

(183) and Jabalpur (71), reported more than 20 fresh positive cases.

Indore has been maintaining 4.9 per cent positivity rate for the past one week, while Bhopal and Jabalpur have been reporting 3.8 percent and 1.8 percent positivity rates respectively for the last one week.

The CM has ordered the ministers given charge of districts in the state to monitor the unlocking process in their respective districts to ensure that corona appropriate behaviour is strictly followed.

education commissioner Nishant Warwade has issued a veiled warning to invoke ESMA against the agitators if they did not call off their strike.

Maha caps charges for treatment of black fungus

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, JUNE 4

The Maharashtra government on Friday capped the charges for treatment of mucormycosis patients at private hospitals in the state. As per the notification, the state government has identified 28 types of surgeries for treating black fungus. In three-tier cities, the minimum charge for surgery has been fixed around ₹6,000, and the final amount can rise up to Rs one lakh, depending on the region and complexity of the treatment. The public health department on Friday issued a notification about these rates.

At present, the number of black fungus patients is rising in the state and there have been complaints about the exorbitant cost of treatment. Therefore, the state government has decided rates of treatment for the disease for private hospitals. The cities have been classified as A, B, and C with varying rates. No private hospital can charge more than stipulated by the notification.

The notification said that Ward Quarantine in Class A cities will be charged ₹4000, while Class B cities will charge ₹3000 and Class C cities will charge ₹2400. This includes care of patients, nursing, tests, medicines, bed charge and meals. Any specialized tests or higher medicines have not been included in this.

A senior official said that since surgery is crucial in the treatment of black fungus, we have identified 28 types of surgeries and expenditures for the surgeries. "The cost of surgery has been fixed. Expenditure for surgeries has been decided at a range from ₹10,000 to ₹1 lakh for an A-class city, from ₹7,500 to ₹75,000 for B class city and from ₹6000 to ₹60,000 for C class city," the official added.

'Prior infection cuts Covid risk for 10 mths'

New Delhi, June 4: The risk of being infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, is substantially reduced for up to 10 months following the first infection with the virus, according to a study.

The research, published in the journal Lancet Healthy Longevity on Tuesday, looked at rates of Covid-19 infections between October last year and February this year among over 2,000 care home residents and staff in England.

The researchers from the University College London (UCL) in the UK compared people who

had evidence of a previous infection up to 10 months earlier, as determined by antibody testing, with those who had not been previously infected.

They found that residents with a previous infection were 85 per cent less likely to be infected during this four-month period than those who had never been infected.

Staff members with past infection were 60 per cent less likely to be infected than those who had not had the infection before.

The researchers said this showed strong protection in both groups,

THE RESEARCH, published in the journal Lancet Healthy Longevity on Tuesday, looked at rates of Covid-19 infections between October last year and February this year among over 2,000 care home residents and staff in England

but cautioned that the two percentages may not be directly comparable.

This is because the staff may have accessed testing outside the care home, leading to positive tests not being included in the study, they said.

"It's really good news

that natural infection protects against reinfection in this time period. The risk of being infected twice appears to be very low," said study lead author Maria Krutikov, from UCL Institute of Health Informatics.

"The fact that prior Covid-19 infection gives a high level of protection to care home residents is also reassuring, given past concerns that these individuals might have less robust immune responses associated with increasing age," Krutikov said.

For the study, 682 residents, with a median age of 86, and 1,429 staff in

100 care homes underwent antibody blood tests in June and July last year following the first wave of Covid-19.

About a third tested positive for antibodies, suggesting they had previously been infected.

Researchers then analysed the results of participants' PCR tests, starting approximately 90 days after the blood samples were taken to ensure the tests did not pick up the initial infection. PCR tests were taken once a week for staff, and once a month for residents, with further testing in the event of an outbreak. — PTI

Our scientists made India self-reliant: Modi

PM hails Indian scientists for developing Covid jab

New Delhi, June 4: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday lauded Indian scientists for developing a Made in India vaccine against Covid and boosting other measures to fight the pandemic within a year of its outbreak.

Addressing a meeting of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Society via video conference, the Prime Minister, who is also the president of the scientific body, cited India's experience in the previous century to say that the country used to wait for years to lay its hands on innovations achieved abroad, but its scientists are now working shoulder to shoulder with their counterparts outside.

They are working at the same quick pace, he said.

He said the Covid pan-



Narendra Modi

demic is the biggest challenge of the century but history has witnessed that whenever humanity has faced any major issues, science has paved the way for a better path in the future. This work was done by scientists across the world and in India, the Prime Minister said. "Our scientists, within a year, developed 'Made in India' vaccine and made it available to the countrymen," he said. India has indigenously developed Covaxin vaccine against coronavirus.

He said within a year, scientists made the country self-reliant by making COVID testing kits. In a short span, they discovered many drugs to treat coronavirus and developed ways to speed up oxygen production.

"Because of your contribution, immense talent, the country is fighting this big war (against coronavirus)," PM Modi said.

On the occasion, PM Modi reiterated his call for an Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant) and a strong India, saying the Covid crisis may have slowed its pace but the country's resolve remains the same.

Lauding the work done by the CSIR, he said the organisation has produced several talented scientists and it was led by ones like Shantiswarup Bhatnagar. — PTI

SC relief for journalist granted pre-arrest bail

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

The Supreme Court, on Friday, refused to interfere with the grant of anticipatory bail to a Mumbai TV journalist, Varun Hiremath, dismissing a petition by a 22-year-old woman from Pune accusing him of raping her in the national capital.

Mr Hiremath is an anchor and news analyst with a news channel associated with a leading economic paper.

The woman had approached the top court challenging the May 13 order of the Delhi high court granting Mr Hiremath an anticipatory bail.

The petitioner had, as an interim relief, sought a stay of the Delhi high court's order, stating that the high court granted the anticipatory bail to the accused journalist in a clear case of rape and assault despite the fact that he had absconded to deliberately evade the



Varun Hiremath

non-bailable warrant issued by the police under Section 82 of the CrPC on a complaint lodged by her at the Chanakyapuri police station in the diplomatic area of Delhi.

A high court had, on May 13, allowed Mr Hiremath interim protection from arrest on the condition that he shall join the investigation whenever required.

A Delhi court had earlier issued a non-bailable warrant against him rejecting his anticipatory bail application and the Delhi police was also in the process of announcing a reward for his arrest since he had absconded.

The FIR lodged with the police accused him under Sections 376 (rape), 342 (wrongful confinement), and 509 (insulting a woman's modesty) of the IPC. The Delhi police had issued a lookout circular barring him from leaving the country.

Covid: Odisha cancels Class 12 Board exams

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 4

After the CBSE, Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE), Odisha on Friday cancelled the Class 12 (Plus II) examinations this year. The decision was taken in view of the uncertain conditions due to Covid and feedback received from various stakeholders.

Announcing the decision, chief minister Naveen Patnaik said, "Education and livelihood have been the worst affected during the

ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. However, keeping everyone safe in this pandemic is most important. Keeping in this view, the Plus II examinations conducted by CHSE have been cancelled this year." "Amples opportunities will come in future and the civilization will grow, only if we survive now," he stated.

The CM also directed the CHSE to consult experts for recommendations and take steps to compile results of Plus II students as per a well-defined objective criteria in a time-bound manner.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE				
Chief Engineer/TMC, Northern Railway, Headquarters office, Baroda House, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites 02 No tenders through E-Procurement system for supply of the following items:				
S. No.	E-Tender No.	Description of Item	Qty	Due date Time
1.	A07P90STM2021	DIGITAL ULTRASONIC DOUBLE RAIL TESTER.	05 Nos	25.06.2021 at 11:30 hours
2.	A28P90TMC2021	Various Types of Cylinder	06 Nos	25.06.2021 at 11:30 hours

Note:- 1. The complete information of above E-Procurement tenders are available on website "www.iraps.gov.in". The firms, who desire to participate against E-Tenders, are advised to electronically register themselves on the above website for which they would be required to have a class-III digital certificate from certifying agencies authorized under IT Act 2000, by Govt. of India. Manual offers against E-Tenders will not be accepted. No. 219-S/1/TMC/07/2021-22 Dated: 03.06.2021 1214/21

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED GIRL



Anjali Kumari lines kurti, black colour laggin and red colour slipper in feet, has been missing/kidnapped since 20.05.2021 from the area of P.S. Kapashera, Delhi. In this regard FIR No. 207/21 dated 20.05.2021 has been registered at P.S. Kapashera, New Delhi.

Any person having any information or clue about this missing/kidnapped girl may kindly inform to the following:-

E-mail: cbc@cbi.gov.in
Website: http://cbi.nic.in
Fax: 24368639,
Tel.: 24368638/24368641

SHO : P.S. Kapashera, New Delhi
Tel. No. : 011-25063758, 25066105

DP/699/SW/21

SHORT TAKES

Odisha: Brown sugar worth ₹2cr seized

Bhubaneswar: The special task force (STF) of Odisha crime branch on Friday seized huge quantities of brown sugar and arrested three persons at Jaleswar area in Odisha's Balasore district. The market value of the seized contraband weighing 2 kg is estimated to be over ₹2 crore, state crime branch deputy inspector general Jay Narayan Pankaj said. "It's a massive quantity worth over ₹2 crore. We have arrested three persons who are prima facie involved in the illegal trade. The trio belongs to Balasore district. We had already seized 33 kg of brown sugar and 66 quintal Ganja and arrested several peddlers since we launched our special drive last year," he added. From the quantity of the contraband recovered from the trio, it becomes clear that they were not the retailers but were trading wholesale, Pankaj added.

Man promises 'money rain', held

Jalna: A man was arrested in Mantha in Jalna for allegedly duping a Pune businessman of Rs 52 lakh by promising to "rain money" through some rituals, police said on Friday. Kisan Asaram Pawar was held on Thursday by a joint team of Jalna and Pune police, an official said. "Pawar, a resident of Hiwarkhedha here, was caught with fake money and items used in his rituals. A decoy customer was sent to verify the complaint against Pawar, and he was held after the confirmation was obtained," Inspector Yashwant Bagul of Mantha police station said. Bagul said the original complaint against Pawar was lodged in Sinhadga in Pune by a businessman who gave him Rs 52 lakh over a period of time after the accused claimed he could bring about a "money rain" with some rituals. — PTI

Visas of stranded foreigners extended

New Delhi: The visas of foreign nationals, stranded in India due to the Covid-19 pandemic, have been extended by the government till August 31 on gratis basis or free of charge. The Union home ministry said that due to the non-availability of normal commercial flight operations on account of the pandemic since March, 2020, a number of foreign nationals who came to India prior to that date on valid Indian visas got stranded in the country. Indian visa or stay stipulation period of such foreign nationals stranded in India will be considered as deemed to be valid till August 31, 2021, on gratis basis without levy of any overstay penalty, the statement said. These foreign nationals will not be required to submit any application to the FRRO or FRO concerned for extension of their visas. — PTI

MoD clears project to build 6 subs

Continued from Page 1 Rosoboronexport, French Naval Group, South Korean Daewoo, German Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems and Spanish Navantia. Last year the DAC had approved these five foreign companies as the potential Original Equipment Manufacturers that could collaborate on the project. "This is a landmark approval, being the first case processed under the Strategic Partnership model. This would be one of the largest 'Make in India' projects and will serve to facilitate faster and more significant absorption of technology and create a tiered industrial ecosystem for submarine construction in India," the defence ministry said on Friday. China is now investing heavily in its Navy and has the fastest growing naval assets in the world. The DAC also accorded approval of procurement of air defence guns and ammunition for the Indian Army at an approximate cost of Rs 6,000 crores under the Buy and Make (Indian) category. The DAC extended the timelines for progressing urgent capital acquisitions under the delegated powers of the armed forces up to August 31, 2021. This will enable the armed forces to complete their immediate and critical acquisitions.

Between 1971 and 2020, 127 cyclonic storms hit India, max 33 cyclones recorded between 2011 and 2020 'Climate disasters displaced 39L Indians in 2020'

New Delhi, June 4: As many as 39 lakh people in India were displaced in 2020 due to climate disasters and conflicts, making it the fourth worst-hit country in the world to have such a high number of internal displacements, a new report said on Friday. The top three countries with high internal displacements last year were China, Philippines and Bangladesh, where over four million people were displaced, according to the State of India's Environment Report 2021 released by the Centre for Science and Environment. The report stated that 76 per cent of the internal displacements globally in 2020 were triggered by climate disasters. It said 4.05 crore people were displaced in the world

that year, out of which, 3.07 crore people were displaced due to climate disasters and 98 lakh due to conflicts and violence. In India, 39 lakh people were displaced in 2020 due to climate disasters, conflicts and violence, the report stated. However, most of the displacements occurred due to major climate disasters like avalanches and landslides in Jammu and Kashmir, flood in Tamil Nadu, glacial lake outburst in Uttarakhand, Cyclone Nivar in Puducherry and Cyclone Burevi in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it said. It also said that an average of around 3.73 million people a year were displaced between 2008 and 2020, the majority by flooding during the monsoon. India is also prone to other sudden and slow-



Health workers plant saplings on the eve of World Environment Day at Saphthagiri Institute of Medical Science and Research Centre in Bengaluru on Friday. — PTI

onset hazards, including earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, storm surges and droughts, it said.

The report projected that India could see 2.3 million internal displacements every year due to earth-

quakes, tsunamis, floods, cyclonic winds and storms. According to the report, the last decade saw the

highest number of cyclonic storms over the north Indian Ocean since the 1970s. Between 1971 and 2020, 127 cyclonic storms hit India, out of which, the maximum cyclones (33) were recorded between 2011 and 2020. Five cyclonic storms occurred in 2020 alone. While Cyclone Amphan crossed the West Bengal coast over Sundarbans on May 20 this year and claimed 90 lives and about 4,000 livestock, Cyclone Nisarga crossed Maharashtra coast on June 3. It claimed four lives and 2,000 livestock. Cyclone Nivar crossed Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coasts close to north of Puducherry and claimed 12 lives and 10,836 livestock over Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Lastly, Cyclone Burevi

claimed nine lives and 200 livestock. Cyclone Gati made landfall over Somalia coast. The report stated that 21 major weather events claimed over 1,374 lives in 2020. Heavy rains, floods and thunderstorms were responsible for over 51 per cent of the deaths. Lightning was responsible for 33 per cent of the deaths. The data shared in the report revealed that out of the 1,374 deaths in the country, 300 people died in Bihar alone. In Uttar Pradesh, 189 people lost their lives, while 144 people died in Jharkhand due to extreme weather events. In Assam, heavy rain and flood took 129 lives in 2020, while 73 people died in Maharashtra and 72 each in Madhya Pradesh and Kerala, it said. — PTI

Scribe booked for WhatsApp status on Wullar tragedy

Faces charges of attempting to cause riot, public mischief

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, JUNE 4

The Jammu and Kashmir police has filed a first information report (FIR) against a journalist based in northern Bandipore district over a WhatsApp status which referred to over 20 schoolchildren who died due to drowning in Wullar, the Asia's largest freshwater lake, in May 2006 as "martyred". A female teacher and a peon had also died in the boat capsizing incident. The WhatsApp status of Sajid Maqbool Raina, a reporter with local news agency — KNO — has the photographs of 20 of the victims with the caption, reading "Walur martyred...30th May 2006". It also says, "The children share graves here. Brothers have been buried together, somewhere three children are buried in the same grave. The tragedy is still fresh. #Boat collapsed". (sic) The FIR registered at the Bandipore police station on May 31 under Sections 153 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause a riot — if rioting be committed — and 505 (statements conducting to public mischief) of the IPC accuses Sajid of uploading the "provocative post" on social media which

may hurt the sentiments of the local people and could also disturb peace. The sections of Valley's media fraternity have expressed shock and dismay at the police action. However, a police official who spoke to this newspaper on the condition of anonymity said that the criticism is "unwarranted and misplaced." He said, "The reporter has not used the word martyrs for the deceased children but martyred, implying they were deliberately killed". He added, "However, the local police authorities are investigating the case and will ascertain if the status was uploaded with mala fide intent or not." A statement issued by the Bandipore police said that the reporter's WhatsApp status "attracts investigation into the content and intention behind it." It added, "It (FIR) was not against anyone's profession particularly journalists as being circulated in social media." The death of the schoolchildren and two staff members of a private school of north-western Handwara town who were on excursion when the Indian Navy boat assault (BAUT) they took for the joyride capsized in the lake, had sparked off widespread protests and shutdowns in the Valley.

BJP suspends MLC for targeting Nitish Kumar

NAYEAR AZAD PATNA, JUNE 4

Simmering discontent within the NDA surfaced on Friday when BJP suspended one of its MLC Tunna Pandey for making statements against chief minister Nitish Kumar. Mr Pandey had recently stoked a controversy by calling Mr Kumar a "chief minister of circumstances" and also threatened to expose him for "having a connection with liquor mafia since 2009". BJP state president Sanjay Jaiswal on Friday issued his suspension letter in which he said that "a show-cause notice was served to you by the party's disciplinary committee for making comments against the party line. Instead of furnishing a valid explanation, you made another statement. You are being suspended with immediate effect".



Tunna Pandey

Taking a strong objection to his controversial statements against Bihar CM, the BJP disciplinary committee chief Vijay Singh had served Mr Pandey a notice Thursday, seeking an explanation within 10 days. Sources said that action was initiated after NDA allies JD(U) and HAM raised the issue with BJP state president Sanjay Jaiswal. Later, when he was approached for his comments regarding the issue, Mr Pandey said that "I will give explanations regarding my statements

to my party leaders soon". He has been targeting Nitish ever since the NDA formed the government in Bihar. Recently, he created a flutter in state politics by saying that "the mandate in 2020 elections was in favour of Tejashwi Yadav but Nitish became the chief minister by misusing official machinery". He also refused to withdraw his statements, saying that he was not afraid of speaking the truth. "I will expose Nitish Kumar's alliance with liquor mafias in Bihar. My party is BJP but I am also a public representative so nobody can stop me from speaking the truth". Reports suggest after he was served notice, Mr Pandey had met Osama Shahab, son of former RJD MP Mohammad Shahabuddin. There is also a buzz that he is in touch with RJD leadership and may join the party soon.

Shocking that 18-yr-old boy was shot by police, pay ₹10L compensation: SC to Bihar

SC pulls up police over boy's death in firing

New Delhi, June 4: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to interfere with Patna high court order directing payment of ₹10 lakh compensation to father of 18-year-old boy, who was allegedly killed in a police firing incident in Munger district of Bihar last year, saying that it is shocking that a young boy was shot. The top court observed that police had not investigated the case properly because then Munger

superintendent of police was a relative of a member of the ruling party. The boy was shot on October 26, last year during clashes between police and mob going to do immersion of idols of goddess Durga after which he was brought to the hospital, where he succumbed to the injury. A bench of Justices Indira Banerjee and M.R. Shah said, "A 18-year-old body, a bystander was shot by the police and we can say the way the police has

investigated this matter is really shocking. "We find no ground to interfere with the judgment and order impugned in exercise of power under Article 136 of the Constitution of India. The special leave petition is, accordingly, dismissed." At the outset, Justice Shah said, "We have gone through the case files and the orders of the high court. We can say that the police have done absolutely nothing in the matter.

Then Munger SP is a relative of member of the ruling party in Bihar. That's why nothing was done and the case was transferred to CID. You must comply with the order." "We have gone through the order. It is well reasoned order which does not call for any interference. He was a young boy who had his entire life before him," Justice Shah added. Advocate Manish Kumar, appearing for Bihar government, vehemently

opposed the observations and said that he is not challenging the order but is against ₹10 lakh compensation at this stage, when there is no clear cut finding that whether the youth was a victim or an accused, as firearms were found in the procession. He said that the procession was illegal as permission was granted for immersion of idols till October 25 but they took out the procession on October 26, last year. — PTI

RBI cuts FY22 growth forecast

Continued from Page 1

the MPC decided to keep the policy rate at its current level of four per cent and to continue with the accommodative stance as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis and continue to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, while ensuring that inflation remains within the target going forward," the RBI governor said. Deploying an expanded set of tools to support financial conditions in the economy, including interventions in bond and foreign exchange markets, the RBI also continued with its targeted support approach to the most stressed segments. "We believe inflation management could pose a serious challenge to the RBI when the fuel price pass through starts to occur," said India Ratings. The bigger move was with regards to yield management as the RBI stressed on smooth liquidity management and orderly government securities borrowings. To soften the G-Sec yield, the RBI announced G-SAP 2.0 with a higher amount of ₹1.2 lakh crores. On the liquidity front, the RBI has created a new on-tap liquidity window for contact intensive sectors and allocated an additional ₹16,000 crores to SIDBI to meet the funding requirements of micro, small and medium enterprises. Mr Das further said his focus now will be on equitable distribution of systemic liquidity than on simply providing adequate systemic liquidity.



Dark clouds hover over CST and BMC building in Mumbai on Friday. — PTI

UP police acts tough on its men, over 500 cops shifted

HOOCH DEATHS

Aligarh (UP), June 4: In a major shake-up in the district police after the recent hooch tragedies, police have transferred over 500 of their men, an official said Friday as the death toll in the second case rose to nine. Three more people who had consumed spurious liquor found dumped in a canal near Rohera village in Jawan area here have died, officials said. Another man died Friday in the district's Kodyagunj village and officials are linking it with the same stock of liquor found in the canal

near Rohera village on June 2 by some brick kiln workers. These deaths are apart from people killed in the first case, in which 35 people are confirmed to have died of liquor poisoning. The number could be higher as reports of viscera examination on 52 more suspected victims are still awaited. All the victims, including women, in the June 2 hooch tragedy belonged to a group of around 120 migrant workers from

Bihar. They were living in temporary shanties at the local brick kiln where they worked. Senior superintendent of police Kalanidhi Naithani said more than 540 police personnel who were posted at the same police station for over two years have been transferred. He said 148 of them have been shunted out of the district. Five police inspectors, including two station house officers, and a circle officer have been suspended for suspected links with the liquor mafia, he said. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

5 JUNE 2021

Change in pension rules a bid to stifle critical voices

Earlier this week, the government amended Rule 8 of the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules 1972. It aims to prevent retired officials from writing books or newspaper articles or give interviews without taking prior approval from the current heads of those organisations. In practice, this is likely to amount to a blanket ban unless, in a specific case, the government wants to promote a viewpoint through a retired officer.

It is evident that changing the pension rules amounts to dangling the threat of withholding or even withdrawing the pension earned through decades of dedicated service. This seems an intimidation tactic. In a recent interview, former Army chief Gen. V.P. Malik (Retd) said the amendment “requires a review” and that it was “overarching”. The military leader, who led the Army with distinction in the Kargil war, chose to speak his mind although the military is not covered under the change made. He rightly noted the Official Secrets Act was adequate deter those who seek to compromise national security.

A retired chief of both the Intelligence Bureau and Research and Analysis Wing, A.S. Dulat, who was an adviser in Atal Behari Vajpayee’s PMO, is an author of many books and newspaper articles and is often interviewed in the media, has said he wouldn’t be seeking permission. He also said the amendment “isn’t right”. He wondered aloud in an interview if the changed rule would apply even if he chose to write literature or poetry. And there is a reason for this.

If the government turned nasty, this could easily apply to a short story, poem or novel where insights or experiences of a period are referred to

Experiences of a period are referred to. Why link pension, widely seen as an inalienable part of government service, to drummed-up fears on national security? It is necessary to raise the question as it is simply clear that through their writings and interviews, and through their contribution to think tanks whose discussions are frequently reflected in public forums, retired senior officials enrich the national conversation by raising the level of debate and discussion. They help us better grasp matters relating to national security, on which millions of rupees from the exchequer are spent. The process makes for an aware citizenry, an unquantifiable attribute that aids society and the State by preparing people for times of crisis. The experience of retired senior officials, when made public, also enhances the scope of knowledge production.

There are 18 departments in the Second Schedule of the RTI Act that are covered under the amended order covering pensions. These include the IB and RAW, the paramilitary forces like BSF, CRPF, ITBP, CISF, Assam Rifles, SSB, SFF, the special branch and CID in select locations like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra, Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep. The Enforcement Directorate, Narcotics Control Bureau and the Central Economic Intelligence Bureau, outfits which are suspected to be used to harass political opponents, are also covered.

The list of departments suggests that the government is sensitive to any criticism or implied criticism in the future to policies related to Kashmir and the Northeast or distant maritime regions where the intelligence and security services are salient, and is keen that suppressing dissidents and political opponents is cost-free.

SDG: Gaps flagged, bridge them

A look at the dashboard of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index of Niti Aayog showing data that was released on Thursday throws up little surprise — some Indian states are seen making steady progress while some fail to catch up in improving the lot of their people. And the pattern continues to be similar to what we have seen over all these decades — the South and West are doing relatively well compared with the northern and eastern states. Kerala retains its top position with 75 points while Tamil Nadu has shared the second spot with Himachal Pradesh, each scoring 74 points. Bihar is at the bottom of the list with 52 points. India as a nation has improved its own position by scoring 66 points against last year’s 60 on the back of better performance in areas such as clean energy, urban development and sanitation. The 2021 index covers 17 goals, 70 targets and 115 indicators compared with last year’s 17 goals, 54 targets and 100 indicators.

As per Niti Aayog, the SDG India Index is intended to provide a holistic view on the social, economic and environmental status of the country as a whole as well as those of the individual states and the Union territories and to provide decisionmakers with critical data for action. It is designed with the help of the United Nations and is expected to help states “understand reasons for differential performance and devise better strategies to achieve the SDGs by 2030”. It should also throw light on the areas where more investment is needed. It’s now over to the states to understand the gaps and focus their priorities.

Data are dead numbers unless the people who are entrusted with the job make proper use of it. It calls for a political will and sagacity.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



BBC’s Di interview, Harry & Meghan... Why do the Brits ‘love’ their Queen?

“How does a seed turn mud into trees?
God won’t say!
Numbers of leaves defy infinities
Nature at play!
Odours the animals, pollen the bees
The eternal way.
The sun sets; birds dance on the breeze
The sky is grey... “

— From **Wobhi Theek** by Bachchoo

The most famous remark of the late Princess Diana in her BBC interview with journalist Martin Bashir was: “Well, there were three of us in this marriage, so it was a bit crowded.”

It was not a revelation. Prince Charles had weeks before admitted in a publicised interview his relationship with Camilla Parker Bowles.

The remark was perceived by the media and the public as an insight into Diana’s suffering and seen as an assault on the morals and integrity of the royal family. It precipitated the Queen’s agreement that Charles file for a divorce.

At the time there was a lot of speculation about how Martin Bashir had persuaded Diana to give him that interview and launch the royal

scandal. Last week, 25 years after the broadcast, the report of an inquiry into that question has been published. The report, compiled by Lord Dyson (not the muck-suction tycoon) was an exposure of Martin Bashir’s perfidious and possibly criminal means of obtaining the interview. Lord Dyson severely criticised the coverup of his actions by the BBC.

The report reveals that Bashir, a junior BBC journalist, got a colleague in the BBC to forge bank statements which “proved” that the press were paying Princess Diana’s staff to spy on her and give them details of her relationship with an Army officer called James Hewitt. Bashir took these forged bank statements to Earl Spencer, Diana’s brother, and persuaded him that Diana should tell all in an interview before the media went on to characterise her as the villain in the triangle — or quadrilateral?

In the interview, Diana admitted her relationship with Hewitt before it got exposed as scandalous. Perhaps she could have, quite justifiably, said: “Well, since there were three of us in this marriage, I assumed there could be a fourth!”

The BBC apparently knew about the

forged documents and Martin Bashir’s devious means of obtaining the interview and covered it up. Bashir was not reprimanded or disciplined and was, years later, hired as the BBC’s head of religion.

Bashir protests that Diana was quite willing to give him an interview in any case and that his forged documents weren’t instrumental in helping persuade her to speak to him.

The 25-year-old episode has been brought to light again and became the focus of media attention displacing, however briefly, the reports from the world and especially India on the Covid devastation, the Israel-Hamas conflict and terrorist activity in Mozambique. Prince William gave an interview attacking the BBC and claiming the interview had led directly to his mother’s death.

The newspapers were in the main very happy to use the Dyson report to attack the BBC without making the connection between Diana’s death two years later in a speeding car which crashed in a Parisian tunnel as it was being relentlessly pursued by — no, not gremlins — the same newspaper paparazzi.

That the public is interested in the shenanigans and quarrels of the royal family is not surprising. There’s

always something to report. The last three focuses on the royals were in themselves, even to a republican like myself, gentle reader, momentarily entertaining.

A year ago, Prince Andrew, the Queen’s favourite son, was interviewed on the BBC’s *Newsnight* programme about his involvement or friendship with the late Jacob Epstein, the paedophile billionaire who procured young girls for him.

And then there was the Prince Harry and Meghan Markle interview with Oprah Winfrey in the United States. It was seen as an assault on the prejudices and repressive controls within the royal family and caused an estrangement between Harry, his father and brother William.

The death and funeral of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, brought Prince Harry back briefly to England but the focus shifted from Philip’s deeds and gaffes to the froideur between Harry and William.

The Windsor Castle funeral, with the restrictions on gatherings imposed by the Covid lockdown, prevented any mass congregation of citizens, but still they came in their hundreds to profess their love for a man they had never met.

I completely understand, gentle

reader, the admiration one may feel for, say, Muhammad Ali, Nelson Mandela or even one of the cricketers or Bollywood actors, male and female — though I suspect the last three have some affinity to the worship of deities. But love?

I, just like you, have various experiences covered by the word. Parental, both ways, romantic and even loving a favourite flower, food or wine... but for members of a privileged, parasitical and patronage-lending, mostly idle family?

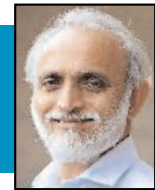
It’s not that I feel Cromwellian in my republicanism. And I certainly don’t feel that a Parliament dominated by the likes of Boris Johnson and the freepart and deport Indian variants, Priti Clueless and Wishi Sunak, or the mendacious health secretary Matt Halfcock are doing a better job than if it were all left to Liz II.

My faith in parliamentary democracy has been deeply shaken through assessing the actions of elected leaders and parties of several nations in this our sad vale of oppressions. But the hope is that Prime Ministers are not permanent and that even in those countries the populace doesn’t love them like the tribal Brits just “love” their Queen.

Subhani



The business of gagging retired spooks isn’t easy



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

A recent amendment to the pension rules of Central government employees provides that those who worked with the intelligence and security agencies, and certain other organisations dealing with India’s scientific, strategic and economic interests, will stand to lose their pensions if they write or talk publicly about the outfits they were once associated with and the work they do. It’s a clear warning for former spies and spooks, and others who know a little too much about the secrets of the State, that they will lose their pension and other benefits if they were to spill the beans. Given the fact that all of us live in a nation state framework and that we are obliged to protect the interests of the State, it seems but natural that those who were part of officialdom and who worked in the inner circles of the Secret State — which is quite distinct from the Deep State — are honour-bound to keep the secrets till the very end.

It is one of the paradoxes of the modern State that though it operates within a democratic framework and the assumption is that the State is there to protect the interests of all citizens living within its boundaries, it turns out at many times citizens are asked to pay obedience to the State, and even surrender their democratic rights for the survival of the State. And this obligation becomes a draconian demand on those who had worked for the State, and that too in its deepest recesses. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government is understandably even more paranoid about the secrets — often dirty and dark — of the State as

befits a political party with the ideology of idol-worshipping the State. The tweak in the pension rules then does not come as much of a surprise.

But it’s a matter of some curiosity and much speculation about why the BJP-led NDA government felt compelled to bring in these punitive changes at this juncture. Is there a fear in the class of political masters that they had tried to use spy rings and the security experts to promote their own agenda on the pretext of serving the State’s interests? The case of Mehul Choksi, the fugitive diamond merchant, in Antigua-Dominica does point to some dirty plan that may have gone wrong, or the sedition cases foisted on critics of this government as well as against students and ailing social activists do point to the possibility that the Modi government may have a lot more to hide on issues that involve so-called national interests.

But the government’s real irritation lies elsewhere. The retired bureaucrats who have been constantly needing the government are mostly from the IAS and IFS, not many from the intelligence and security services. There are many “grey areas” in this order. If anyone were to write on developments after they left the service, will they attract the punitive action implied in the amendment? The scope of vagueness is much too large.

It is fairly unlikely that in India any government will have to face a book like *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man: The Shocking Story of How America Took over the World*, the 2006 best-seller by John Perkins, a former Central Intelligence Agency operative, which showed the reputa-

sive underbelly of America’s secret operations in other countries. If ever there is a book like that of Perkins, it might have more stories of failures rather than successful subversions, in the small countries of South Asia and in the Indian Ocean region.

The issue, however, throws up fundamental issues of morality as well as realpolitik. At the moral level, the citizens of a democratic state have a right to know whether the money they pay in taxes is used for diabolical acts like murder and mayhem, and whether innocent people are being trapped and framed. These goings-on can only be told by those who have worked within the intelligence and security agencies. If the State commits criminal acts in the name of State interests, people have a right to know and to call out the leaders who allowed these things to happen.

It’s necessary to know the truth from the realpolitik viewpoint, even if we choose to junk morality. The people have a right to know if ostensibly immoral operations have helped the State’s cause or not. It may be that the State would have suffered a lot of harm through ill-thought plans of subversion at home and abroad. Many of America’s overseas operations have been utter failures, and the costs in terms of money and men was quite high. The examples of the wars that America has waged in Afghanistan, Iraq and

Syria in the past 20 years in a case in point. No government would, however, allow any of its former employees to spill the beans, and it is natural to hold out the threat of penalties. In India’s case, the government’s amendment of the pension rules only holds out financial penalties. The former spy or security establishment insider who writes on things he is prohibited from writing, except when permission is granted by a higher officer, will stand to lose his/her pension and other handouts.

Of course, all this is another way of validating the Official Secrets Act. But we know that at least in democratic countries, secret documents are declassified, and the time bar in India is 30 years. Unlike in many other countries, especially those in the West, many of the State’s crimes are committed and no record is left about it. It is very unlikely that any of the Indian intelligence agencies, like the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) or the Intelligence Bureau (IB), is ever likely to keep scrupulous records of all the right and wrong things that they have done, and which at least after a lifetime come to light. During the Shah Commission hearings after the Emergency, P.N. Haksar, Indira Gandhi’s onetime confidant, told the commission that not all orders were put in writing. It is often left to the eyewitness or the victim to speak the truth. It is in situations like these that a former spy or security insider has to speak out for the sake of the truth and morality. Of course, he or she does not have to do so. But if there is a call of the conscience, it may become a compelling need. Then the threat of losing his/her pension or other post-retirement financial benefits may not deter the person from speaking out.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

MORE THINGS CHANGE

The winds of change are blowing again in Israel with Opposition parties reaching a deal to oust Benjamin Netanyahu, the longest-serving PM in the Jewish nation’s history. The new coalition is an alliance between eight political parties from an adverse array of ideologies. Naftali Bennett, a former settler leader and standard-bearer for religious nationalists, who wants Israel to annex most of the occupied West Bank, and Yair Lapid, leader of the centrist Yesh Atid party, will share power. In a rare first, the coalition includes an Arab-Israeli party, Ra’am. However, Palestinians are not sure that Mr Netanyahu’s departure will improve their lot.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

THE CHEAPEST JOB

THE DECISION TO book 30 crore doses of Biological E’s Covid-19 vaccine before it has launched marks a major shift in the government’s stance on procurement for mass immunization against the coronavirus. The advance order, which includes ₹1,500 crore in monetary assistance to help the company stockpile doses, is the government’s first at-risk investment on vaccines so far. Bio E’s two-dose vaccine, known as Corbevax, is likely to be among the cheapest Covid-19 vaccines that will be available in India.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

ADVANTAGE KIWIS

NEW ZEALAND will get valuable match practice and acclimatising to the heavy swinging conditions in the early part of the English summer in the two Tests that they play against England before the World Test Championship final against India on June 18, 2021. In contrast, India will go into the final with none. Why the BCCI did not negotiate for a Test against England before the WTC final is anybody’s guess. The Kiwis clearly have the advantage over Men in Blue.

Srinivas Kamat
Alto St Cruz, Goa

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

SHORT TAKES

FIRE AT JUVENILE
DETENTION KILLS
6 KIDS IN EGYPT

Cairo: A fire broke out on Thursday at a juvenile detention center in Egypt's capital of Cairo, killing at least six children, officials said.

The officials said the fire followed a fist-fight between two children in one ward at the facility, located in the city's Marj district. More than two dozen other children were injured, they said.

Police are holding those running the facility as prosecutors investigate the cause of the fire, the officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief media.

It was not immediately clear what caused the fire. Initial investigation blamed an electric short-circuit for the blaze, according to state-run media.

The state-run newspaper *Akhbar el-Yom* reported that the children were not able to flee the fire because the ward was locked.

JAILED SAMSUNG
LEADER FINED FOR
PROPOFOL SHOTS

Seoul: South Korean prosecutors fined the jailed de facto leader of the giant Samsung group 50 million won (\$45,000) on Friday for illegally taking shots of the anaesthetic propofol. Lee Jae-yong — the 168th richest person in the world according to Forbes — is currently serving a two-and-a-half year prison sentence for bribery, embezzlement and other offences in connection with the corruption scandal that brought down ex-South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

He is also standing a separate trial over alleged stock manipulation that effectively eased the path for him to take control of the family conglomerate. Propofol is normally a medical anaesthetic but is also sometimes used recreationally. An overdose of the drug was given as the cause of pop star Michael Jackson's death in 2009.

Lee was accused of having repeatedly taken it at a plastic surgery clinic in Seoul in 2017 and 2018.

GERMAN CLERIC
TO QUIT OVER
CHURCH ABUSE

Berlin: A leading German cardinal and confidant of Pope Francis, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, offered to resign Friday over the Catholic Church's "catastrophic" mishandling of clergy sexual abuse cases, declaring in an extraordinary gesture that the scandals had brought the church to "a dead end." The archdiocese of Munich and Freising, where Marx has served as archbishop since 2007, published his resignation letter to the pope online, in multiple languages, and the cardinal said Francis had given him permission to make it public.

"It is important to me to share the responsibility for the catastrophe of the sexual abuse by Church officials over the past decades," the 67-year-old Marx wrote in the letter. But he also issued a challenge of sorts for his fellow bishops to use the opportunity of the scandal to save the church and reform it. There was no immediate comment from the Vatican, where Marx sits on powerful financial and political committees.

12 OZ FIRMS FINED
FOR BREAKING
PELL ORDER

Canberra: A judge on Friday ordered a dozen Australian media companies to pay fines from 1,000 Australian dollars (\$766) to AU\$450,000 (\$345,000) for breaching a gag order by publishing references to Cardinal George Pell's since-overturned convictions in 2018 for child sexual abuse.

Dozens of companies, reporters and editors were initially charged with contempt and breaching a suppression order over their coverage of the convictions, which were banned from publication in Australia until February 2019.

Such suppression orders are common in the Australian and British judicial systems. But the enormous international interest in an Australian criminal trial with global ramifications highlighted the difficulty in enforcing such orders in the digital age. The media companies pleaded guilty in February to 21 charges of contempt in a plea deal in the Victoria state Supreme Court.



People hold up their phones with the light on in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong on Friday, after police closed the venue where Hong Kong people traditionally gather annually to mourn the victims of China's Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 which the authorities have banned citing the Coronavirus pandemic and vowed to stamp out any protests on the anniversary.

— AFP

HK park empty for 1st time in
32 years on Tiananmen anniv

Cops enforce ban public commemorations but protests flicker at distance

Hong Kong, June 4: A Hong Kong park that traditionally hosts huge vigils on the anniversary of China's deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown lay empty for the first time late Friday as police blocked access, but flashes of defiance still flickered across the city.

Huge crowds have routinely gathered in Hong Kong's Victoria Park to mark the anniversary of Chinese troops crushing peaceful democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.

Hundreds were killed in the crackdown, by some estimates more than 1,000.

Public commemorations are forbidden on the mainland and, until recently, semi-autonomous Hong Kong was the one place in China where large scale

remembrance was still tolerated.

This year's vigil was banned at a time when authorities are carrying out a sweeping clampdown on dissent following huge and often violent democracy protests two years ago.

Police threw cordons around the Victoria Park, keeping crowds out and leaving the venue free of candle carrying mourners for the first time in 32 years.

Activists who approached the park were stopped and searched, while officers used loud

hailers and signs to call for people to disperse from nearby streets.

Some officers displayed signs warning chanting crowds that they were in breach of a sweeping new national security law Beijing imposed on the

● **POLICE THREW cordons around the Victoria Park, keeping crowds out and leaving the venue free of candle carrying mourners for the first time in 32 years.**

city last year to stamp out dissent.

Unable to muster en masse, many Hong Kong residents still found other ways to mourn the dead.

As the clock struck 8pm in Hong Kong's shopping district of Mong Kok, dozens of people simultaneously turned their mobile phone lights on, a small gesture of defiance in a city where mass remembrance of Beijing's Tiananmen crackdown has been banned.

It was a scene repeated

in multiple districts across the city.

For the last 32 years, crowds of Hong Kongers, often tens of thousands

strong, have come together each June 4 in the city's Victoria Park to hold a candlelight vigil for those killed in 1989 when tanks and troops crushed pro-democracy protesters in China's capital.

Police arrested an organiser of Hong Kong's annual candlelight vigil

remembering the deadly crackdown in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, warned people not to attend the banned event and cordoned off parts of the venue on Friday as authorities mute China's last pro-democracy voices.

In past years, tens of thousands of people gathered in Hong Kong's Victoria Park to honour those who

died when China's military put down student-led pro-democracy protests on June 4, 1989.

Hundreds, if not thousands, were killed. China's ruling Communist Party has never allowed public events on the mainland to mark the anniversary and security was increased at the Beijing square, with police checking pedestrians' IDs as tour buses shuttled Chinese tourists in and out.

Chinese officials say the country's rapid economic development in the years since what they call the "political turmoil" of 1989 proves that decisions made at the time were correct.

Efforts to suppress public memory of the Tiananmen events have lately turned to Hong Kong.

— AFP/AP

S. Korea air chief
quits as abused
woman ends life

Seoul, June 4: South Korea's air force chief resigned on Friday, apologising and taking responsibility for the death of a member of the force who took her own life, according to her family, after being sexually harassed by a colleague.

Lee Seong-yong offered to step down a day after an air force master sergeant was arrested on charges of molesting and injuring a female colleague of the same rank in March.

The family of the victim said she had suffered mental distress and persistent bullying, and accused the air force of trying to cover up the assault and silence her over the past two months.

President Moon Jae-in immediately accepted Lee's resignation, his press secretary said, making him the shortest serving South Korean air

force chief after appointing him in September.

"I would like to extend my apology to the citizens and deep condolences to the deceased person and her family. I feel heavy responsibility and offer my resignation," Lee said in a statement.

The case sparked a public outcry after the woman's family filed a petition with Moon's office on Tuesday calling for a thorough investigation and punishment for those involved. More than 326,000 people have signed it so far.

Moon ordered an investigation on Thursday including on how the air force handled the case, as the family reported three officials at Lee's base to military prosecutors, accusing two of them of dereliction of duty and attempted compulsion and the other of sexual harassment.

— Reuters

NZ allows way for
China extradition

Wellington, June 4: New Zealand's top court on Friday left open the possibility that a man could be extradited to China to face murder charges in a landmark case that has big diplomatic implications.

It remains uncertain whether the extradition of Kyung Yup Kim will proceed in a case that has already dragged on for more than a decade.

The dispute hinges on whether New Zealand can be assured that Kim will get a fair trial if he's sent to China and won't be tortured. New Zealand doesn't have an extradition treaty with China.

New Zealand's Supreme Court on Friday didn't make a final ruling on the case but asked for more information from Justice Minister Kris Faafoi and others to be submitted by the end of July.

The 3-2 split decision found that it was possible for New Zealand to get sufficient assurance from China about Kim's welfare, partially overturning an earlier appeals court ruling.

Such assurances could include confirmation that representatives could visit Kim at least every 48 hours during the investigation and that the trial take place in Shanghai. But times have changed since a previous justice minister from a conservative government backed extradition. Faafoi is from a liberal government and will decide how to proceed at a time when relations with China have deteriorated.

The court acknowledged Faafoi might see things differently, saying he would be "entitled to depart from the previous minister's decision."

— AP

China urges closer Afghan
ties as US pullout looms

Beijing, June 4: China is urging closer security and economic cooperation with Afghanistan in an apparent effort to bolster its influence in the region as the US and its allies prepare to withdraw their forces from the country.

The official *Xinhua* News Agency reported that foreign ministers from China, Afghanistan and Pakistan met via video conference on Thursday and agreed that the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan should be carried out in a responsible and orderly manner to prevent the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan and the return of "terrorist forces."

It quoted Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi as saying the three countries "needed to strengthen communication and cooperation" for the sake

of Afghanistan's interests and those of neighbouring countries.

"The security and stability of Afghanistan and the region are facing new challenges, with foreign troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan accelerated, the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan impacted, and armed conflicts and terrorist activities becoming more frequent," Wang was quoted as saying. China has long resented the presence of US and allied forces in Afghanistan, but is equally wary of the country becoming a haven for insurgents that could threaten security in its Xinjiang region that shares a narrow border with Afghanistan.

Xinhua said Wang, Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammad Hanef Atmar and Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi "stressed the need to ...

forbid any terrorist organisations or individuals from using their territories to engage in criminal activities against other countries."

China has sought to invest in Afghan resources, particularly copper, but constant fighting between the government, the Taliban and other groups has largely held back such projects. China has also sought to boost already close ties with Pakistan through its Belt and Road initiative, but the country's economic weakness and security problems have blunted the success of that drive.

The United States is preparing to wrap up its longest war by withdrawing the last of its 2,500, 3,500 troops along with 7,000 allied Nato forces by September 11 at the latest, generating fears of increased chaos in a country already deeply insecure.

— AP

Corporate tax 'in sight' as G7 meets

London, June 4: Group of Seven finance ministers kicked off talks Friday, with optimism growing that the world's wealthiest countries will support US-backed plans for a minimum global level of corporate tax.

British finance minister Rishi Sunak was hosting the meet — held in person after an easing of Covid restrictions and attended by counterparts from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.

The talks were preparing the ground for a broader summit of G7 leaders in Cornwall, southwest England starting on June 11, which will include US President Joe Biden on his first foreign tour since taking office in January.

Momentum is building for a minimum level of corporate tax to prevent multinationals like tech giants from playing the system to boost profits.

Corporate tax is one of two pillars in efforts for global fiscal reforms, the other being a "digital tax"



Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak speaks to Canada's finance minister Chrystia Freeland (right) on the first day of the G7 Finance Ministers Meeting at Lancaster House in London on Friday.

— AFP

to allow countries to tax the profits of multinationals headquartered overseas. "It is increasingly clear that in a complex, global, digital economy, we cannot continue to rely on a tax system that was largely designed as in the 1920s," Sunak said in opening remarks.

"And I would just say this: The world has noticed. And I believe they

have high expectations for what we all can agree over the coming days.

"Opportunities to make truly lasting reforms like this do not come very often, and I sincerely hope that we seize the moment." The finance chiefs and central bankers of the world's seven richest nations will express "strong support" and a "high level of ambition"

over a minimum global minimum corporate tax rate.

They then hope to reach broader agreement at a G20 finance meeting scheduled for July.

Ministers also plan to commit to "sustain policy support", or stimulus, for "as long as necessary" to nurture economic recovery, while addressing climate change and inequalities in society, according to the document.

Furthermore, they will urge "equitable, safe and affordable access to Covid-19 vaccines" everywhere.

The thorny topic of the regulation of digital currencies such as bitcoin will also be on the agenda.

Biden has called for a unified minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent in negotiations with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and G20. His proposal has so far won broad support from countries such as France and Germany, as well as the International Monetary Fund.

— AFP

EXCITEMENT | APPREHENSION | 11-day long annual celebration of cinema, will be held in person from July 6 to 17th

Cannes film festival all set to showcase 61 films

SUPARNA SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

Jodie Foster, vaccination certificates, regular RT-PCR tests, celebrities in designer dresses negotiating the 24 red-carpet steps and a touch of the supernatural are all set to mark the opening of the 11-day long annual celebration of cinema at the 74th Cannes Film Festival that will be held in person from July 6 to 17th.

Whatever may be the apprehension of cinephiles and the film fraternity around the world about hosting an in-person

event at the grand Palais des Festivals theatre on the shore of the Mediterranean, festival president Pierre Lescure and general delegate Thierry Frémaux betrayed none as they unveiled the list of 61 films on Thursday morning that will premiere at Cannes 2021.

The Cannes website claims that 18,000 professionals and journalists have already applied for accreditation and from the looks of it, Pierre and Thierry are all set to welcome them all.

Last year, the 73rd

Cannes festival was cancelled owing to the raging Corona pandemic. But this year, with caution and preparation, it will go ahead.

Of the 61 films announced, 24 are in the festival's most prestigious Competition section. They will be vying for the Palme d'Or trophy — a delicate, golden sprig of leaf resting on a crystal cushion — that will be picked by a jury headed by American director Spike Lee.

Though opening films at Cannes have rarely ever lived up to the hype and expectation, there is buzz



Jodie Foster

around this year's opening film — French director Leos Carax's *Annette*, starring Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard.

Handsome in that very

French shabby-chic, chain smoking style, Carax is known for his "poetic, enigmatic" films that often tell tales of "tortured love". Carax's last film to premiere at Cannes was *Holy Motors* in 2012. It has been ranked as the 16th greatest film of the 21st century in a BBC critics' poll. *Annette* is a musical about "a provocative stand-up comedian and his wife, a world-famous soprano, and the unexpected turn their life takes when their daughter Annette is born, a girl with a unique gift".

Also in the Competition

section this year is *Flag Day*, a thriller directed by and starring Sean Penn, as well as Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch*. The comedy-drama's ensemble cast includes the starlights of American cinema, from Benicio delToro, Tilda Swinton and Frances McDormand to Willem Dafoe, Bill Murray and Owen Wilson.

Forty-five years after she was part of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* entourage, actress-director Jodie Foster will receive an honorary Palme d'Or at the Cannes' opening ceremony on July 6.

Then just 13 years old, Ms Foster has since starred in more than 50 films, directed four feature films, and received two Oscars (for *The Accused* in 1989 and *The Silence of the Lambs* in 1992).

That year, 1976, when Ms Foster climbed the stairs at the Palais Croisette, in Competition alongside *Taxi Driver* was Shyam Benegal's Hindi film, *Nishant*, starring Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, Girish Karnad and Amrish Puri.

This year there is no Indian film in Cannes' official section.5

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,100.05	-0.25
Nifty 50	15,670.30	-0.13
S&P 500*	4,225.86	0.79
Dollar (₹)	73.0	-0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.91	0.51
Euro (₹)	88.44	0.497
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,917.388	0.80
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	71.95	0.90
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.028	0.52
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.564	-0.063

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Govt caps trade margin on O2 machine at 70%

The government has capped the trade margin on oxygen concentrators at 70 per cent at the distributor level. The chemicals and fertilisers ministry said the decision has been taken in view of volatility in the MRP of oxygen concentrators. As per information collected by the government, margin on the oxygen concentrators at the distributor level currently ranges up to 198 per cent, the ministry added.

SBI lends ₹3,725 cr to Jewar Intl airport near Delhi



The Yamuna International Airport Pvt Ltd (YIAPL) has secured a loan of Rs 3,725 crore from the SBI for developing the Noida international airport at Jewar in UP. YIAPL is a Zurich Airport International subsidiary. The entire loan has been underwritten by SBI on a door-to-door loan tenor of 20 years," Christoph Schnellmann, CEO, YIAPL, said. Door-to-door loan means the principal and interest have to be paid within 20 years.

TCPL launches 'Sonnets By Tata Coffee' brand

Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) has made a foray into the premium roast and ground coffee segment with the launch of brand 'Sonnets By Tata Coffee'. Through this brand, TCPL is eyeing customers seeking a special coffee experience. These are microlot coffees that are limited edition offerings and are processed on the estates in a distinctive manner, it said. The aim is "to make it the go-to choice for the well-travelled."

Bayer opens consumer health division in India

Bayer said it has launched its Consumer Health division in India comprising 10 brands across the categories of allergy, dermatology, nutrition and analgesics. These brands include Saridon, Supradyn, Becozym C Forte, Benadon, Alaspan, Canesten and Bayer's Tonic. The brands Saridon and Supradyn licensed to Piramal Consumer Products division in the past, have been transitioned back to Bayer, it said.

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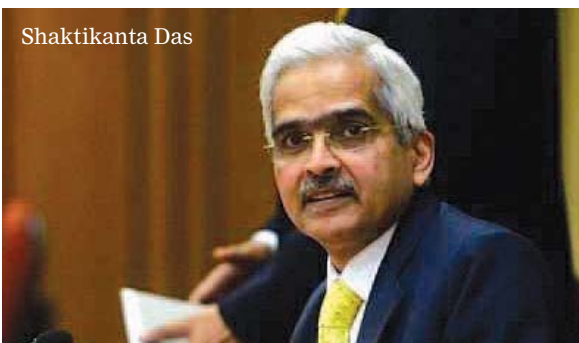
■ Struggling businesses can now get up to ₹50 cr Separate liquidity window for transport, hotels and tourism

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, JUNE 4

To address the adverse impact of the second wave of the Covid 19 pandemic, the Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday announced an on-tap additional liquidity window for Rs 15,000 crore for contact-intensive sectors including hotels and restaurants, transport, tourism, event management companies and beauty salons.

Besides it also raised the aggregate debt eligibility threshold to struggling businesses to Rs 50 crore from Rs 25 crore. Under the on-tap liquidity window, banks can provide loans of three-year tenures to "certain contact-intensive sectors i.e., hotels and restaurants; tourism – travel agents, tour operators and adventure/heritage facilities; aviation ancillary services – ground handling and supply chain; and other services that include private bus operators, car repair services, rent-a-car service providers, event/conference organisers, spa clinics, and beauty parlours/salons.

Banks are expected to create a separate Covid loan book under the scheme," the RBI said. Banks are to be incentivised by being permitted to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of their loan book under the scheme, with the reverse repo window at a rate 40 basis points higher than the reverse repo rate.



REITERATES CONCERNS OVER CRYPTO TRADING

SUVASHREE GHOSH
JUNE 4

The RBI reiterated its concerns over cryptocurrencies, clarifying its stance on digital assets just days after the regulator told banks to set aside a 2018 ban on trading. "There is no change in RBI's position," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das told reporters. "We have major concerns around cryptocurrency, which

we have conveyed to the government."

Das' comments come less than a week after the central bank told banks, which are needed to help facilitate crypto trades, not to cite a 2018 RBI circular as a reason to prevent such transactions. The order, which has since been struck down by the Supreme Court, can't be cited or quoted from, it said.

— Bloomberg

sure threshold from Rs 25 crore to Rs 50 crore for smaller businesses and loans to individuals for business purposes.

"Crisil rates about 6,800 mid-sized companies (excluding financial sector entities). Of these around 4,700 are small and medium enterprises (SMEs), having bank loan exposure of up to Rs 50 crore, and are standard accounts as on March 31, 2021, making these eligible to avail of the restructuring. As per

the earlier aggregate debt threshold of Rs 25 crore, only half of the Crisil-rated mid-sized companies were eligible. But now, with the revised threshold, almost two-thirds have come under the ambit of the restructuring scheme," said Subodh Rai, chief ratings officer, Crisil Ratings Ltd.

The RBI also provided Sidbi with a special liquidity facility of Rs 16,000 crore available at repo rate for one year for financial support to MSMEs.

"In order to meet MSMEs' short- and medium-term credit needs to kick start the investment cycle with additional focus on smaller MSMEs and businesses including those in credit deficient and aspirational districts, it has been decided to provide a further special liquidity facility of Rs 16,000 crore to Sidbi," said the RBI.

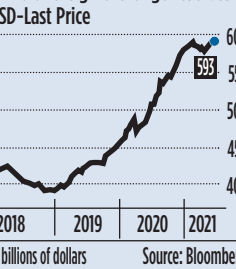
Meanwhile, the RBI monetary policy committee (MPC) kept the repo rate unchanged in the second bi-monthly policy meeting for the financial year 2021-22. With no change this time as well, the repo rate currently stands at 4 percent. The reverse repo rate has been maintained at 3.35 percent.

On the liquidity front, another GSAP operation under GSAP 1.0 will be conducted in June amounting to Rs 40,000 crore and GSAP 2.0 will be undertaken in 2Q worth Rs 1.2 lakh crore to support the liquidity.

FX reserves to help manage global spillovers: Das

Forex buffers

Forex pile will help fight spillovers
■ India foreign exchange reserves
USD-Last Price



ANIRBAN NAG
JUNE 4

The country's foreign exchange reserves have by all indications crossed \$600 billion, central bank chief Shaktikanta Das said, a huge buffer that will help insulate Asia's third-largest economy from global spillovers and volatile external flows.

Earlier this year, the country's forex reserves briefly surpassed Russia's to become the world's fourth-largest, as the Reserve Bank of India continued to hoard dollars to cushion the economy against any sudden outflows. The reserves are enough to cover around 15 months of imports and have been bolstered by rising inflows into the booming stock market and FDI.

"While these flows ease external financing constraints, they also impart volatility to financial markets and asset prices, while producing undesirable and unintended fluctuations in liquidity, Das said.

— Bloomberg

EU, UK open antitrust probe against Facebook over classified ads

KELVIN CHANAP
LONDON, JUNE 4



European Union and British regulators opened dual antitrust investigations on Friday into whether Facebook distorts competition in the classified advertising market by using data to compete unfairly against rival services.

The coordinated effort represents an escalation by European regulators in their battle to rein in the dominance of big tech companies. The focus of the investigations highlights a long-standing concern that the data they collect from people or businesses using their platforms is used to get an advantage over competitors, which could include those same businesses.

Facebook collects vast troves of data on the activities of users of its social network and beyond, enabling it to target specific customer groups, said Margrethe Vestager, the European Commission's executive vice president in charge of competition policy.

We will look in detail at whether this data gives Facebook an undue competitive advantage, in particular on the online classified ads sector, where people buy and sell goods every day, and where Facebook also competes with companies from which it collects data, Vestager said.

The UK's Competition and Markets Authority said in a simultaneous

announcement that it launched its own probe to examine whether Facebook's collection and use of data gave it an unfair advantage over competitors providing classified data and online dating services.

Facebook said it will continue to cooperate fully with the investigations to demonstrate that these are without merit.

Marketplace, Facebook's classified ad service, and Facebook Dating offer people more choices and both products operate in a highly competitive environment with many large incumbents, the company said in a statement.

The EU's executive commission, the bloc's top antitrust enforcer, is looking at the possibility that Facebook collects data on what users are interested in based on how rival classified ad providers are advertising their sites to Facebook users. The commission is worried Facebook then uses that data to tailor Marketplace to outcompete the rival sites.

It's also looking at whether the way Facebook embeds its Marketplace into the social network gives it an advantage.

— AP

Central bank expands QE as growth seen faltering

ANIRBAN NAG
JUNE 4

The central bank expanded its version of quantitative easing (QE) to keep borrowing costs anchored, as economic growth is seen faltering because of a resurgent Covid-19 wave.

The Reserve Bank of India will buy an additional Rs 1.2 lakh crore (\$16.4 billion) of bonds under the Government Securities Acquisition Program 2.0, governor Shaktikanta Das said in an online broadcast on Friday. The programme is aimed at keeping government borrowing costs anchored to ensure it can aid an economic recovery.

The monetary policy committee, which has been in a rate pause mode for



more than a year, said it was retaining its accommodative policy for as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis, signalling there's still room to cut rates further.

"At this juncture, policy support from all sides is required to gain the momentum of growth," Das said.

The RBI's bond-buying programme aims to support the administration's borrowing plan, with the central bank buying sovereign debt to cap yields. It's already on course to acquire Rs 1 lakh crore of bonds in the current quarter.

A recovery in Asia's third-largest economy is in peril from a resurgent pandemic, which forced several states to impose lockdowns to check the virus spread. The movement and activity curbs are seen fanning inflation and hitting GDP, with many economists already cutting their growth forecasts for this fiscal year to single digits, from double digits previously.

— Bloomberg

FM pushes ministries, PSUs to step up capex

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

Focusing on the capital expenditure targets to revive the pandemic-hit economy, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday asked key ministries to aim to achieve more than their capex targets. She also emphasised that an enhanced capital expenditure will play a crucial role in the country's economic revival.

According to finance ministry sources, the minister discussed capital expenditure road map of key ministries and the central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) under them, the status of the implementation of budget announcements, and vari-



Nirmala Sitharaman

ous measures to expedite infrastructure investment were discussed.

"Besides, Sitharaman will also hold a meeting with heads of public and private sector insurers on Saturday for faster settlement of claims under the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJ-BY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) during the pan-

dem," the sources said.

All the discussions happened while reviewing the capital expenditure performance of the key ministries and their CPSEs on Friday. She met with senior government officials and encouraged the ministries to front-load their capex and ensure the clearance of MSME dues.

According to a statement released by the Ministry of Finance on Friday, Sitharaman said that the budget for the financial year 2021-22 provided a capital outlay of Rs.5.54 lakh crore. This is a sharp 34.5 per cent over the budget estimate of the previous fiscal 2020-21.

This was the fourth review meeting by the finance minister:

Restaurant stock leaps over panda pregnancy



SHOKO ODA
JUNE 4

Shares of a Tokyo-based Chinese restaurant operator surged after local media reported that a panda at a nearby zoo may be pregnant, stoking investor speculation of increased foot traffic in the area.

Totenko Company stock jumped as much as 29 per cent, the most in almost four years, after local broadcaster FNN reported that Shin Shin, a giant panda at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo, may be expecting. The zoo had announced earlier in March Shin Shin and Ri Ri had mated twice.

Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike confirmed the reports, local broadcaster NTV reported. Siyoken, another nearby eatery, rose as much as 11 per cent, with trading more than five times the three-month average.

The restaurant stock has served as a gauge for panda-related news in the past. In February 2017, Totenko shares also jumped after Ueno Zoo announced that the same pair of pandas had mated. Shares surged again when Shin Shin gave birth to a cub the same year in June.

The news coincides with the reopening of the popular Ueno Zoo on Friday, which had been closed since December amid the Covid-19 outbreak in Tokyo. Visits require a reservation and the zoo is limiting visitors to 2,000 a day under infection prevention protocols. The pandas are one of the main draws to the zoo.

— Bloomberg

Biden keeps more China firms in suspicious list

ELAINE KURTENBACH
WASHINGTON, JUNE 4

China vehemently objected Friday to US President Joe Biden's expansion of a list of Chinese companies whose shares are off-limits to American investors because of their purported links to the Chinese military and surveillance.

The White House issued the update late Thursday to an order signed last year by Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, that added to antagonisms over trade and technology.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin urged Washington to withdraw the order and provide Chinese enterprises with a fair and non-discriminatory business and investment environment."

"China will take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises," he said at a

regular briefing in Beijing. He did not elaborate.

The executive order takes effect August 2. It is the latest indication that Biden has not softened Washington's stance on alleged security risks from companies US officials say are linked to the Chinese military and industrial complex."

Tariffs on Chinese exports that were imposed under Trump, triggering similar actions from Beijing, mostly remain in place. China's chief economic envoy, vice premier Liu He, and US treasury secretary Janet Yellen held their first meeting by video Wednesday, but the two sides gave no indication when negotiations on ending their tariff war might resume.

The revised order from Biden says it is to ensure that US investments are not supporting Chinese companies that undermine the security or values of the United States and our allies

— AP

BHARAT FORGE Q4 NET AT ₹212 CR

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JUNE 4

Bharat Forge, the Pune-based auto component major, on Friday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 212.12 crore in the fourth quarter ending March, on the back of robust sales.

The company had posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 68.59 crore in the same quarter in the previous financial year, Bharat Forge said in a regulatory filing.

Consolidated revenue from operations during Q4FY21 stood at Rs 2,082.85 crore as against Rs 1,741.92 crore in the year-ago quarter.

For the financial year ended March 31, 2021, the company posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 126.97 crore. It had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 349.25 crore in the previous year.

Consolidated revenue from operations in 2020-21 stood at Rs 6,336.26 crore against Rs 8,055.84 crore in 2019-20.

"The year has ended on a strong note with sharp recovery visible in all our end markets," Baba Kalyani, chairman and MD at Bharat Forge, said.

PLI guidelines for white goods issued

New Delhi, June 4:

Investments made in land and building required for a project will not be covered under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for ACs and LED lights and these would not be considered for determining eligibility of a company to avail of benefits of the programme.

This is part of the guidelines issued by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) on Friday for the PLI scheme for promoting domestic manufacturing of white goods (only air conditioners and LED lights).

The guidelines said eligibility of a company will be subject to achievement of thresholds of net incremental sales of the products for the respective financial year over the base year (2019-20) and cumulative incremental investment in the preceding fiscal.

"Investment in land and building (including factory building or construc-



tion) required for the project or unit will not be covered under the scheme and therefore shall not be considered for determining eligibility under the scheme."

Expenditure on consumables and raw material used for manufacturing shall not be considered as investment.

"No second hand/used refurbished plant, machinery equipment, utilities shall be used to manufacture the eligible product," the guidelines said.

In case an applicant does not meet criteria of threshold investment and threshold net incremental sales for any given year, it would not be eligible for disbursement of incentive

for that particular fiscal.

Investment will include expenditure incurred on new plant, machinery, equipment and associated utilities, research and development (R&D), and transfer of technology relating to the facilities setup for the products.

Investment in R&D should not exceed 15 per cent of the total committed investment, the guidelines added.

The application window for the scheme will be open from June 15 to September 15 this year and no applications will be accepted after that.

The guidelines also said an applicant will have to submit a claim for disbursement of incentive on an annual basis for the sales made in a financial year along with audited financial statements.

The scheme will be implemented through a project management agency (PMA) which will be responsible for providing secretarial, managerial and implementation support.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Milkha stable in ICU, wife unwell

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is “better and more stable” as he battles Covid-19 in the ICU of the PGIMER hospital here even as his wife and former volleyball captain Nirmal Kaur’s condition deteriorated because of the same ailment. Milkha also received a phone call from Prime Minister Narendra Modi enquiring about his health on Friday. In a statement, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) said that Milkha is better than Thursday when he was brought to the hospital with dipping levels of oxygen. “On the basis of his medical parameters today, his condition has been observed better and more stable than yesterday,” PGIMER’s official spokesperson, Prof Ashok Kumar, said. — *PTI*

Ex-hockey player Usman no more

New Delhi: Former India hockey player Usman Khan has died after a prolonged battle with cancer, the sport’s governing body in the country said on Friday while condoling his death. Khan was 76 and survived by three sons and a daughter. Expressing his condolences to Khan’s family, HI President Gyanendro Ningombam said, “We are deeply saddened to learn about the demise of former India player Usman Khan. He is remembered for his excellent abilities as a left-winger and was a very stylish player in those times. On behalf of Hockey India, I extend our deepest condolences to his family in this moment of grief. He breathed his last in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh after a long battle with cancer.” — *PTI*

Tech Mahindra, Fide in big league

Chennai: The FIDE on Friday announced a new partnership with Tech Mahindra Ltd for the Global Chess League (GCL), which will also have former world champion Viswanathan Anand as its official mentor and partner to shape the league. The memorandum of understanding signed by FIDE with Tech Mahindra, a leading provider of digital transformation, consulting and business re-engineering services and solutions, focuses on creating the Global Chess League, a project first proposed by the latter earlier this year. “Now, with the support of FIDE, the Global Chess League will be provided with an accredited and exclusive status as the only world league officially recognised by the governing body of the sport of chess,” a press release here said. — *PTI*

IOA seeks relief from shut down

New Delhi: Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President Narinder Batra has requested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to allow them to operate from their office premises for completing administrative work linked to the upcoming Tokyo Olympics. Due to the Covid-19 surge in the national capital, the Delhi government had ordered shutting down of all premises that don’t fall under the essential category. However, the number of cases has reduced in recent days and the capital is inching towards easing of restrictions. “We request and appeal to You Sir to allow the office of Indian Olympic Association to function from Monday 7th June 2021 to enable IOA to upload the mandatory required data,” Batra wrote in his letter to Kejriwal. — *PTI*

Moin’s son Azam in Pak T20 team

Karachi: Pakistan on Thursday named uncapped Azam Khan, son of former captain Moin Khan, in the T20 squad for the tours of England and West Indies. The selectors also recalled Imad Wasim for the three T20 matches in England and five in the West Indies besides Haris Sohail for the three ODIs in England. — *PTI*

Swiatek shimmers

Nadal celebrates birthday with victory; Zverev too wins

Paris, June 4: Rafael Nadal celebrated his 35th birthday in style with a straight sets win over Richard Gasquet on Thursday to reach the French Open third round. Nadal, the 13-time champion in Paris and chasing a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, won 6-0, 7-5, 6-2 to register his 17th career victory in 17 meetings with France’s 53rd-ranked Gasquet.

Next up for the world number three is Britain’s Cameron Norrie who he has beaten twice already this season, at the Australian Open and on clay in Barcelona.

German sixth seed Alexander Zverev eased into the French Open last 16 for the fourth successive year on Friday with a straight-sets win over Serbia’s Laslo Djere.

The 24-year-old, last year’s US Open runner-up, saw off the 55th-ranked Djere 6-2, 7-5, 6-2 on Court Philippe Chatrier.

He will next face former world number four Kei Nishikori, whose third-round opponent Henri Laaksonen retired injured following the opening set, for a quarterfinal spot.

Meanwhile, Serena Williams continued her quest for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title by reaching the French Open second week for the first time since 2018, after third seed Aryna Sabalenka’s surprise loss left the veteran American as the highest-ranked player in her half of the draw.

Three-time Roland Garros champion Williams came through a potentially tricky third-round tie with compatriot Danielle Collins, winning 6-4, 6-4. She will next face



Poland’s Iga Swiatek returns the ball to Sweden’s Rebecca Peterson during their women’s singles match of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros in Paris on Thursday. Swiatek won 6-1, 6-1. — *AFP*

Kazakh 21st seed Elena Rybakina, with a possible quarterfinal against old rival Victoria Azarenka up for grabs.

Also, former world number one Azarenka, who stunned Williams in their 23rd meeting in last year’s US Open semi-finals, cruised past Madison Keys 6-2, 6-2 to reach the Roland Garros fourth round for the first time since making the last four in 2013.

Earlier, defending champion Iga Swiatek breezed

through to the third round, however, beating Rebecca Peterson 6-1, 6-1 on Court Simonne-Mathieu. The No. 8-seeded Pole next faces No. 30 Anett Kontaveit. — *AFP*

OTHER RESULTS

Men’s third round: Kei Nishikori (Japan) bt Henri Laaksonen (Switzerland) 7-5, 0-0 — RET; Federico Delbonis (Argentina) bt Fabio Fognini (Italy) 6-4, 6-1, 6-3; Alexander Zverev (Germany) bt Laslo Djere (Serbia) 6-2, 7-5, 6-2;

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (Spain) bt Casper Ruud (Norway) 7-6 (3), 2-6, 7-6 (6), 0-6, 7-5; Daniil Medvedev (Russia) bt Reilly Opelka (USA) 6-4, 6-2, 6-4. **Women’s third round:** Elena Rybakina (Kazakhstan) bt Elena Vesnina (Russia) 6-1, 6-4; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Russia) bt Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus) 6-4, 2-6, 6-0; Victoria Azarenka (Belarus) bt Madison Keys (USA) 6-2, 6-2; Serena Williams (USA) bt Danielle Collins (USA) 6-4, 6-4.

Messi scores but Argies held

Santiago Del Estero (Argentina), June 4: Lionel Messi scored a penalty but Argentina missed out on the chance to take over top spot of South American World Cup qualifying from rivals Brazil after a 1-1 draw with Chile on Thursday.

Messi also clipped the woodwork and forced three impressive saves out of Chile goalkeeper Claudio Bravo but Alexis Sanchez earned the dogged visitors a point in Santiago del Estero.

The draw leaves Argentina a point behind Brazil, the only remaining side with a perfect qualifying record, who host Ecuador on Friday.

Chile are down in sixth, still two points off the qualification places having won only one of their five matches so far.

Argentina captain Messi said he was happy with the result, despite failing to win.

“The team had a good dynamic, it wasn’t easy playing again after so much time,” he said.

Elsewhere, Iran bounced back from two straight defeats to put their 2022 World Cup qualification campaign back on track with a 3-1 win over Hong Kong while Bahrain hammered Cambodia 8-0 to go top of Group ‘C’.

Five-time finalists Iran struck twice in the second half of their Group ‘C’ game to take their tally to nine points from five matches, three behind leaders Bahrain, who are hoping to qualify for the tournament proper for the first time in their history.

Midfielder Ali Gholizadeh put Iran ahead from an acute angle after dribbling his way into the box in the 23rd minute before Vahid Amiri and Karim Ansarifard scored in the second half to give them a 3-0 cushion.

Meanwhile, it took less than a minute for Mathew Leckie to head in the opening goal as Australia romped Kuwait 3-0 in Kuwait City.

Jackson Irvine extended Australia’s lead midway through the first half and Eintracht Frankfurt’s Adjin Hrustic netted the third with a free kick in the 66th minute. — *Agencies*



Argentina’s Lionel Messi (right) and Eugenio Mena of Chile battle for the ball during their qualifying match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 in Santiago del Estero, Argentina, on Thursday. The match ended in a 1-1 draw. — *AP*

Greece, Belgium in a friendly draw

Paris, June 4: A Belgium side missing many of the stars that have helped them rise to the top of FIFA’s world rankings were held 1-1 by Greece in a Euro 2020 warm-up on Thursday.

For his first friendly ahead of the delayed tournament starting on June 11 coach Roberto Martinez was without injured trio Kevin De Bruyne (facial fractures), Eden Hazard (thigh), and Axel Witsel (Achilles).

The former Everton boss also chose to give the night off to Thibaut Courtois (with Simon Mignolet in goal), and Jan Vertonghen and Thomas Vermaelen in defence.

Those that were in Brussels had the chance to press their case for a place in Martinez’s lineup for their June 12 opener against Russia.

Like Hazard’s younger brother Thorgan, who started and supplied the finishing touch to the move that put Belgium into a 20th minute lead after Romelu Lukaku was denied at point blank

range by Greek goalkeeper Odysseas Vlachodimos. Georgios Tzavellas levelled for the unscripted winners of Euro 2004 midway through the second half, tapping in Kyriakos Papadopoulos’ diving header which hit the woodwork.

Martinez will be looking for a sharper performance in the Red Devil’s second friendly against Croatia on Sunday.

Belgium romped through to the finals as group winners with a 40-goal haul. After their Group ‘B’ opener in Saint Petersburg they go on to face Denmark and Finland.

In other warm-ups involving finalists for the delayed tournament Switzerland dished out a 7-0 drubbing to Lichtenstein, with Mario Gavranovic grabbing a hat-trick. The Swiss are in Group ‘A’ with Italy, Wales and Turkey who were also in action, seeing off Moldova 2-0. Ukraine, drawn in Group C, edged Northern Ireland 1-0. — *AFP*

TENNIS PLAYER ARRESTED FOR MATCH-FIXING

Paris, June 4: A tennis player suspected of match-fixing last year has been arrested in Paris during the French Open, the Paris prosecutor’s office said Friday.

According to French newspaper *Le Parisien*, which first reported the story, the player is 765th-ranked Yana Sizikova of Russia. The prosecutor’s office confirmed to The Associated Press that a “women’s international player” was in custody, but it did not identify her.

An investigation was opened last October by a French police unit specializing in betting fraud and match-fixing. It has previously worked with Belgian authorities investigating suspected fixed matches at the lower levels of professional tennis.

The prosecutor’s office said the probe centered on suspicions about one match at Roland Garros last year. It did not specify the match. German newspaper *Die Welt* and French sports daily *L’Equipe* said at the time there were suspicious betting patterns in the first round of a women’s doubles match on Sept. 30.

On that day, Sizikova and partner Madison Brengle of the United States played on Court No. 10 against Romanian players Andreea Mitu and Patricia Maria Tig. Sizikova was broken to love serving in game five of the second set, during which she double faulted twice. — *AP*

Sumit fails dope test, suspended

New Delhi, June 4: Olympic-bound Indian wrestler Sumit Malik has been provisionally suspended after failing a dope test during the recent Qualifiers in Bulgaria, a major embarrassment for the country with just weeks left for the Games in Tokyo.

It marks the second consecutive instance of a wrestler being caught in dope net before the Olympics — the previous being ahead of the 2016 Rio Olympics when Narsingh Pancham Yadav had failed one and was slapped with a four-year ban.

Malik, the 2018 Commonwealth Games gold-medallist, had qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in the 125kg category at the World Olympic Qualifier event in Sofia, Bulgaria which was the last chance for wrestlers to earn quotas.

The 28-year-old’s participation at the main event starting July 23 seems uncertain now.

“We got a mail from the UWW (United World Wrestling) on Thursday that Sumit has failed the dope test and he has been suspended provisionally. The substance found in his sample is said to be 5-methylhexan-2-amine (1,4-dimethylpentylamine),” Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) secretary Vinod Tomar said.

A Delhi-based sports lawyer Parth Goswami contends that since this substance is a specified one, Malik cannot be suspended provisionally. — *PTI*



Sumit Malik

Brianna McNeal

HURDLES CHAMP BRIANNA BANNED FOR FIVE YEARS

Paris, June 4: Olympic 100m hurdles champion Brianna McNeal has been banned for five years for tampering with the anti-doping testing process, the Athletics Integrity Unit announced on Friday.

McNeal, 29, can still take part in the US trials for the Tokyo Olympics later this month while she appeals the ban, which is backdated to August 15, 2020, the AIU said in a statement.

Her appeal will be heard before the Olympics begin on July 23.

AIU said she had been banned for “tampering within the results management process”.

It was her second doping violation after she missed the 2017 World Championships while serving a one-year ban for missing three drug tests.

“The system is pretty messed up if you ask me but that’s another topic for another day,” she said in an Instagram post. — *AFP*

JAPAN CORNERED ON GAMES, SAYS COMMITTEE MEMBER

Tokyo, June 4: Japan has been backed into a corner over the Tokyo Games, a member of the country’s Olympic committee said Friday, arguing the virus-postponed event has “lost meaning” but it is too late to cancel. Public opposition to holding the Olympics this summer remains high, but organisers insist they will go ahead safely under strict Covid-19 countermeasures and with most athletes and officials vaccinated.

In an opinion article for *Kyodo News*, Japan Olympic Committee member Kaori Yamaguchi, who won judo bronze in Seoul in 1988, described “anxiety and distrust” between the public and the government over the Games.

“What will these Olympics be for and for whom? The Games have already lost meaning and are being held just for the sake of them,” she wrote.

“We have been cornered into a situation where we cannot even stop now. We are damned if we do, and damned if we do not,” added Yamaguchi, who has previously voiced unease over the Games and called for their postponement last year. — *AFP*

Rain ruins play in Eng-NZ Test

London, June 4: Persistent rain meant there was no play before lunch on the third day of the first Test between England and New Zealand at Lord’s on Friday.

The match was intriguingly poised, with England 111-2 in reply to New Zealand’s first-innings 378 that featured debutant Devon Conway’s 200 — the highest score by a batsman making their Test bow in England.

England, now 267 runs behind, slumped to 18-2 before ending the second day with Rory Burns 59 not out and England captain Joe Root 42 not out following an unbroken stand of 93.

New Zealand looked like batting England out of the game while South African-born opener Conway and fellow left-hander Henry Nicholls (61) were sharing

a fourth-wicket partnership of 174.

But they lost four wickets for just six runs as they slumped from 288-3 to 294-7, with Mark Wood, the fastest member of England’s pace quartet, instigating a collapse.

Meanwhile Test debutant paceman Ollie Robinson led England’s attack with 4-75 in the first of this two-Test series.

This match marks the return of spectators to international cricket in England after last season’s fixtures were all played behind closed doors because of coronavirus restrictions. The second Test is due to take place at Birmingham’s Edgbaston from June 10-14. — *AFP*

BRIEF SCORES

New Zealand 378 vs England 111/2 in 43 overs (Rory Burns 59 batting, Joe Root 42 batting; Tim Southee 1/17).

INDIAN PLAYERS UNDER HARD QUARANTINE IN SOUTHAMPTON

Southampton, June 4: India spinner Axar Patel has revealed that the team will serve a three-day hard quarantine before it is allowed to train at the Ageas Bowl here ahead of the WTC final against New Zealand. The final begins on June 18 and India have limited time to prepare having arrived here on Wednesday.

On the other hand, New Zealand are already involved in a two-match series against England.

The India squad was in quarantine for 14 days in Mumbai prior to its departure and is in the middle of another yet shorter quarantine.

“I had a good sleep...the plan is to quarantine. We have been told that we can’t meet each other for three days so we will be quarantining for that much time,” said Axar. The men’s and women’s squads were in the same flight. After landing in London, the contingent took a two-hour bus journey to Southampton. — *PTI*