

SHORT TAKES

Noida: Man arrested with 30kg cannabis

Noida: The Noida Police on Monday said it has arrested a suspected drug trafficker here and seized nearly 30 kg of cannabis. The suspect is part of a larger network of a drug syndicate working in the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR), officials said. Lalit Gupta was arrested within a fortnight of seizure of around 100 kg of cannabis here, they said. "On June 2, a team of Phase-2 police station officials had arrested three men and recovered around 100 kg cannabis from them. One of the accused was in police remand and during interrogation, he revealed to police some of his links and network," a police spokesperson said. "Based on the information, Lalit Gupta, who hails from Hathras district in western Uttar Pradesh, was nabbed on Monday morning and 29.60 kg of cannabis, estimated worth ₹3 lakh, was seized from him," the spokesperson said. Gupta has a criminal history in drug-related cases and has been booked two times in 2012 and 2019 by police in his home district of Hathras, the officials said. They said a fresh FIR has been lodged against him at the Phase-2 police station. — PTI

Thunderstorm with rain likely in city today

New Delhi: The national capital on Monday recorded the maximum temperature of 39 degrees Celsius as the pre-monsoon rains eluded the city throughout the day, the Indian Meteorological Department said. As a precursor to the southwest monsoon, moderate intensity rain was expected on Monday. The IMD has forecast thunderstorm with rain in the city on Tuesday. "Conditions are favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into most parts of Madhya Pradesh; remaining parts of east Uttar Pradesh; Delhi; some more parts of west Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab during the next 48 hours," the IMD said. The city recorded reduced humidity at 39 per cent at 5.30 pm compared to 70 per cent at 8.30 am. The minimum temperature settled at 25 degrees Celsius, three notches below the usual for the season. — PTI

DSEU appoints Pattnaik, Suri as pro V-Cs

New Delhi: The Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University (DSEU) on Monday appointed professor Snigdha Pattnaik and Rihan Khan Suri as pro vice chancellors of the varsity. DSEU vice chancellor Neharika Vohra welcomed them and said with their guidance, the university will be able to "drive a change in the higher education ecosystem". Pattnaik has over three decades of experience in human resource management and behavioral science, and was the former dean at School of Human Resource Management, Xavier University Bhubaneswar. With a PhD in management, Suri has joined the university with 29 years of industry and academic experience.

Yamuna pollution: Ban on detergents, soaps not conforming to BIS standards

New Delhi, June 14: The Delhi government on Monday banned the sale, storage, transportation, and marketing of soaps and detergents not conforming to the latest BIS standards to curb pollution in the Yamuna river.

The National Green Tribunal had in January accepted recommendations of a two-member expert panel which had suggested directing the Delhi government to issue orders "prohibiting sale, storage and transportation and marketing of detergents which do not conform to the revised BIS standards".

The NGT had also directed to launch awareness campaigns about the harmful effect of using substandard soaps and detergents. All the authorities concerned, including local bodies, civil supplies department and district administrations having control over shops and other establishments dealing with



sale, storage, transportation and marketing facilities for soaps and detergents in Delhi should ensure the compliance of directions through strict vigil and surprise checks, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee said in an order issued on Monday.

The pollution body has asked the authorities concerned to submit monthly action taken reports of inspections conducted and subsequent action taken without fail. Experts have cited soaps and detergents as one of the major reasons behind the pollution in the

New Delhi, June 14: Installing protective screens, conducting temperature checks, contactless ordering, and visible cues to ensure physical distancing are among the various measures taken by restaurants in the national capital which reopened with 50 per cent capacity on Monday after nearly two months.

Dine-in facilities were barred in Delhi from April 17, when the first weekend lockdown was imposed in a bid to curb the spread of Covid-19 infection in the city.

According to the latest guidelines of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), restaurants can open with 50 per cent capacity but they cannot serve liquor to their guests as bars in such establishments will remain closed till further orders.

"The measures in place include mandatory daily wellness and temperature checks for everyone (crew, customers, and delivery partners); compulsory

City records lowest Covid cases since Feb. 22, positivity 0.22%

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

The national capital showing remarkable recovery on Monday recorded 131 new Covid-19 cases, the lowest since February 22, and 16 fatalities. While Delhi is under unlocking process, the positivity rate dropped to 0.22 per cent, according to a health department bulletin. It

face masks; and enhanced focus on hand hygiene with frequent hand washing and gloves for the crew," said Rajeev Ranjan, the chief operating officer of Connaught Plaza Restaurants Pvt. Ltd, which operates McDonald's restaurants in North and East India.

"Front counters and drive-throughs have been fitted with protective screens and ordering, payment, and delivery has been made contactless to

was on February 22, last when Delhi had recorded 128 cases.

The 16 latest deaths are the lowest since April 5, when 15 people had succumbed to the disease. There are 3,226 active Covid-19 cases in the city. As many as 960 patients are in home isolation.

The city had recorded 23 deaths on Sunday, 28 on Saturday, 24 on Friday,

minimise human contact.

"All restaurants have visual cues on furniture and floor to help customers and employees maintain adequate physical distance and follow Covid protocols. The customers will also notice foot-operated taps in the rest rooms," he added.

Restaurants in South Delhi's Lajpat Nagar and Moolchand area largely remained closed or opened shutters for just cleaning the premises on Monday.



A restaurant opens after the ease in lockdown in New Delhi on Monday.

In Lajpat Nagar's Central market area, Afghan Darbar was among the restaurants which were inviting guests again to relish their exotic cuisine.

"We have reopened after the relaxation of lockdown norms, but no guests have come so far till afternoon. People are still afraid to step out after what we witnessed in the second wave of the pandemic. But life has to go on and we are taking all pre-

cautions," Salman Ali, the manager of Afghan Darbar restaurant, told a news agency.

"Most of the restaurants are cleaning the places and a very few in our area have opened shutters. Small cafes have suffered huge losses in the lockdown and are still feeling cagey to reopen as people won't come out much due to the fear of Covid," said Rajesh Rana, the manager of Pind Balluchi's Lajpat Nagar outlet.

— PTI

Elderly woman stabbed to death after sexual assault, 1 held

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

A 62-year-old woman was allegedly sexually assaulted and later stabbed to death in east Delhi's Dallupura village, police said on Monday. Police said that prime facie, it appears to be a case of sexual assault, however, post-mortem report will clear it.

The accused, identified as Vipin Dedha, a resident of Dallupura Village, has been arrested, they said.

According to police, information was received on Sunday at New Ashok Nagar police station from Dharamshila Hospital.

"Police reached the hospital and found that the victim, a resident of Near Peepal Chock, Dallupura Village, was declared brought dead. The throat of the deceased was found slit with a sharp-edged weapon and multiple sharp injuries were found on her stomach," DCP (east) Priyanka Kashyap said.

Thereafter, a case under section 302 (murder) was registered at New Ashok Nagar police station. During investigation, police analysed the CCTV footage of the area. The identity of accused was established and he was later arrested, the DCP said.

During interrogation, he admitted to have committed the offence. The weapons of offence, a knife, has been recovered, police said.

The accused claimed that he was in inebriated condition during the incident, police said.

Man held for snatching handbag carrying ₹7L from businessman

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

A man was arrested by the Delhi Police for allegedly snatching a handbag containing ₹7 lakh from a 63-year-old businessman while he was returning home in northeast Delhi after withdrawing cash from a bank in the National Capital.

The accused has been identified as Aas Mohd alias Ashu, a habitual offender having eight previous criminal involvements. Police said that they have also recovered ₹5.70 lakh of the cash from the possession of the accused.

According to Sanjay Kumar Sain, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northeast district, the incident took place on June 11 when the businessman was on the way to his home after withdrawing Rs seven lakh from a bank in GTB enclave area.

"The bike-borne accused, who was follow-

ing him from the bank, snatched his cash bag near Parshu Ram Chowk and sped away. The victim followed him for some distance, but to no avail," said the DCP.

"During the course of investigation, multiple CCTV footages were scanned, entry and exit routes were verified. Based on technical surveillance, the accused was nabbed from Nand Nagri area," said the DCP.

Police have also recovered one country-made pistol loaded with cartridge and a bike used in the crime from the possession of the accused.

Covid guidelines violation: 61 held from farmhouse

New Delhi: 61 people, including 15 women have been arrested by the Noida Police for allegedly partying at a farmhouse here in violation of restrictions imposed to combat Covid-19, officials said on Monday.

According to the police a pool party took place at the Green Beauty farmhouse in the Yamuna floodplains area in Sector 135 in violation of the Covid-19 protocols. A total of 46 men and 15 women were arrested.

The arrests were made following a raid on the property in Sector 135, under the expressway police station limits, on Sunday night, the police said.

All accused were bathing in the swimming pool in violation of the pandemic protocols. They were found without face masks and some of them were even spitting at various places in the open premises of the farmhouse, they added.

The police said they have recovered 12 bottles of beer and two bottles of whiskey, which were

meant for sale in Haryana, from the venue.

Several of the arrestees are residents of Delhi, while some are from Ghaziabad and other towns of the NCR, the police said.

An FIR was lodged against the alleged persons under relevant sections of IPC.

Gautam Buddh Nagar recorded eight new Covid-19 cases, while Ghaziabad had four on Monday, official data showed, as the two districts in western Uttar Pradesh for the first time in almost three months logged new cases in a single day.

The UP health department's daily bulletin for a 24-hour period on Monday showed there was no death linked to Covid-19 in either of the districts that border Delhi.

With eight new cases, the overall tally of Gautam Buddh Nagar reached 62,958 while Ghaziabad's surged to 55,435 after four more people contracted the infection, it showed. — PTI

'Scam' in Ayodhya land deal by Ram temple trust: Sisodia



Manish Sisodia, AAP leader, on Monday sought a clarification from the Ram temple trust over the purchase of a piece of land for the proposed shrine in Ayodhya by it at an alleged inflated price.

Termed it a "scam", the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader said the temple is being built using donations made by people and their hard-earned money should not be misused.

His remarks came a day after AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh alleged that Champat Rai, general secretary of Shriram

Janmabhoomi T e e r t h Kshetra Trust, purchased 1.208 hectares of land worth ₹2 crore in Sisodia Ayodhya's Bag Bjaishi village for ₹18.5 crore with the help of trust member Anil Mishra.

Terming it a case of money laundering, Singh and Samajwadi Party leader Pawan Pandey sought a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate into the matter.

Addressing a press conference here, Sisodia

urged the trust to not play with people's sentiments. "The Ram Janmabhoomi Trust has purchased a piece of land in Ayodhya for ₹18.5 crore. It was sold for just ₹2 crore five minutes before it was bought by the Ram temple trust. There has been a scam in purchasing this land for the pious work of building the Ram temple. The Ram Janmabhoomi Trust must clarify why the land was bought at such a high price," he said.

"The temple is being built using donations made by people and their sentiments are attached to it," he said.

— PTI

Man arrested for hoax bomb call from flight

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

The Delhi Police have apprehended a 22-year-old man, who was onboard a Delhi-Patna flight, on Monday for allegedly making a hoax call to Delhi's Police Control Room saying that there was a bomb on the plane. Police said that the accused has been identified as Akash Deep and he is "mentally disturbed".

According to a senior police official, after boarding the flight with his father, Deep made the call to the Police Control Room (PCR) saying that there was a bomb on the plane.

It was revealed that the man is "mentally disturbed" and was being accompanied by his father to Patna for treatment," said the senior police official.

"Police have received the papers of his medical treatment. A medical examination will be conducted and further course of action will be decided based on his interrogation," said a police official privy to investigation.

"There were over 48 passengers onboard the flight. They were shifted to another aircraft," he said.



Traffic at ITO in New Delhi after relaxation in lockdown on Monday.

— G.N. JHA

SHORT TAKES

UP scribe death: cops register murder case

Pratapgarh: The Uttar Pradesh Police on Monday registered a case of murder after a journalist of a private news channel, who had recently reported on the liquor mafia, died here in what appeared to be a road accident. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav demanded a high-level inquiry into the death, terming it "mysterious", while West Bengal chief minister and TMC leader Mamata Banerjee expressed shock over the demise of the ABP journalist, saying "we are unable to save lives who are working tirelessly towards unfolding the truth". "Sulabh Srivastava had gone for news coverage to the Kotwali Lalganj area on Sunday and was returning home late in the night. He was found seriously injured near the Sukhpal Nagar brick kiln and was taken to the district hospital, where doctors declared him dead," SP Akash Tomar told reporters. — PTI

MP: Speeding jeep kills mom-son duo

Tikamgarh: A 45-year-old woman and her son were killed after being hit by a speeding jeep on Monday near here in Madhya Pradesh and police later lodged a murder case against the driver following a protest by local residents, officials said. Following the incident, residents of the duo's village blocked the Tikamgarh-Chhattarpur road for six hours, eyewitnesses said. The protesters demanded that the jeep driver, Ghansu Kushwaha, be booked for murder after the death of the woman, Shyama Bai, and her son Harval (25), they added. The protesters, residents of Matol village, alleged that Kushwaha had a long pending property dispute with the family of the deceased and the accused had killed the duo, they said. The police had initially booked the accused for causing death due to negligence. — PTI

TOOLKIT CASE: HC STAYS FIR AGAINST RAMAN & PATRA

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JUNE 14

The Chhattisgarh high court on Monday stayed the First Information Report filed against Bharatiya Janata Party national vice-president and former chief minister Raman Singh and party spokesman Sambit Patra in a police station in Raipur last month in connection with the alleged 'fake' toolkit of Congress. In his interim order, Justice Narendra Kumar Vyas stayed the investigation into the case by the police and sought a reply from the Chhattisgarh government in the case. The FIR was registered based on a complaint lodged by Akash Sharma, Chhattisgarh unit president of National Students Union of India (NSUI) in a police station in Raipur on May 19 this year. Mr Singh had tagged the purported toolkit of Congress in a twitter post. The toolkit was denied by Congress. A FIR was also registered against Mr Patra in the same case. Mr Singh and Mr Patra had earlier moved the Chhattisgarh high court seeking to quash the First Information Report.

'Big scam by Ram temple trust, SC should intervene'

Cong alleges 'fraud' committed using funds collected from devotees

New Delhi, June 14: The Congress on Monday alleged corruption in purchase of land in Ayodhya by the Ram temple trust and demanded a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the charge.

The party also alleged that it was a "big scam" committed using funds collected from devotees and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should answer whether those behind it had his protection.

Congress general secretary and chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala alleged at a press conference that the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust had purchased "12,080 square metres of land" at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh at an inflated price of ₹18.5 crore.

The land was purchased by the temple's trust at ₹18.5 crore on March 18, and according to land deeds, only a few minutes earlier on the same day Kusum Phatak had sold it for ₹2 crore to Ravi Tiwari and Sultan Ansari from whom the trust bought the land, he claimed.

Citing the land deeds, Surejwala claimed that trust members Anil Mishra, who is a BJP leader, and Hrishikesh Upadhyay, a former mayor of Ayodhya, are signatories to the 18.5 crore land deal.

The land was in the name of Pathak and was sold to Tiwari and Ansari, who in turn sold it to the

Raut: Trust must clarify if money collected misused

Mumbai, June 14: Amid charges of corruption in the land purchased by the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust in Ayodhya, Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Monday demanded "clarification" from the Trust and other leaders, saying the construction of the temple is a matter of faith for the saffron party and the common people.

Talking to reporters here, Raut said AAP MP Sanjay Singh spoke to him on the issue this morning and the "evidence provided by him is shocking". "Lord Ram and the fight for the Ram mandir



is a matter of faith for us. For some, it is a political matter. The Trust formed for the construction of the temple should clarify if the allegations are true or false. The temple's 'bhoomipujan' ceremony was also attended by UP CM Yogi Adityanath and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. They should also speak out. Ram temple is a matter of faith. People have made donations out of faith. Even Shiv Sena had contributed Rs one crore to the Trust," Raut said. — PTI

trust, the Congress spokesperson claimed.

Surjewala said the trust formed for the construction of the temple for Lord Ram, who is considered a symbol of faith by crores of people, was set up on February 5 last year on the directions of the Supreme Court.

He said the facts that have come to light point to a "big scam" in funds collected from devotees and this amounts to committing a big sin and wrongdoing.

But Prime Minister Modi, who formed the trust on the directions of the Supreme Court, is

totally silent, Surjewala said.

"Will the prime minister answer if those sinners, who have traded the faith of Lord Ram's devotees, have his protection," he said.

"How could BJP leaders commit such a big malpractice in the name of Lord Ram whose words, values and ethical conduct are sworn as ideals. How much more land has been purchased in such a manner at throwaway rates out of funds received for the temple's construction," Surjewala asked. — PTI



Police personnel try to stop Congress Women Wing workers protesting against the alleged Ram Mandir Trust land scam near CM's residence in Lucknow on Monday.

— PTI

Disqualify Adhikari & Sunil Mondal: TMC asks Om Birla

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JUNE 14

Calling up Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Trinamul Congress parliamentary party leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay urged him for the second time within two weeks to take steps against his two party MPs, Sisir Adhikari and Sunil Mondal, for their disqualification under the anti-defection law over their switch to the BJP ahead of the recently concluded West Bengal Assembly Election.

Mr Bandyopadhyay's plea to Mr Birla on Monday coincided the meeting of Mr Adhikari's son, Suvendu, as a leader of the opposition with



Sunil Mondal



Sudip Bandyopadhyay

governor Jagdeep Dhankhar at Raj Bhavan in a delegation of around 50 BJP MLAs to weaponise the anti-defection law to stop their poaching by the ruling TMC. Mr Dhankhar also assured them about the validity and use of the law in the state.

Mr Bandyopadhyay earlier dialled Mr Birla on June 3 after submitting petition and evidence of defection of Mr

Adhikari, the Contai MP, and Mr Mondal, the Burdwan East MP, to the BJP. Getting no response, the TMC leader again spoke to Mr Birla to mount pressure on the BJP.

This time, Mr Birla assured Mr Bandyopadhyay of setting up a parliamentary panel which will summon the two MPs to explain their present attachment to a party, sources claimed. At the Raj Bhavan, Mr Adhikari alongwith the BJP delegation submitted a deputation to the governor and discussed about the legal provisions. Their meeting took place in the terrace in a rare instance.

It is tailor-made for migrant labourers: Centre tells Supreme court

'ONORC makes food security portable'

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

The Centre has told the Supreme Court that its "One Nation, One Ration Card" (ONORC) scheme makes food security for the migrant beneficiaries "portable" to let them get it from any fair price shop (FPS) of their choice anywhere in the country using their existing ration cards with biometric authentication. Portability gives them the choice to lift the entitled food grains from any FPS while at the same time enables the family back home to draw the remainder of the eligible ration.

Regarding those who do

not have ration cards, the Centre has pointed out that 28 states and UTs have created a mechanism for helping such eligible beneficiaries either by registering them or supplying them dry ration

not have ration cards, the Centre has pointed out that 28 states and Union Territories have created a mechanism for helping such eligible beneficiaries either by registering them or supplying them dry ration. Delhi, the Centre told the top court, is among the states that are yet to

adopt the portability of the ration cards, the other states being West Bengal, Assam, and Chhattisgarh.

The Centre said this in its written statement, underlining that the onus on implementation of ONORC is on these states.

The Centre referred to the technology driven reforms to empower all the 80 crore National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiaries to get their ration from any FPS, but primarily enable the migratory beneficiaries, who are mostly labourers, daily wagers, and urban poor like rag-pickers, street-dwellers, temporary workers in organised and un-

organised sectors.

It has also enabled the states/UTs to obtain any additional quantity of food grains from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) at the subsidised rates pan India—Wheat at ₹2,100 per quintal and rice at ₹2,000 per quintal. For private parties, the rate is ₹2,200 per quintal of rice.

The government has also extended the scheme to supply the food grains to charitable/non-government organisations engaged in relief operation/running relief camps for migrant labourers and vulnerable groups due to the prevailing Covid situation.

Seven held for raping woman, 3 minor girls

Agartala, June 14: Seven men have been arrested for allegedly raping a woman and three minor girls at a rubber plantation in West Tripura district, around 15 km from here, a police officer said on Monday.

SDPO, Amtali range, Anirban Das, said seven of the eight accused were apprehended on Sunday from Champaknagar in Jirania police station area, after the family members of the minor girls and the woman filed a complaint. According to Das, the accused, who were familiar faces from the neighbourhood, had invited all four for a motorcycle ride. — PTI

Bihar sizzles after LJP split: RJD says JD-U is to blame

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, JUNE 14

Split in the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) has triggered sharp reactions from across the political spectrum in Bihar.

RJD, which is the main opposition party in Bihar, on Monday, accused the JD(U) of scripting the political crisis in the Lok Janshakti Party to destabilise Chirag Paswan.

Speaking in this newspaper, RJD spokesperson Shakti Yadav said, "The script to marginalise Chirag Paswan was prepared at 1, Anne Marg (chief minister's house) with Bharatiya Janata

Party's support.

"The LJP contested the 2020 Assembly elections separately due to its differences with Nitish Kumar. But now, to destabilise Chirag Paswan, the JD(U) used one of its senior party leaders and MP to create a split in the Lok Janshakti Party. People will not forget this and give a fitting reply to the JD(U) and Bharatiya Janata Party during the elections."

Sources said that JD(U) MP Rajiv Ranjan alias Lalan Singh played a significant role in the rift within the LJP.

Sources in the LJP said that the main reason

Won't review decision of MLAs' security cover: MHA

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

Home Ministry will not review the security cover provided to all its 70-odd MLAs in West Bengal even though senior Trinamul Congress leader Mukul Roy who went back to TMC from BJP just two days ago has requested the ministry to withdraw his Z-category security. Top Home ministry sources said all BJP MLAs in Bengal will continue to have the Y-category security cover provided by central para-military forces like CISE, CRPF and ITBP.

Even as the Home ministry is likely to accept Mukul Roy's request for withdrawing the central security cover there would be no change in the security of other top BJP functionaries in the States, sources added. Mukul Roy, a senior BJP leader who had joined the saffron party from TMC in 2017, has once again gone back to his "original party." During the time that Mukul Roy remained in BJP he was given Z-category security and armed commandos at his residence also.

Even though there is much speculation that some more BJP MLAs could switch sides specially the ones who had switched sides just before the Assembly elections, Home ministry officials clarified that as of now there would be no change in their security pattern.

BSP defectors demand Raj Cabinet expansion

Jaipur, June 14: After the Sachin Pilot camp, the MLAs who defected from the Bahujan Samaj Party to the ruling Congress are also raising voice for Cabinet expansion and political appointments, adding to the party's Rajasthan conundrum.

Karauli Member of the Legislative Assembly Lakhman Singh said cabinet expansion should take place as it would improve the efficiency of the government, but Udaipurwati MLA Rajendra Singh Gudha did not mince words as he reminded the Asok Gehlot government that

it was "saved" because of the six MLAs who merged their legislative party with the Congress and the independents.

Three of the six MLAs—Lakhman Singh, Rajendra Gudha and Sandeep Yadav - met at the residence of Yadav in Jaipur on Monday.

Nine cabinet berths are vacant in the state. Some departments are completely dependent on government officials, and they will function in a better way if they get ministers. I hope the cabinet expansion will happen soon, Lakhman Singh said.

— PTI

Pinarayi-led LDF on defensive soon after big win

PREM CHANDRAN
KOCHI, JUNE 14

The shine of the highly trumpeted 'second coming' of the Pinarayi Vijayan-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in Kerala is lost within weeks of its assumption of power, following expose of a massive loot of forest and other governmental wealth along the fabled Western Ghats and beyond.

A re-energised Congress and the United Democratic Front (UDF) leads energetically took up a visual media report of the large-scale cutting down of highly-priced trees like Veeti and Teak from across districts in the western sector in recent months. The loot, in which an individual known to have links with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan stood in the front, is suspected to be of the

order of over Rs 100crore. The Kerala high court is seized of the matter though there is pessimism as to how this case will be taken to its logical conclusion.

The loot was facilitated by a state government order issued last year in the backdrop of the Covid-induced paralysis of life. Months later, the GO was withdrawn. The suspected plan was to provide a window of opportunity to facilitate the loot with strong political backing. Communist parties, the CPI(M) and the CPI, are largely infested with corrupt elements as they handled power in the state for long years, meaning half of the past 70 years. CPI ministers handled the revenue and forest departments when the massive felling of prized trees from forest and poramboke lands took place.

The perceived weak organiza-

KERALA NEWSLETTER



Pinarayi Vijayan

tional strength of the Congress, its aging leadership that has now been changed, as also substantial support from Muslim and Christian minorities to ably checkmate the forays of the BJP-RSS in the state helped the LDF

return to power this time. Added to this was the free food kits distribution by the first Pinarayi-led government.

Some officials have been suspended and an investigation ordered by the state government into the loot of forest and revenue wealth in a highly coordinated and mischievous manner by gangs with help from top government entities. There are strict rules guiding the removal of trees on the Western Ghats, but the forest flying squads were forced by governmental entities to look the other way.

Now, question marks are raised as to the sincerity of the government as regards the present investigations, seen by many as a farce. The top cop who has been entrusted with the investigations is known to be a confidant of chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

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This is notified for the information of rail passengers that the timings of following Special Trains will be revised at undermentioned stations with immediate effect as under:-

| Train No. / Train Name | Stations | Revised Timings |
|---|----------|-------------------|
| | | Arrival Departure |
| 02431/Trivendrum Central- Hazrat Nizamuddin Rajdhani Express Spl. | Vadodara | 23:42 00:02 |
| 02617/Ernakulam Jn.-Hazrat Nizamuddin Superfast Special | Panvel | 12:20 12:25 |
| 06001/Trivendrum Central-Hazrat Nizamuddin Superfast Special | Kalyan | 13:27 13:30 |
| | Panvel | 18:00 18:05 |

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

Minor domestic help rescued in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: A 12-year-old girl was on Monday rescued from the house of a retired collector in Odisha capital Bhubaneswar, where she was allegedly engaged as a domestic help. Acting on a tip-off, a team of Childline rescued the minor girl with the help of Nayapalli police. The rescued girl was produced before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC). The child protection body directed the state government for her temporary rehabilitation at a local short-stay home. According to sources, the minor girl was allegedly trafficked from her village in Berhampur in November 2020 and engaged in domestic work at the residence of the retired collector of Ganjam district, Dinanath Panda. When the girl was trafficked, she was studying in Class 5 in a school. Her father is a rickshaw-puller and mother works as a domestic help.

BJP leader violates corona norms, fined

Bhopal: A Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) leader in a Madhya Pradesh town was let off with mere a fine of ₹10,000 without being booked under Epidemic Diseases Act for flouting Covid norms by the local administration, inviting criticism from the Congress. Katni district BJYM president Mridul Dwivedy was penalised ₹10,000 by the local tahsildar for celebrating his birthday in public by throwing Covid norms to wind. The local administration swung into action when a video showing him celebrating his birthday near a temple in district headquarters of Katni along with his supporters went viral on social media, and imposed the fine on him. His supporters, who attended the birthday bash, were sent to home quarantine for a week.

Maha: No Param Bir arrest till June 22

Mumbai: The government of Maharashtra on Monday once again assured the Bombay high court that it will not take any coercive action against former Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh till June 22, in the case registered against him under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Senior counsel Darius Khambata, representing the Maharashtra government, told the high court that his previous statement on protecting the senior IPS officer from any “coercive action” in the case will be extended till June 22. He told the court that the police will not arrest Singh till this date. Following Mr Khambata’s statement, a bench of Justices P.B. Vajale and S.P. Tadvade adjourned the hearing till June 22 on the pleas filed by Mr Singh seeking quashing of an FIR registered against him by the Thane police.

‘China, India, Pak expanding nukes’

■ **Continued from Page 1** emphasis on China, with the development of longer-range missiles capable of targeting all of China.

It said that India has assigned its nuclear weapons to a maturing nuclear triad of aircraft, land-based missiles and ballistic missile submarines.

The report said that the remarks in recent years by Indian defence ministers have created doubts about India’s commitment to the no-first-use policy. “Recent scholarship and government statements have called that policy into further question, with some analysts suggesting that ‘India’s NFU [no-first-use] policy is neither a stable nor a reliable predictor of how the Indian military and political leadership might actually use nuclear weapons,’” said SIPRI. It said that there are suggestions that some portions of India’s arsenal, particularly those weapons and capabilities designed for retaliation against Pakistan, “are now kept at a much higher state of readiness, capable of being operationalised and released within seconds or minutes — not hours, as has been previously assumed”.

The report said that aircraft are the most mature component of India’s nuclear strike capabilities. “It is estimated here that approximately 48 nuclear bombs are assigned to aircraft. The

WB extends curbs till June 30

Mamata govt provides relaxations with restricted workforce in many sectors

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JUNE 14

Continuing with the suspensions on the state-run transport network and academic activities, the Mamata Banerjee government on Monday extended the lockdown in West Bengal for another two weeks till June 30.

It, however, eased the curbs at various levels in many sectors due a drop in daily Covid-19 cases and deaths in the last two weeks.

The chief minister informed that schools, colleges and educational institutes, intra-state bus services, local train services, Metro services and ferry services would remain closed in addition to beauty parlours and

MP to prepare new roadmap for vaccination, says Shivraj

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, JUNE 14

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday indicated that his government was preparing a new roadmap for inoculation in the state in the wake of the Centre taking over the responsibility of supplying the vaccines for 18-44 age group. Addressing his Cabinet

swimming pools for the public. She elaborated that private vehicles, cabs can only function for emer-

colleagues at a private resort in Raisen, around 50 km from Bhopal, Mr Chouhan said he has ordered the health department to prepare the vaccination roadmap afresh.

“We will have enough vaccines in July. I have asked the health department to prepare a new roadmap for vaccination in view of the changed situation”, he said.

gency or essential services. Among the relaxations, the government and private offices have been allowed to be open with 25

per cent strength from June 16. Private and corporate offices can operate from 10 am to 4 pm.

Markets and haats related to fruits, vegetables, meat and eggs can be run from 7 am to 11 am, while small and medium enterprises can be open from 11 am to 6 pm to help the public and trade. Restaurants and bars can be open between 12 pm and 8 pm with 50% seating capacity.

The state government mentioned that the retail shops in shopping malls and multi complexes will remain open during 11 am to 6 pm with 25 per cent workforce and restricted entry of people up to 30 per cent at a time.

All other shops are allowed to open from 12 pm till 6 pm.



A health worker administers a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to a woman at a railway hospital in Prayagraj on Monday. — PTI

Head of world’s largest family ‘still very much alive’, say kin

Loved ones refuse to perform last rites of patriarch

Aizawl, June 14: It has been over 36 hours since Zionghaka aka Zion-a, the patriarch of what is believed to be the world’s largest family, breathed his last in Mizoram, but his loved ones are not ready to bid him one final goodbye, claiming that he was “still very much alive”.

The 76-year-old, who lives in a sprawling four-storey home in Baktawng village with 39 wives, over 90 children and at least 33 grandchildren, headed a religious sect Lalpa Kohhran thar — which allows polygamy for men.

Zion-a, who was suffering from hypertension and diabetes, was on Sunday declared dead by doctors at Trinity Hospital in Aizawl. Family members, however, insisted that his body was warm and his

▶ **THE 76-YEAR-OLD, who lives in a sprawling four-storey home in Baktawng village with 39 wives, over 90 children and at least 33 grandchildren, headed a religious sect Lalpa Kohhran thar**

pulse still beating. Zaitinkhuma, the secretary of Lalpa Kohhran thar, said Zion-a regained pulse beat after he was brought home from the hospital.

“His (Zion-a) body is still warm. His family members and people of Chhuanthar in Baktawng village can’t bury him under such circumstances,” he said.

According to Chhuanthar village council president Ramzuava, over 2,500 members belonging to 433 families

form part of the sect, which was founded by the Zion-a’s uncle around 70 years ago. Most members of the sect practise carpentry for a living.

“All of them hold the septuagenarian in high regard, and would not want to perform his last rites until they are convinced that he is gone,” Ramzuava added.

CM Zoramthanga had extended his condolences on Sunday, upon hearing about the septuagenarian’s death, and tweeted, “With heavy heart, Mizoram bid farewell to Mr Zion-a (76), believed to head the world’s largest family..Rest in Peace Sir.”

State congress president Lal Thanhawla and Zoram Peoples Movement (ZPM) leader Lalduhoma among others also mourned his demise. — PTI

Mukul Roy to get key post in TMC, RS seat

■ **Continued from Page 1**

who had earlier too served as a Rajya Sabha MP, will have to resign as an MLA, which he has become for the first time in his life. The BJP is planning to target him legally over his defection to the TMC as a legislator, so his resignation will make any action unnecessary. Mr Roy said his party would decide on making him a candidate for the Rajya Sabha shortly.

A senior TMC leader who sought anonymity said the “double promotion” for Mr Roy would also send a signal to the BJP on how much importance the TMC gives to an efficient leader like him. When Mr Roy was in the BJP, he had apparently sought a Rajya Sabha member as well as a Union Cabinet berth, besides holding a party post. However, his wishes were ignored. The TMC also has plans to nominate Yashwant Sinha for the second Rajya Sabha seat, sources claimed.

■ **Continued from Page 1**

mankind’s collective responsibility to reverse the damage to land caused by human activity. It is our sacred duty to leave a healthy planet for our future generations.”

The Prime Minister added: “Land degradation poses a special challenge to the developing world. In the spirit of South-South cooperation, India is assisting fellow developing countries to develop land restoration strategies. A centre of excellence is being set up in India to promote a scientific approach towards land degradation issues.”

He further said: “In India, we have always given importance to land and considered the sacred Earth as our mother. India has taken the lead to highlight land degradation issues at international forums. The Delhi Declaration of 2019 called for better access and stewardship over land, and emphasised gender-sensitive transformative projects. In India, over the last 10 years, around three million hectares of forest cover has been added. This has enhanced the combined forest cover to almost one-fourth of the country’s total area.”

“In many parts of India, we have taken up some novel approaches. To give just one example, the Banni region in the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat suffers from highly degraded land and receives very little rainfall. In that region, land restoration is done by developing grasslands, which helps in achieving land degradation neutrality. It also supports pastoral activities and livelihood by promoting animal husbandry. In the same spirit, we need to devise effective strategies for land restoration while promoting indigenous techniques,” Mr Modi pointed out.



Man lynched in Raj over cow smuggling suspicion

Jaipur, June 14: A man was lynched while another injured by a group of people who attacked them on suspicion of smuggling cattle in Rajasthan’s Chittorgarh district, the police said on Monday.

The police said the victims were taking three oxen to their village in Madhya Pradesh from Begun town of Chittorgarh for agriculture work when a group of people hit them with sticks accusing them of smuggling cows.

The incident occurred near Bhilkhandia in the intervening night of June 13-14.

“Babu Bhil and Pintu

Bhil, both natives of Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, were critically injured in the attack and were rushed to a hospital, where Babu Bhil succumbed to injuries,” superintendent of police Deepak Bhargava said.

He said that seven-eight persons have been detained in connection with the incident.

Circle officer Begun Rajendra Singh said the victims were taking three oxen in a van.

The local men alleged that they were smuggling cows and attacked them. However, the animals were oxen. The injured man has stated that he

and Babu purchased the oxen from Begun town of Chittorgarh and were taking them to their village for farming work, he said.

The officer said that Pintu could not produce any document pertaining to the purchase and the animal trader has been called for verification of his claim.

A case of murder has been registered and stern action will be taken, Additional Director General, Crime, Ravi Meherda said in Jaipur.

Inspector general of police, Udaipur range, has also reached Chittorgarh, he added.

— PTI

■ BJP, Cong in ‘tacit’ alliance: Kejri AAP to contest all seats in Guj polls’

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

The AAP will contest all seats in Gujarat in the 2022 Assembly polls, party’s national convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Monday as he visited a Vaishnavite temple in Ahmedabad and blamed the ruling BJP and Opposition Congress for the “plight” of people but avoided a direct attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah on their home turf.

Addressing a press conference on the campus of the Vallabh Sadan temple after taking darshan of the deity, Mr Kejriwal, who was on a one-day visit to the city, said his party was a credible alternative to the BJP and Congress in Gujarat who he said had a tacit alliance between them.

“The AAP will contest each and every seat in the 2022 Gujarat Assembly



polls. The AAP is a credible alternative to the BJP and Congress. Gujarat will change soon,” he said.

The Gujarat House has 182 seats. Gujarat is suffering because of this friendship and alliance between the BJP and the Congress. The BJP ruled this state for the last 27 years. I heard people saying that Congress is in the pocket of the BJP. Both the BJP and Congress are the same. This must stop,” he said.

Mr Kejriwal said the Congress and the BJP have been in power for most of the period after Independence but “people are witness to what they have done. Farmers are committing suicide even after 75 years”.

During the press conference, the former head of a Gujarati news channel, Isudan Gadhvi, joined the AAP in the presence of Mr Kejriwal.

Year after Sushant's death, CBI inquiry still continues

New Delhi, June 14: The CBI probe into actor Sushant Singh Rajput’s death is still continuing, even after the AIIMS medical board’s report last year that had said it was a case of suicide.

Asked about the developments, CBI officials said the probe is continuing and all angles are being looked into.

The Central agency that took over the probe from the Bihar police, which had registered a case of abetment to suicide on a complaint from the Patna-based father of Rajput,



had formed a SIT but failed to make much headway into the case except recording statements and receiving the forensic reports from the AIIMS panel led by Sudhir Gupta, the head of the institute’s forensics department.

In its conclusive medico-legal opinion to the CBI, the six-member team of forensic doctors had dismissed the claims of “poisoning and strangling” made in the case of Rajput’s death. — PTI

Coup in LJP: MPs throw out Chirag

■ **Continued from Page 1**

Mr Paras spoke to reporters, Mr Paswan drove to his uncle’s residence in the national capital to meet him. Paswan’s cousin and MP Prince Raj also stays there.

Mr Paswan, who has not been keeping well for some time, waited for over 20 minutes in his car before he was let into the house and then left after spending more than an hour inside. He left without saying a word to waiting media persons.

It is believed that neither of the two rebel MPs met

him. A household help said the two were not at home when the LJP chief arrived.

Paras had long been unhappy with Paswan’s style of functioning and was joined by other MPs, including Chandan Singh, Veena Devi and Mehboob Ali Kaiser, as they believed that his campaign against Nitish Kumar had left them at a disadvantage in the state’s politics.

Kaiser has been elected the party’s deputy leader.

The group is also likely to stake claim in the Election Commission to

represent the real LJP with its president now left isolated at the top after taking on the mantle following his father’s death last year. It may move to oust Paswan from the top party post in the coming days.

Sources close to him have blamed the JD(U) for the split, saying the party had long been working to isolate the LJP president after his decision to go all out against CM Kumar in the 2020 Assembly polls.

The JD(U), which was for the first time reduced to the status of a junior part-

ner to the BJP after it lost more than 35 seats due to the presence of LJP candidates, has been seething and had worked to woo over a number of LJP’s organisational leaders to its fold. The lone LJP MLA joined the JD(U).

Paras denied the charge that Kumar’s party had a role in the split.

The BJP, which has its share of pro-Paswan voices as well as his critics, maintained a silence over the matter, with some party leaders noting that it was an internal matter of the party. — PTI

India’s daily numbers dip, but deaths still a concern

■ **Continued from Page 1**

three days. Union health ministry officials said more than 1.40 crore vaccine doses are still available with states and UTs to be administered.

Meanwhile, Novavax’s Covid-19 jab has been found to be more than 90 per cent effective, including against coronavirus variants, the vaccine maker said Monday after a large-scale US study. The jab “demonstrated 100 per cent protection against moderate and severe disease, 90.4 per cent efficacy overall”, the company said in a

statement, adding “the study enrolled 29,960 participants across 119 sites in the US and Mexico to evaluate efficacy, safety and immunogenicity”. The Maryland-headquartered company said it intended to apply for regulatory approval by the third quarter of 2021.

“Novavax continues to work with a sense of urgency to complete our regulatory submissions and deliver this vaccine, built on a well understood and proven platform, to a world that is still in great need of vaccines,” the company said.



THE ASIAN AGE

15 JUNE 2021

A year after Galwan, a lot of questions still remain

Exactly a year ago, on June 15-16, 2020, in eastern Ladakh's Galwan Valley area, soldiers of China's People's Liberation Army attacked a body of Indian soldiers of 16 Bihar Regiment and other units which had gone there to ensure the Chinese had adhered to the agreement reached on June 6 at a meeting of corps commanders from the two sides to facilitate the disengagement of forces at friction points.

The Chinese had to dismantle their camp in parts of the Galwan riverbed near the point where this river meets the Shyok. In an ambush late at night, the Chinese soldiers used iron rods and heavy clubs with steel spikes embedded in them. Twenty Indians, including their commanding officer, a Colonel, were killed. They fought back with bare hands but pushed the Chinese back that night, although the PLA would return later with China claiming it always had "sovereignty" over the Galwan area, which is an outlandish distortion of the facts.

June 15 is an anniversary of bravery and betrayal. To this may be added national humiliation, for Prime Minister Narendra Modi told Opposition parties on June 19 last year that the Chinese "had not intruded, were not intruding..."

Acknowledging this at a public platform last month, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar noted that India-China relations were at a "cross-roads". He also observed that the ongoing relationship had been violated. The Chinese military is yet to vacate the areas where it intruded April 2020 onward. These add up to thousands of square kilometres in strategic regions, including areas where Chinese and Pakistani troops can potentially come together against India.

Numerous rounds of technical meetings between military officials, in some of which diplomats were included, have only produced homilies from China's side. Repeated Indian requests to the Chinese government to disengage, de-escalate and normalise ties have fallen on deaf ears. Beijing seeks a return to normal without first vacating the encroached Indian territories. How matters go from here is not clear.

Strangely enough, the country's military brass has not been above parroting the damaging narrative that no encroachments have occurred, and that India will "not give away an inch". Evidently, they feel protected by the PM's on-record June 19, 2020, observation, of which Beijing has taken full advantage. Baffled Indians naturally ask what the boundary negotiations are then all about. They also wonder about the relevance of the external affairs minister's observations. Is the government speaking to its own people in different voices?

In all areas where China has violated the LAC, its troops are in Ladakh well to the west of the 1960 Chinese claim line, whose map coordinates were given to India by the Chinese four decades ago. But the government seems afraid to point this out to Beijing. India did not accept the claim line and adhered to its historical claim to Aksai Chin.

Undisputed champ of Grand Slams

No one in 52 years has won the four tennis Grand Slams multiple times since Rod Laver did it just after tennis was thrown open, and Roy Emerson. He was down two sets and seemingly out of the contest when Novak Djokovic returned from a toilet break re-energised like a cellphone coming to life after a recharge and wore down his young opponent, Stefanos Tsitsipas, the most talented of the emerging brigade, to win his 19th Grand Slam.

The Serb was in another fluctuating four-hour battle within 48 hours of having jousting with Rafael Nadal in the greatest duel of the era that contained more shades of art than the raw power of modern tennis. He emerged winner against a player with an unsurpassable record on the red shale of Roland Garros. So fiercely locked in their gladiatorial contest were they that the tennis authorities, prompted by President Emmanuel Macron, overruled curfew rules to allow the crowd to stay to the end on the night of the semi-final.

Djokovic may not win popularity contests against contemporary greats Roger Federer and Nadal, both of whom have just one more Grand Slam title than his 19. But, when it comes to tennis on the varied surfaces of the four Grand Slams, he has a record — nine Australian, two French, five Wimbledon and three US Opens — that is superior to that of the legends, of whom Federer has only one French Open win and Nadal a solitary Australian Open title among 20 Grand Slams.

Djokovic's athleticism is backed up by an array of strokes, including laser-like crosscourt backhands. Such weapons from his armoury come with uncanny anticipation and decisiveness in volleys and drop shots at extreme angles played with amazingly deft touch. Power and subtlety flow from his racket in equal measure and to metronomic accuracy in trading shots from the baseline. Tennis has been known to lament the seeming inability of the younger generation to take over from the three musketeers who are in their 30s but Tsitsipas appears ready to challenge the kings.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Ladakh standoff: Can Galwan occur again?



Syed Ata Hasnain

What happened in the Galwan Valley on June 15 last year cannot be easily forgotten. Twenty Indian soldiers led by the valiant Col. Santosh Babu, MVC (Posthumous), commanding officer of 16 Bihar, were killed in action. A deceptive enemy who hid behind the veil of 45 years of trust turned upon these unsuspecting soldiers who were on a mission to verify what had been agreed by their senior commanders just 10 days ago.

Perhaps nowhere in the world has occurred an incident in such bad taste and against all ethics of soldiering. You can take counteraction against adversary soldiers who threaten you or deceive you but targeting those on a verification mission after an agreement was something new in the world of military ethics. The PLA had transgressed to ostensibly dominate the Shyok-DBO Road. Not known to be followers of any rule-based order, the PLA took its time in disengaging from the transgression. When pressured to do so, it chose to get aggressive and turned upon those who were verifying the vacation, with weapons which were straight from the Stone Age, to pulverise, shred and tear human flesh. The PLA came prepared with these weapons and perceived that their employment could be projected as non-lethal in today's age.

What was clear from the incident was the fact that the Indian Army worked on a principle of trust. Forty-five years without loss of life at the Sino-Indian border, 22 meetings to resolve the border through a civilised format, dignified campaign at the highest political level to progress economic and people-to-people relations and regular delegation visits to each other's

military establishments, should count for a justified level of trust. Professional armies do not work on assumptions, but yet an element of human compulsion exists, forcing all implausible contingencies out of the consideration and settling for those within the realm of perceptual reason. Even more important, Galwan exemplified camaraderie and team spirit of an extreme kind when soldiers of different units, arms and services all joined the fight for the sake of their comrades, their countrymen and the honour of their nation.

Much water has already flown down the Shyok River through 2020-21, since Galwan, with a lot happening at the Line of Actual Control. From partial mobilisation to staying put in freezing winter conditions with rustic habitats, lifting and transporting stocks of an unimaginable quantum and the virtual conversion of the LAC to a LoC, we have also witnessed the professional Indian riposte via the quid pro quo operation at the seven heights of the Kailash Range in south Pangong Tso. Through negotiations stretching into the eleventh round, a partial de-escalation and disengagement has been executed but restricted to north and south Pangong Tso. It can safely be assumed that the occupation of the Kailash Range heights caused much consternation in PLA ranks as its major war centre in Ladakh was under direct threat. We could force the PLA vacation of north Pangong Tso transgression because of this. However, some other key transgressions, including the one at Depsang, continue and await the outcome of further talks which could be indefinitely delayed.

So is a Galwan likely to be repeated, and for that

matter should one expect a deterioration of the situation in Ladakh anytime soon. It is easy to dismiss Galwan as a one-off event brought on by cascading out of control circumstances. Situations in an environment with troops at close quarters to each other (although a separation exists here larger than at the LoC) can always be unpredictable and response to awkward situations may find escalation. The feasibility of China deliberately triggering tension appears less likely as it should be viewing its actions in Ladakh as a misadventure which failed to deliver. China had reasonable clarity in the politico-strategic domain of aiming to make India realise that it was alone in the high Himalayas even as it may be among future partners in strategic arrangements that it is seeking under the American umbrella in the Indo-Pacific region. The misadventure in Ladakh, effectively thwarted by India, had a flawed military strategy. The occupation of some pressure points, transgressions across some of them and the refusal to vacate, awaiting more negotiations, are being perceived by some as a victory for China. Victories are measured against the attainment of the politico-strategic aim and not bits and pieces of occupation of territory which was vacant. What we in India have failed to capitalise upon is the ethical aspects of functioning between nations. China may have aspirations for superpower status, but it lacks the ability to build a larger perception of itself beyond that ambition; powerful nations show better ethics in international functioning. President Xi Jinping's recent

The fact that China couldn't attain its aims in coercing India even under pandemic conditions and its decision to negotiate at the field level are pointers to a possible change in strategy.

directions to remove "wolf warrior" diplomacy from China's ways of international dealings and build a more positive external perception about China is proof enough of its failure in pursuance of effective international relations. Notwithstanding what success it may perceive for itself through the Belt and Road Initiative outreach and attempts at cultivating influence in India's near abroad, the world's image of China remains one of a predatory nation which refuses to be bound by rules and agreements and therefore untrustworthy. The outlay of China's external aid remains at a quarter of what the US dishes out although the Chinese economy is just over half the US economy and growing at a much faster speed.

Given all these circumstances and the ongoing transition in the global order, what one should reasonably expect is some change in China's approach. How much this will impact Sino-Indian relations and the Ladakh standoff is difficult to say, being already a theatre of recent and ongoing tension. The fact that China couldn't attain its aims in coercing India even under pandemic conditions and its decision to negotiate at the field level are pointers to a possible change in strategy. The PLA will play hard to get, it will display reluctance to negotiate and for the foreseeable future will effect no change in the LAC's status. A campaign-like operation appears remote but even coercion operations which China experienced as having potential to go out of control may not take place. However, cyber threats should be expected to escalate, also campaigns in the information domain. Yet a Galwan could always happen as a spinoff from other circumstances, given the unpredictability of the LAC. It is something we should be prepared for even as the tone and tenor of the relationship at the highest levels improves to far greater levels.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps

LETTERS

DATA AND LIES

The government is rattled by a hard-hitting report in a reputed international publication saying that the Covid-induced death toll is between five and seven times the official count. Its own defence is flimsy as well. What is the infallible statistical tool adopted by it to ascertain the number of deaths? It is clear that our indigenous media outlets can be muzzled by strongarm tactics. But the international media cannot be arm-twisted. The Centre has a dubious record of fudging data, be it on the employment rate by the NSSO or the GDP. The tools empowering citizens such as RTI are time and again blunted.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

A CLOSE CALL

DENMARK'S STAR midfielder Christian Eriksen collapsing on the pitch during the first half of the Euro 2020 game against Finland in Copenhagen on Saturday left the football world in horror and shock. Cardiac-linked sudden deaths in sport aren't unusual, and there have been instances galore of players collapsing on the football field and fading away. Though Denmark went down 1-0 after the match resumed, the good news is that Eriksen is stable and receiving treatment at a hospital. Here's wishing him a speedy recovery!

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

TAKE YOUR SHOT

THERE ARE a lot of rumours being spread on the social media about the Covid-19 vaccines, with the clear implication that they will have harmful effects on people. Some people have said that they will not take the vaccine even if they have fever, cough or cold. It is being said that those receiving the second dose are dying. Infertility is another common fear. Please don't pay heed to these rumours. Doctors are doing their best to persuade people to get themselves vaccinated. Follow their advice and book your appointment.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

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

Aakar Patel



Civil society & NGOs: Why they matter in run-up to 2024

We have entered the third year of the Narendra Modi government and in the months to come the discussion will inevitably turn to the general election of 2024. Some of the recent political activity around Uttar Pradesh is being seen in this light. In India what the government does is left generally to the political parties, especially by the middle class which, once it has voted, does not engage with the State. But there is a part of our country which does engage and does not remain aloof.

The term "civil society" refers, according to the World Health Organisation, to a wide array of organisations: community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations".

In India we usually use the term "civil society" almost exclusively for the NGOs and activists, because professional associations are quite afraid of confronting the government. There are some exceptions, but these are very few. It is the NGOs, activists and

indigenous groups who represent the people and their interests outside the framework of politics. In India, when we say indigenous groups, we mean adivasis. The model of development that India has adopted is to extract from adivasi lands the resources that are used for the rest of the country. You and I do not get displaced by the government from our homes. It is the adivasis who must leave the homes and settlements that their ancestors have lived in for thousands of years because we need to build a dam or because we have found coal underneath.

The adivasis have protested against India's government and its policies for over a century. The rebellion of Birsu Munda, the man whose statue Amit Shah once wanted to garland (but he wrongly garlanded someone else's) forced the British to introduce the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, which banned the transfer of adivasi land to non-advasis. The BJP wanted to garland Birsu Munda's statue but it also passed a law to undo the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act in 2016. This produced such a backlash from the adivasis that the BJP retreated from the law and

was defeated in the next state election. This is why Mr Shah was garlanding what he thought was Birsu Munda's statue in 2020.

Adivasi resistance to the Indian State is not understood and it is not very widely covered in the media. This month has seen at least two places where adivasis have been holding protests. In Gujarat 11 adivasis were arrested for protesting against the proposed parking lot near the Statue of Unity. They said the land acquired by the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam for the development project belonged to them and had been taken illegally.

The strength of the emotion can be understood by knowing that the women among them removed their clothes in public. An FIR was filed against 20 of them under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including 143 (unlawful assembly) and 294 (singing obscene song, ballad or words near a public place). In Chhattisgarh, which has a Congress government, thousands of adivasis have been on protest against a Central Reserve Police Force camp erected on their land without their permission. The government opened fire on them,

killing three, but the adivasis are still there in the open in Bastar, demanding their rights and insisting that the camp be removed.

On the outskirts of Delhi, tens of thousands of farmers are continuing their protest, having gathered in November and spent the entire winter and now the summer in the open along the highways. The laws that they are protesting against were passed without a division vote in the Rajya Sabha. The laws have been suspended indefinitely by the Supreme Court and the Narendra Modi government itself has offered to suspend them for 18 months. There is extreme disaffection against the laws, including by groups supporting the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, and it is unlikely that the laws will ever be implemented. The Modi government itself has lost interest in them and does not speak about their implementation. But it has allowed the protests to continue because it does not want to be seen as retreating, though it appears to have already retreated.

Similarly, though the Citizenship Amendment Act was passed by Parliament more than a year and a half ago, it has not been implemented.

One reason is the widespread protests against it in India, the other is the widespread condemnation against it globally, including in the European Parliament.

Civil society action in Gujarat has resulted in the setting up of fast track courts to hear atrocities against dalits and adivasis. This came after the protest against the assault on dalits in Una over a cow's carcass. The civil society action was led by a former journalist, Jignesh Mewani, who was then elected to the Gujarat Assembly.

A lot of action has taken place in civil society since 2014. A weakening of the government, meaning a Central government with no party having an absolute majority, or a change in government, will give civil society groups additional leverage. Laws that are unacceptable to civil society groups will not be easy to pass and implement. And laws that are in outright violation of international human rights standards will come under pressure to be repealed. It is a most interesting time that is leading up to 2024.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

SHORT TAKES

MAN, 25, DIES AFTER DOWNTOWN AUSTIN SHOOTING

Austin (US), June 14: A man has died from his injuries following a mass shooting on a crowded downtown Austin street that left more than a dozen people injured, police said Sunday.

Douglas John Kantor, 25, who was hospitalised with critical gunshot wounds following the early Saturday morning shooting, died Sunday at 12:01 pm, the Austin Police Department said in a news release that also was confirmed by Lt Brian Moon. Interim Police Chief Joseph Chacon said the shooting happened around 1:30 am Saturday on a street packed with bars and barricaded off from vehicle traffic. He said investigators believe the shooting began as a dispute between two parties.

PAK COPS DENIED FREE BURGERS. DETAIN 19 STAFF

Lahore, June 14: A group of police officers in Pakistan flipped out when a takeaway joint refused to hand over free burgers, detaining all 19 staff at the branch.

Workers at the trendy chain Johnny & Jugnu in the eastern city of Lahore were rounded up and held for seven hours overnight on Saturday, leaving behind unattended kitchens and hungry customers.

"This is not the first time something like this has happened with our kitchen teams at our restaurant, but we want to make sure this is the last," the fast food chain said in a statement published on social media. It started when staff at the restaurant refused a "request from a very high profile special guest".

Restaurant staff said that most of those arrested were young people.

B'DESH ACTRESS CRIES RAPE, ASKS PM FOR JUSTICE

Dhaka, June 14: Prominent Bangladeshi film actress Shamsunnahar Smriti, popularly known as Pori Moni, has sought justice from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a Facebook post alleging that a businessman attempted to rape and murder her at a club here.

After making the allegations in a Facebook post without naming the suspect on Sunday, she held a media briefing later in the night and accused businessmen Nasir U. Mahmood, entertainment and cultural affairs secretary of Dhaka Boat Club, of assaulting her; *bdnews24* reported.

The 28-year-old actress alleged that Nasir assaulted her at the club in Dhaka's Uttara four days ago. The businessman could not be reached immediately for comments, the news website said. A founding member of the Dhaka Boat Club, Nasir is involved with real estate business.

TWO AMERICANS STAND TRIAL IN GHOSN'S ESCAPE

Tokyo, June 14: Two Americans suspected of helping former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn flee Japan while he was out on bail go on trial Monday in Tokyo.

Michael Taylor, a former Green Beret, and his son Peter Taylor are suspected in the Houdini-like operation where Ghosn hid in a box for music equipment that was loaded onto a private jet that flew him to Lebanon, via Turkey in December 2019. Unlike the US, Lebanon has no extradition treaty with Japan.

Ghosn has French, Lebanese and Brazilian citizenship. The Taylors were arrested in Massachusetts in May last year and extradited in March on charges of helping a criminal. The authorities say Ghosn hired the Taylors for at least \$1.3 million. Ghosn led Japanese automaker Nissan Motor Co. for two decades before his arrest in November 2018. He was charged with falsifying securities reports in under-reporting his compensation and of breach of trust in using Nissan money for personal gain.

Ghosn says he is innocent. At Monday's court session, the Tokyo District Prosecutors will outline the allegations against the Taylors before Presiding Judge Hideo Nirei and two other judges. The Taylors will also likely make statements. They have been held in a Tokyo detention centre since arriving in Japan and were not available for comment.

Peter Taylor said in a statement to a Massachusetts court in January that he met Ghosn in 2019 in Japan to pitch his digital marketing company to repair Ghosn's tarnished reputation.

Will better India ties, says Bennett

Israeli foreign minister Yair Lapid says he hopes to welcome PM Modi to Israel soon



Naftali Bennett

upgradation of diplomatic ties next year.

"Thank you Mr. Prime Minister @narendramodi, I look forward to working with you to further develop the unique and warm relations between our two democracies," Bennett tweeted from his official handle. Bennett took oath of office on Sunday after the Knesset (Parliament) elected him as the 13th Prime Minister of Israel.

Alternate Prime Minister and foreign minister Yair Lapid also said that Israel's new government will work to "advance strategic relations" with India. "I look forward to working together to advance the strategic relations between our countries and hope to welcome you to Israel soon," Lapid tweeted on Monday in response to a congratulatory message from External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

Jaishankar earlier in a tweet congratulated his new Israeli counterpart. "Congratulate APM & FM @yairlapid of Israel on his appointment. Look forward to working closely together to further advance our multifaceted strategic partnership," Jaishankar wrote. Lapid, the head of the Yesh Atid party, would take over premiership in September 2023 under a

power-sharing deal with Bennett, serving for two years till the end of the term. In his tweets, Modi also conveyed his "profound gratitude" to Netanyahu, whose long tenure as Israeli prime minister ended on Sunday.

Modi thanked Netanyahu for his "personal attention" to India-Israel strategic partnership. "As you complete your successful tenure as the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, I convey my profound gratitude for your leadership and personal attention to India-Israel strategic partnership @netanyahu," Modi tweeted.

The personal chemistry between the two leaders has often been talked about in the Israeli media and Prime Minister Modi got a royal welcome during his historic trip to the Jewish state in July 2017. — PTI

Suu Kyi on trial but critics say charges bogus

Bangkok, June 14: Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi was set to go on trial Monday on charges that many observers have criticised as attempt by the military junta that deposed her to delegitimise her democratic election and cripple her political future.

Suu Kyi's prosecution poses the greatest challenge for the 75-year-old and her National League for Democracy party since February's military coup, which prevented them from taking office for a second five-year term following last year's landslide election victory. Human Rights Watch charged that the allegations being heard in a special trial in the capital, Naypyitaw, are "bogus and politically motivated" with the intention of nullifying the victory and preventing Suu Kyi from running for office again.

"This trial is clearly the opening salvo in an overall strategy to neuter Suu Kyi and the National

League for Democracy party as a force that can challenge military rule in the future," said Phil Robertson, the organisation's deputy Asia director.

The army seized power on Feb. 1 before the new lawmakers could be seated, and arrested Suu Kyi, who held the post of special counsellor, and President Win Myint, along with other members of her government and ruling party. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward more democracy for Myanmar.

The army cited the government's failure to properly investigate alleged voting irregularities as its reason for seizing power — an assertion contested by the independent Asian Network for Free Elections and many others. Junta officials have threatened to dissolve the National League for Democracy for alleged involvement in election fraud and any conviction for Suu Kyi could bar her from politics. — AP

US checking leak at China N-plant

Beijing, June 14: The US government is assessing a report of a leak at a Chinese nuclear power plant, after a French company that partly owns and helps to operate it warned of an "imminent radiological threat", a media report said on Monday.

The warning included an accusation that the Chinese safety authority was raising the acceptable limits for radiation detection outside the Taishan Nuclear Power Plant in Guangdong province in order to avoid having to shut it down, the CNN quoted a letter from the French company to the US Department of Energy. There is no reaction yet in Beijing by the Chinese government or officials on this report, it said. The media report said despite the alarming notification from Framatome, the French company, the Biden administration believes the facility is not yet at a "crisis level".

While US officials have deemed the situation does not currently pose a severe safety threat to workers at the plant or Chinese public, it is unusual that a foreign company would unilaterally reach out to the American government for help when its Chinese state-owned partner is yet to acknowledge a problem exists.

The scenario could put the US in a complicated situation should the leak continue or become more severe without being fixed, the report said.

However, concern was significant enough that the US National Security Council held multiple meetings to discuss the situation, it said. The Biden administration has discussed the situation with the French government and their own experts at the Department of Energy, the report said, adding that the US has also been in contact with the Chinese government. — PTI

US MILITARY | DOCUMENTS

Ultra-nationalists were looking to glorify ex-PM, 6 more as martyrs

Mystery of war criminal Tojo's remains solved

Tokyo, June 14: Until recently, the location of executed wartime Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo's remains was one of World War II's biggest mysteries in the nation he once led. Now, a Japanese university professor has revealed declassified US military documents that appear to hold the answer.

The documents show the cremated ashes of Tojo, one of the masterminds of the Pearl Harbor attack, were scattered from a US Army aircraft over the

Pacific Ocean about 30 miles (50 kilometres) east of Yokohama, Japan's second-largest city, south of Tokyo. It was a tension-filled, highly secretive mission, with American officials apparently taking extreme steps meant to keep Tojo's remains, and those of six others executed with him, away from ultra-nationalists looking to glorify them as martyrs.

The seven were hanged for war crimes just before Christmas in 1948, three years after Japan's defeat.

The discovery brings partial closure to a painful chapter of Japanese history that still plays out today, as conservative Japanese politicians attempt to whitewash history, leading to friction with wartime victims, especially China and South Korea.

After years spent verifying and checking details and evaluating the significance of what he'd found, Nihon University Professor Hiroaki Takazawa publicly released the clues to

the remains' location last week. He came across the declassified documents in 2018 at the US National Archives in Washington.

It's believed to be the first time official documents showing the handling of the seven war criminals' remains were made public, according to Japan's National Institute for Defence Studies and the Japan Center for Asian Historical Records.

Hidetoshi Tojo, the leader's great-grandson, told *The Associated Press* that

the absence of the remains has long been a humiliation for the bereaved families, but he's relieved the information has come to light. "If his remains were at least scattered in Japanese territorial waters ... I think he was still somewhat fortunate," Tojo said.

"I want to invite my friends and lay flowers to pay tribute to him" if further details about the remains' location becomes available. Hideki Tojo, prime minister during much of World War II, is a complicated

figure, revered by some conservatives as a patriot but loathed by many in the West for prolonging the war, which ended only after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States.

About a month after Aug. 15, 1945, when then-Empress Hirohito announced Japan's defeat to a stunned nation, Tojo shot himself in a failed suicide attempt as he was about to be arrested at his modest Tokyo home. — AP

Bibi ouster ends worst conflict, says Palestine

Ramallah, June 14: Benjamin Netanyahu's ousting as prime minister of Israel closes the chapter on one of the "worst periods" of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said on Monday.

"The departure of the Israeli ex-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu after 12 years in power marks the end of one of the worst periods in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," Shtayyeh said ahead of the Palestinian Authority's weekly cabinet meeting.

But Shtayyeh also said he was under no illusions about the new government

or its likelihood of advancing a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

"We do not see this new government as any less bad than the previous one, and we condemn the announcements of the new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in support of Israeli settlements," the Palestinian premier said, referring to Israeli construction activity in the occupied West Bank.

"The new government has no future if it does not take into consideration the future of the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights," Shtayyeh added. — AFP



Luxury yachts are moored at the Dubai Marina Beach in the Gulf emirate. Charter companies said they have seen an increased interest in yachting after Coronavirus measures eased, especially among those who want to spend time with friends and family. — AFP

UK curbs may lift by July 19 over Delta variant case spike

London, June 14: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce a four-week delay to an end to all legal lockdown restrictions in the country when he makes a statement later on Monday in relation to so-called "Freedom Day", which was set for June 21.

The last and fourth stage of the lockdown roadmap is now expected around July 19 instead amid a worrying spike in cases of the Delta variant, which experts fear will result in greater hospitalisations in the coming weeks. On Sunday, the UK recorded 7,490 new cases of Covid-19 and eight deaths, with the seven-day average for cases up 49 per cent compared with the seven days before. Scientists and health officials have called for a delay in lifting all social distance norms in order to allow the vaccination programme to gain further ground, with second doses for the older age groups and first doses for the younger population cohorts of over-25s now eligible for jabs.

"It is one last heave. It is a straight race between the vaccine and the virus," a senior government source was quoted as saying after Johnson met his Cabinet ministers and scientific advisers to assess the latest data. Johnson is

Novavax shot 90% effective

Washington, June 14: Vaccine maker Novavax said Monday its shot was highly effective against Covid-19 and also protected against variants in a large, late-stage study in the US and Mexico.

The vaccine was about 90 per cent effective overall and preliminary data showed it was safe, the company said. While demand for Covid-19 shots in the US has dropped off dramatically, the need for more vaccines around the world remains critical.

The Novavax vaccine, which is easy to store and transport, is expected to play an important role in boosting vaccine supplies in the developing world. That help is still months

away, however.

The company says it plans to seek authorisation for the shots in the US, Europe and elsewhere by the end of September and be able to produce up to 100 million doses a month by then. "Many of our first doses will go to ... low- and middle-income countries, and that was the goal to begin with," Novavax Chief Executive Stanley Erck told *The Associated Press*. While more than half of the US population has had at least one Covid-19 vaccine dose, less than one per cent of people in the developing world have had one shot, according to Our World In Data. — AP

expected to blame the delay on the third wave of Covid-19 infections and say it will allow millions of more people to be vaccinated and more to receive a second jab by the end of July. As well as a delay in lifting restrictions to allow scientists more time to monitor the Delta variant,

the UK Prime Minister is also likely to announce a drive to accelerate the vaccination programme. The extension will be put to a House of Commons vote this month and could trigger a backbench rebellion from Johnson's own Conservative Party MPs. — PTI

NEPAL PLANT TO CUT DOWN INDIA OXYGEN IMPORT

Kathmandu, June 14: Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli on Monday virtually laid the foundation stone of Nepal's first-ever liquefied oxygen plant in the Lumbini Province which will help cater to growing domestic demand and reduce oxygen imported from India, amidst the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

The plant is being set up at Simarhawa of Rupandehi district in the province. The country has been facing a shortage of oxygen and oxygen cylinders as the second wave of Covid-19 hit Nepal, Prime Minister Oli noted while laying the foundation stone from his official residence Balaudhar. It was an unprecedented event of happiness at a time when the country had been reeling under an acute crisis of oxygen, he noted.

The government was compelled to import oxygen and other essential medical equipment, he said. "Later, the government thought that it would be appropriate to set up an oxygen plant on its own," he added. — PTI

PAK SC STOPS DEMOLITION OF DHARAMSHALA

Islamabad, June 14: Pakistan's Supreme Court has ordered the Karachi administration to stop the demolition of a Hindu dharamshala and leasing out the heritage property located in the heart of the city.

A three-judge bench led by Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed issued the order on Friday while hearing a case regarding the implementation of a 2014 judgment on minorities' rights. During the hearing, Dr Ramesh Kumar a co-opted member of a one-man commission on minorities stated that the property at Saddar Town-I in Karachi measuring about 716 square yards was a dharamshala, *The Express Tribune* reported on Sunday.

Kumar also placed before the court photographs of the building. He said the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) leased out the property to some private person, who was demolishing the dharamshala to construct a commercial plaza. Kumar said the ETPB chairman contended that the Sindh High Court (SHC) has allowed the ETPB to lease the place out, have it demolished and raise a new building there. — PTI

BIDEN-PUTIN MEET UNNERVE SOME US ALLIES

Kyiv, June 14: Central and Eastern European nations are anxious about the coming summit meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, wary of what they see as hostile intentions from the Kremlin.

Some in the countries that once were part of the Soviet Union or the Moscow-led Warsaw Pact during the Cold War worry that Washington could scale down support for its allies in the region in a bid to secure a more stable and predictable relationship with Russia.

"I think there have been doubts as to the resoluteness of the present administration to face Russian aggressive actions in a decisive manner," said Witold Rodkiewicz, chief specialist on Russian politics at Warsaw's Center of Eastern Studies, a state-funded think tank that advises the Polish government. Both Russia and the US have sought to moderate expectations about Wednesday's summit in Geneva, ruling out any breakthroughs amid the worst tensions between the two powers. — AP



Joe Biden

AT NATO, BIDEN READY TO TALK CHINA, RUSSIA

Brussels, June 14: President Joe Biden makes his entrance at a Nato summit aiming to consult European allies on efforts to counter provocative actions by China and Russia while highlighting the US commitment to the 30-country alliance that was frequently maligned by predecessor Donald Trump.

The summit Monday comes as Biden tries to rally allies for greater coordination in checking China and Russia, two adversaries whose actions on economic and national security fronts have become the chief foreign policy concerns in the early going of the Biden presidency.

Biden will use his time at the summit to underscore the US commitment to Article 5 of the alliance charter, which spells out that an attack on one member is an attack on all. — AP

quick BITES

| INDICATORS | | % |
|------------------------|------------|-------|
| Sensex | 52,551.53 | 0.15 |
| Nifty 50 | 15,811.90 | 0.08 |
| S&P 500* | 4,237.13 | -0.24 |
| Dollar (₹) | 73.27 | 0.27 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 103.25 | 0.12 |
| Euro (₹) | 88.76 | 0.06 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 47,705*464 | 0.97 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)* | 73.18 | 0.67 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 6.004 | 0.00 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.484 | 0.022 |

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Government clips powers of cashew council

The government suspended the power of the Cashew Export Promotion Council to issue or renew RCMCs (registration-cum-membership certificate) for cashew kernels, cashewnut shell liquid and kardanol and authorised the Apeda for the same. However, RCMCs already issued by the council would remain valid for the rest of their validity period, the DGFT said in a public notice.

IOB Q4 profit rises more than 2-fold to ₹350 cr



Indian Overseas Bank reported a more than two-fold jump in net profit at Rs 349.77 crore in Q4 against Rs 143.79 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total income in Q4FY21 rose to Rs 6,073.80 crore against Rs 5,484.06 crore in Q4FY20. Provisions for bad loans and contingencies rose to Rs 1,380.46 crore from Rs 1,060.38 crore. For the full year, IOB reported a net profit of Rs 831.47 crore against a net loss of Rs 8,527.40 crore in 2019-20.

Palm oil imports jump 48% at 7.69 LT in May

India's import of palm oils rose by 48 per cent to 7,69,602 tonne in May this year against 4,00,506 tonne a year ago in higher shipments of crude palm oil, industry body Solvent Extractors Association (SEA) said. Total vegetable oil imports rose by 68 per cent to Rs 12.49 lakh tonne in May this year compared to 7.43 lakh tonne in May 2020. The share of palm oil is over 60 per cent in India's vegetable oil imports.

CAI cuts cotton output estimate to 356 L bales

The Cotton Association of India (CAI) reduced its cotton crop estimate for 2020-21 by 4 lakh bales to 356 lakh bales, due to lower output expected in southern and central zones. The crop estimate for the southern zone has been reduced by 3 lakh bales to 91.50 lakh bales. In Telangana, the estimates are lower by 3 lakh bales based on the data provided by the Telangana Cotton Millers and Traders Welfare Association.

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Shares tumble up to 25% intraday Hot Adani stocks turn freezing cold

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD with agency inputs MUMBAI, JUNE 14

Adani Group companies shares fell between 5 per cent and 25 per cent intraday on news that the National Securities Depository Ltd (NSDL) has frozen accounts of three foreign portfolio investors' (FPIs), which own over Rs 43,500 crore worth of shares in four of the group's firms.

According to reports, the market-cap of Adani Group Companies took a \$6-billion hit after media reports emerged about the suspension.

Group flagship Adani Enterprises lost 25 per cent as shares plunged to a low of Rs 1,201.10 on the BSE compared to the previous close at Rs 1,601.45. Later the stock recovered most of the day's losses to close at Rs 1,501.25, still down 6.26 per cent.

Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone ended the day with a loss of 8.3 per cent at Rs 768.70, after plunging 18.75 per cent to a low of Rs 681.50, compared to the previous close at Rs 838.80.

Adani Power and Adani Transmission closed 4.99 per cent and 5 per cent lower, respectively, as both stocks hit the 5 per cent lower circuit and remained locked till the close of the market.

Adani Green Energy, which has risen sharply since August last year and commands a higher market cap than even Adani



Enterprises at Rs 1,83,920 crore, fell 4.13 per cent. Adani Total Gas fell 5 per cent and hit the lower circuit and was locked in the lower circuit till day's end. It has also risen sharply since mid-October and commands a market cap of Rs 1,69,871.17 crore.

Reports said that NSDL has frozen the accounts of Albula Investment Fund, Cresta Fund and APMS Investment Fund due to insufficient disclosure of information regarding beneficial ownership.

The funds are based out of Mauritius and registered at the same address in Port Louis and the frozen accounts, as of May 31, won't be able to sell or buy new securities, reports said.

However, the Adani Group said it has written confirmation that accounts of three foreign funds that are among its top shareholders are not frozen and reports to the contrary are "blatantly erroneous and misleading". In identical filings to the stock exchange, some group companies said, "This is causing irrepara-

ble loss of economic value to the investors at large and reputation of the group."

A sharp rally in the shares of Adani Group companies had added over \$40 billion to the wealth of Gautam Adani this year.

The quick surge in these stocks, largely held by overseas funds and with very little public float, had also led some analysts to flag the risks involved.

The group's stocks, especially Adani Total Gas, Adani Enterprises and Adani Transmission, "look extended," Bloomberg Intelligence analysts Gaurav Patankar and Nitin Chanduka wrote in a June 10 note after analyzing technical indicators.

"Among the biggest foreign investors are a few Mauritius-based funds holding over 95% of assets in these companies," the analysts wrote. "Such concentrated positions, along with negligible onshore ownership, create asymmetric risk-reward as large investors conspicuously avoid Adani," they said.

SEBI SLAPS ₹15 CR FINES ON FRANKLIN BOSSES, TRUSTEE

New Delhi, June 14: The Sebi on Monday imposed a penalty totalling Rs 15 crore on senior officials of Franklin Templeton AMC and its trustee for violating regulatory norms in the case of winding up six debt schemes in 2020.

A fine of Rs 3 crore has been levied on Franklin Templeton Trustee Services Pvt Ltd and Rs 2 crore each on Franklin Asset Management (India) Pvt Ltd president Sanjay Sapre and its chief investment officer Santosh Kamat, according to a Sebi order.

In addition, the regulator imposed a penalty of Rs 1.5 crore each on Kunal Agarwal, Sumit Gupta, Pallab Roy, Sachin Padwal Desai and Umesh Sharma, who were the fund managers at the time of violation, and Rs 50 lakh on Saurabh Gangrade, who was the chief compliance officer at that time.

They have been directed to pay the penalty within 45 days.

Sebi noted that the trustees of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund (MF) are thorough professionals and these officials are experts in their respective domain, and yet they failed to avert certain lapses in the functioning of a mutual fund.

"The acts and deeds committed by them while discharging their duties are not in the interest of the unitholders in specific and the investors in general," the Sebi said.

RBI set to lift pricing cap on micro loans

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JUNE 14

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday proposed to do away with pre-payment penalty, requirement of collateral and provide greater flexibility in repayment frequency for all microfinance loans. For the lenders, the central bank proposed removing the pricing caps on micro loans introduced after the 2010 microfinance crisis.

The proposals are part of a consultative document on uniform regulation for companies engaged in microfinance business released by the central bank. The proposed recommendations aim to ensure a level-playing field between banks, non-banks and microfinance firms, all of which do micro lending but have different regulations.

The suggestions include a common definition of

microfinance loans for all regulated entities, capping the outflow on account of repayment of loan obligations of a household to a percentage of the household income and a board approved policy for household income assessment.

The paper has proposed to align the pricing guidelines for NBFC-MFIs with guidelines for NBFCs, introduce a standard simplified fact sheet on pricing of microfinance loans for better transparency, besides displaying the minimum, maximum and average interest rates charged on microfinance loans on the websites of regulated entities.

At present the maximum interest charged by an NBFC-MFI has to be lower of (i) the cost of funds plus a margin cap of 10 per cent for MFIs with loan portfolio of Rs 100 crore or above and 12 per cent for others; (ii)

The average base rate of the five largest commercial banks by assets multiplied by 2.75. The average base rate of the five largest commercial banks is announced by RBI at the end of each quarter, which determines the interest rate for the ensuing quarter. These pricing restrictions were introduced in 2014 by the regulator in line with the Y.H. Malegam committee recommendations.

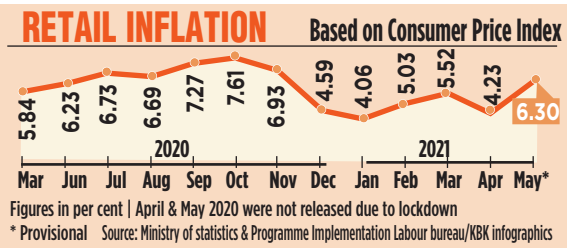
The current regulations are applicable only to 30 per cent of the microfinance loan portfolio NBFC-MFIs whereas other lenders, which comprise around 70 per cent share in the microfinance portfolio, are not subjected to similar regulatory conditions. The emerging dynamics in the microfinance sector as well as the concerns of customer protection call for a review of the regulations, it said.

Inflation spikes above comfort zone in May

New Delhi, June 14: Rising prices of edible oils and protein rich items pushed the retail inflation to a six-month high of 6.3 per cent in May, breaching the RBI's comfort level and thus rendering reduction in interest rates a difficult proposition in the near-term.

The government has asked the Reserve Bank to keep the retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

CPI inflation has breached the upper band of the inflation target about



10 times since the first meeting of the monetary policy committee in October 2016.

Wholesale price-based inflation too accelerated to

a record 12.94 per cent in May on account of rising prices of crude oil, manufactured goods and the low base of last year due to the Covid-19 lockdown. — PTI

Amara Raja plans \$1 bn capex in new green tech

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JUNE 14

Automotive and industrial battery manufacturer Amara Raja Batteries (ARBL) has a \$1 billion capex plan for investment in new green technologies, including lithium-ion batteries, to capitalise on the evolving trends in the energy and mobility sectors.

"It's a moving capex as EV (electric vehicle) batteries technologies are changing fast and we may need to keep revisiting our capex requirements," Jaydev Galla, vice chairman, ARBL, told *Financial Chronicle* after the company's board meeting.

"The technology in this space is emerging rapidly...The ACC (advanced chemistry cell) PLI scheme announced recently by Government of India for Rs 18,000 crore provides a significant impetus for building a domestic supply chain for lithium and other advanced cell chemistries to serve the fast-growing EV and



Jaydev Galla renewable energy sectors.

"ARBL plans to invest in a bouquet of products and services to accelerate its transformation to an Energy and Mobility solutions provider," Galla said.

Jaydev Galla will be taking charge as the chairman of ARBL after the company's annual general meeting in August from his father and ARBL founder, Ramchandra Galla, who has been at the helm for 36 years.

ARBL will also be expanding the core business of lead acid batteries production as Galla feels they will be used for at least two more decades by commercial and heavy vehicles.

PE/VC EXITS MOVE UP AHEAD OF UNICORN IPOs

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 14

PE/VC-funded companies have entered a major exit phase with May being the second-best ever in terms of exit values. With some of the unicorns getting ready for IPOs, exit activity is expected to heat up in the coming months.

May 2021 recorded 18 exits worth \$12 billion, almost 42 times the value of exits in May 2020 at \$286 million and nearly four times the value in April 2021 at \$2.7 billion.

Till May this year, there have been \$19.3 billion worth exits and this is three times the total exit value of last year. Large well-funded corporations have been taking advantage of the current environment to consolidate businesses or acquire online capabilities to enhance the value proposition of their existing brick and mortar businesses, says a IVCA-EY report.

Going ahead, PE/VC funds will see a heightened activity. Several PE/VC-funded firms, including Paytm, Nykaa, and Policy Bazaar have announced IPO plans.

Rishi Sunak drawn into tax query on Murthy-funded Cloutail

London, June 14: Cloutail India Pvt Ltd—the online retailing joint venture of Infosys co-founder N. R. Narayana Murthy's firm and Amazon.com—faced a 5.5 million pounds demand, including interest and penalties, from tax authorities after it paid "meagre" taxes over the past four years, a media report said on Monday.

Amazon reportedly developed independent sellers such as Cloutail, as 'special merchant' which enjoyed over 35 per cent of total sales on the platform until 2019.

While Murthy's Catamaran Ventures indirectly holds 76 per cent in Cloutail and Amazon the remaining 24 per cent, the firm's two top posts—chief executive and finance director—were with the US retailer. Cloutail's holding company, Prione is also run by a former Amazon manager; the report in *The Guardian* newspaper said.

The report said it is not known precisely what the tax dispute is about and the company said that it was contesting the bill, adding that since the "matter is sub judice, we are unable



Rishi Sunak

to comment any further.

Following the report, the office of UK chancellor of the exchequer Rishi Sunak, who is son-in-law of Murthy, was forced to comment.

The revelations come just days after Sunak led the G7 finance ministers' charge to agree to a global deal designed to make tech companies pay more tax.

"Reaching an international agreement on how large digital companies are taxed has been a priority for the chancellor since he took office," said a spokesperson for his UK Treasury office.

The chancellor's consistent position has been that it matters where tax is paid, and any agreement must ensure digital businesses pay tax in the UK

that reflects their economic activities. That is what our taxpayers would expect and is the right thing," the spokesperson said.

Sunak has been dubbed the UK's richest minister, largely as a result of his wife Akshata Murthy's family wealth. The latest *Guardian* report claims that an analysis of Cloutail's accounts and activities shows that it is one of the largest sellers on Amazon.in, as part of a 76-24 per cent joint venture with Amazon.

"The company has received a show cause notice in the current year from Directorate General of Goods and Service Tax Intelligence amounting to Rs 5,455 lakh (5.5 mn pound) along with interest and penalties for service tax-related matters, it quotes Cloutail's most recent accounts as saying.

It claims that the annual report further reveals that Cloutail which only sells via the Amazon platform paid Amazon fees of 95 million pounds last year, almost 10 times more than the Indian business reported in profit. — PTI

REGULATORS TO VET PNB HOUSING FINANCE PLAN TO RAISE ₹4K CR FROM CARLYLE



New Delhi, June 14: Reserve Bank of India and Sebi will look into various regulatory issues related to the proposed Rs 4,000-crore investment by US-based private equity firm Carlyle and others in PNB Housing Finance, sources said on Monday.

Last month, the board of PNB Housing Finance cleared a proposal to raise up to Rs 4,000 crore by issuing preference shares and convertible warrants to Carlyle Group firms and other entities.

According to the sources, concerns of minority shareholders, corporate governance and others regulatory aspects would be looked into by the RBI and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi).

Earlier this year, the RBI had shot down a Punjab National Bank (PNB) proposal to infuse capital into its subsidiary PNB Housing Finance through a rights issue on concerns of the lender's financial health.

About the proposed deal, PNB managing director and CEO S. S. Mallikarjuna Rao, earlier this month, said the bank will neither be investing nor divesting its stake but because of investment from other sources, its shareholding could come down to around 21 per cent.

Currently, PNB as a promoter holds 32.64 per cent stake in PNB Housing Finance.

PNB Housing Finance's extraordinary general meeting (EGM) is scheduled to be held on June 22 to seek shareholders' approval for the preferential allotment of shares on a private placement basis to Carlyle and other entities, besides other proposals. — PTI

NEW | STRATEGY Sovereign wealth fund also keen on warehouses, tech hubs Abu Dhabi's Adia eyes affordable housing

DINESH NAIR, JACK SIDDEES & NICOLAS PARASIE JUNE 14

The Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, one of the world's biggest property investors, is considering changes to its real estate strategy after some of its major holdings suffered during the coronavirus pandemic, people with knowledge of the matter said.

The sovereign wealth fund is reviewing the performance of its property assets following weakness in a number of the shopping malls and office buildings in its portfolio, according to the people, who asked not to be identified because the information is private. Adia may consider cutting its exposure to some troubled investments, the people said.

Adia has shifted in recent years to making more direct property investments and relying less on



external managers. The state-owned investor has amassed just under \$700 billion in assets, according to estimates from data provider Global SWF, and Adia has said real estate traditionally accounts for about 5 to 10 per cent of that overall portfolio.

While Adia will continue to be a major player in property, it could shift its focus for future deals and increase exposure to areas like warehouses, life sciences properties, technology hubs and affordable housing, one of the people

said. Its investments in logistics sites in China through a partnership with industrial real estate investor Prologis Inc are among those that performed well through the downturn, the person said. Adia bet on the UK affordable housing market in 2014 through an investment in Fizzy Living Ltd.

The fund has also been putting more resources into private equity investments, which have outperformed during the pandemic, the people said. The review is ongoing, and Adia hasn't made any final decisions on the changes it will make, the people said.

A representative for Adia declined to comment.

Adia remains in search of new in-house expertise, including a global head of real estate, following a wave of senior departures.

Last year Tom Arnold, a former Cerberus Capital Management executive, left after more than a decade with the sovereign wealth fund.

Pascal Duhamel, the head of European real estate investments, and Anthony Bertoldi, acting head of real estate in Asia, also left the firm in the second half of 2020. Travel restrictions have slowed Adia's efforts to recruit replacements for some positions, according to the people.

Pandemic shutdowns have hurt investors in the commercial real estate market since early 2020. Stay-at-home orders left shops empty and hit the payment of rents to owners of such properties. Offices have also lain dormant, with many companies now reassessing their real estate requirements in the light of work-from-home trend.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Malvika pockets Lithuanian crown

Kaunas (Lithuania): India's Malvika Bansod defeated Rachael Darragh of Ireland in straight games to clinch the women's singles crown at the RSL Lithuanian International badminton tournament here. The third seeded Indian got the better of fourth seed Darragh 21-14 21-11 in the summit clash on Sunday night that lasted just 29 minutes. Malvika, who reached the quarterfinals of the Austrian Open last month, had earlier defeated France's Anna Tatranova 21-13 21-10 to enter the singles final. En route to her title triumph here, the 19-year-old Malvika had defeated local player Vilte Paulauskaite 21-6 21-10 in the opening round, before crushing Heli Neiman of Israel 21-10, 21-11. — PTI

Mushfiqu, Bryce get ICC awards

Dubai: Former Bangladesh captain Mushfiquur Rahim and Scottish all-rounder Kathryn Bryce were on Monday adjudged the ICC Players of the Month for May in the men's and women's categories respectively. The winners were announced by the ICC in a press release. Diminutive wicket-keeper batsman Mushfiquur played one Test and three ODIs against Sri Lanka in the month of May, where he helped Bangladesh win their first ODI series against Sri Lanka by scoring 125 in the second game. Bryce, on the other hand, is the first player from Scotland, to make it to the top 10 of the batting or bowling lists in the rankings. — PTI

WTC winners to bag \$1.6 million

Dubai: The winner of the upcoming World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand will walk away with a prize money of USD 1.6 million along with the Test Championship Mace, the International Cricket Council said on Monday. India and New Zealand will battle it out for the prestigious title at Southampton on June 18. "The winners of the much-awaited ICC World Test Championship (WTC) Final between India and New Zealand will take home a purse of \$ 1.6 million along with the ICC Test Championship Mace," an ICC statement read. — PTI

Sporting pitch in store for big Test

Southampton: Head groundsman at Southampton Simon Lee is aiming to produce a pacy and bouncy pitch for the World Test Championship final with some assistance for spinners later on in the game. The final will be played between India and New Zealand from June 18. "Pitch preparation for this Test is a little simpler as we are a neutral venue, we are guided by the ICC, but we all want is a good pitch that offers an even contest between the teams," Lee said. "For me personally I just want to get something out that has some pace, bounce and carry in the pitch." — PTI

Federer eases into Halle 2nd round

Halle Westfalen: Roger Federer eased into the second round of the ATP grass court tournament in Halle on Monday with a straight sets win over qualifier Ilya Ivashka. Federer, who turns 40 in August, had few problems in his first match this season on grass to seal a 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 first-round win over Belarusian Ivashka, world No. 90. — AFP

Live on TV

EURO

Group Stage: Hungary vs Portugal from 9.30 pm; France vs Germany from 12.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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DUTCH DRAMA

Dumfries gives Netherlands a thrilling 3-2 win over Ukraine

| | |
|--|----------|
| Netherlands | 3 |
| (Wijnaldum 52, Weghorst 58, Dumfries 85) | |
| Ukraine | 2 |
| (Yarmolenko 75, Yaremchuk 79) | |

Amsterdam, June 14: Denzel Dumfries scored a dramatic late winner as the Netherlands marked their long-awaited return to a major tournament with a 3-2 victory over Ukraine in a remarkable Euro 2020 game in Amsterdam on Sunday. Dumfries, the PSV Eindhoven full-back, headed in a cross from substitute Nathan Ake to complete a madcap second half after the home side eased into a two-goal lead and then threw it away. Captain Georginio Wijnaldum and Wout Weghorst both scored before the hour mark in front a raucous crowd at the Johan Cruyff Arena, only for Ukraine to silence the home supporters as Andriy Yarmolenko and Roman Yaremchuk netted to briefly restore parity. Frank de Boer's side got there in the end and the victory will provide a major lift to the Netherlands after what was their first game at a major competition in seven years. They will now hope to build on it on Thursday against Austria, who beat North Macedonia earlier in Bucharest in the same Group C.



Netherlands' Denzel Dumfries celebrates after scoring a goal against Ukraine in the Euro match at Amsterdam on Sunday. — AP

| | |
|--|----------|
| Austria | 3 |
| (Lainer 18, Gregoritsch 78, Arnautovic 89) | |
| N. Macedonia | 1 |
| (Pandev 28) | |

AUSTRIA SEE OFF NEWBIES N. MACEDONIA

Bucharest, June 14: Substitutes Michael Gregoritsch and Marko Arnautovic scored late goals as Austria sealed a 3-1 victory over major tournament debutants North Macedonia in their Group C opener at Euro 2020 on Sunday. Stefan Lainer put the Austrians ahead early on in Bucharest, but 37-year-old captain Goran Pandev levelled before the half-hour mark to become the second-oldest scorer in Euro history and delight the vocal Macedonian fans. "Above all, the substitutions really paid off," said Austria coach Franco Foda. "Gregoritsch and Arnautovic gave the team a new impulse. Overall I think it was a deserved win." — AFP

Czechs grin Schick-to-Schick

Glasgow, June 14: Scotland's long-awaited return to a major international tournament was ruined by Patrik Schick's slick finishing as the Czech Republic won 2-0 at Hampden on Monday to move top of Euro 2020 Group D. Schick's header just before half-time opened the scoring, but it was his stunning strike from just inside the Scotland half after the break that will live in the memory as one of the all-time great European Championship goals. After a 23-year wait to qualify for a major tournament, Scotland's hopes of making more history

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Czech | 2 |
| (Schick 42, 52) | |
| Scotland | 0 |

by getting out of the group for the first time now look slim. Steve Clarke's men face England next on Friday at Wembley before hosting World Cup finalists Croatia at Hampden on June 22. Playing in front of fans at Hampden for the first time since November 2019 with 12,000 in attendance, Scotland made a nervous start.

David Marshall was the hero of penalty shootout wins over Israel and Serbia to qualify and was needed early on to turn Schick's powerful effort at the near post behind. The hosts were desperately missing the driving runs and poise on the ball normally provided by Kieran Tierney on the left side of a back three. Clarke was settled on a 3-5-2 to make way for two of the Premier League's best left-backs in the same team. Without the Arsenal defender, Liverpool's Andy Robertson was his side's biggest threat with a series of rampaging runs.

His cross was turned narrowly wide by Lyndon Dykes at the near post before the Scotland captain was denied a moment to remember by Tomas Vacklik. Robertson burst onto Ryan Christie's pass but his shot that was headed for the top corner was tipped over by the Sevilla goalkeeper. A cagey game of few chances burst into life after Schick's towering leap put the visitors in front three minutes before half-time. Scotland were slow to react after initially clearing a corner and the Bayer Leverkusen forward rose highest to flick home Coufal's cross. — AFP

Germany host France in blockbuster group clash

Munich, June 14: France and Germany usually play each other in the latter stages of major football tournaments. Not this time. The teams will meet in the group stage of a European Championship or World Cup for the first time on Tuesday when they open their Euro 2020 campaigns in Munich. Their last match at a major tournament came in the Euro 2016 semifinals. Antoine Griezmann scored twice for France in the 2-0 victory over then-World Cup champion Germany in Marseille. Germany have never really recovered, and though the French lost to Portugal in the final five years ago, they went on to win the World Cup two years later. Remarkably, no player in Germany's current squad



Germany's Thomas Muller during a training session ahead of his team's Euro opener against France. — Twitter

has ever scored in a European Championship match. Thomas Muller,

who has played 11 tournament games, missed a penalty in the 2016 quarter-final shootout win over Italy.

HUNGARY RUN INTO CHAMPIONS PORTUGAL

Home advantage at the European Championship may not count for much when Hungary face a Portugal team with scoring talent and one particular player looking to make history. Cristiano Ronaldo needs six more goals to become the all-time leading scorer for a men's national team. If the defending champions go far, Ronaldo could indeed break Ali Daei's record of 109 goals. And he'll get his first chance to add to his total on Tuesday against the Hungarians at the Puskas Arena. — AP

COPA AMERICA



Brazil's Neymar celebrates after scoring against Venezuela during the Copa America 2021 group match in Brasilia on Sunday. — AFP

Big guns Brazil begin with bang

Brasilia, June 14: Star forward Neymar netted a penalty and created a second as hosts Brazil eased to a 3-0 victory over a coronavirus-depleted Venezuela on Sunday in the opening match of the 2021 Copa America. Center-back Marquinhos opened the scored midway through the first half and Gabriel sealed the win a minute from time. In a tournament already delayed a year and moved from its original hosts Argentina and Colombia due to the pandemic, it was fitting that the coronavirus should take centre-stage right up to the tournament kick-off.

| | |
|--|----------|
| Brazil | 3 |
| (Marquinhos 23, Neymar 64, Gabriel 89) | |
| Venezuela | 0 |
| Colombia | 1 |
| (Edwin Cardona 42) | |
| Ecuador | 0 |

Played in front of an empty Mane Garrincha stadium in Brasilia due to Covid-19 restrictions, Brazil made light of the continent's minnows, who arrived with a makeshift side missing at least eight players who were ruled out after testing positive for coronavirus the day before. Venezuela called up 15 emergency replacements but could still only name seven out of a possible 12 substitutes due to a lack of available players. Richarlison was denied from close range by Venezuela's goalkeeper Joel Graterol early on before the forward flicked

a header wide form a corner. Centre-back Eder Militao was also off target with a header while Graterol did well to hold a Danilo volley from distance. Venezuela produced little going forward but Jose Martinez did have the Brazil defence back-peddalling with a dangerous burst before winning a corner that came to nothing. Brazil took the lead on 23 minutes when Richarlison flicked on a Neymar corner that deflected into Marquinhos's path inside the six-yard box, allowing the centre-back to bundle home. Richarlison had a goal ruled out for offside while Neymar incredibly fired wide from 12 yards out as Brazil threatened to put the game to bed before half-time. — AFP

CHHETRI ONE GOAL AWAY FROM ENTERING TOP-10

Doha, June 14: Goal-machine Sunil Chhetri will look to add to his tally and enter the all-time top 10 scorers' list as a buoyant India meet Afghanistan in the joint 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup qualifiers here on Tuesday. While the Indian team needs just a draw from their final game against Afghanistan to secure a place in the third round of AFC Asian Cup qualifiers after Oman defeated Afghanistan 2-1 on Friday, a hat-trick for Chhetri will see him equal the iconic Pele in terms of numbers of goals scored in the international arena. Chhetri is also just one goal off entering the all-time top-10 list of goal-scorers, something he can easily achieve against Afghanistan, if not a hat-trick. A Chhetri-inspired India ended their winless run in international football when the captain struck a brace against Bangladesh in their previous outing. The talk since then mostly centered around the Indian talisman surpassing the legendary Lionel Messi as international football's second highest scorer among active players. — PTI

India women up for English Test

Bristol, June 14: Indian women's team vice-captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Monday said they are mentally prepared to take on mighty hosts England in their first Test in seven years, especially after "picking the brains" of red-ball specialist Ajinkya Rahane. India and England will play a one-off Test here from Wednesday, which will start the visitors' full-fledged tour of the UK, where they will also feature in ODI and T20 series. "I have not played much of red-ball cricket, I have played just two Tests. This time we got a chance to speak to Ajinkya Rahane, we picked his brains on how to bat in the longer format, mentally we are prepared," Harmanpreet said during a virtual press conference. The swashbuckler has made a name for herself in white-ball cricket and is now looking to stamp her class in the traditional format. She added, "Even in the nets, we try to be in the right frame of mind. When you are happy, you play good cricket. We try to play to our strengths. "We had an easy and friendly talk with Rahane, he is very experienced, we had a chance to talk to him and we did exactly that." "He has so much experience, he shared them with us, offered us tips on how to bat, what kind approach should we have to batting because it's long format, how to break your inning in parts..." — PTI

Novak gifts racquet to 'boy coach'

Paris, June 14: Novak Djokovic said he gave away his French Open winning racquet to a young boy watching courtside for "giving me the right tactics". The world number one claimed a 19th Grand Slam title and became the first man in 52 years to win all four majors twice when he came from two sets down to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4. At the end of the four-hour and 11-minute final, the 34-year-old Djokovic handed his racquet to the youngster who was then pictured on TV jumping for joy and in shock at the gesture.



Novak Djokovic gifts his racquet to a young fan after winning the French Open title on Sunday. — Twitter

"He was in my ear the entire match basically, especially when I was two sets to love down. He was encouraging me. He was

actually giving me tactics, as well," said Djokovic. "He was like, 'Hold your serve, get an easy first ball, then dictate, go to his

backhand.' He was coaching me literally. "I found that very cute, very nice. So I felt like to give the racquet to the best person was him after the match. That was kind of my gratitude for him sticking with me and supporting me." **TSITSIPAS' GRANDMOM DIED MINS BEFORE FINAL** Greek tennis star Stefanos Tsitsipas has revealed that he learned of his grandmother's death just minutes before his epic five-set French Open final loss to Djokovic on Sunday. In an Instagram post early Monday morning, the 22-year-old dedicated

his first Grand Slam final to her. "Five minutes before entering the court my very beloved grandmother lost her battle with life. A wise woman whose faith in life, and willingness to give and provide can't be compared to any other human being that I have ever met," Tsitsipas wrote of the grandmother on his father's side. "Life isn't about winning or losing. It's about enjoying every single moment in life whether that's alone or with others," he wrote. "Lifting trophies and celebrating wins is something, but not everything." — AFP