

IN BRIEF

Woman harassed online, student held

New Delhi: Delhi Police has arrested a 23-year-old student for allegedly harassing a woman by sending her obscene messages on social media in South Delhi area. The accused has been identified as BA first-year student Kafil, a resident of Mehrauli.

According to Atul Kumar Thakur, deputy commissioner of police (DCP), South district, a woman had lodged a complaint that a Facebook user was harassing her by sending obscene and abusive messages on her account. "A case under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) was registered and investigation was taken up. During investigation, police obtained the details of the user and with the help of technical surveillance, he was arrested on Saturday," said the DCP.

"During interrogation, the accused said he would create fake Facebook IDs in order to make friends with women and send them obscene messages. He used hotspot or WiFi services of others to evade detection," said the DCP. "The accused was stalking the complainant online and presenting himself as a gym trainer," the DCP added.

Smuggling racket busted, 2 held at IGI

New Delhi: Custom officials have busted a smuggling racket in Delhi after two men were arrested for allegedly sneaking in luxury watches in the capital from Dubai. Two passengers were arrested at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport with expensive watches worth over ₹51 lakh on Thursday, custom officials said on Sunday. The accused were smuggling in four luxury wristwatches from Dubai when they were stopped and searched. The accused later confessed to have smuggled in more such watches from Dubai amounting to over ₹1.4 crore. The accused also said they supplied the smuggled watches to a big showroom of luxury watches in Delhi. The showroom was also raided and 29 smuggled watches of the luxury Swiss brand Chopard were recovered, officials said. The smuggled watches are worth a whopping ₹2.38 crore in addition to the watches seized from the Dubai passengers. The two owners of the showroom have also been arrested by custom officials along with the passengers from Dubai. Further investigation is underway in the case.

Jamia entrance exams from Oct. 10

New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) announced on Sunday that entrance tests for admission to 126 undergraduate, postgraduate and diploma programmes will commence from October 10. In normal situation, around 12,000 students could be accommodated for entrance tests, but due to the coronavirus pandemic not more than 4,000 candidates can sit at a time, the university said. In order to ensure that the norms are followed, the university is in talks with Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) to set up other entrance test centres in Delhi, it added. The final figure of test centres in Delhi will be finalised in a couple of days while centres outside Delhi are already mentioned in the prospectus, it said. The admit cards will be available on students' portal www.jmicoe.in before seven days of the date of the entrance tests. — PTI

Stone crushing along Yamuna, 7 arrested

Noida: Seven people have been arrested for alleged illegal stone crushing along the Yamuna river in Noida, police said on Sunday. The arrest was made during a raid by the Sector 39 police and officials of the district mining department on Saturday night, the police said. "Illegal stone crushing was underway on the banks of Yamuna, near Sector 94. Seven people, including drivers and labourers, were arrested from the spot," SHO of Sector 39 police station Azad Singh Tomar said. Thirteen stone crushers, five dumpers, three trucks, and three earth movers were impounded from the spot and two generators also seized, Tomar said. The accused were taken in police custody and a report sent to the city magistrate over the matter, he said. Further proceedings are being carried out by the mining department, he added. — PTI

All city households to pay sewage charges, DJB approves proposal

New Delhi, Sept. 27: The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) has approved a proposal to collect annual sewage pollution charge from all households, irrespective of whether they are located in areas with or without sewer network.

According to a National Green Tribunal order, every individual household causing pollution by the release of sewage into an open environment or in the sewer network is liable for payment for its treatment as per "polluter pays" principle.

At present, the utility collects sewage charges only from those households which have water connections and a functional sewer network. The money is utilised for maintenance, upkeep and to upgrade the sewer network. But many households get water from the DJB and generate sewage but have not been paying sewage charges as there is no sewer network in their area, according to an official.

The DJB has 25.20 lakh active water consumers, of which 19.94 lakh come under areas with sewage connection. Sewage charges are levied in their water bills. "Earlier, we had been collecting sewage charges from households which come under sewer network and

There are eight categories of residential colonies in Delhi – A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H. Domestic consumers in A and B categories of colonies, such as Maharani Bagh and Andrews Ganj, will have to pay ₹5,000 a year as sewage pollution charges.

Households in C and D categories of colonies will have to pay ₹2,000 and ₹1,000 a year respectively. Those in E and F categories of colonies will be charged ₹200 per year, while consumers in G and H categories will be required to pay ₹100 annually.

have an active water connection. Now, all households irrespective of whether they are part of sewer or unsewered areas will have to pay these charges," the official said.

Officials said there are areas where DJB does not have water pipelines and sewer networks, such as unauthorised colonies and JJ clusters. In such areas, land-owning agencies are responsible for collecting sewage charges.

According to the proposal approved by the DJB at a board meeting recently, annual sewage pollution charges for all households — based on the categories of colonies — will be levied and collected from domestic and non-domestic consumers.

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consumers in A and B categories of colonies, such as Maharani Bagh and Andrews Ganj, will have to pay ₹5,000 a year as sewage pollution charges. Households in C and D categories of colonies will have to pay ₹2,000 and ₹1,000 a year respectively.

Those in E and F categories of colonies will be charged ₹200 per year, while consumers in G and H categories will be required to pay ₹100 annually. According to the proposal, sewage charges will be collected through power distribution companies.

"There is only one facility which is uniformly used by every household in Delhi — electricity. The power companies have one of the largest billing and collection networks and are most well placed for collection of sewage charges," the proposal

read. — PTI



Patients perform yoga at CWG village Covid-19 care centre near Akshardham in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

2 held in liquor home delivery scam, gang leader at large

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

Delhi Police on Sunday claimed to have arrested two men who had allegedly cheated over thousand people across the country on the pretext of home delivery of liquor.

The accused were identified as Huzaifah (25), a resident of Sangam Vihar, and Hafiz Tufail (35), a resident of Lado Sarai.

According to R.P. Meena, DCP (Southeast district), the matter came to light on July 24 after Karan Palta, one of the victims of the scam, lodged a police complaint. During investigation, police identified Huzaifah and arrested him on Friday from Saket. According to the bank statement of Huzaifah, ₹35 lakh was deposited in his account from February 20 to September 9.

"Huzaifah told police that he had opened multiple bank accounts. The gang leader, Naseer, used to deposit money online into his accounts and take cash from him. He further told police that Naseer lives in Bharatpur in Rajasthan and was introduced to him by Tufail. On his instance, Tufail was also apprehended," said the DCP. "Tufail told police that Naseer is his relative and he used to transfer money online in his bank accounts and charged a commission from Naseer. The accused have cheated around 1,500 people in the last one year. Five e-wallet accounts and three bank accounts have been frozen," said the DCP adding efforts are on to nab Naseer.

Manhunt launched for SI who shot at girlfriend

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

A Delhi Police sub-inspector allegedly shot at her lover in Delhi's Alipur area on Sunday. The accused has been identified as Sandeep Dahiya, who was posted at Lahori Gate police station.

According to Gaurav Sharma, the deputy commissioner of police (DCP), Outer North, information was received from SI Jaiveer, posted at Shahbad dairy of Outer North District, that while crossing Sai mandir on GTK road, he spotted a girl lying down on roadside.

"On seeing her, he immediately shifted the girl in his private car and straight away rushed to nearby hospital. On the way, victim revealed that she has been shot by Sandeep Dahiya," said the DCP.

"During initial investigation, it was revealed that the victim and the

THE CONDITION of victim is stable and her life has been saved because of proactive action of SI Jaiveer, said DCP Gaurav Sharma. SI Sandeep Dahiya is having matrimonial dispute with his wife.

accused were having affairs since last year. The incident took place in midst of the quarrel over some issue while they were roaming in his car," said the DCP.

"It was also revealed that Sandeep is having matrimonial dispute with his wife and is reportedly being separated. The condition of victim is stable and her life has been saved because of proactive action of SI Jaiveer," said the DCP.

"A case under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been registered at Alipur police station and manhunt has been initiated to nab Sandeep," the DCP added.

Withdrawal of monsoon likely to influence air quality negatively**High wind speed improves city air quality**

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

Delhi's air quality improved marginally on Sunday due to high wind speed, while favourable ventilation conditions are likely to keep it in the "moderate" category for the next three days, a government forecasting agency said.

Sporadic farm fires were observed on Saturday around Punjab and border regions but its impact has been negligible so far due to unfavourable wind direction and speed, the System of Air Quality and Weather

Forecasting and Research (SAFAR) said.

The city recorded a 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) of 117 on Sunday. It was 165 on Saturday. "AQI has improved marginally due to high wind speed and rainfall in Rajasthan which washed out dust en route to the city, reducing dust intrusion," the ministry of earth science's air quality monitor said.

"High surface wind speed is predicted... Favourable ventilation condition is likely to keep Delhi's AQI in the moderate category for the next three days,"

3,292 new cases in 24 hours, 3,739 recoveries City records over 40 Covid deaths for 2nd straight day

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

Delhi reported 3,292 new coronavirus cases, 3,739 recoveries and 42 deaths on Sunday. The total cases in the state have increased to 2,71,114, including 2,36,651 recoveries and 5235 deaths. Active cases stand at 29,228, as per official data. The Delhi Government tested over 50,000 coronavirus samples in the last 24 hours. Of these, 11,414 are RT-PCR/CBNAAT/TrueNat tests and 40,002 are Rapid antigen tests. A total of 29,24,754 tests have been done so far, as per Government of Delhi.

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain has said the Aam Aadmi Party government in the national capital has increased testing by three times to 60,000 tests a day, adding that this was the new strategy to combat the surge in coronavirus cases.

"Delhi has increased testing to 60,000 per day. This is a big change in our containment strategy. We have done this to ensure we can track every positive case and contain the spread of coronavirus;

COVID-19 FATALITY rate in the national capital was less than one per cent in the last 10 days, said Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain, and asserted that a massive increase in testing for detection of coronavirus infection has led to the rise in cases

Delhi's doubling rate is 50 days," said Satyendar Jain, who recently recovered from Covid-19.

The statement comes a day after Delhi reported 46 coronavirus-lined deaths - the highest since June 16 when the city recorded 93 deaths — in the backdrop of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's statement that the national capital has witnessed the second wave of Covid-19 and has now turned the corner.

"Covid deaths should not be seen as single day figures, but as 10-day average because people usually don't die (of this disease) in a day," Mr Jain said, adding that Delhi's 10-day average is 0.94 per cent. Its death rate is 1.94 per cent.

Delhi recorded 3,372 new

cases and 4,476 recoveries on Saturday as occupancy of Covid-only beds in hospitals has reduced. According to the state Health Minister, 6,840 Covid patients are admitted in hospitals right now. "This number was more than 7,100 a week ago," Mr Jain said, adding that Delhi's positivity rate is 6.5 per cent as per the seven-day average.

The city has been reporting less than 4,000 cases a day for the past week after a week of reporting more than 4,000 cases a day between September 15 and 19.

The sudden daily spike in cases crossing 4,000, which took place earlier this month, was the second wave of the disease, Mr Kejriwal indicated.

Mr Jain said on Sunday that the Covid-19 fatality rate in the national capital was less than one per cent in the last 10 days and asserted that a massive increase in testing for detection of coronavirus infection has led to the rise in cases.

The overall case fatality rate is 1.94 per cent. The occupancy of beds in Delhi hospitals has

declined in the last four-five days and 55 per cent of the total beds are unoccupied currently, the minister added.

The Delhi government had constituted a three-member committee to audit daily the deaths caused by the novel coronavirus in the national capital. Jain said the committee visited all the hospitals and the report is satisfactory.

"There were a few glitches which have been ironed out. There was a time when the fatality rate was at four per cent but it has remained below one per cent in the last 10 days," he said.

In the national capital, the number of containment zones has breached the 2,000-mark, which Jain said is a part of Delhi's strategy to tackle the spread of the virus.

"We tripled the number of tests and those who tested positive was isolated in small containment zones to contain the spread. We knew we would have to do it aggressively for two to four weeks and we are seeing positive results now as the cases are declining," he added.

Over 60K oximeters provided to Covid patients in city: Govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

The Delhi government has so far provided 60,042 oximeters to home quarantined Covid-19 patients in the city to help them check their oxygen levels, according to official figures.

The Arvind Kejriwal government had, in June, announced to provide oximeters to Covid-19 patients in home isolation with no symptoms or mild symptoms of the disease and facing breathing problems due to low oxygen levels.

"It was started with a view to be able to provide treatment and shift any such patients to hospital for medical care. Thousands of oximeters distributed by the government have saved many lives of patients in home isolation," a senior government official said.

OXIMETERS ARE devices used to measure oxygen level in blood. With a drop in blood oxygen level, patients feel problem in breathing and need to be admitted to hospital if their oxygen saturation drops to 90 per cent or below (normal is 95-100 per cent)

According to the latest government figures, a total of 60,042 oximeters have been distributed among Covid-19 patients spread across 11 districts. Most of the oximeters were provided to patients in West (7,504), Central (7,050), Southwest (6,953), Northwest (6,656), and East (5,925) districts.

Oximeters are devices used to measure oxygen level in blood. With a drop in blood oxygen level, patients feel problem in breathing and

need to be admitted to hospital if their oxygen saturation drops to 90 per cent or below (normal is 95-100 per cent).

"As per need, each day around 40 to over 100 Covid-19 patients are provided with oximeters in each district. Since home isolation patients are in touch with district medical officers, these devices help provide interventions like oxygen concentrators or hospital shifting of patients, if needed," the official said.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had earlier termed pulse oximeters as "suraksha kavach" (protective shield) for Covid-19 patients and credited the device with minimising deaths of patients under home isolation in Delhi.

The number of Covid-19 patients under home isolation in Delhi stands at 17,600.

Cops rescue man being beaten up during brawl

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

A patrolling team of Delhi Police saved the life of a 32-year-old man on time who was attacked by a group of people during an argument over takeaway food in central Delhi's Anand Parbat area. The incident took place at a dhaba on Saturday night.

According to Sanjay Bhatia, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Central district, at around 9:33 pm when head constable Damodar and constable Vijay Dudi were on patrolling duty in Nai Basti, Anand Parbat they saw two groups chasing and fighting with each other. "Damodar intervened and saved the life of Gaurav, who had suffered injuries to his head and other body parts when the accused dhaba owners attacked them with a knife and utensils," said the DCP.

"Gaurav had gone to the dhaba with his friend Prem Sagar (30). An argument over ordering takeaway food broke out among Gaurav, his friend Sagar and the dhaba owners, identified as Neelash and Akash, who are brothers," said the DCP.

"As Gaurav and his friend left the dhaba, they were attacked by Neelash and Akash. Gaurav received stab injuries on his head and other body parts.



SHORT TAKES

2.25 lakh affected by fresh floods in Assam

Guwahati: A total of 2.25 lakh people in Nine districts were affected and over 10,000 hectares of crops submerged on Sunday as fresh floods hit Assam, the state disaster management authority said. Dhemaaji, Lakhimpur, Morigaon, Nagaon, Majuli, West Karbi Anglong, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts have been affected, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said in its report. Incessant rain in the last few days has triggered this year's third wave of floods in the state, claiming one life in Nagaon district on Saturday, it said. The fresh fatality has pushed the number of deaths in flood-related incidents in Assam this year to 118, the report said. The number of affected people was 1.8 lakh on the previous day. Nagaon is the worst-hit district with 1.51 lakh affected people, followed by Morigaon (32,711), Dhemaaji (16,792) and Dibrugarh (10,622), the report said. Human habitations and farmland in 219 villages in nine districts are submerged, it said. The mighty Brahmaputra is flowing above the danger mark at Neamatighat in Jorhat district and Tezpur in Sonitpur. — PTI

Couple commits suicide in R'sthan

Jodhpur: Agonised by their married son's elopement with a woman from their own 'gotra', a couple in Rajasthan's Jodhpur committed suicide on Sunday morning, police said. The incident took place in the Masuriya area and the couple was found hanging from a ceiling fan at their house by their elder son, police added. Their son raised an alarm after which their relatives and neighbours rushed them to a hospital where they were declared brought dead. According to area SHO Som Karan, Vishnudutt (48) and his wife Manju Devi (45) had been living with their two sons, both married, at Shramikpura in the Masuriya area. "The sons were married but their wives were yet to be taken home. Their younger son eloped with a woman from their own community and 'gotra' three days ago and the couple was under stress due to it," the SHO said. — PTI

Muzaffarnagar: 5 held for killing man

Muzaffarnagar: The Muzaffarnagar police on Sunday claimed to have cracked the murder case of a medical store owner who was shot dead at his residence earlier this month. The incident had taken place at the district's Morna village on September 17 when medical store owner Anuj Karanwal was killed by some men at his home. SSP Abhishek Yadav said they have arrested five people, identified as Ashish, Sohanvir, Brijpal, Rina and Raju. The SSP said the key three accused—Pankaj, Ajit and Kapil—are still absconding, for which police have announced a reward of ₹25,000 on each of them. Tensions had prevailed in the area after the murder, which was condemned by different political parties. A controversy had erupted after the victim's family had threatened to migrate from the village. — PTI

President gives assent to 3 new farm bills

Punjab's CM: Exploring all options to protect farmers

New Delhi, Sept. 27: President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday gave assent to three contentious farm bills passed in Parliament last week that have triggered farmers' protest especially in Punjab and Haryana.

These three farm bills are: The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2020.

A gazette notification has been issued in this regard. Parliament last week cleared the bills that are aimed at liberalising the agriculture sector and allowing farmers to sell their produce anywhere they want at a better price.

The Opposition is, however, criticizing the manner in which these bills were passed in Parliament. They had alleged that the bills were passed "unconstitutionally" in a "complete disregard" of Parliamentary norms. They had requested the President to return the bills, and only give his assent after they have been passed after following proper rules and procedures.

Even NDA's oldest ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Saturday parted ways on the issue of these farm bills as farmers in Punjab



Farmers during 'Rail Roko Andolan' against the Central government's newly introduced farm bills at Devi Dass Pura village near Amritsar on Sunday. — PTI

and Haryana intensified protest. The government has asserted that these bills will allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere they want at a better price.

The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020 aims to permit the sale of agricultural produce outside the mandis regulated by the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMC) constituted by different state legislations.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 provides for contract farming. The

Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2020 aims to deregulate the production, supply, distribution of food items like cereals, pulses, potatoes and onion. Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the passage of two of the three bills by Parliament last week had termed the laws as a "watershed moment" in the history of Indian agriculture that will empower crores of farmers. The prime minister in his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' broadcast on Sunday said that a large number of peasants have benefited since fruits and vegetables were brought out of the APMC Act in some states a few years ago and asserted

that grain-producing farmers will now have the same freedom.

Protests by farmers against the laws continued on Sunday, with peasants in Punjab squatting on the Amritsar-Delhi railway track. Farmers, under the banner of the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, have been staging a sit-in on the rail track in Punjab since last Wednesday.

Farmers have expressed apprehension that the Centre's farm reforms would pave a way for the dismantling of the minimum support price system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big companies. — PTI

Chandigarh, Sept. 27: Terming the President's assent to the Farm Bills as "unfortunate and distressing", Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh on Sunday said his government is exploring all options, including possible amendments to the state laws, to protect farmers' interests.

All farmer organisations and other stakeholders will be taken into confidence before taking any decision on the way forward, the chief minister said, adding that his government was committed to the procurement of every single grain of farmers without compromising on the pricing.

The state government is already consulting legal and agriculture experts, and all those impacted by the Centre's calamitous legislations to decide the future course of action, he said.

Besides legal recourse, the CM said his government is looking at other options to scuttle the Centre's new laws that are designed to ruin Punjab's farmers and economy.

The chief minister is scheduled to sit on a dharna against the legislations



Amarinder Singh

at Khatkar Kalan on Monday after paying tributes to Shaheed Bhagat Singh at his Samadhi Sthal.

The chief minister expressed disappointment and anguish over President Ram Nath Kovind's nod to the three Bills without giving the Congress and other Opposition parties the opportunity to put their concerns before Parliament.

The President's assent had come as a big blow to the farmers, who are out on the roads protesting against the Centre's assault on their interests, he said.

Implementation of these dangerous new laws in their current form would destroy Punjab's agriculture the lifeline of its economy, said Amarinder,

adding that the very livelihood of farmers was at stake due to the legislations, which the Centre succeeded in imposing by brute majority.

The exclusion of the MSP from the legislations had raised serious concerns about the intent of the BJP-led Union Government, the chief minister said.

Punjab, which will be the worst affected by these treacherous laws, will take this fight forward with all its might, said Amarinder, vowing not to give up till the farmers get back their due rights.

Amarinder also reacted strongly to Akali chief Sukhbir Singh Badal's response to the Presidential assent, terming it a "cruel joke on the farmers since it was the Shiromani Akali Dal's active support to the farm Ordinances that had brought things to such a pass. Even now, after the face of his party's breakup with the NDA, all Sukhbir seemed concerned about was not the farmers' plight but exploitation of the issue to boost the Akali prospects in the next assembly polls, he added. — PTI

'I wish govt's Covid vaccine strategy was mann ki baat'

New Delhi, Sept. 27: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday questioned the government on its strategy for making the Covid vaccine available to people, saying he wished it was the subject of the "Mann Ki Baat" programme.

"The question is legitimate, but how long will India wait for the government's answer? Alas, the Covid vaccine access strategy should have been the "Mann ki baat", he said in a tweet in Hindi. Mr Gandhi's tweet came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi aired his monthly "Mann ki baat" programme on the All India Radio (AIR).

Along with his comment, Gandhi shared a news report regarding Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla's tweet in which he asked the government if it had ₹80,000 crore available to distribute the Covid vaccine to the country's population over the next one year.

"I ask this question, because we need to plan and guide, vaccine manufacturers both in India and overseas as service the needs of our country in terms of procurement and distribution," Poonawalla had asked on Twitter on Saturday. — PTI

With 88,600 fresh cases, India corona tally nears 60 lakh

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

India's Covid caseload neared 60 lakh with 88,600 fresh infections being reported on Sunday. As a total of 92,043 people recuperated from the deadly virus in a span of 24 hours, taking India's total recoveries close to 50 lakh, Prime Minister Modi said the coronavirus crisis period has also served in fostering bonding among family members by bringing them even closer.

At a time when the whole world is going through numerous phases of transformation, Mr Modi in the 69th edition of his monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat' on Sunday said: "There is a saying: 'One who is grounded, stays firm during the biggest of storms'. Our farmers are a living example of this during Covid-19." With 1,124 fresh deaths reported in the last 24 hours and the country's toll due to the pandemic going up to 94,503, the Prime Minister reminded people to always wear a mask and do not venture out without a face shield. 'Do Gaz Ki doori' will protect you and your family. We should not forget 'Jab tak dawai nahi tab tak koi dhila nahi' (till the time we have medicine, we should not be lenient).

India's Covid tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and it went

▶ OF THE 1,124 new fatalities, 430 are from Maharashtra, 86 from Karnataka, 85 from Tamil Nadu, 67 from Uttar Pradesh, 57 from Andhra Pradesh, 56 from Bengal, 54 from Punjab, 46 from Delhi and 40 from C'garh

past 50 lakh on September 16. Of the 1,124 new fatalities, 430 are from Maharashtra, 86 from Karnataka, 85 from Tamil Nadu, 67 from UP, 57 from Andhra Pradesh, 56 from West Bengal, 54 from Punjab, 46 from Delhi and 40 from Chhattisgarh. The total deaths reported so far in the country includes 35,191 from Maharashtra, followed by 9,233 from Tamil Nadu, 8,503 from Karnataka, 5,663 from Andhra Pradesh, 5,517 from Uttar Pradesh, 5,193 from Delhi, 4,721 from Bengal, 3,406 from Gujarat, 3,188 from Punjab and 2,181 from Madhya Pradesh. The Union health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths have occurred due to comorbidities.

With the single-day recoveries on an average for the last few days been more than 90,000, the ministry said this has sustained India's leading global position as the country with the maximum number of recovered cases. Maintaining its upward trend, the national recovery rate presently has risen to 82.46 per cent.



Students step out of an examination centre after appearing in Joint Entrance Examination-Advanced 2020 during Unlock 4.0 in Gurugram on Sunday. — PTI

Bengaluru is epicentre of terror activities: BJP MP

New Delhi, Sept. 27: Bengaluru has become an epicentre of terror activities, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya claimed on Sunday and said he had requested Union Home Minister Amit Shah to set up a permanent division of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in the city.

A day after becoming the president of the BJP's youth wing, Surya said many terror modules have been busted in Bengaluru, the Silicon Valley of India, in the recent past. The terrorist groups want to use the city as an "incubation centre" for terror activities.

Surya said he had met Shah at the latter's residence two days ago and emphasised the need to



have a well-equipped and sufficiently staffed NIA office to mitigate terror-related activities in Surya Karnataka.

"The Home Minister has assured that he will direct officials to establish a permanent station house manned by an officer of the rank of the SP at the earliest," Surya said.

"In last few years, Bengaluru, the Silicon Valley of India, has become epicentre of terror activities. It has been proved through many arrests and sleeper terror cells busted by the investigative agency in the city," Surya, who represents Bengaluru South in

Lok Sabha, told reporters here.

"It is a matter of grave concern that NIA investigations into the DJ Halli and KG Halli mob violence in August have indicated that many terrorist organisations are using Bengaluru as their incubation centre for carrying out anti-India activities," he said. Over 3,000 people went on a rampage on August 11 torching the residences of Congress MLA R Akhanda Srinivasa Murthy, his sister Jayanthi and DJ Halli and KG Halli halli police stations in Bengaluru.

The violence broke out over an alleged inflammatory social media post by the nephew of the Congress MLA. — PTI

BJP: R'sthan govt to blame for crisis in Dungarpur

New Delhi, Sept. 27: Blaming the Congress government in Rajasthan for the tense situation in the violence-hit Dungarpur, the BJP said on Sunday that it has made no efforts to thrash out an agreement with protesting youths.

BJP spokesperson and Lok Sabha MP Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore accused the Congress government of all-round failure, and said the situation in the southern Rajasthan has been worsening but it has made little effort to resolve the crisis.

The agitation had been going on for several days but it appears that the government was either unaware or made no communication, Rathore alleged.

Violence erupted in the region on Thursday when the candidates of teachers recruitment examination-2018 blocked the Udaipur-Ahmedabad Highway, pelted stones at police, damaged several properties and torched vehicles, demanding filling of 1,167 general vacant posts with ST candidates. Rajasthan minister Arjun Singh Bhamaniya, senior officers and other public representatives on Sunday met a delegation of protesters in Dungarpur where two companies of the Rapid Action Force have been deployed to deal with the situation. — PTI

Cong dares BJP allies to unite, oppose bills

■ Continued from Page 1
clearing of the bills in the Cabinet. "The resignation by the Akali minister was not given but taken by the BJP and the Akali Dal did not quit the NDA on its own but were thrown out," he claimed

"The anger of farmers and the BJP's arrogance forced the Akalis to buy a permit to enter Punjab by this drama," Mr Jakhar told reporters. Ms Selja dared the JJP, which shares power with the BJP in Haryana, to quit the alliance and stand with farmers in the state. "The Akalis did a drama and it is time for other parties to think as people are asking questions. Farmers will be made bonded labour under contract farming and after the farm bills are implemented... We urge the BJP allies to think and stand unitedly with farmers and against the farm bills. We appeal to all to stand up with the cause of farmers," Ms Selja

said. Taking on the JJP, she said: "Leaders of the JJP abused the BJP ahead of the elections and after a fractured verdict in Haryana, joined hands with it. Dushyant Chautala should open his eyes and stand with farmers."

Mr Jakhar said Devi Lal's soul must be churning in heaven on seeing his descendants support the 'anti-farmer' BJP. "The bills are like cancer and its effects will be known later as this cancer reaches the terminal stage and no medicine will work. This is like slow poison," he alleged. Ms Selja said other parties like the BJD, TRS and the YSR Congress that have been supporting the BJP when it needed their backing "should not shut their eyes". "Those who are part of the NDA, like the JD(U) and LJP in Bihar, should also think. Polls are approaching in Bihar, and people will seek answers from them," said Ms Selja.

Tanks in Ladakh

■ Continued from Page 1
these tanks which don't freeze in sub-zero temperatures and keeps these tanks running.

Earlier, the PLA had brought forward their tanks near the Chushul sector to put pressure on the Indian Army after it occupied the strategic heights on the south bank of Pangong Tso on August 29-30.

The Depsang plains are flat and suitable for tank action. It is one of the critical points where a thrust by Indian tanks threatens Aksai Chin.

Last week, during the sixth round of corps commanders' talks, India and China had agreed to a stop sending more troops to the frontline, to refrain from unilaterally changing the situation on the ground, and avoid taking any action that may complicate the situation.

Jaswant Singh dies

■ Continued from Page 1
and external affairs. Saddened by his demise." He added: "Jaswant Singh Ji will be remembered for his unique perspective on matters of politics and society. I will always remember our interactions. Condolences to his family and supporters. Om Shanti."

President Ram Nath Kovind, vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu, Union ministers, Congress president Sonia Gandhi, former PM Manmohan Singh and other leaders across the political spectrum paid rich tributes, recalling his contribution in several crucial portfolios. Singh had a fall at his home in August 2014 and was admitted to the R&R Hospital. He was in a coma for a long time and had been in and out of the hospital since then. He was admitted again in June this year. In his eclectic career, Singh donned many hats —

Army officer, author, Union minister — but his handling of the Kandahar hijack crisis as the then external affairs minister in 1999 was one that looms large. He was seen as close to both Vajpayee and veteran leader L.K. Advani. Mr Advani, in a statement, said Singh was one of his closest colleagues and a dear friend, adding that he was an "outstanding parliamentarian, astute diplomat, great administrator, and above all, a patriot". He noted that there was "a special bond between Atal ji, Jaswant ji and myself" while handling tenacious issues in those six years. "As a person, Jaswant ji was a true gentleman and will be remembered as a soft-spoken, erudite and warm-hearted person. He was known for his sharp, analytical mind and was respected by people across the political spectrum," Mr Advani said.

Odisha launches innovative steps to promote tourism

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, SEPT. 27

The Odisha government, on Sunday, launched a number of initiatives, including 'Bana Bhoji' or picnic in forest, a one-day programme under which tourists will be allowed to enjoy their time in the identified jungle camps for a day. Chief minister Naveen Patnaik, while announcing the reopening of the state tourism which was shut down after the onset of the Covid pandemic, said the one-day "Bana Bhoji" picnic package would boost tourism as local tourists would love to enjoy their time in nearby forests and nature camps.

The CM also launched the 'Odisha by Road' campaign through Kalinga Rides—a superbike rally—

inviting visitors from neighbouring states as well as within the state to explore Odisha.

The campaign aims to encourage tourists to travel to various tourist destinations in the state through the excellent network of quality roads. Visits to the eco-tour nature camps, OTDC (Odisha Tourism Development Corporation) properties, and spending nights at such destinations is expected to give a boost to the tourism sector in the hinterlands of the state and revive the economy.

Also, social media posts of the road trips by such tourists are also expected to boost the positive image of Odisha, the CM claimed. Naveen also announced a campaign for promotion and popularisation of Odia cuisine through a chain of

authentic Odia cuisine restaurants named "Nimantran" by OTDC.

The CM exhorted tourists from other states and abroad to visit Odisha during the pandemic saying all kinds of precautionary measures had been taken for the safety and security of visitors.

He highlighted the award winning initiative of eco-tourism nature camps run successfully for five years by the communities which is in line with this year's World Tourism Day theme of "Rural Tourism." On Sunday, state tourism minister Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi flagged off a superbike rally consisting of 80 superbikes from 9 groups at Infocity Square here in the city. The rally covered 25 km and culminated at Shanti Stupa atop Dhauli hill.

SHORT TAKES

4,403 fresh Covid cases across UP

Lucknow: Seventy-seven more people died from coronavirus in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday as 4,403 fresh infections surfaced, taking the case tally to 3,87,085 in the state. So far, 5,594 people have died from the disease in the state, according to a health bulletin. Of the 77 fresh deaths, Lucknow reported 11, followed by seven in Kanpur, six in Gorakhpur, five in Kushinagar and four in Allahabad. As far as fresh cases are concerned, Lucknow reported the maximum 549 infections, followed by Allahabad (263), Ghaziabad (229), Gautam Buddh Nagar (204), Meerut (191), Kanpur (179) and Varanasi (163). The count of active Covid-19 cases in the state stands at 55,603, the bulletin said. — *PTI*

Minor boy killed in leopard attack

Lakhimpur Kheri: A 14-year-old boy was killed on Sunday in a suspected leopard attack in Dhaurahra range of North Kheri forest division. The boy, Chandan, was a resident of Sahabdeenpur village, forest officials said. According to the villagers, the boy had gone to the fields to collect grass for his livestock when a leopard attacked and killed him. Villagers rushed to the rescue of the boy, but he had died by then, while the big cat fled into dense fields. Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), North Kheri, Anil Kumar Patel confirmed to have received the information of the boy's death. He said local field staff was on the spot to collect pugmarks of the big cat. — *PTI*

2 militants killed in J&K encounter

Srinagar: Two unidentified militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district on Sunday, the police said. Security forces launched a cordon and search operation in the Samboora area of Awantipora in the south Kashmir district after receiving specific information about the presence of militants there, a police official said. He said as the forces were conducting the searches in the area, the militants fired upon them. The security forces retaliated, ensuing an encounter. In the exchange of fire, two militants were killed, the official said, adding the identity and group affiliation of the slain ultras is being ascertained. — *PTI*

Give up mindless eating, says Naidu

New Delhi: Pitching for a healthy and balanced diet, vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday urged people to give up mindless eating and replace it with nutritious food. Apart from having a fitness routine, it is essential to have a healthy and balanced diet, he said in a Facebook post. Noting that rapid urbanisation and modern lifestyle have drastically altered the eating habits of the people, he said it is high time "we take control and mend our dietary habits". "We should not eat for palate alone. Let's remember that we are what we eat and food is for nourishment. Let us replace mindless eating with having nutritious and protein-rich food," he said. With the Covid-19 pandemic throwing normal life out of gear, people realised the importance of returning to age-old traditional dietary habits, he said. — *PTI*

Gangster's house demolished in UP

Lucknow: A two-storey house, worth over ₹1 crore, of gangster Khan Mubarak was razed on Sunday in Ambedkar Nagar district, a government spokesperson said. On September 22, the administration in Ambedkar Nagar district had demolished 20 shops worth around Rs 1.40 crore belonging to the gangster. As many as 35 cases are registered against Mubarak in various districts of the state. Action has also been initiated under the Gangsters Act at a complex in Hansvar market, according to the official. — *PTI*

Cells of Deepika, Sara & Shraddha seized

NCB: Mobiles will be 'thoroughly scanned'

SAURABH JOSHI
MUMBAI, SEPT. 27

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has seized cellular phones of Deepika Padukone, Shraddha Kapoor and Sara Ali Khan to retrieve data and conduct a forensic analysis on them in connection with the interrogation they underwent on Saturday. The trio were grilled on drugs procurement and consumption in connection with the Sushant Singh Rajput suicide case probe. The officials said any relevant data found from their phones would be useful for the case's probe and would act as evidence.

The officials said that the seizure of their electronic gadgets is a routine procedure as part of the investigation. The NCB will look for messages or drug chats if any along with the details of who all the actors were in contact with in the tenure that is being probed by the NCB. The handsets of the three actors in case changed recently have also been asked to be submitted to the investigating team.

"The investigation is underway from all angles and the electronic gadgets will also be thoroughly scanned," said an officer privy to the investigation.

The drugs chat involving the three actors along with the manager Karishma Prakash that were found by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) led to the NCB probe in connection with the suicide. The probe into suicide of Rajput, who

NCB wanted me to implicate Karan Johar: Khsitij Prasad

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, SEPT. 27

Executive producer Kshitij Ravi Prasad, who has been arrested by Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) in a drugs case linked with the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput, has been remanded to police custody till October 3. According to his lawyer, when Kshitij was produced before the court, he alleged before the magistrate that he was tortured and pressurised and was asked to name Karan Johar or some other top official linked with Dharma Productions.

Initially when Prasad's name cropped up during this probe it was said that he was an employee of Dharma Production, but

Karan Johar denied it and said that he was not linked with his firm.

According to advocate Satish Maneshinde, after arrest, Prasad was produced before magistrate through video conferencing.

At that time the lawyer informed the magistrate that Kshitij was harassed and blackmailed to make a statement as told by the probe officer. On his request the magistrate recorded the statement made by Prasad.

Prasad told the court that when NCB searched his house they found nothing objectionable but still in the panchnama they mentioned his house as "ganja joint" and at his wife's insistence they add the word "believed" to be a ganja joint.

was found hanging by the ceiling of his Bandra apartment on June 14.

The teams of NCB grilled actor Deepika for around five hours and the two other actors for similar times at two separate locations. Deepika and Karishma were questioned at the guest house at Colaba's Radio Club, whereas Shraddha and Sara were interrogated at the NCB's zonal office at Ballard Pier. Deepika arrived at round 9.50am and was allowed to leave around 3.50pm. Sara and Shraddha arrived at

around 1 pm and noon respectively. The officials let off Sara at around 5.30 pm and Shraddha followed around 5.55 pm.

The officials stated that while she accepted the chats on narcotics, many of her answers were unsatisfactory. The investigators stated that she may be summoned again for questioning if need be. The investigators will now dig deeper into the details shared by Deepika, whose chats with her manager Karishma asking for hash were found by the investigators.

Modi, Denmark PM Frederiksen to attend event today

India, Denmark to ink pacts at virtual meet

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

India will host a Virtual Bilateral Summit with Denmark on Monday at the prime ministerial level, the Government said on Sunday. An MOU in the field of intellectual property cooperation between India and Denmark will signed at the Summit. "Another major outcome" will be the joining of International Solar Alliance (ISA) by Denmark, New Delhi said.

The Summit will mark the strengthening of ties with the Scandinavian region in Europe of which Denmark is an important part.

India had held a similar Summit with southern maritime neighbour Sri Lanka just on Saturday.

On Sunday, the ministry of external affairs (MEA) said, "A Virtual Bilateral Summit is being held between Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) and Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen on 28 September 2020, hosted by

India. ... An MOU in the field of intellectual property cooperation between India and Denmark is being signed on the occasion. Another major outcome will be the joining of International Solar Alliance by Denmark."

The MEA added, "The Virtual Bilateral Summit will give an opportunity to the two leaders to comprehensively review the broad framework of the bilateral relationship in the context of the time-tested friendly ties between the two countries

and give broad political direction for a strengthened and deepened collaborative partnership on key issues of mutual interest." The MEA further said, "The India-Denmark bilateral relations are marked by regular high level exchanges and are based on historical links, common democratic traditions and shared desire for regional, as well as international peace and stability. ... Bilateral trade grown by 30.49%, from US\$ 2.82 billion in 2016 to US\$ 3.68 billion in 2019.

Bengal BJP leader revolts after 'turncoat' named V-P

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, SEPT. 27

Daggers are out in the BJP in West Bengal after the promotion of two Trinamul Congress turncoats, Mukul Roy and Anupam Hazra, in the saffron party's rank and file at the cost of old-timers ahead of the Assembly Election in the state.

Soon after the BJP's announcement of the organisational reshuffle on Saturday evening, Rahul Sinha, a party veteran, shockingly found his name dropped from the new list of national secretaries. What infuriated him was the appointment of Mr Hazra, known to be a follower of Mr Roy, who has been made the national vice president, in

his place from the state. Disappointed, Mr Sinha revolted publicly. Tagging chief minister Mamata Banerjee's party and Prime Minister, he tweeted, "Served @BJP4India for 40 Years as the Warrior and today just to include @AITCofficial Leaders, I have been asked to Left the Post of the Party. @narendramodi @BJP4Bengal."

Rebelling against his party, the former state BJP president, who contested many elections but never won any till date, shared a video message but with a deadline.

Bengal: Another youth is arrested over Qaeda links

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, SEPT. 27

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) made its 10th arrest in the case of the "Pakistan-sponsored" terror module of Al Qaeda it had busted in West Bengal and Kerala a week ago. Shamim Ansari, the accused, was detained by the NIA with the help of the Border Security Force jawans from his home at Nardapara village in

Jalangi of Murshidabad of West Bengal during a raid on September 25 night, as reported by this newspaper earlier.

His cellphone and some documents were seized also. Shamim was later booked in the case on Saturday and was produced before the chief metropolitan magistrate at the Berhampore Court.

The judge has granted the NIA his transit remand following its prayer.

Jaswant Singh cremated in Jodhpur



Manvendra Singh, son of former Union minister late Jaswant Singh, lights the funeral pyre of his father at his farmhouse in Jodhpur on Sunday. Singh, 82, died after a cardiac arrest at Delhi's Army Hospital on Sunday, where he had been admitted in June. — *PTI*

'N-E can become tourism, biz hub'

New Delhi, Sept. 27: Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the country's Northeastern region with its rich natural beauty, culture and art can emerge as a major centre of world tourism.



Amit Shah

Inaugurating the 'Destination North East-2020', a four-day event showcasing the region's rich heritage, diversity and tourism potentials, Shah said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Northeastern region will emerge as one of the favourite tourism and business destinations of India.

Northeast, rich in natural beauty, folk culture and art, is fully capable of becoming a major centre of world tourism, he said.

MULTANI CASE Punjab police asks ex-DGP Saini to join probe today

Chandigarh, Sept. 27: The Punjab Police on Sunday summoned former DGP Sumedh Singh Saini to join investigation in the 1991 Balwant Singh Multani disappearance case on Monday. The summons was pasted outside his residence in Chandigarh after he was not found at home.

According to the summons, Saini has been asked to appear before a Special Investigation Team at the Mataur police station in Mohali at 11 am on September 28. The copies of the summons were also sent to his counsel, said Special Public Prosecutor Sartaj Singh Narula.

Earlier, the former Punjab Director General of Police had failed to appear before the SIT on September 23. The Supreme Court had earlier granted him interim protection from arrest.

Mr Saini was booked in May this year in connection with the disappearance of Multani, a junior engineer with Chandigarh Industrial and Tourism Corporation. Police had last month added the murder charge under Section 302 of the IPC in the case after former police inspector Jagir Singh and ex-ASI Kuldeep Singh, who are also co-accused, turned approvers. — *PTI*

the tourist places of many states and countries but the beauty of the Northeast is unparalleled.

Northeast is the jewel of India and without it the Indian culture is incomplete, he said. Inviting the next ceremony to be organised in his constituency Gandhinagar, Shah said it will familiarise the people of Northeast with the culture of Gujarat while the people of Gujarat will be introduced to the culture of the Northeast.

The home minister said peace in the Northeast is very important for economic development, promotion of tourism and employment in the region.

The Northeast, which was once in the news due to terrorism, blockades,

violence, is now known for development, tourism, organic farming, industry and start-ups and this has been possible due to Modi's leadership in the last six years, he said.

Mr Shah said a lot of work has been done to establish peace in the Northeast under the leadership of Modi.

The land boundary agreement with Bangladesh, end of blockade in Manipur, signing of the Bodo agreement and the surrender by 641 cadres of eight militant groups were among the notable achievements of the Modi government, he said. The home minister said after becoming the Prime Minister, Mr Modi has visited the Northeast more than 30 times. — *PTI*

Railways set to charge 'user fee' from passengers

'Visitor fee' to be charged from people entering stations to receive/drop kin

ANIMESH SINGH
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27

Travelling in trains could soon burn a hole in the passenger's pocket, as not only people boarding trains but even passengers alighting from trains after undertaking often long and tiring journeys would have to shell out additional charges as user fees over and above the ticket prices!

Also if you are entering the station to drop or receive a friend or a relative, you may have to shell out a visitor fee over and above the platform ticket.

The cash strapped Railway Ministry is planning to implement the user fee model with the aim of redeveloping 50 stations under PPP mode, under which these charges would have to be paid by passengers soon, once the model receives Cabinet approval.

Passengers belonging to all categories would have to pay this user fee. Commuters under the reserved category will have to pay ₹10 for boarding trains, passengers under the non-AC reserved category will have to pay ₹25, while passengers under the high-end reserved AC category will have to pay ₹50 as user fee.

For alighting passengers, user fee would be

charged at 50 per cent of the rates mentioned above.

Apart from this, visitor fee of ₹10 would be levied from people buying platform tickets.

All the above mentioned charges are without GST and would be subject to upward revision after every five years.

Considering the fact that New Delhi railway station has a daily footfall of around five lakh passengers, even if on an average roughly ₹50 are charged per passenger, then the revenue for Indian Railways could be in the range of Rs 2.5 crores.

This newspaper had reported on July 24, how the Railway Ministry has sought finance ministry's urgent intervention as it can't meet its pension expenditure of ₹53,000 crore for the current fiscal.

Even passengers using the good old suburban trains on a daily basis, would have to shell out user charges on tickets, as these would be levied on suburban passenger tickets at ₹3 per journey in monthly season tickets.

The proposal of levying these user charges for redevelopment of stations is likely to be sent for the approval of Union Cabinet soon, sources have indicated.

Lift prohibition in Guj to help tourism: Ex-CM

Ahmedabad, Sept. 27: Prohibition must be lifted in Gujarat to promote tourism as the anti-liquor policy is nothing but a sham that criminalises social drinking, former chief minister Shankersingh Vaghela said on Sunday.

However, neither the ruling BJP nor the Congress want prohibition to go as they do not want to lose the illicit income generated from the policy, Vaghela said in a series of tweets to mark World Tourism Day.

The ban is a sham as people are drinking, but by offering double money for



Shankersingh Vaghela

fear of being held and criminalised for a "social practice", 80-year-old Vaghela, who has been with the BJP, Congress and NCP earlier, said.

"Today on #WorldTourismDay we have to think why Gujarat is behind in the tourism

sector? Why can't we attract more tourists from other states and countries? Tourism industry is best in terms of employment and revenue," he tweeted with the hashtag #AgainstLiquorBanChallenge.

"BJP and Congress will (n)ever want to lose illegal income earned through #Liquorban in this state. They will always want people to pay double and drink with fear of arrest," he added.

He said the ban must be lifted if it cannot be implemented properly, adding "let the people decide good and bad".

"It is time to think big. Time has changed. Today liquor is part of social gathering. It has nothing to do with criminality. But in Gujarat people who drink and people who do robbery both are considered criminals. This should come to an end," he further said.

Mr Vaghela has also previously spoken against prohibition in the state, and in a release on Sunday claimed "during my CM tenure in the year 1996-97, I wanted to remove the liquor ban policy, but the coalition government has some limitations". — *PTI*

THE ASIAN AGE

28 SEPTEMBER 2020

Duplicitous government exposed on GST funds

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (CAG) that the Union government wrongly retained ₹47,272 crores of GST compensation cess that was collected specifically to compensate states for the loss of revenue in the financial years 2017-18 and 2018-19 is a stinging rebuke of its financial management.

The GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017, guarantees all states an annual growth rate of 14 per cent in their GST revenue in the first five years of implementation of GST beginning July 2017. Should there be a shortfall, the Union government will compensate it from the GST Compensation Cess Fund, created by levying a cess on certain luxury and “sin” goods. The Act and the accounting procedure mandate that the entire cess collected during a year is credited to the Fund, a non-lapsable one which can be used only for the purpose for which it is created. For the financial year 2017-18, the government collected ₹62,612 crores as cess and transferred ₹56,146 crores to the Fund and for 2018-19, it collected ₹95,081 crores and transferred ₹54,275 crores. In effect, it retained ₹6,466 crores in 2017-18 and ₹40,806 crores in 2018-19. This is a violation of the law, the CAG said. Worse, the Centre transferred the money to the Consolidated Fund of India, thereby making it available for use for purposes other than what was provided in the Act. This has “led to an overstatement of revenue receipts and understatement of fiscal deficit for the year”, the report said.

The government has not officially responded to the CAG report but it has let it be known that the cess mess was not a diversion but a retention of funds. This is ridiculous. The Union government has no right over the funds; its job is to collect and distribute it as per the approved formula. By not following its own mandate, the government has defiled the law, the national consensus on GST and the legislative intention behind the constitutional amendment. That it got an opinion of the attorney-general in its favour is no matter of pride.

The GST was implemented with a number of noble and notable aims including making tax administration a smooth affair and plug leakage by creating a proper trail of goods and services from the first point to the last. However, this tax reform took a heavy toll on the state governments’ finances as it took away their right to levy taxes and deposited them all with the Union government. The CAG report says the latter has failed to keep its part of the bargain.

It may be remembered that the states, fatigued by the long-drawn fight against pandemic Covid-19, have been knocking on the Union government’s doors for financial aid, including GST compensation. The government, which consumed the excess cess in the previous fiscal, took shelter behind “act of god” and shrugged its shoulders. This is gross, and strikes at the very root of the idea of constitutional democracy that India is. The earlier the government corrects itself, the better.

Golden voice of SPB

A mellifluous voice that sang in innumerable Indian tongues has fallen silent but the songs of the polyglot playback singer will live on. The passing of SP Balasubrahmanyam, or just “SPB” in affectionate abbreviation, is just another tragedy caused by the shadow of the coronavirus Covid-19 falling on the lives of millions. The virus seems to have acted wilfully in the case of so many celebrated talents in the fields of music, performing arts and fine arts who have passed on in the last six months in which the pandemic has been raging globally. It is small consolation that their works will live on in music tracks, celluloid or video.

The outpouring of grief and the underlying affection for the charismatic singer illustrates the depth of his engaging personality who, as a public performer, was peerless in dealing with people in the film music industry. His greatness lay in his humane qualities and the manner in which he made everyone around him feel important and touched by playing a constructive part in the expression of his art. His fans, enraptured by the melodies he sang or the devotional songs he rendered in emotional asseveration of faith in a higher being, will immortalise his songs by playing them again and again.

Remarkably, in a career that began in 1966 and ended only on the day he was admitted to hospital in August 2020, the 74-year-old singer’s voice retained its richness, depth, range and timbre. His felicity in rendering his songs in concerts was phenomenal, making his shows a celebration of the artiste and his works while establishing a direct link with lovers of popular music. He never trained formally in classical music and still made his name reverberate nationally with his songs in *Sankarabharanam*, a movie that brought the vibrations of Carnatic music to the common man. Music has always had the quality of uniting Indians across the divides of a unique national diversity. SPB, who sang in 16 languages while capturing every nuance, was a true pan-Indian performer who lent his golden voice to matinee stars across the country.

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Subhani



Govt didn’t bring Opp. on board on China question



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

It is unfortunate that Parliament ducked discussing the most serious National Security challenge that India faces since 1962 i.e. the stand-off in Eastern Ladakh and North Sikkim qua China. It is obvious that government would try and avoid answering the hard questions but the combined Opposition in both Houses should have pushed hard for a full-fledged discussion and not contented itself with a bland statement from the defence minister with some pro-forma clarifications in the Rajya Sabha and not even that in the Lok Sabha.

In fact, this writer wrote to the defence minister on September 16, 2020, urging that the government should suo-moto propose a discussion on the border situation for not only would it demonstrate the strength of our democracy but also convey our unequivocal national resolve expressed through the collective will of Parliament to the Chinese.

I reminded him that during the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict 165 Members of the Lok Sabha had participated in a discussion on the ongoing Sino-Indian war in the Lok Sabha and an equal number including former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in a concurrent discussion in Rajya Sabha. In fact, the day the Chinese invaded India on October 20, 1962, on the urging of Mr Vajpayee who was one of the MPs of a four-member Bharatiya Jan Sangh grouping in Rajya Sabha Nehru unhesitatingly summoned Parliament to meet on November 8, 1962.

A day later Mr Vajpayee took the floor. He commenced by fiercely critiquing the Nehru administration just as the Chinese were seizing the two crucial knolls — Green Pimple and Yellow

Pimple — thereby giving them a bird’s eye view of the 4 Dogra battalion HQ established at Walong on that very day.

Unconstrained by the consideration that the Indian Army was locked in a brutal battle with the Chinese trespassers he began up by highlighting the need for introspection especially with regard to the events leading up to the Chinese offensive all through the 1950s and early 1960s.

He demanded answers to some very uncomfortable questions — namely — why our army was not “in full force” in NEFA and why were they not battle-ready. He enquired why between September 8 when China’s bellicose intent started manifesting itself and October 20, when they struck, the Army had not mobilised itself in full force to preempt the belligerents. He insisted on clarity on the identity of those “eminentes” in both the civil and military establishment who had kept the dispensation in the dark and what action had been taken against them.

Mr Vajpayee intuitively understood that in a democracy we must state the truth howsoever uncomfortable it might be rather than brushing sensitive issues under the carpet. That is why 37 years later when the Kargil intrusion took place in April-May 1999, just one year after the highpoint of the Lahore bus ride, he had no qualms about telling the nation that he had been betrayed by the Pakistanis and they had captured key heights in Drass, Kargil and other areas overlooking National Highway 1-A that connects Srinagar to Leh. Similarly, during the December 1971 war for Liberation of Bangladesh, Late Mrs Indira Gandhi did not dodge Parliament.

Unfortunately, Mr Vajpayee’s successors lack the moral courage to be forthcoming on the latest Chinese transgressions. They hide behind the specious fig leaf of national security to avoid the hard questions labelling everyone who tries to hold their policies and personnel to account as anti national. Such is the paranoia of this government that all my questions — and there were only unstarred questions permitted in this session of Parliament addressed to the Prime Minister, defence, home and external affairs ministers on the Sino-Indian face-off — were disallowed on grounds of “sensitivity” despite having been balloted in the list of 230 questions that are supposed to be answered on any given day. This level of opacity only raises further misgivings that the government is attempting to hide the truth from the nation.

During both World Wars I and II, parliaments of democratic nations across the world regularly met to discuss the conduct and direction of war. Winston Churchill’s most famous speeches were made on the floor of the House of Commons during the duration of the Second World War.

The present mess that India finds itself in one is of its own making. India failed to read the Chinese intent. When India was busy playing the friendly neighbour the Chinese were preparing themselves for the confrontation. China deceived India by making it complacent. The present confrontation shows that the 2018 Wuhan and the 2019 Mamallapuram summits were but a smokescreen. The lack of early detection of the Chinese activities on the LAC has intelligence, strategic and tacti-

cal failure written all over it. The Chinese know that the ruling party is heavily invested in maintaining its hyper-nationalist image. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s official statements of denying the transgressions have played to China’s advantage. It now accuses India of violating the LAC.

The ongoing stand-off does not seem to end anytime soon. Talks have been ongoing since May with a goal to disengage and to restore the status quo ante. However, the talks have failed because there is a differing understanding of what status quo ante means to the two parties. India wants a status quo ante as of the pre-April 2020 situation. However, the Chinese seem to prefer the pre-2019 situation before the revocation of the autonomous status of the region. Both the parties have dug into their positions, to deny the other any strategic advantage. Both the parties do not want the confrontation to turn into a full-fledged war; therefore, this would turn into a war of attrition that would further sap our already-weakened economy. The Chinese are taking advantage of the stand-off situation to rapidly augment their offensive capabilities along the entire LAC. The Chinese, by occupying and building infrastructure in the previously viewed “grey areas” by both the parties, have forced India to accept the Chinese claim line as the new normal through the force of arms.

Should any self-respecting nation tolerate this national humiliation, notwithstanding the obfuscation that the government is blatantly encouraging by running a Bollywood soap opera on what were till yesterday supposed to be news and current affairs dissemination outlets?

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s official statements of denying the transgressions have played to China’s advantage. It now accuses India of violating the LAC.

LETTERS

GOODBYE JASWANT

The death of former Union minister Jaswant Singh on Sunday is sad-denying. He served the nation diligently, first as a soldier and later in politics. During the rule of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, Singh handled crucial portfolios and left a strong mark in the worlds of finance, defence and external affairs. He came clean about his views on the issue of M.A. Jinnah and paid dearly for it. May his soul rest in peace.

Sankar Paul

Chakdaha, West Bengal

NO ROOM IN UNSC

THE PM’S ANGST on India being denied a lead role in the UNSC may not be assuaged any time soon. It would need an amendment to the UN Charter requiring a two-third vote of general members, and the support of the P5 who could just keep tabling the issue in lip service. A tall task for the world body, when it has not been able to even raise the number of non-permanent members on the Security Council. And then, what about legitimate bids of Germany, Brazil, et al who would support each other’s case, being part of G4? In 75 years, too many nations have grown in clout but the UNSC has added no room for a large table.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

RESPECT WOMEN

THIS IS WITH REFERENCE to Sheebani Sethi’s “No country for young women” (Sep. 27). It is no exaggeration to say that women are treated badly in this modern and putatively civilised era. It starts on the playground and ends in domestic violence. A girl should be respected for her qualities and character, not her physical appearance. A woman is present in every part of a man’s life as mother, sister, wife, daughter, and also cousins, colleagues and friends. So men should treat even relative strangers with love and dignity, providing them confidence and encouragement just as we do to our family members. We should not forget that girls, too, have locomotion, enthusiasm, consciousness and thinking skills, just like boys.

M.M. Afreen
Ranchi

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to D.B. Madan (Sep. 23). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Sanju Verma



Farm laws to end Arhatiya control, bring down prices

The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which removes cereal, pulses, oilseed, edible oil, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities, was passed by the Rajya Sabha on September 22, 2020, to curb hoarding, artificial scarcity and trade cartelisation. Earlier last week, the Narendra Modi government also passed two historic farm bills, to defang APMCs and allow farmers to engage in contract farming, in the Rajya Sabha. The three bills had already cleared the Lok Sabha.

A beleaguered Opposition electorally vanquished by the Modi juggernaut, cried foul, alleging the bills were passed by only a voice vote in the Upper House. A voice vote is perfectly democratic and the deputy chair of the Rajya Sabha was within his rights to pass these bills with a voice vote.

Keeping the politics aside, the moot question is, will these farm bills help farmers? The answer is a resounding, “yes”. Do the farm bills remove MSP or public procurement? No, they do not.

The procurement process will continue as before. The minimum support price (MSP) payment to farmers for paddy rose by 2.4 times at ₹4.95 lakh between 2014 and 2019 under the Modi government, as against only ₹2.06 lakh crores under the previous Congress-led one between 2009 and 2014. The MSP to farmers for wheat increased by 1.77 times during 2014-2019, as compared to 2009-2014. For pulses, MSP payment of ₹49,000 crores to farmers was up by a massive 75 times. Payment to farmers for oilseeds and copra surged 10 times to ₹25,000 crores.

Do the farm bills dismantle the existing “APMC-Anaj Mandi” structure? No, they do not. The rights or livelihood of those associated with Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Mandis will not be encroached upon. However, it is a known fact that APMC structure has been inefficient, with farmers relying on APMC agents to help them sell their produce. In this system, while APMC agents walk away with hefty commissions, while the hapless

farmers make precious little. It is precisely to unshackle them from predatory agents and middlemen that the Modi government passed the farm bills.

APMCs will not be dismantled but they will certainly face stiff competition now from “Trade Areas”, which will be created and will exist alongside APMC Mandis. Farmers will be free to sell their produce to whomsoever they wish to, at a price they deem fit, in these “Trade Areas”. So let it be clear that it is not farmers who are protesting but middlemen and APMC Mandi owners who are upset because their monopoly has been broken. There will be no taxes by either the state or central governments on trade conducted in these “Trade Areas”, thereby reducing the cost of transaction in the entire food chain from farm to fork.

The farm bills also allow for contract farming, whereby farmers can enter into contracts, at a predetermined price, even before the crop has been harvested, with private companies, aggregators, food processors and exporters. This is

an unprecedented reform, as it allows farmers to lock in a good price for their harvest and insulates them from any post-harvest price volatility.

Is partial privatisation of agriculture good? Of course, it is. Who will pay for the insurance, cold storage, machinery and farm equipment when farmers enter into contracts with private players? The farm bills clearly state that these will be paid for by the counter-party and not the farmer. This will be a big relief for especially small and marginal farmers who can access superior farm technology and become agripreneurs without having to go out of pocket.

How will farmers negotiate with private entities that are supposedly equipped with more business acumen? Well, in Budget 2020, the Modi government announced the formation of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). These FPOs are largely big groups of farmers who are brought together, as they will have better bargaining skills, rather than farmers operating as individuals. There are already

about 5,000 FPOs in India.

Why are protests largely from Punjab? Well, in Punjab, there are over 40,000 powerful arhatiyas or middlemen, with one lakh clerks working under them. Arhatiyas also double up as moneylenders to farmers. Under the existing system, in states like Punjab, APMC/Mandi fees come to around 8.5 per cent — a market fee of three per cent, rural development charge of three per cent and the Arhatiya’s commission of 2.5 per cent. The “Arhatiya” system is more influential in Punjab than elsewhere in India, and hence most protests are from this region. In FY20, 40,000 Arhatiyas in Punjab reportedly pocketed commissions worth over Rs 1,600 crores. Prime Minister Modi’s farm bills, however, seek to put money into the hands of farmers, something no political leader ever attempted before.

The writer is an economist, chief spokesperson for BJP Mumbai and bestselling author of Truth & Dare — The Modi Dynamic.

IN BRIEF

Lebanon shooting: 2 soldiers killed

Beirut: Gunmen in a car opened fire on an army post in the Minyeh region of northern Lebanon Sunday, triggering a shootout in which two soldiers and one gunman were killed, the Lebanese military said. Another gunman fled to an unknown destination. An army operation is underway to arrest the fugitive and uncover the circumstances of the attack, the military said. The shootout occurred as the army was engaged in a heavy exchange of fire with a group of militants linked to Sunni extremists in northeast Lebanon, close to the border with Syria.

16 killed in China mine accident

Beijing: Sixteen people trapped in a coal mine in south-west China's Chongqing Municipality on Sunday were killed due to the presence of excessive levels of carbon monoxide, official media reported. The incident happened when the burning belts in the mine caused the carbon monoxide to exceed safety limit, trapping 17 people inside, state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported. A 75-member rescue team has entered the mine and 30 medical workers have rushed to the scene, it said. One person who survived the accident was rushed to the hospital, *CGTN TV* reported.

15 perish in Pakistan inferno

Karachi: At least 15 people were killed when a passenger van travelling in southern Pakistan crashed and caught fire. The van was carrying passengers from Karachi to Hyderabad city when it struck an object and careered off the road late Saturday. "The death toll has reached 15," Owais Shah, the transport minister of Sindh province, said. Five other people were injured, three of them critically. Most of the bodies were burned beyond recognition, said Faisal Edhi, head of the non-profit Edhi Foundation which runs the morgue the bodies were taken to. Investigators were looking to see if a natural gas cylinder aboard the bus had contributed to the inferno.

Chinese soldiers' remains returned

Beijing: The remains of 117 Chinese soldiers who died in the 1950-53 Korean War were returned to China on Sunday in an annual repatriation delayed this year by the Coronavirus outbreak. South Korea handed over the remains at a ceremony at Incheon airport outside Seoul, and a Chinese military transport plane flew them to Shenyang, a northeastern Chinese city near the North Korean border. Chinese soldiers fought on the North Korean side against US-led forces in the South during the war on the Korean Peninsula. Most of the 117 remains were found in the Demilitarized Zone that separates North and South Korea.

NORTH KOREA ACCUSES SEOUL OF INTRUSION

Seoul, Sept. 27: North Korea accused South Korea of sending ships across the disputed sea boundary to find the body of a South Korean official recently killed by North Korean troops, warning Sunday the intrusion could escalate tensions. South Korea denied the accusation. "We urge the South side to immediately halt the intrusion across the military demarcation line in the West Sea that may lead to escalation of tensions," the official *Korean Central News Agency* said. "It arouses our due vigilance as it may lead to another awful incident." Along with its denial, South Korea proposed a joint investigation to resolve discrepancies in each country's account of the South Korean official's death last week. Officials in Seoul have said the 47-year-old was likely attempting to defect before North Korean troops aboard a boat fatally shot him and burned his body. According to Seoul, North Korea on Friday sent a message, including a rare apology by leader Kim Jong-un for the shooting death of the official, who was found floating on an object in its waters. It said its troops shot the official because he attempted to flee after refusing to answer to questions. It said North Korea maintained troops were unable to find the official's body and burned the object he was floating on in line with anti-Coronavirus rules.



In this image taken from a footage released by Armenian Defence Ministry on Sunday, Armenian forces destroy Azerbaijani military vehicle at the contact line of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan. Fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan has broken out around the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian Defence Ministry says two Azerbaijani helicopters have been shot down. Ministry spokeswoman Shushan Stepanyan also said Armenian forces hit three Azerbaijani tanks. — AP

Martial law in Azerbaijan as fighting erupts with Armenia

RETURN TO NEGOTIATIONS OVER KARABAKH, SAYS EU

Yerevan (Armenia), Sept. 27: After fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan broke out on Sunday around the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian Defence Ministry said two Azerbaijani helicopters were shot down, Azerbaijan on Sunday declared martial law and a curfew in capital Baku and several other cities, as fighting with Armenian rebel forces in Nagorno-Karabakh claimed military and civilian casualties on both sides.

A top territorial official said 16 people were killed and more than 100 wounded. "Martial law will be introduced as of midnight as well as a curfew from 9 pm to 6 am," in Baku, several other cities and districts that are close to the Karabakh frontline, presidency spokesman Hikmet

Brussels, Sept. 27: The European Union called Sunday for a halt to fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani separatists over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and an "immediate return to negotiations".

The worst clashes since 2016 broke out on Sunday between arch-foes Azerbaijan and Armenia, which have been locked for decades in a territorial dispute over the Armenia-backed breakaway region. "Military action must stop, as a matter of urgency, to prevent a further escalation," European Council president Charles Michel tweeted, calling for "an immediate return to negotiations".

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell stressed the urgency of relaunching negotiations over Nagor-

ny Karabakh under the auspices of the so-called "Minsk Group" led by France, Russia and the United States. "The European Union calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities, de-escalation and for strict observance of the ceasefire," he said.

A major conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia could draw in top regional players Russia and Turkey. — AP

with an Azerbaijani attack, but Azerbaijan said the Armenian side attacked and that Azerbaijan launched a counteroffensive. The news was harshly received in Turkey, a close ally of Azerbaijan. Turkey's ruling party spokesman Omer Celik tweeted: "We vehemently condemn Armenia's attack on Azerbaijan. Armenia has once again committed a provocation, ignoring law."

He promised Turkey would stand by Azerbaijan and said, "Armenia is playing with fire and endangering regional peace."

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin also took to Twitter: "Armenia has violated the ceasefire by attacking civilian settlements ... the international community must immediately say stop to this dangerous provocation."

— AP

Despite lockdown, thousands of Israelis stage protest in Jerusalem

Jerusalem, Sept. 27: Thousands of Israelis gathered outside the official residence of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday night to demand his resignation, pressing ahead with weeks of protests against the embattled Israeli leader despite a strict new lockdown order. With Israel facing one of the world's worst Coronavirus outbreaks, the tough lockdown rules went into effect Friday, closing many businesses, banning large gatherings and ordering people to stay close to home.

But Israel's Knesset, or parliament, was unable to agree on proposed legislation that would ban the right to protest. Netanyahu has pushed hard for a ban on the demonstrations, claiming they pose a threat to public safety, and he has threatened to declare a state of emergency to halt the unrest. But his opponents accuse him of using the health crisis as a pretext to put a halt to weeks of demonstrations against him.

For over three months,

Prince Charles: 1mn youth require help

London, Sept. 27: Britain's Prince Charles on Sunday issued an urgent plea in favour of the youth, who he fears are being severely impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. In an article for *The Sunday Telegraph*, the 71-year-old heir to the British throne, warned that at least 1 million young people could be in "urgent need of help" as he reflected upon the work of his Prince's Trust charity in this area over nearly 45 years.

"Over all these years since the Trust was launched, there has never been

an easy time. However, there has never been a time as uniquely challenging as the present, when the pandemic has left perhaps another million young people needing urgent help to protect their futures," writes the royal.

"The task ahead is unquestionably vast, but it is not insurmountable," he said. He cited unemployment in the 1970s that prompted him to set up the Prince's Trust to help people aged between 11 and 30 seek job opportunities and life skills. — PTI

thousands of people have thronged the streets of central Jerusalem near Netanyahu's residence, calling on him to step down. Protesters say Netanyahu shouldn't remain in office when he is on trial for corruption charges

and accuse him of bungling the response to the Coronavirus crisis. Many of the protesters are young, educated Israelis who have lost their jobs because of an economic downturn. — AP

WISCONSIN SEES RECORD SPIKE IN COVID-19 CASES

Madison (US), Sept. 27: Wisconsin on Saturday hit a record for Coronavirus cases reported in a single day as health officials reported 2,817 people have tested positive for the virus. The state has seen some of the nation's fastest Coronavirus spread over the last two weeks.

The rolling average number of daily new cases has increased by 950, an increase of nearly 97 per cent, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. In that time, the state has reported the nation's third-highest number of new cases per capita, with about 423 new cases per 100,000 people. In another troubling trend, the positivity rate for Coronavirus testing has also been among the country's highest. That's an indicator that many more have infections than tests are revealing. — AP

— AP

Police: One shot and killed, seven injured in Iowa

Waterloo (US), Sept. 27: Gunfire erupted early Saturday at a gathering of motorcycle clubs in Iowa, killing one person and wounding seven others, authorities said.

About 100 people were at the gathering inside a building in Waterloo when there was "some kind of confrontation shortly after 3 a.m.," Joel Fitzgerald, the police chief of the city about 145 kilometres northeast of Des Moines, said at a news conference.

Officers were nearby at a traffic stop when the shooting started, said Capt. Joe Leibold with the Waterloo Police Department. They arrived to find a chaotic scene, with people hurt and others fleeing the area, and they began administering aid as paramedics and firefighters pulled up. "It was a pretty dynamic scene," said Battalion Chief Ben Petersen with Waterloo Fire Rescue. "Coming into something like that, you are trying to size up the patients

After Barrett nod, GOP invests \$10m in boosting Trump

Washington, Sept. 27: The Republican National Committee is putting Amy Coney Barrett's Supreme Court confirmation fight front and center with voters just weeks before Election Day.

The confirmation battle will be featured in a new \$10 million RNC digital ad campaign to encourage battleground state voters to return vote-by-mail ballots or go to the polls. The national party, in concert with President Donald Trump's campaign, is planning local events and protests across the country to support Barrett's confirmation as well.

The party is also incorporating Barrett's nomination into its scripts that staffers and volunteers use when calling or knocking on voters' doors, with a focus on social conservative Catholic and evangelical voters — particularly in swing states

Trump campaign sues to block mail-in ballot rule changes

Raleigh (US), Sept. 27: President Donald Trump's campaign committee and the Republican National Committee sued Saturday to block North Carolina election officials from enforcing rule changes that could boost the number of ballots counted in the presidential battleground state.

The Republicans' lawsuit claims a new system adopted by the State Board of Elections will allow for absentee ballots to be cast late and without proper witness verification, which invites fraud, coercion, theft, and otherwise illegitimate voting.

The elections board on Tuesday issued new guidance allowing mail-in absentee ballots with defici-

ent information to be fixed without forcing the voter to fill out a new blank ballot for November's general election.

The change means absentee voters who don't provide complete information on their envelope about a witness who saw them fill out the ballot won't have to complete a new ballot and locate another witness.

A voter will just have to turn in an affidavit confirming they filled out the original ballot.

North Carolina is one of eight states with witness and or notary public requirements for absentee ballots, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. — AP

NATIONAL TREASURE Dept of archaeology to fund repairs to heritage buildings of the Indian celluloid stars

Pak's KP govt to buy houses of Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar

Peshawar, Sept. 27: The provincial government in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa has decided to purchase the ancestral houses of legendary Bollywood actors Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar to conserve the historic buildings which are in dilapidated condition and facing demolition threat.

The Department of Archaeology in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province has decided to allocate sufficient funds for purchasing the two buildings, which have been declared as the national heritage and lie in the heart of Peshawar city, an

official said. An official letter has been sent to the Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar to determine the cost of both the historic buildings, where the two greats of Indian cinema were born and raised in their early days before the partition, said Dr Abdus Samad Khan, the head of department of archaeology.

Raj Kapoor's ancestral home, known as Kapoor Haveli, is situated in the fabled Qissa Khwani Bazar. It was built between 1918 and 1922 by the legendary actor's grandfather Dewan Basheswarnath Kapoor. Raj Kapoor and

his uncle Trilok Kapoor were born in the building. It has been declared national heritage by the provincial government.

Veteran actor Dilip Kumar's over 100-year-old ancestral house is also located in the same locality. The house is in shambles and was declared as national heritage in 2014 by the then Nawaz Sharif government.

Khan said the owners of the two buildings made many attempts in the past to demolish them for constructing commercial plazas in view of their prime location but all such mo-

vements were stopped as the archaeology department wanted to preserve them keeping in view their historic importance.

However, the owner of Kapoor Haveli, Ali Qadar, said that he did not want to demolish the building and made many contacts with the archaeology department officials to protect and preserve this historic structure which is a national pride. The owner has demanded Rs 200 crore from the KP government to sell it out to the government. In 2018, the Pakistan government decided to convert the Kapoor Haveli



The houses of Dilip Kumar and (R) Raj Kapoor.

into a museum, heeding to a request by Rishi Kapoor who died this year in Mumbai. However, the announcement to this effect could not be materialised. — PTI



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	37,388.66	2.28
Nifty 50	11,050.30	2.27
S&P 500*	3,298.46	1.60
Dollar (₹)	73.61	0.39
Pound Sterling (₹)	94.01	0.03
Euro (₹)	86.01	0.19
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	49,551▼0.71	353
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	41.78	-0.16
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.038	0.046
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.659	-0.005

* As of Friday/Saturday

DPIIT spots 24 key sectors to boost mfg

The DPIIT has shared a list of 24 key sectors, including food processing, toys, furniture, agro chemicals and textiles, with respective ministries asking them to work on an action plan with a view to boost domestic manufacturing and make India a self-reliant country, an official said. The other sectors include organic farming, iron, aluminium and copper, electronics, industrial machinery, furniture, leather and shoes, and auto parts.

Centre offers moong, urad at subsidised rates



The Centre has offered to provide processed moong and urad pulses from its buffer stock to state governments for retail sale at a subsidised rate in the current lean period in a bid to check any possible price rise, according to consumer affairs secretary Leena Nandan. Moong will be offered at Rs 92 per kg and urad at Rs 84-96 per kg, much lower than pre-valuing retail market prices, she said.

HDFC Bank aims to rope in 20 mn small merchants

HDFC Bank is targeting a ten-time increase in the number of small merchants it serves to 20 million in the next three years, sources at the lender have said. The bank started targeting merchants about 18 months ago with solutions on accepting payments, providing value-added services like creating a simple website for them, taking care of their inventory and lending based on cash flows, through a single app.

Voda Idea starts upgrading 3G users to 4G

Vodafone Idea Ltd (VIL) said it has started upgrading its 3G users to 4G in key markets. Further, VIL said it is in the best position to upgrade 2G customers also to 4G, but it will continue with basic voice based services to its 2G subscribers. "While the company will continue to offer basic voice services to its 2G users, 3G data users will gradually be upgraded to 4G..VIL has started informing its customers," it said.

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■ Accommodative stance, tweaks expected RBI may opt for rate status quo

FALAK NAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, SEPT. 27

Elevated retail and rising core inflation seem to rule out a rate cut on October 1 from the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India. However, the RBI would continue to emphasise its accommodative stance and keep doing tweaks to liquidity and regulatory operations to keep financial market conditions benign, said economists who now expect the central bank to cut rates only in December or in February policy.

The six-member MPC headed by RBI governor is scheduled to meet for three days, starting September 29. The resolution of the MPC would be announced on October 1. The RBI has cut the repo rate by 115 basis points since February.

While price stability is the prerogative of the MPC, the central bank is also juggling other policy priorities, with some of them running counter, such as managing the dollar deluge while ensuring currency stability; keeping bond yields low just as inflation plays spoilsport.

"The current elevated level of inflation, which is well above the RBI's upper bound of 6 per cent, suggests the MPC will pause again in October. However, given more durable damage to growth versus a more transitory shift in inflation, we expect 50 basis points in cumulative rate cuts in



total, with the next 25 basis points to be delivered at the December policy meeting," said Sonal Varma, chief India economist at Nomura.

The August CPI inflation stayed steady at 6.7 per cent year-on-year heading in a favourable direction, but still above the RBI's 2-6 per cent target range while growth has slipped quite sharply. Core inflation (ex-food and fuel) ticked up to 5.8 percent YoY compared to 5.7 per cent in July, with the core-core (core excluding transport and gold) witnessing a pullback. Rural and urban inflation also remained high, moving in lockstep in recent months, as supply hit impacted across geographies.

At 9.1 per cent in August, food inflation was the lowest since November 19. Inflation of pulses, cereals, meat, spices and milk showed softened inflation. While the liquidity situa-

tion is comfortable, bank credit growth has been negative.

The policy comes at the time when the term of three external members of the MPC ends in September, but a short extension of their term may be considered, according to media reports.

"High-frequency indicators (and staple food prices) along with rising number of infection cases necessitating regional movement restrictions suggests that September inflation is also likely stay firmly in the 6 per cent-plus terrain for a fifth consecutive month. Our evolving forecast trajectory points to shallow pullback toward the 4 per cent CPI target only in 1Q21. This lowers the odds of a rate cut in December, prompting us to revise our forecast to a pause in December and 25 basis points cut in 1Q," said DBS.

All 4 labour codes to take effect by Dec.

Sept. 27:

The government is aiming to implement all the four labour codes in one go by December this year and complete the final stretch of labour sector reforms, labour minister Santosh Gangwar has said.



Santosh Gangwar

Parliament in its just concluded session passed three labour code bills: the Industrial Relations Code, the Social Security Code, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code.

The Wage Code Bill, 2019 was passed by Parliament last year.

The labour ministry had circulated the draft rules on the Wage Code Bill last year but held back its finalisation and implementation. The ministry wanted to implement all the four codes and rules under those in one go as all of them are inter-linked.

Talking to PTI, Gangwar said, "Government is doing all efforts to complete the labour reforms by implementing the all four labour codes by December this year..."

He further said "the rules under these legislations would be enforced at once".

—PTI

Dhanlaxmi needs course correction: Aibea tells RBI

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, SEPT. 27 SEPT

The banking sector's largest union, the All-India Bank Employees' Association (Aibea), has asked the central bank to effectively intervene in Dhanlaxmi Bank to prevent it from running into problems once again. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has appointed its nominee G. Jagan Mohan as additional director on the board of the private lender and through him the RBI should actively intervene to oppose management decisions that can adversely impact the bank, C.H. Venkatachalam, general secretary, Aibea told *Financial Chronicle*.

In a strongly worded letter to RBI governor Shaktikanta Das, the union opposed management decisions to change



the business profile of the bank, opening of branches in northern India, and appointment of a large number of sales executives and senior executives on contractual and cost to company bases at much higher remuneration, which could adversely impact the bank.

"We strongly believe that RBI's role in the board of directors of the bank should be reviewed as otherwise RBI would become answerable if things go bad," wrote

Venkatachalam.

The 93 year old Dhanlaxmi Bank (originally Dhanalakshmi Bank) is a small-sized private bank headquartered in Thrissur, Kerala. A few years ago, particularly during 2008 to 2012, the bank was facing multiple problems regarding its performance and made losses to the tune of Rs 850 crore during this period.

The letter said that after making losses for continuously for five years the bank is making profit for the last eight quarters. The profit for 2019-20 at Rs 65 crore was the highest since the bank's inception. However, in the beginning of this year, the top management has changed and "in the recent months we are concerned to observe that perhaps the bank is once gain heading in the wrong direction."

TCS offers its hiring test to other firms

New Delhi, Sept. 27: Tata Consultancy Services has opened its National Qualifier Test (NQT) to corporates to help them in their fresher recruitment programmes. Till last year, the NQT was restricted to hiring for TCS.

NQT—conducted by TCS' strategic unit TCS iON—is a multi-level assessment to assess competence on core cognitive abilities required for entry-level jobs, industry-specific knowledge and insights, and specialisation on skills required for performing the job role. Introduced in 2018, NQT

last year saw more than 3.6 lakh students participating from over 2,600 colleges.

"NQT will now be a common gateway test for several participating corporates for their fresher recruitment programmes. This standardised test will provide candidates with access to open positions at multiple corporates giving millions of young jobseekers an opportunity to work for India's top corporates," TCS iON global head Venguswamy Ramaswamy told PTI.

It will provide subscribing corporates with a well-

rounded evaluation of candidates' abilities, and access to quality talent across the nation at speed and scale, he added.

Apart from large groups, the company is also in touch with small businesses across 600 cities so that students from these locations can get the NQT score and smaller enterprises can hire local talent.

Young professionals with up to two years experience, and students from any stream, can apply for the test, conducted every quarter and the score will be valid for two years. —PTI

ORIENT LAUNCHES DECORATIVE WATER HEATERS

Sept. 27:

Orient Electric Limited, part of the \$2.4 billion CK Birla Group, has announced the launch of its new range of decorative water heaters, with alluring designs and finishes.

The new models include Aura Neo Art instant water heater with designer marble finish and BEE 5-star rated Evapro PC and Gusto Art storage water heaters flaunting distinctive designs.

The storage water heater have Ultra-Diamond Glassline tank for durability, Glassline coated heating element for better heating, Magnesium anode rod for enhanced tank life, PUF Insulation for better heat retention.

Salil Kappoor, Business Head, Home Appliances, Orient Electric, said, "Consumer's expectation about product functionality, reliability and aesthetics has increased manifold and thus we are routinely introducing products that address their evolving needs."



Salil Kappoor

BPCL pays up for Videocon in Brazil

New Delhi, Sept. 27: State-owned Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL) has been forced to pay for its defaulting partner Videocon Industries Ltd after it had relied on a rarely used model to acquire stake in five oil blocks in Brazil, sources said.

In September 2008, BPCL and Videocon had formed a 50:50 joint venture to acquire a Brazilian oil exploration firm for \$283 million.

The two firms formed an incorporated joint venture IBV Brasil Petroleo Limitada to acquire Encana Brasil Petroleo Limitada from Canadian gas producers EnCana.

Sources said usually such acquisitions are done through unincorporated joint ventures but BPCL chose to form an incorporated joint venture.

Incorporated joint venture is organised as separate and distinct legal enti-

ty. And the entire entity is held in default if any one of the partners doesn't pay for its share of cost.

With bankrupt Videocon unable to pay its cash calls for exploration and development of the oilfields, IBV faced likelihood of a default and the risk of being booted out.

To save the day, BPCL infused \$53.98 million into IBV in 2019-20, resulting in its share in the JV rising to 55.13 per cent.

—PTI

'Medical tourism requires govt support'

New Delhi, Sept. 27: Apollo Hospitals Enterprise said India's medical tourism sector needs support from the government to get back on its feet after being severely impacted by the pandemic.

"The medical tourism sector came to a standstill due to the lockdown. This has impacted not just India but Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and other Asian countries also which have a thriving medical tourism sector", Apollo Hospitals Group joint MD Sangita Reddy told PTI.

While there is easing out of the lockdown, it will take government level discussions to help bring



Sangita Reddy

patients in for treatment, she added.

"For example, Malaysia has seen some patients coming in for open-heart surgery from Brunei as a direct result of government level discussions. Similarly, in India, there is a need for government support to ensure that medical value tourism in

India gets back on its feet," Ms Reddy said.

Medical value travel tourism is still nascent in India and holds great potential. Niti Aayog has identified medical value travel as one of the major growth drivers and a major source of forex earning, she added.

"As the world unlocks, we will see a gradual increase in patients, all taking due precautions, turn to India for their treatments. In a world where people have become increasingly cost-conscious, India offers a significant advantage with high quality, high value care," Ms Reddy said.

—PTI

DRAWNG | EYEBALLS

US cosmetics giant pays Nasa \$128,000 for photo shoot in space

Estee Lauder skin serum to show off in space station

KIM BHASIN &
JUSTIN BACHMAN
SEPT. 27

Estee Lauder Cos is sending its newest skincare formula into space, and it'll cost only about as much as paying a big influencer for a few Instagram posts.

The US cosmetics giant is spending \$128,000 for Nasa to fly 10 bottles of its skin serum to the International Space Station. Once there, astronauts will take pictures of Estee Lauder's Advanced Night Repair in the cupola control tower, which has panoramic views of the cosmos. The images

will be used on social media, with the company planning to auction one bottle off for charity when the items return to Earth this spring.

The global recession, triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, has pushed brands to get more creative with their advertising because consumers are cutting back. Within beauty, several companies are spending less on traditional ads, while looking for new ways to break through the glut of content out there. In a press release, Estee Lauder highlighted it being the "first beauty



brand to go into space" as a means to tout its "skincare innovation."

The Northrop Grumman Antares rocket that will transport the skin serum as part of a supply run is scheduled to

launch on Tuesday night from Wallops Island, Virginia. The Cygnus cargo craft will then dock on the space station early Saturday.

Estee Lauder's push into micro-gravity is part of

Nasa's effort to commercialise low-earth orbit and make it a domain where private enterprise eventually does business as routinely as the government conducts spacewalks. Companies from Goodyear Tire & Rubber to Merck & Co have used space for research, and Nasa is hoping to expand its use, including private citizens visiting the space station.

"We need to expand people's perspective on what we can accomplish in space," said Phil McAlister, Nasa's director of commercial spaceflight development.

—Bloomberg

IKEA set to tap online sales, expand in India

New Delhi, Sept. 27: The pandemic has slowed down Swedish furniture retailer IKEA's expansion plans in India but the company is adjusting to the new reality while continuing to bet on the country as one of its "very important markets", according to company's India CEO Peter Betzel.

With the changing consumer behaviour due to the health crisis, online business will play a very important role for IKEA, which plans to expand in India with a cross-channel approach.

The pandemic may have slowed us down a bit like it has for everyone, but we are adjusting to the new

reality and are on track with our projects. Our Mumbai store...will open within the next half year or so, Betzel told PTI.

He said, "India remains a very important market and we have our plans to enter many cities with an omni-channel approach. Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi are among the prioritised cities for Ingka Group for fast expansion."

Ingka handles the global retail operation for IKEA, which has a target to reach 100 million people in India by 2022 through an omni-channel approach, by integrating its brick and mortar format stores with online stores. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Chelsea stage superb fightback

West Bromwich: Chelsea staged a superb second-half fightback from three goals down as Tammy Abraham's last-gasp strike rescued a thrilling 3-3 draw against West Bromwich Albion on Saturday. Frank Lampard's side were torn apart in the first half as Callum Robinson's brace and Kyle Bartley's goal punished woeful defending. But Mason Mount reduced the deficit soon after the break and Callum Hudson-Odoi got Chelsea's second before Abraham equalised deep into stoppage-time. On Sunday, Tottenham were denied by another controversial penalty given for handball deep into stoppage time as Callum Wilson's spot-kick snatched a 1-1 draw for Newcastle. — *AFP*

Ramos snatches win for Madrid

Madrid: Sergio Ramos scored a late penalty as Real Madrid came from behind to scrape a 3-2 win against 10-man Real Betis, their first La Liga victory of the season. Betis were ahead at half-time after two goals in two minutes from Aissa Mandi and William Carvalho overturned Fede Valverde's opener for the reigning champions. But Betis defender Emerson endured a nightmare start to the second half by scoring an own-goal. VAR again intervened in Madrid's favour in the 82nd minute as Marc Bartra was adjudged to have cleared with his arm, leaving Ramos to chip in the winning penalty. — *AFP*

James powers Lakers into Finals

Miami: The Los Angeles Lakers, fueled by a triple-double from superstar LeBron James, beat the Denver Nuggets 117-107 on Saturday to reach the NBA Finals. With the win in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, the Lakers completed a 4-1 victory over the Nuggets in the best-of-seven Western Conference finals. James scored 16 of his 38 points in the fourth quarter as the Lakers remained perfect in elimination games this post-season. Denver, already the first team to twice come back from 1-3 series deficits in the same playoffs, couldn't work the magic again. James added 16 rebounds and 10 assists. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

IPL: Royal Challengers Bangalore vs Mumbai Indians from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

England Women vs West Indies Women: Fourth T20 from 10.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

TENNIS

French Open: Matches from 2.30 pm on Star Sports, Select 2

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Fulham vs Aston Villa from 10.30 pm on Star Sports 3; Liverpool vs Arsenal from 12.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 2, HD

Italian League: Bologna vs Parma from 12.15 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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ROYAL TWIST

RR record highest IPL rurchase, beat KXIP by 4 wickets

Sharjah, Sept. 27: Rajasthan Royals recorded the highest rurchase in IPL history to beat Kings XI Punjab by four wickets in a high-scoring encounter here on Sunday. Put into bat, Mayank Agarwal smashed a 50-ball 106, while skipper K.L. Rahul cracked a 54-ball 69 as the duo stitched a 183-run opening stand off 99 balls to power Punjab to an imposing 223 for 2.

Sanju Samson then put on a lion-hearted effort with a 42-ball 85 studded with seven sixes and four boundaries, while Steve Smith scored a 27-ball 50 to keep RR in the hunt.

However, it was Rahul Tewatia, who turned hero when he smashed five sixes in the 18th over off Sheldon Cottrell to turn the match on its head. He scored a 31-ball 53 after struggling initially to take them to the brink of win.

Earlier, Agarwal outshone his captain Rahul with a maiden IPL hundred. The duo just missed the record of highest opening wicket partnership in IPL history by a mere two runs when Agarwal was out in the 17th over after hitting 10 fours and seven sixes during his magnificent 50-ball knock.

Nicholas Pooran then hit 25 not out from just eight balls while Glenn Maxwell also remained unbeaten on 13.

Rahul was content to playing second fiddle to Agarwal though the KXIP captain also made some brilliant shots during his 54-ball knock studded with seven fours and a six, continuing his rich vein of form after his 132 not out against Royal Challengers Bangalore. Agarwal surged ahead of his captain by reaching his fifty (from 26 balls) in style with a six off Shreyas Gopal and followed it up with another maximum to bring up KXIP's 100 in the ninth over. — *PTI*



Sanju Samson of Rajasthan Royals plays a shot against Kings XI Punjab in their Indian Premier League match held at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium in the United Arab Emirates on Sunday. — *BCCI*

IPL POINTS TABLE

Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Pts	NRR
Delhi Capitals	2	2	0	0	4	+1.100
Rajasthan Royals	2	2	0	0	4	+0.615
Kings XI Punjab	3	1	2	0	2	+1.498
Mumbai Indians	2	1	1	0	2	+0.993
Kolkata Knight Riders	2	1	1	0	2	-0.767
Chennai Super Kings	3	1	2	0	2	-0.840
Royal Challengers Bangalore	2	1	1	0	2	-2.175
Sunrisers Hyderabad	2	0	2	0	0	-0.730

Tabulated as Played, Won, Lost, No Result, Points, Net Run Rate

Warner hits out at SRH's batters

Abu Dhabi, Sept. 27: Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper David Warner has criticised the below-par effort of his batsmen after they slumped to their second successive defeat in the ongoing IPL, saying poor application in the middle overs let the team down yet again.

Manish Pandey (51 off 38) and Wriddhiman Saha (30 off 31) failed to take on Kolkata Knight Riders' disciplined bowling in the middle overs to set a modest 143-run target after Warner chose to bat. Coming in place of an injured Vijay Shankar, Bengal wicketkeeper batsman Saha was particularly slow to start with and wasted a lot of balls before being run out.

"We could have applied a bit more pressure on the bowlers and tried to hit more boundaries in that middle period," Warner said after the seven-wick-

We could have applied a bit more pressure on the bowlers and tried to hit more boundaries in that middle period. I'm disappointed more about the dot balls we played — there were about 35-36 dot balls in the middle, which in T20 cricket is not acceptable. I think we need to change our mind-set.

— DAVID WARNER

Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper David Warner after losing the match against Kolkata Knight Riders

et loss to KKR on Saturday.

"I'm disappointed more about the dot balls we played — there were about 35-36 dot balls in the middle, which in T20 cricket is not acceptable. I think we need to change our mind-set."

The dashing Australian opener said SRH were 20-30 runs short of what could have been a good score. "We were probably 20-30 runs short and then it would have been a good game. If you don't put the right total on board, it's going to be hard to defend."

Saha came in at No. 4 ahead of Afghan hard-hitting all-rounder Mohammad Nabi, who was fresh from his exploits in the Caribbean Premier League. But Warner defended the move, saying he wanted a "genuine batsman" to build a partnership

after his dismissal.

"You got to put a genuine batsman in, when I got out, we were trying to build partnerships. It's easy to say, send pinch-hitter in or what not, but you got to generate some momentum," he said.

"It's just unfortunate that they bowled well. They pulled their length back. We're unable to hit the boundaries. They executed well."

Warner looked in his elements in a 30-ball 36 before becoming spinner Varun Chakravarthy's maiden IPL victim. "Obviously, it was a very poor and soft dismissal for myself. We just got excited, pressed the button and started going on," he said.

"I don't blame anyone. I take full responsibility for myself for not batting through the overs and getting a soft dismissal."

— *PTI*

AFRIDI LAMENTS ABSENCE OF PAK PLAYERS IN IPL

Karachi, Sept. 27: Pakistan's former captain Shahid Afridi has rued the absence of top players from his country in a "big platform" like the Indian Premier League.

In a report published in the Pakistani media, Afridi said that the IPL is a big platform for any player to get exposure, gain experience and improve.

"The IPL is a big brand and I know that if our players like Babar Azam and others get a chance to play in it they would learn to play under pressure situations. Unfortunately, due to the existing policies, our players are not getting that big platform," he said. Pakistani players have not been part of the IPL since the first edition in 2008. — *PTI*

MI test awaits Kohli's boys

Dubai, Sept. 27: Royal Challengers Bangalore would be looking to address their pace-bowling concerns when they face defending champions Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League here on Monday.

RCB started on a winning note but then they collapsed against Kings XI Punjab, resulting in a humbling 97-run defeat.

After scores of 14 and 1, Kohli is due for a big one and would be itching to spend more time in the middle. Opener Devdutt Padikkal, who started his IPL career with a classy half-century, did not do much against KXIP and will be aiming for consistency.

Australian limited overs captain Aaron Finch would be hoping to convert starts into match-winning performances while AB de Villiers will be expected to provide the late fireworks again with the lower-order not inspiring a lot of hope.

It is still not clear whether RCB will have the services of South African all-rounder Chris Morris, who sat out of the first two games due to a side strain.

In the bowling department, Yuzvendra Chahal, as always, will be the key man with pacers, barring Navdeep Saini, leaking runs.

Dale Steyn and Umesh Yadav have proved expensive so far. The South African great is likely to retain his place in the playing eleven but the same can't be said about Yadav, who could make way for Mohammad Siraj.

England all-rounder Moeen Ali will be a welcome addition to the middle-order but with Josh Philippe keeping wickets regularly, he can only replace Steyn.

Mumbai Indians, who ticked all the boxes in their comfortable win against Kolkata Knight Riders, are unlikely to tinker with

NUMBERS GAME

HEAD TO HEAD

OVERALL:

- Matches: 25
- Rajasthan won: 16
- Punjab won: 9

MEETING IN 2019

- Mumbai Indians beat Royal Challengers Bangalore by 6 runs in Bangalore.
- Mumbai Indians beat Royal Challengers Bangalore by 5 wickets in Mumbai.

FOR THE RECORD

- Virat Kohli, who scored 8,915 runs at an average of 40.89 in 268 innings of 283 innings, needs 85 runs to become first Indians and seventh batsman overall to complete 9,000 runs in Twenty-20 cricket.

- Rohit Sharma, who scored 689 runs at an average of 29.95 in 25 innings of 26 matches, is the second highest run-getter behind Mahendra Singh Dhoni (794 runs in 27 matches) against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*

their team composition.

The biggest positive is that skipper Rohit Sharma is back among the runs and looked in ominous touch against KKR, and so did Suryakumar Yadav.

The only change that the team can make is bring in Ishan Kishan in place of the bulky Saurabh Tiwary.

Apart from their batting prowess, Hardik Pandya and Kieron Pollard can jointly perform the role of an additional bowler, but MI coach Mahela Jayawardene has made it clear that they don't want to take any risks with Hardik, who is playing after a long break following a back injury. — *PTI*

GILL HAILS CUMMINS' SUPERB COMEBACK

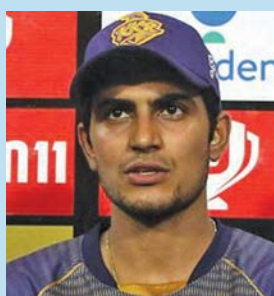
Abu Dhabi, Sept. 27: Young Kolkata Knight Riders opener Shubman Gill, who played an unbeaten match-winning knock against Sunrisers Hyderabad, hailed Pat Cummins for his strong comeback after the Australian pacer had a forgettable outing against Mumbai Indians in their opening IPL fixture.

The world number one Test bowler, who leaked in excess of 16 runs an over without any success against MI, smartly altered his length on Saturday to return with tidy figures of 1 for 19 as KKR restricted SRH to a below-par 142 for 4 here.

And then Gill made an unbeaten 70 off 62 balls to anchor KKR's chase.

"One odd day doesn't mean much to us and he (Cummins) bowled really well in this game," Gill said after helping KKR beat SRH by seven wickets to register their first win in IPL 2020.

Cummins, who was



Shubman Gill

bought by KKR for a record ₹15.5 crore, shared the new-ball with spinner Sunil Narine and castled an in-form Jonny Bairstow (5) with a delivery that sharply nipped back in.

"Pat is one of the best bowlers in the world right now. We had to start with Pat and Sunil," Gill said.

Gill said as an opener it's his duty to bat through the innings.

"I think as an opener, it's very important to stay there and it's your duty to see the team through," he said. — *PTI*

Halep reaches second round, Venus bows out

Paris, Sept. 27: Top-seeded Simona Halep won 10 straight games in beating Sara Sorribes Tormo 6-4, 6-0 to reach the second round of the French Open on Sunday and extend her winning streak to 15 matches.

Halep won on her 29th birthday, but with minimal celebrations planned for the evening since the coronavirus pandemic means players stay locked inside the security bubble of their hotels.

Wearing thick black leggings and a long-sleeved pink jersey to combat the chilly conditions, the 2018 champion made a series of unforced errors and trailed 4-2. But then she found her range, clinching the first set with a hold to love and

FRENCH | OPEN

sealing victory on her first match point when her Spanish opponent clipped a forehand wide.

Over on Court Suzanne Lenglen, U.S. Open runner-up Victoria Azarenka experienced a vastly different temperature to Flushing Meadows only two weeks ago.

The 10th-seeded Azarenka, who beat Danka Kovinic 6-1, 6-2, fumed when match officials didn't immediately send them back to the locker room during a rain interruption. "I am going to get frozen," she complained.

"No. I'm not waiting here a couple of minutes because I'm cold. It's eight

degrees, eight degrees, I live in Florida, I am used to hot weather."

After the match, she said the conditions were risky. She next faces Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, who won 6-4, 6-4 against American veteran Venus Williams. "Even on my really good shots she had a lot of amazing replies that just kind of came out of nowhere," Williams said.

Williams exited in the first round at Roland Garros for the third straight year and is 0-3 in Grand Slams this year following the Australian Open and the U.S. Open. Since the start of 2018, the seven-time Grand Slam champion has lost in the first round in seven of the past 11 major tournaments. — *AP*

Bottas exploits Hami's troubles in Russia



Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas celebrates on the podium after winning the Russian Formula One Grand Prix at the Sochi Autodrom circuit on Sunday. — *AP*

Sochi (Russia), Sept. 27: Valtteri Bottas took full advantage of a troubled day for his Mercedes team-mate Lewis Hamilton to claim the ninth win of his career with a measured drive to victory in Sunday's incident-packed Russian Grand Prix.

The Finn swooped to take second place at the start and inherited the lead when the runaway series leader and six-time champion took an extended pit-stop to serve two five-second penalties for irregular pre-race practice starts.

A disgruntled Hamilton, aiming to win and equal Michael Schumacher's record of 91 Grand Prix triumphs, re-joined in 11th place, but fought back to finish third behind Bottas and Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

His second win in Russia and second this season reinvigorated Bottas' chal-

- A disgruntled Hamilton, aiming to win and equal Michael Schumacher's record of 91 Grand Prix triumphs, re-joined in 11th place, but fought back to finish third behind Bottas and Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

lenge for the drivers' title and reduced Hamilton's lead to 44 points.

Sergio Perez came home fourth for Racing Point ahead of Renault's Daniel Ricciardo, who had to take a five second penalty for an infringement, and Charles Leclerc, who was sixth for Ferrari. Esteban Ocon was seventh for Renault ahead of local hero Daniil Kvyat and his Alpha Tauri team-mate Pierre Gasly and Alex

Albon in the second Red Bull.

Hamilton did not want to talk about his penalty.

"It doesn't matter. It's done now. I'll take the points and move on, but congratulations to Valtteri," said Hamilton.

STEWARDS ARE TRYING TO STOP ME: HAMILTON

Hamilton accused the stewards "trying to stop me" after he was handed two five-second penalties that wrecked his hopes of a record-equalling 91st victory. The runaway series leader said the stewards' penalties, given to him for a minor infringement when he performed two pre-race practice starts, were excessive.

"They're trying to stop me, aren't they? But, that's ok. I just need to keep my head down and stay focussed and we'll see what happens." — *AFP*