

SHORT TAKES

EDMC terminates
Tahir's membership

New Delhi: The BJP-ruled East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) has passed a resolution cancelling the membership of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Tahir Hussain, an accused of the February riots in North East Delhi. The EDMC has cancelled Hussain's membership under section 33 (2) of the Delhi Municipal Act. The proposal to terminate Mr Hussain's membership was placed in the before EDMC house on Wednesday as an agenda item and passed unanimously. The proposal moved by municipal secretary office quoting section 33 (2) of DMC Act which says, "If during three successive months, a councillor is, without permission of the Corporation, absent from all the meetings thereof, the Corporation may declare his seat vacant." "Mr Hussain, a councillor from Ward 59E, was absent from house meetings held in January, February (No meeting was held in March, April and May due to Covid), June, July without any intimation.

Man found dead
at Noida home

Noida: The body of a 25-year-old man was found hanging from a ceiling fan at his home in Noida on Thursday in a suspected case of suicide, police said. The deceased worked at a private firm and lived in Sector 122, under Phase 3 police station limits, according to an official. The police were alerted about the incident around 8 am by the family of the deceased, the official said.

India slams Pak for
sheltering Dawood

■ **Continued from Page 1**
consensus but it has also chosen not to act against them." The MEA added, "Pakistan has never taken any credible and verifiable action against terror entities or listed individuals, including the most wanted ones. This subsequent denial by their Foreign Office calls into question their intentions and it would not mislead the world community in believing its propaganda. Pakistan must take credible action and ensure that the listed individuals are prosecuted." On the Pulwama attack chargesheet, the MEA stated, "The chargesheet has been filed after investigation of a year-and-a-half since the attack took place on 14 February 2019. It has been filed to address the act of terrorism and to bring perpetrators of such a heinous crime to justice. Jaish-e-Mohammad had claimed responsibility for Pulwama attack. The organisation and its leadership is in Pakistan. It is regrettable that Masood Azhar, the first accused in the chargesheet, continues to find shelter in Pakistan. Enough evidence has been shared with Pakistan but it continues to evade responsibility." It added, "Pakistan has not yet taken any credible action against perpetrators of the Mumbai terror attack of 2008 which resulted in loss of 165 innocent lives, including 25 foreign nationals."

No Muharram
processions: SC

■ **Continued from Page 1**
spreading Covid." Referring to the top court allowing Lord Jagannath's Rath Yatra at Puri, CJI Bobde said that it was one specific place where the rath was to go from point A to point B. "Had you sought permission for one place, we could have assessed the risk and passed orders. Moreover, even the state governments are not in favour of such activity during the pandemic," CJI Bobde said, suggesting that the concerned high court may be approached if permission is sought for the procession in one city or town. On August 21, while permitting the Jain community in Mumbai to perform Paryushan rituals for two days – August 22 and 23 – in three temples with restricted and regulated entry, the court had said that its order can't be cited as a precedent for seeking permission to hold religious festivities involving congregation of devotees, like Ghanesh Chaturthi. "We make it clear that this order is not intended to be used as a precedent by other persons to seek permission to hold any festivals/festivities which would involve, by their very nature, congregation of people, such as Ganesh Festival," the court had said.

Centre: Never put pressure on AAP to reduce testing
'MHA putting pressure to not increase Covid test'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Thursday alleged that union home ministry pressurising officers in the national capital to not increase the Covid testing as directed by the chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. The allegation was denied by the Union home ministry.

As many as 1,840 new cases and 22 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours. Of the total 1,67,604 cases in the city, 13, 208 are active and 1,50,027 patients have recovered. The virus-related fatalities have gone up to 4,369.

The Union home ministry on Thursday termed as baseless the allegation that it is putting pressure on the Delhi government not to increase Covid tests to 40,000 in Delhi. A Home ministry spokesperson said the marked improvement in the Covid situation in Delhi has been possible due to enhanced testing and other containment measures.

"The allegation raised in the letter of the health minister of Delhi Govt dated August 27, 2020, which is

Closely monitoring Delhi's
virus situation, says Centre

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

A concerned home ministry is closely monitoring the corona situation in Delhi as there has been a sharp rise in Covid cases in the national capital over the last few days with 1,544 cases — the biggest single day spike in August — being reported on Tuesday.

Corona cases have been rising sharply in Delhi since August 17. The home ministry has asked the Delhi government to go in for "more aggressive test-

ing and isolation" by increasing the tests from 20,000 to 40,000 daily.

"If required, arrangements will be made for additional beds," officials said. The home ministry is the Central nodal agency which is co-ordinating with all the states to make necessary preparations to deal with the corona crisis.

Officials said the situation in Delhi is being monitored very closely to ascertain as to what could be the possible reason behind the sudden spurt in corona cases.

addressed to Union Home Secretary, to the effect that MHA is putting pressure on Delhi Govt officers not to increase testing in Delhi is false and baseless," the spokesperson tweeted.

The Home Ministry said it was after the intervention of Union Home Minister Amit Shah that the daily tests in Delhi, which were averaging around 4,000 per day till

mid June, 2020, went up to around 18-20,000 per day in a calibrated manner.

According to sources in the Delhi government, Mr Jain has written a letter to Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla and said, "I am shocked to know that Union home ministry officials pressurising Delhi officials not to increase the number of tests".

The AAP government in

the national capital on Wednesday decided to double the number of daily corona virus tests being conducted following a surge in the virus cases over the last 10 days. The decision was taken at a review meeting chaired by chief minister Mr Kejriwal that also had Mr Jain and various other officials in attendance.

Mr Jain pointed that in view of increase in Covid cases in Delhi, CM Mr Kejriwal had held an emergency meeting and ordered officers to double the number of tests within a week to 40,000 from current 20,000.

"Why does the union home ministry interfere in the working of Delhi government and when there is an elected government capable of taking decisions? Secondly, why is the Delhi government stopped from increasing the test? When testing was globally termed the best way to fight pandemic and it also helped in controlling the infection in the national capital," wrote Mr Jain demanding city's officers are not pressurised and Centre must not interfere when Delhi government is going to increase the test.

5 HC benches to hold physical
courts on rotation from Sept. 1

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

The Delhi high court Thursday said five of its benches will start holding physical courts on a rotation basis from September 1, and issued standard operating procedure (SOP) for it.

The HC, which has been conducting hearings through video conferencing since March 24 to contain the spread of ongoing Covid pandemic, said the remaining benches shall continue taking up matters through the virtual mode.

The cause list will specify

▶ **ALL THE pending matters listed before the high court from Sept. 1 to 30 would be adjourned to Nov. 3 to December 7 respectively**

in advance the courts which shall take up matters through physical hearing and those through video conferencing.

Though the high court will open on all five days in a week, the benches will sit on rotation basis. An office order issued by Registrar General Manoj Jain said that while considering the matter regarding resump-

tion of physical functioning of the high court, the suspension of functioning of court has been extended till September 30.

All the pending matters listed before the high court from September 1 to 30 would be adjourned to November 3 to December 7 respectively, the order said. As per the SOP, the entry in the court blocks for the purpose of attending physical hearings will be restricted to only one advocate per party whose case is listed that day and party-in-person who is pursuing his/her case without any legal assistance.

12-yr-old raped, accused held after gunfight

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NOIDA, AUG. 27

A 12-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a man in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida and the accused arrested after a gunfight with police personnel, officials said on Thursday.

The incident took place under the Ecotech 3 police station area on Tuesday afternoon after which an FIR was lodged, and the accused was identified and nabbed on Wednesday, the officials said.

"The case was challenging as the accused was wearing a face mask at the time of the crime and there was no eyewitness of the incident. The victim too had seen the accused for the first time. Police

teams swung into action and the accused was identified," deputy commissioner of Police (Women Safety) Vrinda Shukla said.

"When a police team reached the location of the accused, he tried to run away from the spot. He also opened fire on the team in his bid to escape but was overpowered and caught," Ms Shukla said.

The officer said she met the minor girl, whose parents are daily wage earners. She was in a stable condition and getting adequate medical care. Further legal proceedings in the case are underway, Ms Shukla added.

Meanwhile, the Gautam Buddh Nagar police arrested five other men

▶ **THE INCIDENT took place under the Ecotech 3 police station area on Tuesday afternoon after which an FIR was lodged, and the accused was identified and nabbed**

▶ **ACCORDING TO police said she met the minor girl, whose parents are daily wage earners. She was in a stable condition and getting adequate medical care.**

allegedly involved in separate cases of rape, sodomy and rape attempt on minors in the district.

In Greater Noida's Badalpur area, a 15-year-old girl who had gone out of the village for some



Covid infected child dances inside a ward at the CWG Village sports complex in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

AAP to BJP: Stop 'crying'
over lack of funds in MCDs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), on Thursday, launched a fresh attack on the BJP ruled municipal corporations over their perpetual complain regarding the lack of funds.

Aam Aadmi Party chief spokesperson and MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj said BJP should immediately hand over the civic bodies in Delhi to it instead of "crying" over lack of funds and that AAP will run the same MCDs with the available fund and budget.

Claiming that the Aam Aadmi party government was not releasing the due funds, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), on Wednesday, said that the politicisation of fund allocation is all against the basis of devolution of funds between states and urban local bodies of Delhi.

"Aam Aadmi Party will tell people to give the responsibility of the MCDs to it and it will perform every work in a much better way. AAP will not increase any tax or involve in any corruption when it gets the responsibility of running the MCDs. Aam Aadmi Party will make Delhi a world-class city and make a cleanliness model for

▶ **AAM AADMI Party chief spokesperson and MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj said BJP should immediately hand over the civic bodies in Delhi to it instead of "crying" over lack of funds and that AAP will run the same MCDs with the available fund and budget**

Delhi when we come to power in the MCDs," said Mr Bhardwaj.

He pointed out that before coming to power in the corporations, BJP was aware of the fund allocations and despite that it cried about lack of funds.

"Every citizen of Delhi is aware of the fact that the BJP municipal corporations are a complete failure. Employees are not getting paid. This has created a huge mess and with every passing day the capital city is becoming dirtier," said the Aam Aadmi Party chief spokesperson.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor has said that it is not BJP but AAP which needs to shed its mixture of biased and childish behaviour towards the municipal corporations.

Reacting to Aam Aadmi Party's attack on the party-ruled civic bodies, Delhi BJP spokesperson

said that the Delhi government should first start giving the municipal corporations funds as per the already accepted 4th Delhi Finance Commission (DFC) recommendations and the report of the 5th DFC report which is with the Delhi government.

"CM Arvind Kejriwal and Mr Bhardwaj need to tell Delhi why they are not releasing the municipal funds as per the 4th DFC at least. Mr Bhardwaj's statement is too childish, he is a MLA and should know elected power is not transferable as the Aam Aadmi Party leaders keep saying if you can't run MCDs hand them to us."

"The civic bodies are already constitutionally under you. Just tell us what cooperation you have extended to help them to economically sustain them," Mr Kapoor added.

Recently, Aam Aadmi Party has alleged a 'scam' worth crores in the purchase of the anti-dengue medicine by the BJP-ruled municipal corporations, saying the purchases were made at an inflated price. The ruling party has claimed that the MCDs bought the chemical for ₹3,256 per kg, while the civic body of Bhopal paid ₹2,500 per kg for it.

Ola and Uber
drivers threaten
strike across
NCR from Sept 1

New Delhi, Aug. 27: Drivers working with mobility platforms Ola and Uber have threatened to go on strike in Delhi-NCR from September 1 in support of their various demands like fare hike and extension of moratorium on repayment of loans.

Around 2 lakh drivers working with cab aggregators will take part in the strike if the government fails to solve our problems, said Kamaljeet Singh Gill, president of Sarvodaya Drivers Association of Delhi.

The cab drivers have demanded extension of moratorium on loan payments to December 31, fare hike, increase in commission by cab aggregators, and withdrawal of e-challans issued against their vehicles for speeding, according to a pamphlet circulated by the drivers.

The strike by drivers of cab aggregators may cause hardships to large number of commuters as Metro train services are yet to resume and buses are running at reduced capacity amid the Covid pandemic. No reaction was immediately available from Ola or Uber.

"Our immediate fear is that most cabs have loans against them. The central government's moratorium on EMI payment will end on August 31 and banks will start seizing vehicles for EMI payment defaults after that," Mr Gill said.

He said cab drivers have been hit hard by the pandemic and the lockdown. "Most of the drivers are finding it difficult to feed their families at this time and have no means to fulfil their financial obligations."

— PTI

Delhi aims at
25% green
cover by 2023

New Delhi, Aug. 27 The Delhi government has set an ambitious target to increase the city's green cover from 22 percent at present to 25 percent in the next three years, officials said on Thursday.

According to the latest India State of Forest Report (ISFR) released in 2019, Delhi's green cover, comprising forest and tree cover, is 324 sq km or 21.9 percent of the total area at present. It was 305.4 sq km or 20.6 percent in 2017.

"According to our assessment, Delhi's green cover can be increased to 25 percent of its total area of 1,484 sq km. It means 45 sq km land is available with various departments in Delhi for afforestation purposes," Principal Conservator of Forests Ishwar Singh said. — PTI

5 held for running
extortion racket
from Mandoli jail

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

The Delhi police has busted an extortion racket allegedly being run from the Mandoli jail in north-east Delhi and arrested five men, including the head warden of the prison, officials said on Thursday.

The accused have been identified as Vikas (28), Pramod Kumar (30), Honey Rajpal (35) and Jagmohan (23). The head warden of Mandoli jail Rajender Singh (50) has also been arrested, they said.

The police said Vikas, an active member of Nandu Gang, is the mastermind behind the extortion racket and allegedly operated from inside the jail where is currently lodged.

Among the other gang members, Kumar was

under judicial custody and had recently come out on bail while Rajpal is also lodged in the jail.

According to the police, each of the five members of the racket had been assigned a specific task.

Kumar's job was to arrange SIM cards for Singh, Singh, being a jail employee, was tasked to collect and deliver the SIM cards to Rajpal inside the jail by avoiding checking.

While Rajpal arranged mobile phones, Vikas was the one who make WhatsApp calls and send messages to the gang's targets, police said.

A probe was initiated after the police received a complaint on August 22 from a Dabri resident who alleged that he had been receiving threats through WhatsApp calls and messages from two mobile numbers.

SHORT TAKES

Papon's mom, singer Mahanta, dies at 72

Guwahati: Noted folk singer Archana Mahanta died on Thursday at a private hospital where she was undergoing treatment after suffering a brain stroke. She was 72. She is survived by a daughter and son Papon, who is a popular singer in Bollywood. Her last rites were completed at Nabagraha crematorium in the city with full state honours in presence of a large number of followers, including senior officials of the state government. According to family members, she suffered a brain stroke in July and was admitted in a private hospital then. "Her situation had deteriorated in the last few days," a relative said. Mahanta used to perform along with her husband and Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee Khagen Mahanta. Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal said, "I am deeply saddened to hear the demise of singer Archana Mahanta." — *PTI*

2 killed in Maha building collapse

Mumbai: At least two died and two persons are feared trapped after a portion of a three-storey building in Naggpada area of South Mumbai collapsed on Thursday. The incident occurred around 1 pm. Maharashtra housing minister said that action will be taken against the builder who was appointed for redevelopment of the building. A girl identified as Aliya Riyasat Kureshi, and a 70-year-old woman, Noor Kureshi, were rescued from under the rubble. They were rushed to the JJ Hospital, where they were declared dead. Five fire engines, a quick response vehicle with local police and ambulance were rushed to the spot. "The toilet block portion of Mishra building, an old structure, located on Shuklaji Street caved in," an official of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation said.

Religious places in Raj to reopen Sept 7

Jaipur: All religious places in Rajasthan will reopen for public from September 7, months after they were closed due to the coronavirus-induced lockdown, an official statement said on Wednesday. The decision was taken during a review meeting on the coronavirus situation in the state chaired by chief minister Ashok Gehlot. Social distancing norms will have to be followed and all religious places will be sanitised from time to time, the statement said. District collectors and superintendents of police will carry out inspections and ensure all safety measures are taken, it said. Mr Gehlot instructed officials to ensure that health protocols are followed properly and there is no crowding at these places, according to the statement. — *PTI*

1 killed, 6 injured in Bihar road mishap

Begusarai: One person was killed and six people were injured when a pick-up van carrying them hit a height gauge of a rail overbridge in Bihars Begusarai district on Thursday, police said. The incident took place near Subhash Chowk here around 7.30 am. The deceased has been identified as Ram Bhagat Paswan, Additional SHO (station house officer) of Town police station Barun Kumar said. The injured have been admitted to nearby nursing homes, Mr Kumar said. The passengers of the vehicle, which was travelling from Darbhanga to Simariya Ganga ghāt, were going to immerse ashes in the river. Locals blocked the road, leading towards the rail overbridge, demanding removal of the height barrier and adequate compensation to the deceased's family. — *PTI*

Idols worth ₹35cr seized in Bengal

Kolkata: The Kolkata Customs on Wednesday seized 25 antique idols valued at ₹35.3 crore, which were being smuggled to Bangladesh. A senior customs official of the Preventive Wing said acting on a tip-off, it searched a truck carrying paddy on the night of August 23 and found the antiquities hidden inside. The truck was intercepted in South Dinajpur district, he said. Of the 25 seized antique idols, seven stone idols are of Goddess Parbati, Manasha Devi, Lord Vishnu and Lord Surya. — *PTI*

'Self-reliant India can become arm-supplier'

Will become security provider in Indian Ocean: PM

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that a self-reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat) in defence sector can become reliable supplier of weapons to friendly nations and will strengthen its role as net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region. This will also strengthen India's strategic partnership with the countries in the region.

"Our resolve for Atmanirbhar Bharat is not inward looking," said Mr Modi in his address to a webinar 'Atmanirbhar Bharat — Defence Industry Outreach', organised jointly by industry chamber FICCI and department of military affairs (DMA).

Prime Minister said that the government has made efforts to unshackle defence production sector so that more equipment is produced in the country,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses Atmanirbhar Bharat defence industry outreach webinar via video conference in New Delhi on Thursday.

— *PTI*

new technology is developed and there is an expansion of the private sector. He said that self-confidence in the defence sector is very important for making a self-reliant India. The Prime Minister said that the size of procurement orders from the domestic industry is going to increase in the coming days and a portion of the

defence ministry's capital budget has been earmarked for the equipment made in India.

He said that allowing 74% foreign direct investment (FDI) in defence sector and corporatisation of Ordnance Factory Boards (OFBs) were among steps taken by the government to boost defence manufacturing.

Covid: Cab secy asks states for 140 daily tests per million

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

Amid unrelenting spike in cases of Corona virus across the country, cabinet secretary Rajiv Gauba on Thursday held a video conference with chief secretaries and health secretaries of nine states including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka — which have recorded the most number of positive cases and deaths due to the pandemic — directing them to ensure effective containment, contact tracing and surveillance as well as to ensure a minimum of 140 tests per million per day in all districts.

According to official sources, Mr Gauba directed the chief secretaries to ensure that at least in 80 per cent of new cases, all close contacts should be traced and tested with 72 hours.

Ensuring a minimum of 140 tests per million per day in all districts while targeting a positivity/confirmation rate of less than 5 per cent, was also suggested to the states by the chief secretary.

The states were also asked to conduct regular monitoring of home isolation patients (tele-calling and home visits).

Govt thrusting GST decisions on states: Cong

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

Expressing dissatisfaction with the GST council meeting, the Congress Party on Thursday alleged that the Central government was adopting a majoritarian approach and thrusting solutions on states.

The Congress representatives at the GST Council meeting said that finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's proposal that states should borrow to make for the losses on account of non-payment of GST compensation should not be forced on them as they need to discuss the proposal with their respective Cabinets and legislatures. Addressing a virtual press conference, Punjab finance minister Manpreet Badal said that the Congress-ruled states were not happy with the outcome of GST Council meeting as decisions were thrust upon them by the Centre. Mr Badal, who had opened the discussions from the Congress side at the council meet, sought activation of the disputes resolution mechanism in the Council as provided for in Article 279 of the Constitution.

"I appeal to the Centre that if some states are not agreeable to their proposals, they should not force the solutions on states. The Centre should activate the dispute resolution mechanism in the GST Council, so that states have legal

► **THE CONGRESS** representatives at the GST Council meeting said that finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's proposal that states should borrow to make for the losses on account of non-payment of GST compensation should not be forced on them

recourse to what they do not agree upon," he said.

He claimed that there was a trust deficit in the meeting. "We saw a trust deficit. The meeting did not progress in a very cordial atmosphere. The Attorney General's comments were read out to communicate that the Centre had no legal commitment in the matter. We wonder why the AG's views were not circulated to us".

Chhattisgarh finance minister T.S. Singh Deo said that the GST Council was increasingly yielding to majoritarianism instead of being consensual.

Chief minister of Puducherry V. Narayanasamy said it was unfortunate the Centre was not helping the revenue-starved states by honouring its commitment to pay them GST compensation at 14 per cent.

Mr Narayanasamy added that there was a serious flaw in the GST Act as producing states are losing and consuming states are at an advantage under the present GST regime and that the central government should look into it.

Former SC judge Lakshmanan dies

Chennai, Aug. 27: Justice A.R. Lakshmanan, former Judge of the Supreme Court, who banned smoking in public places and issued a telephonic order to permit a student to write a university exam, has died following a heart attack.

He was 78 and he died at a hospital in Tiruchirappalli on Wednesday at 11.30 pm, his family said on Thursday. He is survived by two sons and two daughters.

"He suffered a heart

attack at 11 am on Wednesday and he was rushed to a hospital in Karaikudi where he was stabilised and then admitted to a hospital in Tiruchirappalli where he collapsed before a procedure could be done," Lakshmanan's son, AR L Sundaresan, a designated senior advocate, told PTI.

Justice Lakshmanan's body was taken to his native Devakottai in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu and cremated there.

He was the former chairman of the Law Commission of India.

— *PTI*

Rohtang Tunnel ready for opening by mid September

Mumbai, Aug. 27: The ₹4,000-crore Rohtang Tunnel, the world's longest motorable roadway at an altitude of over 3,000 metres, is ready for opening next month following the completion of civil works that began a decade ago.

The tunnel will be opened by Prime Minister Narendra Modi by mid-September, Satish Paretkar, director of Hydro & Underground business unit at Afcons told PTI.

A joint venture of Shapoorji Pallonji Group-run Afcons and Strabag of Austria won the Engineering Procurement & Construction (EPC) tender for ₹1,458 crore from Border Road Organisation in 2009.

The cost of the project



► **The ₹4,000-crore Rohtang Tunnel, the world's longest motorable roadway at an altitude of over 3,000 metres, is ready for opening next month following the completion of civil works that began a decade ago.**

has crossed ₹2,500 crore now, he said. The civil works started in 2009 and was to be completed within 6.5 years.

Paretkar said the exact date of opening of the tunnel is yet to be finalised.

The 9.02 kilometres-long Atal Tunnel, named after former Prime minister Atal Bihari

Vajpayee, passes under the Rohtang Pass in the eastern Pir Panjal range on the Leh-Manali highway at an altitude of 3,060 metres at the lowest and 3,078 metres at the peak.

The tunnel is 10.5 metres wide and has a height of 5.52 metres and a car can zip through at 80 kmph.

According to Paretkar, the horseshoe shaped single-tube, double-lane tunnel has many firsts.

With a length of 9.02 km, it is the longest in the world at an altitude of over 3,000 metres or 10,000 feet mean sea level, he said. Further, it is also the country's first tunnel to have an escape tunnel within the main tunnel because of the topography.

— *PTI*



Authorities demolish an illegal building allegedly belonging to gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari during an anti-encroachment drive in Lucknow on Thursday. The building had been constructed on 'nishkrant sampatti', belonging to people who have migrated to Pakistan.

— *PTI*

Overall cases cross 33.10L, total deaths go up to 60,472 Highest 1-day spike of 75,760 Covid cases

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

With 75, 760 fresh cases and 1, 023 deaths, India recorded the highest single day jump in the novel coronavirus cases on Thursday as overall cases crossed 33.10 lakhs while total deaths in the country so far reached 60, 472, as per Union health ministry.

However, the number of recoveries too are improving and till Thursday, India's total Covid-19 recoveries surpassed 25.23 lakhs out of which 56,013 persons were discharged

from medical supervision in the last 24 hours. India's Recovery Rate now is 76.24 per cent. The Recovery Rate is best in Delhi (90%), followed by Tamil Nadu (85%), Bihar (83.80%). The country as of now has 7.26 lakh cases under active medical care.

"The sustained high recoveries have ensured that the actual caseload of the country vir active cases comprise 21.93% of the total positive cases," said health ministry officials.

"A focus on standard of care protocol as described

► **INDIA'S RECOVERY Rate now is 76.24 per cent. The Recovery Rate is best in Delhi (90%), followed by Tamil Nadu (85%), Bihar (83.80%). The country as of now has 7.26 lakh cases under active medical care.**

in the clinical management protocol of Ministry of Health Ministry, better skilled doctors in the ICUs and hospitals, improved ambulance services, use of non-invasive oxygen and use of investigational therapies have led to the

national Case Fatality Rate (CFR) maintaining its downward slide. It has further slumped to stand at 1.83% today," officials added.

As per data, 10 States/UTs are faring better in terms of Recovery Rate than the national average. The CFR is lowest in Assam (0.27%), followed by Kerala (0.39%), Bihar (0.42%), Odisha (0.51%), Telangana (0.70%), Tripura (0.87%), Andhra Pradesh (0.93%), Chhattisgarh (0.95%), Goa (1.08%) and Jharkhand (1.09%).

Manjhi meets Nitish amid talks of return to NDA fold

Patna, Aug. 27: Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) president Jitan Ram Manjhi on Thursday met Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar amid speculations of his talks over seat sharing before joining the ruling NDA.

Manjhi paid a visit to Kumar, who is also national president of the JD(U), at his official residence 1, Aney Marg here.

The HAM chief, however, denied having any political deliberations with Kumar and asserted that the talks were centred around local issues and problems.

Notably, Manjhi had on August 20 severed his



Jitan Ram Manjhi

ties with Grand Alliance (Mahagathabandhan) after spending two and a half years in the opposition coalition.

"No political talks took place (with Kumar), rather it (talks) was centred around some local issues, Manjhi told reporters emerging out

of the CM residence.

The HAM chief is the lone member of his party in the Legislative Assembly currently.

"I will talk to you (media persons) on August 30, Manjhi gave a terse reply when reporters wanted to know from him whether he has been offered 10 seats to contest as a constituent of NDA, which currently comprised of three parties- BJP, JD(U) and LJP.

It may be noted that Manjhi had quit the JD(U) in 2015 after being forced to step down as the chief minister to make way for return of Mr Kumar. — *PTI*

BJP introduced aya Ram gaya Ram politics: Nath

RABINDRA NATH CHOUHURY
BHOPAL, AUG. 27

Congress veteran and former chief minister Kamal Nath on Thursday accused ruling BJP of taking recourse to horse trading to topple his 15-month-old government in March, bringing in 'aya Ram gaya Ram' (encouraging defection of elected representatives) politics in the state in the process.

Mr Nath said BJP brought disrepute to Madhya Pradesh by indulging in horse trading, which was hitherto alien to political culture of the state, to pull down his government.

He was talking to reporters while emerging from chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's official residence here where he had a closed-door meeting with him that lasted nearly half-an-hour.

Mr Nath said they held discussions on ensuing three-day session of MP assembly, scheduled to commence on September 21. He however refused to elaborate further.

Mr Nath dismissed the charges made by the BJP that his government had failed to deliver the promise of waiving crop loans of farmers.

"My government had waived crop loans of 26.5



Kamal Nath

lakh farmers and the rest beneficiaries would have been covered in phases", Mr Nath said while presenting pen drive to the media containing the details of beneficiaries of the scheme during his regime.

Mr Nath said he had sought to promote the state as an investment destination by creating a brand of MP in the national and international level.

"I wanted to create a brand of MP outside the state. But, BJP has tainted the image of the state by indulging in horse trading to pull down my government, formed with due mandate of the people", he said. He said the upcoming by-polls to 27 assembly constituencies in the state may change course of history of the state. "I will not call it a mini-assembly election. But, I will say the ensuing assembly by-polls will change course of history of the state and also the fate of this government", he said.



SHORT TAKES

Saradha case: CBI quizzes TMC leader

New Delhi: The CBI has questioned Trinamul Congress (TMC) leader Kunal Ghosh in connection with the Saradha chit fund scam nearly a month after he was appointed national spokesperson of the party, ending doubts about his association with the Mamata Banerjee-led political outfit. The agency questioned Ghosh on Wednesday, officials said. Ghosh was the CEO of Saradha Media, an arm of the Saradha Group which was busted in 2013 for its illegal operations, and was arrested by Bidhanagar police in 2013 for his alleged involvement in the chit fund scam, they said. The TMC had reportedly suspended him for anti-party activities months before his arrest but there had been no formal statement or communication from the party on his status as its leader. — PTI

Over ₹40 lakh silver bricks seized, 3 held

Hyderabad: Silver bricks worth over ₹40 lakh, allegedly smuggled from Berhampur in Odisha's Ganjam district, were seized by Andhra Pradesh police near Ichchapuram late on Wednesday night, reports from Berhampur said on Thursday. Three persons were arrested in connection with the incident. As per information, three youths — P Suri Babu, Ijad Govinda and driver B. Narasinghamulu of Machilipatnam — were heading to Andhra Pradesh from Berhampur in a car with the silver bricks weighing around 61 kg. At Purushottampur checkpoint on Odisha-Andhra border, police of the neighbouring state intercepted them and asked them to show valid documents. After the accused failed to furnish the same, the cops arrested them and seized the silver bricks along with the vehicle.

Flood threat looms large over Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Unrelenting rains triggered by back-to-back low pressures over the Bay of Bengal have resulted in floods in several rivers in Odisha, causing serious concern for the state administration. In Bhadrak district, eight panchayats under Bhandarikopari block and seven in Dhamnagar block were reportedly inundated after floodwater from Baitarani entered the areas. Vehicular movements on many routes in the region were affected as several roads and bridges have been submerged. As per reports, Baitarani river was flowing two metre above the danger-level near Akhuapada. While the cautionary mark in the river is 17.83 metre, the water level in the river on Thursday evening was recorded at 19.56 metre.

Jaishankar invited to SCO meet: MEA

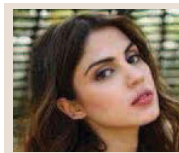
New Delhi: The ministry of external affairs on Thursday confirmed that external affairs minister S. Jaishankar had received the invite to attend a scheduled meeting of the foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)-member countries that will be held in Moscow next month. The SCO is an eight-member predominantly Central Asian grouping that comprises China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan. Mr. Jaishankar is bound to meet his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi during the meeting in case he travels to Moscow next month and this will then be the first time since the deadly Galwan valley clash between Indian and Chinese troops in mid-June that the foreign ministers of the two countries will be face-to-face.

Rajnath launches NCC training app

New Delhi: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday launched an app which will assist in conducting country-wide online training of NCC cadets at a time when schools and colleges are closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr. Singh said that the app will be useful of NCC cadets in digital learning and overcoming the difficulties posed by Covid-19 due to restrictions on direct physical interactions. "But if one moves ahead with determination, he or she would be able to clear all hurdles and achieve success," he said.

I wasn't living off Sushant's money: Rhea

Actor didn't attend funeral as Sushant family doesn't like her



Rhea Chakraborty

▶ ASKED WHEN she got to know about Rajput's mental condition or the fact that he was bipolar, Chakraborty said it was during their Europe trip. Rajput, she was told, used to get claustrophobic during flights and took medicines.

professional assignment.

Mumbai, Aug. 27: Actor Rhea Chakraborty, who is accused of abetting Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide by his family, has opened up about her relationship with the late actor on Thursday, denying that she was living off his money.

Chakraborty, along with her family members, is also accused of misappropriating Rajput's wealth by the actor's family but she dismissed the allegations in a TV interview.

After Mumbai Police, Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation are investigating various angles in the actor's death.

Opening up about her much-talked-about Europe trip with the late Bollywood star, who died by suicide on June 14 in Mumbai, the young actor said in an interview to a TV news channel that she was set to go to Paris on a

choices. Who are we to say how Sushant should live his life? He lived like a star, he loved it. It was his choice to take those men on that trip, did they also force him? No, I was not living off Sushant Singh Rajput's money. We were living like a couple, she told senior journalist Rajdeep Sardesai.

Asked about why her brother Showik joined them on their Europe trip, Chakraborty said all three of them had formed an artificial intelligence company called Rhealytix, which was named after her and invested Rs 33,000 each in the firm.

The actor said she was

These were his lifestyle

She said it was Rajput's idea to make a Europe trip about it and he cancelled the tickets booked by the company that was sponsoring her trip. She said her brother joined them in Italy at the insistence of the late actor.

"He paid for the rest of the trip and the hotels. He wanted to and I didn't have a problem with that. I had a problem with how much he was spending. But Sushant lived king size, he was like that," she said, adding that he once went on a trip to Thailand with his friends and spent Rs 70 lakh on that vacation.

These were his lifestyle

choices. Who are we to say how Sushant should live his life? He lived like a star, he loved it. It was his choice to take those men on that trip, did they also force him? No, I was not living off Sushant Singh Rajput's money. We were living like a couple, she told senior journalist Rajdeep Sardesai.

Asked about why her brother Showik joined them on their Europe trip, Chakraborty said all three of them had formed an artificial intelligence company called Rhealytix, which was named after her and invested Rs 33,000 each in the firm.

The actor said she was

not on the list for his funeral as his family members don't like me.

Chakraborty said she wanted to attend the funeral but dropped the idea at the suggestion of her friends as the family did not want her there.

he actor said her friends told her that you will be ridiculed, you will be thrown out. You are already not in a sound mental state. Don't come here.

Chakraborty said two of her friends told her to see his body to get closure. She said she saw Rajput's body for three-four seconds said sorry and touched his feet.

Yes, I said 'Sorry babu'. When you see a dead person, what else will you say? I said sorry as he was no more. When you love someone and they die, you say sorry. Sorry that you aren't here. Sorry that a joke has been made out of your death, she said.

— PTI

Azad pitches for polls in CWC, key posts in states

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

Senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, who was among the 23 leaders who sent a letter to Congress president Sonia Gandhi calling for sweeping changes in the party, on Thursday strongly pitched for elections to the Congress Working Committee and said the party chief should be elected and it is their "victory" that they will have a "full-time president" after six months. He also pitched for elections to the key organisational posts of state chiefs and district chiefs.

"Anyone who has a genuine interest in the internal working dynamics of Congress would welcome our proposal to have every state and district president as being elected. The entire Congress Working Committee should be elected," Azad told ANI.

Azad, who is Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, defended the move to write the letter and said their effort was to make the party strong and active and those who simply got "appointment cards" continue to oppose

Ghulam Nabi Azad

their proposal.

"The intention is to make Congress active and strong. But those who simply got 'appointment cards' continue to oppose our proposal. What's the harm in having elected CWC members who will have fixed tenures in the party," he said. CWC is the highest decision-making body of the party.

Azad, a former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, said the party should have an elected president.

"I don't have any problem. Whosoever becomes president, should be elected, Rahulji was elected for five years but he resigned and we had to elect interim president," he said.

Mangled remains of vehicles after being washed away due to cloudbursts in Kullu district on Thursday.

— PTI

Matter referred to larger bench by Constitution bench 'States can create quota within quota'

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

The Supreme Court on Thursday referred to a 7-judge constitution bench the question whether the State government could create sub-classification within the scheduled castes to ensure that they get the benefits of reasonable reservation within the permissible limit of 15 per cent reservation schedule castes.

Referring the matter to a larger 7-judge bench Justice Arun Mishra heading a five-judge constitution bench also comprising Justice Indira Banerjee, Justice Vineet Saran, Justice M.R. Shah and Justice Aniruddha Bose said that States are

competent to create sub-classification to ensure that the benefits of reservation reaches that sections of reserved category which are deprived of it.

The constitution bench referred the matter to a 7-judge bench as its conclusions were at variance with the conclusions drawn by an earlier five-judge bench in 2004 on the similar issue.

The 2004 judgment is also known as E.V. Chinnaiah judgment. It was a case of E.V.Chinnatah vs. State of Andhra Pradesh.

The constitution bench in its order said: "We endorse the opinion of a Bench of 3 Judges that E.V. Chinnaiah is

▶ THE BENCH said that States are competent to create sub-classification to ensure that the benefits of reservation reaches that sections of reserved category which are deprived of it

required to be revisited by a larger bench; more so, in view of further development and the amendment of the Constitution, which have taken place."

"We cannot revisit E.V. Chinnaiah being bench of coordinate strength. We request the Hon'ble Chief Justice to place the matters before a Bench comprising 7 Judges or more as considered appropriate", said the order

passed by the constitution bench.

Speaking for the constitution bench, Justice Mishra said: "The state government is conferred with the power to provide reservation and to distribute it equitably. The State Government is the best judge as to the disparities in different areas. In our opinion, it is for the State Government to judge the equitable manner in which reservation has to be distributed.

"It can work out its methodology and give the preferential treatment to a particular class more backward out of Scheduled Castes without depriving others of benefit."

Actress claims threat to family, seeks security

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 27

Actor Rhea Chakraborty on Thursday said there was a threat to her and her family's life and requested the Mumbai police for protection. Rhea took to Instagram and shared a video where her father was seen being hounded by the media outside her building compound.

She said they have been trying to get out of the house to cooperate with various investigating agencies probing actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death.

"There is a threat to my life and my family's life. We have informed the local police station and even gone there, no help provided," the 28-year-old actor wrote.

ED to attach assets of Rhea and her brother

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27

The Enforcement Directorate (ED), probing money laundering charges in the death case of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput, is all set to initiate the proceedings to attach certain immovable assets belonging to Rhea Chakraborty and her brother Showik Chakraborty. Besides, the agency will soon freeze bank accounts of the duo as part of its investigation into the matter.

Sources said, "Proceedings to attach immovable assets of Rhea and her brother will be initiated under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The agency is preparing a list of assets

that will be attached". The ED recently registered a money laundering case against Rhea and others on the basis of the Patna Police FIR after Sushant Singh's father K.K. Singh filed a complaint. Singh alleged that Rs 15 crore was transacted to unknown bank accounts from Sushant's Kotak Mahindra bank account. The ED has already recorded the statements of Rhea, her father Indrajit, her brother Showik, her manager Shruti Modi and several others in the case.

The ED has also questioned Jaya Saha, talent manager for Rhea. Sources said the financial probe agency will question her again about the drug angle, that has come up after one of Saha's conversation with Rhea got leaked.

'Conspiracy to finish off RaGa's leadership'

Cong should revive itself as country needs a strong Opp, says Sena

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, AUG. 27

Amid the demand to change the guard of the 130-year-old grand party Congress, the Shiv Sena alleged that the letter written by 23 senior Congress leaders to Sonia Gandhi was a "conspiracy to finish off Rahul Gandhi's leadership". The Sena said that the Congress should revive itself as the country needs a strong opposition party.

The executive editor of party mouthpiece 'Saamana' Sanjay Raut said that Rahul Gandhi is the only leader in the Congress, who has "unanimous acceptability" in the party. "Sonia Gandhi

Sanjay Raut

is ageing and I don't see Priyanka Gandhi in full-time politics. There are many senior leaders in the party, due to whom Rahul Gandhi is not being able to work," he said.

"The country requires a strong opposition party and the Congress has a pan-India identity. The party should recover

▶ The executive editor of party mouthpiece 'Saamana' Sanjay Raut said that Rahul Gandhi is the only leader in the Congress, who has 'unanimous acceptability' in the party. "Sonia Gandhi is ageing and I don't see Priyanka Gandhi in full-time politics," he said.

from the present turmoil and resume work," the Sena MP said.

Mr Raut's remarks come in the backdrop of the controversy over the letter written by 23 Congress leaders, to Sonia Gandhi, in which they called for far-reaching reforms within the party, such as having a

"full time, active and visible" leadership, devolution of powers to state units and revamping the CWC in line with the party constitution.

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Monday unanimously urged Sonia Gandhi to stay on as the party chief till a new president is appointed and authorised her to bring about organisational changes to take on the challenges within.

"Where were these leaders when the BJP was indulging in 'below the belt attacks' on Rahul Gandhi, and after he quit as the Congress president why these leaders did not take up the challenge to revive the party," Sena asked.

Govt defends move to hold NEET, JEE exams

New Delhi, Aug. 27: The government on Thursday defended its move to go ahead with NEET and JEE exams despite mounting pressure to defer them, saying over two-thirds of candidates have downloaded the admit cards which shows that students want these exams to be conducted at any cost, and asserted that it won't let the Congress party "spoil" students' future to find relevance.

Noting that over 17 lakh out of nearly 25 lakh candidates have already downloaded admit cards for the medical and engineering entrance exams, Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' said his ministry has been receiving e-mails from students and parents that these exams should not be further postponed.

The minister's remarks came a day after seven chief ministers of non-BJP ruled states agreed to the need for filing a review petition urging the Supreme Court to reconsider its recent order rejecting the postponement of the competitive

Akhilesh slams Centre's decision to hold exams amid pandemic

Lucknow, Aug. 27: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday wrote an open letter opposing the central government's decision to hold NEET and JEE exams amid the coronavirus pandemic.

He said the BJP-led government at the Centre is unnecessarily putting the students' health at risk.

"Funny and illogical things are being spread by the BJP that when people can come out for other work, why can't they give exams? It has forgotten that people are moving

Akhilesh Yadav

out in compulsion and even those who want to stay at home to save themselves are now being forced to come out of their homes in the name of examinations," Yadav said in the letter.

The SP chief asked who will be held responsible if students contract the infection. He claimed that the saffron party is only concerned about people who vote for it. — PTI

exams.

Congress and various opposition parties have demanded that NEET and JEE examinations be deferred due to the Covid-19 pandemic and floods in parts of the country, even as the Union government has made it clear that they will be held as per schedule with due precautions.

On Thursday, Odisha chief minister Naveen

Patnaik also spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the phone and requested him to postpone NEET and JEE exams, in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and the flood situation in the state, a senior CMO official told reporters.

In Bhubaneswar, two days ago, Patnaik had also written a letter in this regard to Nishank. — PTI

Music therapy being given to 'naughty Moti' in MP zoo

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, AUG. 27

Music therapy has finally calmed down Moti, the lovelorn elephant of Indore zoo, famous for his ill temper. The 55-year-old tusker, the key attraction of Kamala Nehru Prani Sangrahalaya in Indore for his famous mood swing which often became disruptive, has been administered music therapy in the last couple of weeks to sooth his temper after he turned unusually aggressive.

"We have tried many tricks to calm him down. He was provided toys to

Lovelorn elephant Moti in Indore zoo.

play to take control of his temper. A swimming pool was also created in his enclosure for his mud bath to keep him cool. All these efforts had hardly yielded any result. Later, we decided to administer him music therapy. The therapy seems to be working on him as he appears to be enjoying

music of various musical instruments. He has considerably calmed down now". Indore zoo director Uttam Yadav told this newspaper on Thursday.

The tusker has earned the sobriquet of "naughty Moti" for his disruptive activities such as damaging properties of the zoo, attacking the staff of the zoo and even sometimes throwing stones at the visitors with his trunk.

Moti suffered from mood swing disorder when he lost his female partner Champa, his mate of three and half decades in the zoo, in 2015. Champa died of cardiac problems.

THE ASIAN AGE

28 AUGUST 2020

Relook at entrances, take gap year instead

The holy grail of the life of an Indian student — and the gateway to prestige, and in many cases, continued prosperity, for their family — is less than a week away. A mulish government has decided to go by the decision of a blinkered court and hold the JEE (Main) and NEET entrances in the first weeks of September amid a raging pandemic whose daily case count topped 75,000 on Thursday in the face of fierce outrage from a section of the prospective examinees.

With the JEE (Main) starting on Sep 1 and the NEET set to be held on Sep 13, it may already be too late to reschedule these tests unless they are dropped altogether. The government did not make any provisions to have the National Testing Agency conduct an online exam. Plus, education mandarins have come out backing the move to go through with them and over 17 lakh have downloaded admit cards. At this stage, any uncertainty entails putting students through fresh psychological stress, and the education minister has cried foul.

This newspaper would like to highlight that climate warrior and role model Greta Thunberg, who has incidentally called the holding of these exams ‘unfair’, has also taken a gap year

new crisis in which the poor will be hit the hardest and the most. It can, therefore, no longer hold the high moral ground that it supports an examination system that assures a level playing field in which merit is the sole criterion for success. And for this, it must be urgently held accountable.

A perhaps equally urgent question would be to ask if the conduct of the exams would not result in the coronavirus epidemic finally spiralling completely out of control.

To the adamant parents who insist their children take the exams and who won’t even let them take part in symbolic protests inside their homes, too, the newspaper would like to highlight that even climate warrior and role model Greta Thunberg, who has incidentally called the holding of these exams “unfair”, has taken a gap year herself. It would advise parents in this regard to take a leaf out of the West, which encourages this practice as a means of self-determination, and rid themselves of their obsession over “year loss”, more so because these are extraordinary times that call for introspection on their parts.

Extraordinary times also call for extraordinary measures. Hence the collective review petition of the Supreme Court order planned by the Opposition and state CMs.

Are some hypothetical family goals regarding the careers of the next generation more important than the ideal of equal opportunity to all and the health and safety of 1.37 billion? Are they more important than the student’s own health and life? These are a few questions the government must reckon with at some point, and that point will now arrive sooner rather than later.

It’s messy in Barcelona

It is said sportsmen die twice, first when they retire. In the case of Lionel Messi, one of the greatest footballers in the sport’s history, it might well be thrice, first when he leaves Barcelona FC. This might be akin to the Mona Lisa leaving the Louvre or MS Dhoni moving, of his own volition, from Chennai Super Kings. In the case of Messi, who first signed a contract on a paper napkin to join Barcelona in 2001, the Bufofax (recorded delivery) message he sent on his intention to move on represents a heart-wrenching tearing of ties. The decision rips asunder Spanish football even as it lights up the eyes of clubs and managers elsewhere dreaming of signing up the Argentinian super star.

Those who believe an institution is always greater than the individual may sometimes be wrong, at least in sport. Muhammad Ali, Pele, Don Bradman are just a few examples from a long list of sportspeople who seemed larger than life in the societies they lived in. Messi is the modern avatar of a universally loved sportsman, the man with the golden boots, the winner of six Ballon d’Ors, member of Olympics gold-winning Argentina and a million Euros a week footballer who was at odds with his favourite club as it deteriorated when falling from the heights.

Over time, even great edifices crumble. Increasingly angry and frustrated by Barcelona’s dipping fortunes, Messi may have sighted the clear end when they were pummelled 8-2 by Bayern Munich, eventual Champions League winners. In the time of the pandemic when sport is trying to prove its relevance beyond just the playing of games, it cannot be of great consequence to society as to where Messi ends up — Manchester City, Paris St Germain or Juventus. At a time when American pro sport is redefining sport itself in the most modern era by protesting against racial injustice with strikes, Messi must introspect and gauge where he can contribute most to football and to society.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

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Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office in the United Kingdom Air surcharge for Kathmandu and J&K ₹1

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre,

219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

Mumbai: Dangat Media Pvt Ltd, Plot No 22, Digha MIDC, TTC Industrial Estate Area, Vishnu Nagar, Digha, Navi Mumbai-400708. Kolkata: Satyajug Employees Cooperative Industrial Society Ltd, 13/A, Prafulla Sarkar Street, Kolkata 700 072. London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94 Postal registration numbers: DL(S)-05/4189/15-17

Sudhanshu Sarangi



Suicide probe: Not the ‘who’ but the ‘how’ of it is the key

Three decades back, when I joined the police, suicide cases were entrusted to the junior-most investigating officers in the police stations for inquest. Once the autopsy report was made available, the officer concluded, “death is suicidal in nature, no suspicion of foul play”, and that was the end of the story. Of course, in a few instances, the autopsy report and circumstances did raise suspicions requiring registration of a criminal case and further investigation. But it was relatively uncommon for families to question police findings. The media was still not as ubiquitous in our lives and people were not as vocal.

By now, police officers realise that suicide inquiries are potential minefields. Society feels an understandable sense of empathy for a person who has ended life and seeks an answer. The near and dear ones cannot believe that a person they know so intimately and for so long, could have taken such a decision of their own volition. “They can’t do it” is their obvious view and so a logical demand for justice. Problem is, the dead tell no tales. Suicide victims mostly end life in their personal space. There are no eyewitnesses. Suicide notes, the final will and testament, even when

available, are mostly cryptic statements of a person who is running away from life in a hurry. Consequently, all the ingredients of a mystery are in-built for crafting many conspiracy theories at will and at the cost of the privacy and dignity of the deceased and those in his or her life. The pressure on the police to find a scapegoat to end the storm is enormous. Most suicide victims have no news value. Their families reconcile to the tragedy after sometimes. Otherwise, there would be much more hullabaloo.

For a variety of reasons, investigative findings of the Indian police have suffered from trust deficit historically. When allegations are levelled, some with merit and many without, senior officers in the police, government or courts have had an easy way out. Any case, facing accusations, is handed over to another team of police officers, known by a different name, hoping for a more satisfactory conclusion. There is a need to shift focus from “who investigates” to “how suicides are investigated”, if serving the truth is the goal. Four areas need to be considered for systemic reform.

First, an autopsy and its findings are absolutely vital. Once autopsy surgeon(s) have recorded conclu-

sions, the fate of the case is almost sealed. Neither the police nor the court can change a clear autopsy finding unless the autopsy surgeon or one of the team members disowns the report in part or in its entirety. So, changing the investigating team is just a waste of time. The new team can only seek a few clarifications, but the basic conclusion, in sum and substance, will be the same. There are three problems here. First, bodies are handed over to the family almost immediately for last rites. Unless the body has been buried, there is no scope for exhumation and a second autopsy in case of any doubt. Second, laws should permit the presence of a qualified autopsy surgeon to represent the interest of the family and he may provide a report to the family’s counsel like in the West. In the absence of an alternate expert opinion, lawyers have really no basis to question police findings. Thirdly, the infrastructure and skill set currently available for autopsy is hardly of a desirable standard in most parts of the country. The ideal way will be that a specialist autopsy surgeon examines the dead body without any time pressure, gets all the related test reports and submits findings before body is handed over for last rites unless family dis-

avows future claims. This will take between a week and 10 days.

Second, the mandate of a police inquiry is to eliminate the apprehension of murder or what is called “foul play”. A police officer is neither trained nor required under the law to get into psychological aspects of a suicide, which requires a “psychological autopsy”. In psychological autopsy a qualified forensic or investigative psychologist reconstructs the state of mind of the person at the point of death. There are established protocols for such a procedure. A person may decide to end life for a variety of complex psychological reasons. There might be long-term behavioural issues as well as immediate triggers. Sometimes the person has expressed an intent earlier and might have shown symptoms of self-harm. If a person is under clinical care then the clinician may have followed a set of strategies that may require peer review. None of these are in the scope or competence of cops. In India we do not have any practice of psychological autopsy as of now.

Third, there is a need for a coroner court system so that a full judicial process can be gone through as part of an inquest. In colonial times such elaborate inquest was limited

to metropolitan towns. We now need to assign greater value to human life, and seek a full inquest in all cases of equivocal deaths.

Fourth, the only major research on suicide in India is the statistics compiled by the National Crime Record Bureau, which is largely a presentation of data generated by the police. There is a need for collaboration between the academia and the police for better understanding of suicides and their causes, which can be relied upon for psychological autopsy, psycho-linguistics for understanding suicide notes and other investigative supports. Also, policy interventions can be made to address incidence of suicide. India needs to deal with mental health issues far better.

Investigation into suicide cases needs to be carried out with greater professionalism and transparency. Otherwise, from time to time we will have episodic maelstroms that will captivate TV audiences and undermine police credibility only further.

Sudhanshu Sarangi, an IPS officer, is commissioner of police of Bhubaneswar-Cuttack. He has received special forces training and has a PhD in psychology from UK’s Liverpool University.

Subhani



It’s time for Congress to change its ‘culture’

Anand K. Sahay

Far & Near

It is preposterous to believe that the letter-writers (with exceptions, possibly) who brought a spot of drama to the Congress Party recently by demanding change in leadership, specially the jettisoning of former president Rahul Gandhi from a perch of influence, would have launched themselves on this path to benefit the BJP.

The ruling party’s object, no doubt, is to spread a sense of deepening organisational crisis in the Congress, and to degrade it in the eyes of voters. This is because this party alone, even in its much-weakened state, offers a challenge to Hindutva on an all-India plane — in ideas, policy, and social and political acceptability. But men like Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kapil Sibal, Shashi Tharoor or Manish Tewari, and many others among those 23, are hardly the type to consciously help the Hindutva party trump the Congress.

However, it is equally hard to credit their epistolar venture with political maturity or acumen, or indeed a sense of occasion. After all, the Bihar Assembly polls are less than three months away and needs focused attention. A pandemic is raging. Floods are devastating many states. At the political level, the Congress is still trying to stabilize itself in Rajasthan where only chief minister Ashok Gehlot’s astuteness and tenacity came in the way of the corrupt bid to topple the state government with the help of defectors, with the BJP playing a key role.

Therefore, to call the letter-bomb amateurs “dis-senters”, as many have done, is to be ignorant of the meaning of dissent.

The act of dissent takes a toll. But the letter-writers as a group have been beneficiaries of the Congress’ decades-old durbar and family connections culture (which now afflicts all parties), and were not bitten by the democracy bug before, though, to be fair, some began to espouse the cause of organisational polls after Mr Gandhi resigned as party president last year — honourably taking responsibility for the Lok Sabha rout — with a couple even throwing their hat into the ring.

Now the whole group has publicly demanded organisational elections in the Congress at all levels and the revival of the Congress Parliamentary Board, an elected CWC, and a more “visible” and proactive party president. This is a valid demand. Elections bring cohesion and accountability to a political organisation and throw up debates and discussion around issues that are important to the people. Indeed, such discussions — which sometimes grew fierce and ugly — were once the norm in the party that won India freedom, and triggered public participation around policy concerns.

But the context in which the “23 musketeers” raised the demand seems to suggest they have chosen to be innocent of ground realities. A full-fledged internal election in the Congress, starting with ascertaining, correcting and broadening a membership roster, can take about a year. If only the crusaders had waited until after the Bihar elections and the ebbing of the pandemic, they might have been more credible.

Since their demand was not made at a party forum (given that there were four CWC members

among them) but publicised through the media, it is not outlandish to think that they desired to embarrass or panic the current leadership (though it’s meant to be a stopgap, with Sonia Gandhi as interim president), whittle its public standing, and force it to concede organizational polls and change of guard at the top here and now.

Even a college union doesn’t work that way. So, if some Congress figures in frustration accuse the lot of aiding the enemy, their angst is understandable even if not well-founded, considering we are in an era of turncoats (as Madhya Pradesh showed graphically, and Rajasthan nearly did).

An Indira Gandhi (she had to claw her way back from the brink when the hardened old men of the party tried to shove her under the bus), a Chandra Shekhar, a V.P. Singh, a Madhu Limaye or a George Fernandes (the latter two from among socialists) would likely have stomped the countryside by now, and started their crusade even single-handed if they had a bee in their bonnet on the leadership or organisational issue, or an authentic point of policy contention, or plain burning ambition in their bosom. Each had shortcomings but they were not straw characters.

The protagonists of the simulated dissent who have come to the fore today appear to be a very different set. Their anxieties belong to the realm of existentialism: What will happen to their political careers if the Congress’ fortunes don’t change? It’s not necessarily concern for the party or the country. And they

The protagonists of the simulated dissent who have come to the fore today appear to be a very different set. Their anxieties belong to the realm of existentialism.

LETTERS

SANER OPTION

The education minister’s argument that admit cards downloaded in large numbers immediately after the announcement of exams shows a silent majority favours the conduct of JEE/NEET in September does not hold water. It is obvious that the first thing students would do after their exam dates are announced is download this document. If the exams are conducted, what about students who can’t make it to the centre? The shift to an online mode comes with its own challenges, but it is undeniably the saner option for the future.

Subhashini Ramasamy
Mumbai

BOON FOR BEZOS

AMAZON FOUNDER Jeff Bezos has shattered all records and become the richest person of all time. Bezos also became the first to amass \$200 billion. The pandemic was a boon for Amazon owing to the public’s shift from offline to online services. Bezos has left Microsoft’s co-founder Bill Gates miles or rather millions behind. Gates is the world’s second wealthiest man. Amazon is spreading its wings in every possible domain and becoming a behemoth. Bezos’ personal wealth would have rallied in the vicinity of \$250 billion, had he not divorced his ex-wife, who bagged \$38 billion in alimony.

Rahul Chouhan
Ujjain

CAUTIOUS HOPE

INDIA AND SRI LANKA have ancient cultural links and share a maritime border. In recent years, Sri Lanka moved closer to China signing naval agreements marking growing Chinese presence in the island nation. But now the new Lankan government has said that the country will adopt an “India first approach” in its foreign policy and protect New Delhi’s strategic interests. Admiral Jaynath Colombage quoted President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in saying so. Hope it is the beginning of a new chapter in India-Sri Lanka relations.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

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

IN BRIEF

Thai principal gets death for killing 3

Bangkok: A court in Thailand handed a death sentence Thursday to an elementary school principal convicted of fatally shooting three people during a robbery of a gold shop. The Bangkok Criminal Court found Prasitthichai Khaewkao guilty on charges including first degree murder, killing in commission of another crime, illegally carrying a gun and illegal possession of a war weapon in the January 9 robbery at Robinson Loppuri mall in Loppuri, about 145 kilometres north of Bangkok. During the robbery, the gunman began shooting wildly, killing a sales clerk, a security guard and a 2-year-old boy, and wounding four other people. Security video that was widely broadcast after the incident showed a man dressed in a black ski mask and camouflage trousers, with a backpack across his chest, carrying a pistol with a silencer.

Rijneveld wins Int'l Booker Prize

London: A 29-year-old Dutch writer has become the youngest author to win the International Booker Prize. Marijke Lucas Rijneveld's "The Discomfort of Evening," a dark story about a devout farming family in a strict Christian community in the rural Netherlands, was announced as the winner Wednesday. Under the rules of the prize, the £50,000-pound award will be split between the author and translator Michele Hutchison, giving both equal recognition. Ted Hodgkinson, who chaired a panel of judges, described the novel as "a tender and visceral evocation of a childhood caught between shame and salvation". The International Booker Prize is awarded every year to a book of fiction in any language that is translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland. The award is separate from the main Booker Prize, and aims to encourage more publishing and reading of quality fiction.

China test-fires missile into SCS

Beijing: China's military test-fired two missiles into the South China Sea, including a "carrier killer" military analysts suggest might have been developed to attack US forces, a newspaper reported Thursday. The DF-26B and DF-21D missiles fired Wednesday targeted an area between the southern island province of Hainan and the Paracel Islands, *The South China Morning Post* newspaper of Hong Kong reported, citing unidentified sources close to the Chinese military. The ministries of defence and foreign affairs in Beijing didn't immediately respond to requests for confirmation. Disputes over control of the South China Sea, one of the world's busiest trade routes, are a growing irritant in Beijing's relations with Washington and its southern neighbours. The Trump administration this year rejected most of Beijing's claims to sovereignty over majority of the disputed sea, portions of which are claimed by Vietnam, the Philippines and other governments.

TIKTOK CHIEF KEVIN MAYER QUILTS COMPANY

Los Angeles, Aug. 27: TikTok CEO Kevin Mayer said Wednesday he has quit the company as tensions soar between Washington and Beijing over the Chinese-owned video platform. Mayer's resignation comes days after TikTok filed a lawsuit challenging a crackdown by the US government over claims the wildly popular social media app can be used to spy on Americans.

TikTok has been at the center of a diplomatic storm between the US and China, and President Donald Trump signed an executive order on August 6 giving Americans 45 days to stop doing business with TikTok's Chinese parent company ByteDance — effectively setting a deadline for a sale of the app to a US company.

TikTok, which has been downloaded 175 million times in the US and more than a billion times around the world, argued in the suit that Trump's order was a misuse of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act because the platform — on which users share often playful short-form videos — is not "an unusual and extraordinary threat". The platform's kaleidoscopic feeds of clips feature everything from dance routines and hair-dye tutorials to jokes about daily life and politics.



Police stop a car near where protesters gather for a fourth night to demonstrate against the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on Wednesday. — AP

17-year-old held after two killed in Kenosha

Kenosha, Aug. 27: A white, 17-year-old police admirer was arrested Wednesday after two people were shot to death during a third straight night of protests in Kenosha over the police shooting of a PoC Jacob Blake.

Kyle Rittenhouse, of Antioch, Illinois, was taken into custody in Illinois on suspicion of first-degree intentional homicide. Antioch is about 15 miles from Kenosha. Two people were killed Tuesday night and a third was wounded in an attack apparently carried out by a young white man who was caught on cellphone video opening fire in the middle of the street with a semi-automatic rifle. "I just killed somebody," the gunman could be heard saying at one point during the rampage that erupted just before midnight. In the wake of the killings, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers said, "A senseless tragedy like this cannot happen again."

"I again ask those who choose to exercise their First Amendment rights please do so peacefully and safely, as so many did last night. I also ask the individuals who are not there to exercise those rights to please stay home and let local first responders, law enforcement and members of the Wisconsin

Portland protesters clash with US agents

Washington, Aug. 27: Protesters and US agents assigned to protect federal property in Portland clashed late Wednesday outside a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Building in another night of violence for Oregon's largest city.

Some people in a crowd of about 200 disabled or vandalised building security cameras, shined laser lights at the agents and threw rocks and bottles at them, Portland police said in a statement issued Wednesday. During the clashes, agents shot non-lethal munitions at the crowd and set off stun grenades and irritants that released green and white plumes into the air, *The Oregonian/Oregonian Live* reported.

One apparently injured

in National Guard do their jobs." In Washington, the Justice Department said it is sending in the FBI and federal marshals in response to the unrest. The dead were identified only as a 26-year-old Silver Lake, Wisconsin, resident

protester was carried away by fellow demonstrators, the newspaper reported. A federal agent was injured after being hit in the leg by a rock and police made 11 arrests, the Portland police said.

Portland has been gripped by nightly protests for nearly three months since the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The demonstrations, often violent, usually target police buildings and federal buildings. Some protesters have called for reductions in police budgets while the city's mayor and some in PoC community have decried the violence, saying it's counterproductive. The Wednesday night protest followed another protest where demonstrators smashed windows at City Hall. — AP

AUTHORITIES NAME OFFICER WHO THEY SAY SHOT BLAKE

Kenosha (US), Aug. 27: The Wisconsin officer who shot a PoC Jacob Blake, seven times in the back has been identified as a seven-year veteran of the Kenosha Police Department, the state Department of Justice said Wednesday. Officer Rusten Sheskey shot Blake, 29, while holding onto his shirt after officers first unsuccessfully used a taser and as Blake leaned into his vehicle during an incident Sunday evening, the agency's news release said.

State agents later recovered a knife from the driver's side floorboard of the vehicle, the release said. A search of the vehicle located no additional weapons.

No charges were announced and the state Department of Investigation was continuing to investigate. The shooting set off three nights of unrest in the city midway between Milwaukee and Chicago. — AP

Pak: Indian lawyers can't represent Kulbhushan

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, AUG. 27

Pakistan said on Thursday that it was not legally possible to allow a lawyer from India to represent Indian prisoner on death row Kulbhushan Jadhav in a court in this country.

Pakistan foreign office spokesman Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri was asked at the weekly press briefing about India's demand to appoint a local counsel to plead Jadhav's case in the Islamabad high court (IHC) which announced that it would the case on September 3.

"The Indian side has been also making incongruous demands of allowing an Indian lawyer to represent



Kulbhushan Jadhav

Commander Jadhav. We have repeatedly told them only those lawyers can represent Commander Jadhav in the court who have a licence to practise law in Pakistan. This is in accordance with legal practice in other jurisdictions also," he said.

The spokesman also said that the Indian Supreme Court, in one of its judgments, also ruled

that foreign lawyers cannot practise law within the country.

Jadhav, the 50-year-old retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of "espionage and terrorism" in April 2017. Weeks later, India approached the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Pakistan for denial of consular access to Jadhav and challenging the death sentence.

The Hague-based ICJ ruled in July last year that Pakistan must undertake an "effective review and reconsideration" of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav and also to grant consular access to India without further delay. — PTI

NZ mosque shooter gets life term without parole

Christchurch, Aug. 27: The white supremacist who slaughtered 51 worshippers at two New Zealand mosques was sentenced on Thursday to life in prison without the possibility of parole, the first time the maximum available sentence has been imposed. Judge Cameron Mander said the crimes committed by 29-year-old Australian Brenton Harrison Tarrant were so wicked that a lifetime in jail could not begin to atone for them. He said they had caused enormous loss and hurt and stemmed from a warped and malignant ideology. "Your actions were inhuman," Mander said. "You deliberately killed a 3-year-old infant by shooting him in the head as he clung to the leg of his father."

After the sentence was announced, survivors of the shootings raised hands and fists in celebration and greeted supporters waving signs with painted hearts and carrying roses outside the court building. The March 2019 attacks targeting people praying at the Al Noor and Linwood mosques in Christchurch shocked New Zealand and prompted new laws banning the deadliest types of semi-automatic weapons.

They also prompted global changes to social media protocols after the gunman livestreamed his attack on Facebook.

● **AFTER THE sentence was announced, survivors of the shootings raised hands and fists in celebration and greeted supporters waving signs with painted hearts and carrying roses outside the court building.**

● **During the sentencing hearing, 90 survivors and family members recounted the horror of that day and the trauma they continue to feel.**

During the four-day sentencing hearing, 90 survivors and family members recounted the horror of that day and the trauma they continue to feel. One of those who spoke was Temel Atacocugu, who survived being shot nine times during the attack at the Al Noor mosque. Atacocugu said he felt relieved at the sentence. "Finally we can breathe freely and we feel secure, and my kids feel secure," Atacocugu said. "The justice system has locked up this ideology forever." Tarrant pleaded guilty in March to 51 counts of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and one count of terrorism, reversing his earlier not guilty pleas. He fired his lawyers and told the judge he didn't wish to speak at his sentencing. A standby lawyer app-

ointed by the court told the judge that Tarrant did not oppose the maximum sentence. The judge said Tarrant recently told a psychiatrist that he now rejects his extremist views and considers his attacks "abhorrent and irrational". But Mander said he was skeptical Tarrant had abandoned his ideology, especially considering that the gunman told police after the attacks he wished he'd killed more people. Mander said Tarrant had shown no empathy toward his victims and remained detached and self-centred.

Tarrant arrived in New Zealand in 2017, never sought work, and began planning for his attack by stockpiling high-powered weapons and joining shooting clubs, the judge said. "It appears that while travelling in Europe you developed deep-seated radical views regarding the migrant population of some Western countries," the judge said. Tarrant flew a drone over the Al Noor mosque and researched the layout, according to prosecutors.

On the day of the attacks, he drove to the mosques with six guns, including two AR-15s. "You committed mass murder," the judge said. "You slaughtered unarmed and defenceless people. You maimed, wounded and crippled many others."

— AP

Putin urges all to end Belarus crisis

Moscow, Aug. 27: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday called on the authorities in Belarus and the opposition to find a solution to the political unrest that has erupted over a disputed presidential election.

"The parties to this process have enough common sense to find a way out without resorting to extremes," Putin said in an interview aired on state television.

Belarus has been hit by opposition protests since President Alexander Lukashenko claimed a sixth term in the August 9 vote that sparked unprecedented protests and was rejected by the European Union. Putin also told state television that he followed through on a request from Lukashenko to create a reserve group of law enforcement officers who could be dispatched to Belarus.

The Russian leader conceded however that there were problems in the Belarus: "Otherwise people wouldn't take to the streets." Putin added that he hoped the problems would be resolved peacefully. Lukashenko's notorious security services rounded up nearly 7,000 participants of peaceful rallies that erupted after he claimed some 80 percent of the vote, with hundreds of detainees claiming they were abused by police in custody.

Putin warned that he stands ready to send police to Belarus if protests there turn violent, but added in an interview broadcast Thursday that there is no such need now and voiced hope for stabilizing the situation in the neighbouring country. Putin told Russia's state television that Lukashenko has asked him to prepare a Russian law enforcement contingent to deploy to Belarus if necessary. Putin said that he and Lukashenko have agreed that "there is no such need now, and I hope there won't be". — AFP

EU CONDEMNS PROSECUTION OF OPPN COUNCIL

Minsk, Aug. 27: The European Union and ambassadors of its member states in Belarus on Thursday condemned a crackdown on opposition leaders seeking new elections after a disputed vote this month.

Allies of exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya formed the Coordination Council to oversee the peaceful transition of power after strongman Alexander Lukashenko claimed a sixth term in August 9 elections that critics said were rigged.

The 65-year-old authoritarian leader ordered a criminal probe into the opposition's attempts to "seize power" and several of the council presidium's members have been detained or summoned for questioning.

"The European diplomats emphasised that prosecution of Coordination Council members on grounds presented by the authorities is unacceptable," a joint statement said.

"Belarusians are asking for an open dialogue with their own authorities about the future of their country."

— AFP

ko has asked him to prepare a Russian law enforcement contingent to

prepare a Russian law enforcement contingent to deploy to Belarus if necessary. Putin said that he and Lukashenko have agreed that "there is no such need now, and I hope there won't be". — AFP



Alexei Navalny

NO CRIME IN NAVALNY COMA CASE: RUSSIA

Moscow, Aug. 27: Russian authorities said Thursday they have found no indication so far that opposition leader Alexei Navalny's coma, which his allies and German doctors treating him believe may have been brought about by poisoning, was caused by a criminal act.

A preliminary inquiry launched last week hasn't found any indication of "deliberate criminal acts committed against" Navalny, Russia's Prosecutor General's office said. The statement comes amid growing pressure from the West to investigate the sudden illness of the Kremlin's fiercest critic and authorities' apparent reluctance to do so.

Navalny, an opposition politician and corruption investigator is a long-time foe of President Vladimir Putin. — AP

INDO-PACIFIC CHINA CONTEST CENTRE: ESPER

Washington, Aug. 27: The Indo-Pacific is the epicentre of "great power competition" with China which wants to project its power globally, Defence Secretary Mark Esper has said as he underlined America's efforts to strengthen ties with partners like India to get Beijing to respect the international rules-based order.

Esper in his keynote address to the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii said that to advance the agenda of the ruling Chinese Communist Party, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to pursue an aggressive modernisation plan to achieve a world-class military by the middle of the century. "This will undoubtedly embolden the PLA's provocative behaviour in the South and East China Seas, and anywhere else the Chinese government has deemed critical to its interests," he said. — PTI

LESS | UPROAR

Authorities imposing mask rules, hiring extra teachers, building new desks

Virus on but Europe is going back to school

Paris, Aug. 27: A mother and her three children scanned the school supplies in a Paris supermarket, plucking out multicoloured fountain pens, crisp notebooks — and plenty of masks. Despite resurgent coronavirus infections, similar scenes are unfolding across Europe as a new school year dawns.

Virus or no virus, European authorities are determined to put children back into classrooms, to narrow the learning gaps between haves and have-nots that deepened during lockdowns — and to get their parents back to work.

Facing a jump in virus cases, authorities in France, Britain, Spain and elsewhere are imposing mask rules, hiring extra teachers and building new desks en masse.

While the US back-to-school saga has been politicised and chaotic, with a hodgepodge of fast-changing rules and backlash against President Donald Trump's insistence on reopening, European governments have faced less of an uproar.

And even though the virus has invaded classrooms in recent days from Berlin to Seoul, and some

teachers and parents warn that their schools aren't ready, European leaders from the political left, right and centre are sending an unusually consistent message: Even in a pandemic, children are better off in class.

France's prime minister promised Wednesday to "do everything" to get people back to school and work. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called reopening schools a "moral duty", and his government even threatened to fine parents who keep kids at home. Italy's health minister abruptly shut

down discos this month with one goal in mind — "to reopen schools in September in complete safety"

As both a parent and a teacher, Mathieu Maillard has plenty to worry about before French schools reopen Tuesday. The number of virus infections per 100,000 people has grown five-fold in France in the last month.

How will his 5-year-old daughter keep a safe distance from preschool friends she's so excited to see for the first time in six months? How will he gain the trust of his high school students, from one of

Marseille's roughest neighbourhoods, if he has to police their mask use?

But overall, Maillard thinks it's time to go back. School "has to start up again at some point", he says. "The health risk exists, but the risk of not putting children in school is even bigger."

During lockdown, he said, some students never joined his online French literature classes. Some had no place to work, or no computers, just telephones they used to send blurry photos of handwritten work. "Our students really, really need school," he

said. For some of those growing up in an environment plagued with violence and drugs, school "is a place where they can breathe". Unlike the US, many European schools reopened at the end of the last term, offering lessons for the fall. Among measures in place: Hand-washing stations, one-way corridors, staggered starts and lunch times. Some regions are giving out free laptops, in case of new lockdowns. Many countries require masks in school, but rules vary on where to wear them and from what age. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	39,113.47	0.10
Nifty 50	11,559.25	0.08
S&P 500*	3,483.21	0.13
Dollar (₹)	73.81	0.67
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.55	0.16
Euro (₹)	87.37	0.46
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	52,508.743	1.41
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	44.91	-0.73
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.147	-0.056
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.742	0.055

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Q2: US economy plunges annualised 31.7%

The US economy shrank at an alarming annual rate of 31.7 per cent during the April-June quarter as it struggled under the weight of the viral pandemic. It was the sharpest quarterly drop on record. The previous worst quarterly drop since record-keeping began in 1947 was a 10 per cent annualised loss in 1958. The Commerce Dept downgraded its earlier estimate of the US GDP last quarter from 32.9 per cent.

Realme India head Sheth to see Europe as well



Smartphone-maker Realme elevated its vice president and head of India market Madhav Sheth to lead business in Europe as well. Sheth co-founded Realme along with Sky Li in May 2018. Since then, the company has expanded to 59 regions in five continents, Realme said in a statement. Under the new designation of VP, Realme and CEO, Realme India and Europe, Madhav will lead product, marketing and sales functions in Europe.

GMR Infra Q1 loss more than doubles to ₹834 cr

GMR Infrastructure's consolidated net loss for the quarter ended June 30 more than doubled to nearly 834 crore against Rs 336 crore loss in the January-March period in FY20, the company said in an exchange filing. The consolidated total income for the quarter almost halved to Rs 1,224 crore from Rs 2,206 crore in the year-ago quarter. Revenues from the airports segment stood at Rs 494 crore against Rs 1,460 crore.

Abjayon wins Oracle customer cloud service deal

Abjayon said it has won the mandate for implementing customer care and billing solution for Bluegreen Energy in Europe. Bluegreen, a global energy retailer, is expanding its operations in Europe across France, Spain, and other countries. With Abjayon as its technology partner, Bluegreen will implement a single billing solution for these markets using Oracle Utilities Customer Cloud Service product.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

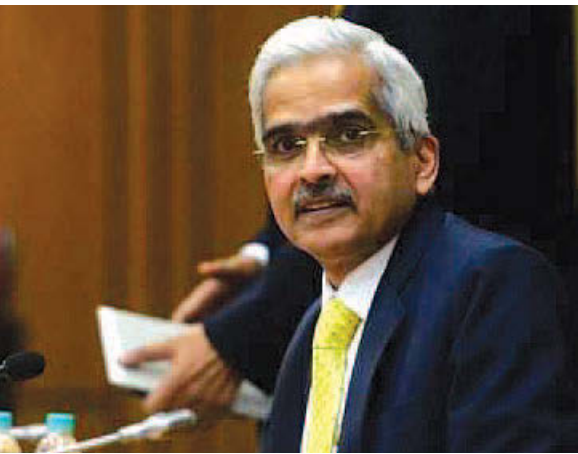
Banks need to reorient business, lend more RBI hasn't exhausted all options, ready to act: Das

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, AUG. 27

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the central bank is yet to exhaust all options and added that it would not unwind the recent measures taken to support the Covid-19 hit economy. Hinting that it could announce more policy measures, including rates cut if required, to support the economy, Das said, "We have not exhausted our ammunition, whether on rate cuts or other policy actions. We are constantly watchful and as and when we anticipate certain emerging situation, we'll deal with it."

He warned banks that being overly risk-averse would be "self-defeating" and that lenders will not be able to "win their bread" if they do not carry out their basic task. Rather than becoming averse to lending, banks have to improve their risk management and governance frameworks, and also build sufficient resilience, Das said.

On a question whether the RBI, which cut policy rates in two moves since the onset of the pandemic, front-loaded its calls and what is it left with to tackle further impact, Das said, "We have not exhausted our policy options, whether it relates to rate cuts or any other aspects of central banking. We have not exhausted our instruments or ammunition." Das that the RBI wanted



BANKERS RESENT RISK-AVERSION REMARK

Mumbai, Aug 27: Heads of various public and private sector banks on Thursday sought to present a counter narrative on RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das warning lenders about the perils of extreme risk-aversion when credit demand is on the wane.

But bankers were of the view that the real problem was not risk-aversion but lack of demand, which only the government can help revive.

Aditya Puri, MD & CEO, HDFC Bank said his bank

has booked 20 per cent growth in core interest income in the June quarter, which proves the robust lending at his bank.

"There is no risk aversion but there is prudent banking," he said in reply at a webinar.

PNB MD & CEO S. S. Mallikarjuna Rao said, "I can categorically say that there is no risk-aversion at all. The real problem is lack of demand". He said credit demand has been slowing ever since the RBI brought out stringent NPA norms. —PTI

to keep its gun powder dry and hence opted for a status quo at the last policy review earlier this month.

Speaking at a webinar, Das said, "The measures taken by the RBI are intended to deal with the

specific situation of Covid and cannot be permanent. Post-containment of Covid-19, a very careful trajectory needs to be followed for orderly unwinding of the various counter-cyclical measures taken by the

Audi's most powerful RS Q8 launched at ₹2.07 cr



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, AUG 27

Audi, India's third largest luxury car maker, on Thursday introduced its sportiest Q, the all-new high performance Audi RS Q8 priced at Rs 2.07 crore at pan-India showroom.

A rival to the Lamborghini Urus SUV and Porsche Cayenne Turbo Coupe, the Audi RS Q8 costs Rs 74 lakh more than the standard V6-powered Q8, which is priced at Rs 1.33 crore.

The imported Audi RS Q8 combines the power of an RS model with the elegance of a premium coupe and the ability of an SUV. "We are thrilled to bring the record setting Audi RS Q8 to India. It's an all-in-one model, Balbir Singh Dhillon, head of Audi India, said.

HONDA HORNET 2.0 STARTS AT ₹1.26 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, AUG 27

Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India has forayed into the lucrative 180cc-200cc bike segment by launching its new Hornet 2.0 motorcycle at a price tag of Rs 1.26 lakh at Delhi showroom to boost sales ahead of the festive season.

The Hornet 2.0 features a stunning and aggressive exterior design in the segment. It competes with the Bajaj Pulsar NS 200 and the TVS Apache RTR 200 4v.

It sports an all-LED lighting setup



Centre puts its burden of compensation on states

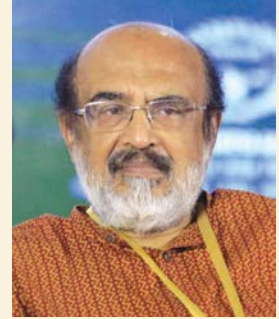
SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 27

The Centre placing the burden of borrowing for GST compensation on the states can hamper the economy of the states. The uncertainty of revenue collection and the possible differential treatment towards states in terms of lending can make things worse.

"Both options enforce sacrifice from the part of the states. This is not acceptable for us. We will talk to other states before we send our response to the Centre," said T. M. Thomas Issac, Finance Minister of Kerala.

According to Sumit Batra, partner at India Law Alliance, the Central government in its bid to end the woes of the states caused due to shortfall in GST collections and lockdown, has completely ignored the plight of the states.

"The compensation cess was designed to cover losses that the states may incur due to the implementation of GST. While the states are facing acute shortage of funds



Thomas Issac

to meet their day to day expenses, the way central government has asked the states to borrow the shortfall from RBI at the reasonable rate of interest or to chalk out a plan in consultation with RBI will only result in collapse of respective state economy," he said.

The government has made an estimate of a shortfall of Rs 2.35 lakh crore based on the expected cess collection for the remaining months and Rs 97,000 crore on the Covid impact. "The actual numbers can go up if the revenue collection remains lower than the estimates in the coming months of

the fiscal. In such a case, the burden on the states will further go up," he said.

The Centre is only talking about the compensation for this year. What if the compensation requirement is higher in the next two years till 2022? he asked.

"The compensation requirement gets compounded at a rate 14 per cent from the base year of 2016-17. So anyway the requirement will be higher in the coming years," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner, EY

Further, the possibility of a differential treatment by the RBI to the states cannot be ruled out. "As the Centre is facilitating the borrowing, the non-BJP ruled states can face issues in raising money. If the RBI is not willing to lend the entire amount estimated by such states, there could be issues," said Batra.

Also, the Centre has only raised the FRBM limit by 0.5 per cent and states need a higher limit to accommodate compensation borrowing.

WPP says worst of crisis may have passed

THOMAS PFEIFFER AUG. 27

WPP Plc said trading improved in July and it won more business than rivals, suggesting the worst impact of the pandemic may have passed for the world's biggest ad group.

"Assuming there is no second wave nor major lockdowns, the second quarter is expected to be the toughest period of the year, although we remain cautious on the speed of recovery," chief executive officer Mark Read said in a results statement.

He said global brands slashed spending on ads when the pandemic struck, forcing WPP to suspend shareholder payouts and take a hatchet to costs.

Like-for-like revenue less pass-through costs fell 15



Mark Read

per cent in the second quarter. With profits slumping, the company booked 2.7 billion pounds (\$3.6 billion) of impairments in the first half.

While the revenue drop narrowed to 9.2 per cent in July, a sustainable ad market rebound depends upon how soon the pandemic subsidies and consumer spending starts to recover. —Bloomberg

AAAI Lifetime Achievement Award goes to Krishan Premnarayan

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, AUG.27

The Advertising Agencies Association of India on Thursday said this year's AAAI Lifetime Achievement Award will be conferred on Krishan Premnarayan, senior partner, Prem Associates Advertising and Marketing. This is the highest honour given to individuals for their outstanding contribution to the advertising industry, said a release from the AAAI, the official body of ad agencies.

The previous recipients of the award include stalwarts like Alyque Padamsee, Sylvester

Maha stamp duty cut lifts realty stocks

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, AUG. 27

The Maharashtra government's temporary stamp duty reduction from 5 per cent to 2 per cent on residential flat purchase price till December 31, 2020 and road tax waiver worth Rs 700 crore on commercial vehicles from April 1 to September 30, led to rally in real estate and select auto stocks.

The stamp duty rate will be 3 per cent from January 1, 2021 to March 31, 2021.

The BSE Realty index gained 6.63 per cent while the Auto index gained 0.95 per cent as the market expects other states to follow suit.

The top realty gainers included DLF (9.93 per cent), Prestige Estates (8.07 per cent), Sunteck Realty (7.31 per cent), Godrej Properties (7.06 per cent), Oberoi Realty (6.94 per cent) and Sobha (6.85 per cent).

"Realty stocks were in action post-the Maharashtra government's move to cut 2-3 per cent stamp duty and on the hopes that the other states may follow soon," analysts said.

Festival season buying may get a boost now with flat buyers saving on stamp duty.

"Now, the fence sitters waiting for market correction will decide to take the plunge and buy properties with all-time low interest cost and muted prices," said Anuj Khetan, director, Vijay Khetan Group, a Mumbai developer.

Insolvency move against Ambani stayed

New Delhi, Aug 27: The Delhi High Court Thursday put on hold the insolvency resolution process (IRP) proceedings against

Reliance Communications (RCom) Chairman Anil Ambani in relation to recovery of Rs 1,200 crore loans given by SBI to his two firms.

Ambani had given personal guarantees for Rs 565 crore and Rs 635 crore SBI loans to RCom and Reliance Infratel Ltd (RITL), respectively, in August 2016.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rajnish Bhatnagar, while putting on hold the IRP under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), also restrained Ambani from "transferring, alienating, encumbering or disposing of his assets or legal rights and interests therein till the next date of hearing".

It issued notice to the Centre, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) and State Bank of India seeking their stand on the plea by October 6, the next date of hearing.

The court also said that the proceedings would continue in relation to the corporate debtor (the companies), and while dealing with those proceedings, the liability of the petitioner-personal guarantor (Ambani) may also be examined by the IRP.

"However, proceedings against the petitioner (Ambani) under Part 3 of



Anil Ambani

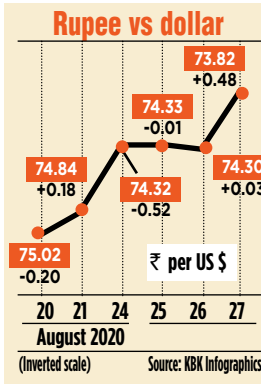
the IBC shall remain stayed," it said.

Ambani in his plea has challenged the constitutionality of the IBBI (Insolvency Resolution Process for Personal Guarantors to Corporate Debtors) Regulations, 2019.

During the hearing via video conferencing, the Centre and the IBBI -- represented by Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma, central government standing counsel Akshay Makhija and advocate Madhavi Divan opposed stay of the IRP saying it could lead to the guarantor "frittering" away his assets.

SBI too raised similar apprehensions during the hearing. It also urged the court to allow the resolution professional appointed by the NCLT to go on with his work and give a report, but the bench did not agree to it.

The NCLT on August 20 had directed initiation of insolvency proceedings against Ambani. —PTI



Fortunes of tech billionaires surge



Jeff Bezos Elon Musk

DEVON PENDLETON & JACK PITCHER AUG. 27

Three of the world's richest people have achieved staggering new levels of personal wealth.

The net worth of Amazon.com Inc founder Jeff Bezos eclipsed \$200 billion on Wednesday as shares of the e-commerce giant climbed to a record. The move simultaneously pushed his ex-wife MacKenzie Scott, 50, to the brink of becoming the world's richest woman, just behind L'Oreal heiress Francoise Bettencourt Meyers.

Elon Musk, meanwhile, extended an extraordinary stretch of wealth gains to become a centibillionaire. Tesla Inc. shares rallied on Wednesday, pushing his net worth to \$101 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, a listing of the world's 500 richest people.

The gains by Bezos, 56, and Musk represent just the latest high water mark for wealth accumulation in a topsy-turvy year defined by both surging markets and catastrophic human and economic loss. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

India loses two shuttle tourneys

New Delhi: The India Open Super 500 and the Syed Modi International Super 300 tournaments were on Thursday cancelled by the Badminton World Federation in its adjusted calendar to salvage a season thrown haywire by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The India Open, which was originally scheduled in March, was to be held from December 8 to 13 in New Delhi and Syed Modi was slated for November 17 to 22 in Lucknow in the previously revised calendar. "The Badminton World Federation (BWF) will implement an adjusted tournament calendar for the HSBC BWF World Tour in 2020," the world body said in a statement. "The TOTAL BWF Thomas & Uber Cup Finals 2020 in Aarhus, Denmark will remain part of the international tournament calendar and will proceed on the planned dates of 3-11 October 2020," it added.

The badminton season has been on hold after the All England Championship in March. — PTI

Pogba tests +ve for Coronavirus

Paris: France midfielder Paul Pogba has tested positive for Covid-19 and been left out of the national team squad, coach Didier Deschamps said Thursday.

"I had to make a change at the last minute because Paul Pogba was supposed to be in the squad," Deschamps said. "Unfortunately for him, he had a test yesterday which was positive this morning," he further added.

The Manchester United midfielder's place in the squad will be taken by 17-year-old Rennes midfielder Eduardo Camavinga ahead of upcoming Nations League qualifiers against Sweden and Croatia. — AP

Maguire appeals, is set for retrial

Manchester: Manchester United captain Harry Maguire has filed an appeal against his conviction for assault and attempted bribery of a police officer, and will get a retrial, the Premier League club said Wednesday.

Maguire was handed a 21-month suspended sentence on Tuesday following his arrest after a brawl last week on the Greek island of Mykonos. United said Maguire's legal team filed the appeal against the verdict on Wednesday and that he has been granted a full retrial "in a more senior court."

"This means," United said, "that Harry has no criminal record and is once again presumed innocent until proven guilty."

The club did not give a date for the retrial. Maguire, who is the world's most expensive defender and plays for England's national team, was not present at the trial on the nearby island of Syros on Tuesday, when he also was found guilty of swearing in public.

The 27-year-old Maguire had already issued a statement saying he would be appealing. — AP

NISHIKORI SAYS NO TO US OPEN

New York: Kei Nishikori, the 2014 US Open runner-up, said he tested negative for Covid-19 after having two positive tests but still decided to withdraw from the Grand Slam tournament that begins next week. Nishikori wrote Wednesday on his mobile app that he is ready to "slowly" return to practice — but not prepared to compete in best-of-five-set matches.

"After such a long break I feel that returning in a best of 5 long-match setting is not smart until I am fully ready to do so," Nishikori's post said.

Nishikori said last Friday he tested positive for COVID-19 a second time and had "very minimal symptoms."

Meanwhile, top-ranked Novak Djokovic had all parts of his game working while advancing to the semifinals of the Western & Southern Open. — AP

HEAD & SHOULDERS

Eoin will complement Karthik, says KKR coach

Abu Dhabi, Aug. 27: The presence of England's World Cup-winning skipper Eoin Morgan as Dinesh Karthik's deputy augurs well for Kolkata Knight Riders, the franchise's bowling coach Kyle Mills said on Wednesday.

The wicketkeeper-batsman faced criticism in 2019 after they failed to make the cut following a string of losses in the business end of the tournament.

This time, the franchise has brought back the England limited-overs skipper Morgan, who played for the KKR from 2011 to 2013, as the team's vice-captain.

"I think Eoin is going to complement DK really well. DK can focus on keeping, Eoin will be in the cover region. So, the communication with the bowler in the death overs or pressure situations will work well," Mills said in an interview on KKR's website.

The former New Zealand pacer spoke about KKR's heavy bowling artillery with world number one Pat Cummins spearheading the attack comprising Harry Gurney, Lockie Ferguson and Andre Russell alongside Indian youngsters — Prasidh Krishna, Kamlesh Nagar Koti, Sandeep Warrier and Shivam Mavi.

"We have got a really heavy artillery. I guess Pat Cummins will be a superstar by the time he ends his career. He has been around for a while, and he is just 26-27 years of age. He is really young. We have got him in his prime," he added. — PTI



Dwayne Bravo (left) shares a light moment with Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni in this photo.

Bravo, Tambe script history

Port of Spain, Aug. 27: All-rounder Dwayne Bravo wrote his own piece of history, while Praveen Tambe became the first Indian cricketer to play in the Caribbean Premier League as Trinbago Knight Riders posted their fourth straight win, beating St Lucia Zouks by six wickets via D/L method in a rain-truncated match here.

While Dwayne Bravo made history on Wednesday by becoming the first player to reach 500 T20 wickets and 100 Hero CPL wickets, his brother Darren hit a quick-fire 23 off 13 balls with two sixes to help Trinbago Knight Riders chase down the revised 72-run target in nine overs with six balls to spare.

Darren's first off the two

sixes also made him the first to record 100 sixes in CPL.

There was another landmark on Wednesday as Tambe, 48, became the first Indian to play in the CPL and his only over saw him pick up the wicket of Najibullah Zardan.

The Zouks started aggressively before Andre Fletcher (10) departed to be reduced to 32 for one

after three overs. When Rakheem Cornwall handed Colin Munro a low diving catch, Dwayne Bravo (2/7), on his home ground, became the first bowler to reach T20 cricket's 500 club. Bravo was the pick of the bowlers for Knight Riders with two for seven in three overs as rain intervened in 17.1 overs with Zouks scoreboard reading 111 for 6. — PTI

Sachin remembers Don Mankad talk is on as Ricky in Dubai

New Delhi, Aug. 27: The Covid-19-forced break and the uncertainty it brought has turned the athletes into a worried lot but iconic cricketer Sachin Tendulkar has an advice for them. Tendulkar has asked the worried athletes to find inspiration from Sir Donald Bradman, who missed out on eight years of Test cricket between 1939 to 1945 due to World War II but did not let it affect his performance.

Even such a long period couldn't make Bradman rusty as he was hungry as ever during the final phase of his career finishing with an unbeatable

average of 99.94 from 52 games.

"Sir Don Bradman was away from cricket for several years due to World War II, yet has the highest Test batting average," Tendulkar wrote on Twitter while remembering the 'greatest' of them on his 112th birth anniversary.

"Today, with concerns about athletes' form due to uncertainties and long breaks, his career stands even taller as a source of inspiration. Happy birthday Sir Don," he wrote.

In fact when asked about how players will cope up with this long six-month

break before the IPL starts, the maestro had spoken about days till the 1990s when there used to be a dedicated cricket season in India.

"If I am not mistaken, one phase during 90s, between March, 1994 and October, 1995, for close to 18 months, we had hardly played in Test matches."

"During that phase till mid 90's, getting three to four months off was normal, and when we would go to Sri Lanka during summer months and a lot of matches would be washed out. There was no cricket in India and it was normal," he said. — PTI

Dubai, Aug. 27: Delhi Capitals head coach and former Australia captain Ricky Ponting on Thursday landed here and went into mandatory six-day quarantine at his hotel ahead of the 13th Indian Premier League to be held in the UAE from September 19.

"My view for the next 6 days, hotel quarantine is officially underway," Ponting tweeted from his hotel room after landing here.

Delhi Capitals players

and other support had already reached here on August 23.

Ponting had triggered quite a debate recently when he said that he won't allow senior off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin to run out batsmen at the non-strikers' end if they back up too far. Ashwin recently said that he has spoken to his IPL coach on the contentious issue and will reveal the details after a face-to-face meeting with Ponting. — PTI

Shooting protests stall sport in US

Orlando, Aug. 27: LeBron James' Los Angeles Lakers and the Los Angeles Clippers have voted to abandon the NBA season in protest at the latest US police shooting of a black man — Jacob Blake — multiple reports said on Wednesday.

The Lakers and Clippers vote to end the season came at an emergency meeting of all the teams left in the NBA's playoffs, which are taking place in Orlando, Florida.

The meeting followed the Milwaukee Bucks' boycott of their first round playoff game against the Orlando Magic earlier. That decision prompted the NBA to call off all three playoff games on Wednesday.

The Lakers' James had earlier tweeted angrily over the shooting of Blake, who was shot seven times in the back by police as he got into a car containing his three children. "WE DEMAND CHANGE. SICK OF IT," James wrote on Twitter.

The NBA has scheduled a special Board of Governors meeting to address players' concerns.

The WNBA too did not play three games, Washington, Atlanta, Minnesota, Los Angeles, Connecticut and Phoenix were supposed to be in action. Atlanta's Elizabeth Williams read a statement saying that the "consensus is not to play in tonight's games. We stand in solidarity with our brothers in the NBA." — AP



Naomi Osaka reacts during her quarterfinal with Anett Kontaveit in New York. — AP

Osaka pulls out of semis, later changes decision

New York, Aug. 27: Japan's Naomi Osaka reversed her decision to withdraw from the WTA Western & Southern Open semifinals on Thursday, saying she will now play the match that has been rearranged for Friday.

The two-time Grand Slam champion said in a statement on Wednesday that she had pulled out of her last-four clash with Belgium's Elise Mertens in protest at the police shooting of black man Jacob Blake in Wisconsin.

However, after WTA and ATP chiefs announced a suspension of play at the tournament following anger over Blake's shooting, Osaka said she has now changed her mind.

"As you know, I pulled out of the tournament yesterday in support of racial injustice and continued police violence," Osaka said in a statement first reported by Britain's *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*.

"I was (and am) ready and prepared to concede

the match to my opponent. However, after my announcement and lengthy consultation with the WTA and USTA, I have agreed at their request to play on Friday. They offered to postpone all matches until Friday and in my mind that brings more attention to the movement. I want to thank the WTA and the tournament for their support," she said.

Osaka beat No.12 Anett Kontaveit 4-6, 6-2, 7-5 in the quarterfinals. — AFP

BASEBALL AND SOCCER SIDES STAY OFF TIES

Los Angeles, Aug. 27: The Milwaukee Brewers and Cincinnati Reds refused to play their Major League Baseball fixture on Wednesday, following the police shooting of an unarmed black man in the teams' home state.

"With our community and our nation in such pain, we wanted to draw as much attention to the issues that really matter, especially racial injustice and systemic oppression," a team statement said.

Other teams across MLB also opted not to play on Wednesday, with the Seattle Mariners voting not to take to the field in their game against the San Diego Padres in Southern California.

Major League Soccer players too boycotted five games on Wednesday night. Players from games between Atlanta United and Inter Miami, FC Dallas and Colorado, Portland and San Jose, Real Salt Lake and LAFC, and the LA Galaxy and Seattle decided not to play.

Atlanta United released a statement before its scheduled game against Inter Miami in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The players all gathered on the field before the game, arm in arm. — Agencies

Satwik and two others test +ve

New Delhi, Aug. 27: Three winners of this year's National Sports Awards, including badminton player Rankireddy Satwiksairaj, have tested positive for Covid-19 and will not attend the virtual ceremony on August 29, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Thursday.

The SAI said that 65 of the 74 awardees will attend the first-ever virtual National Sports Awards from its centres across the country due to the pandemic. "There are 74 awardees in seven categories. Total 65 award winners will be attending the function from various locations. Nine award winners will not attend due to several reasons like being quarantined, tested positive, ill health or not in the country etc," the SAI said in a statement.

"Three award winners after having tested positive will not attend the function," it added without giving any names.

However, Satwiksairaj earlier confirmed his positive test.

The country will honour an unparalleled five Khel Ratna winners and 27 Arjuna awardees among others.

The five chosen for the highest honour are cricketer Rohit Sharma, wrestler Vinesh Phogat, Paralympian Mariyappan Thangavelu, table tennis player Manika Batra and women's hockey captain Rani Rampal.



Rankireddy Satwiksairaj

Satwik is yet to develop any symptoms of the infection. "There are no symptoms, neither my parents nor any friends, none had the virus. So, I don't know from where it has come," the 20-year-old said from his home in Amalapuram.

"Few days back, I went for a test (antigen) and it has been five days since I have been in quarantine. I went for an RT-PCR (test) and that too came positive," he added.

Satwik said he will undergo another test in three days' time. "I have no cough, fever or body ache. I tested positive and was to a separate room. Many people are helping me. I am taking medicines. I will go for test again after three days," the doubles player said.

"Good thing is my parents have tested negative," he added.

Satwik and his doubles partner Chirag Shetty were recommended for the Arjuna Award jointly. — PTI

HOCKEY STAR AKASHDEEP LAPS UP ARJUNA HONOUR

Bengaluru, Aug. 27: Acknowledging the contribution his teammates made in his and Indian hockey team's Akashdeep Singh on Thursday said he is delighted and honoured to be selected for the Arjuna.

Akashdeep, who has played 194 matches for the national side, has been part of several cherishable performances in the last four years — the FIH Olympic Qualifiers win against Russia last year, the bronze medal winning show at the Asian Games.

"I am extremely delighted and honoured to be conferred with the Arjuna Award," Akashdeep said in a media release.

"I have been very fortunate to be playing for my country since December 2012 and I am very grateful for playing alongside a fantastic bunch of players. I wouldn't have been able to contribute to the Indian team's victories if I hadn't received the wonderful support from all of my teammates," he added. — PTI

Delhi High Court asks HI for stand

New Delhi, Aug. 27: The Delhi High Court Thursday asked the Centre and Hockey India (HI) for their stand on a plea alleging that the sports federation has violated the national sports code by creating posts, like 'life member', 'life president' and CEO, which are not permitted under the rules.

A bench of Chief Justice D. N. Patel and Justice Prateek Jalan issued notice to the Sports Ministry, HI and the two persons who have been appointed in the sports body as life member and CEO, seeking their stand by September 28 on the petition by a former hockey player.

Petitioner Aslam Sher Khan, who was part of the Indian team which won gold in the 1975 Hockey World Cup, has sought quashing of the articles in HI's Memorandum of Association (MOA) under which the posts of 'life member', 'life president' and 'CEO' with unlimited tenure and full voting rights have been created.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for Khan, said these posts are not contemplated under the National Sports Code of 2011 and have been created in violation of the rules, circulars and guidelines governing functioning of the national sports federations (NSFs). The petition, filed through advocate Vanshdeep Dalmia, has also sought quashing of the appointments of Narinder Dhruv Batra and Elena Norman as 'life member' and CEO, respectively.

Khan, in his plea, has alleged that "various acts of nepotism and favouritism" by Batra and Norman was "causing loss, financial and otherwise to the sport of hockey". — PTI

TT BODY PLANS TO GO SINGLE AT NATIONALS

New Delhi, Aug. 27: The Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) wants to host the senior National Championship in November subject to government approval albeit with only singles event in the wake of rising cases of Covid-19.

In its bid to organise an event in bio-secure environment with least health safety concerns, the TTFI doesn't want to conduct doubles, mixed doubles and team events to avoid close contact among the players.

"We will only have team events and doubles if a vaccine is found by then. The target is to have the camp in October and from November to February, we can have the national championships in various categories," TTFI secretary general MP Singh said. — PTI