

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 17 JUNE 2021



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Empty chair between PM & Shivraj creates flutter, stirs Cong-BJP slugfest



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C. Ronaldo scores double against Hungary to become Euro's all-time best scorer

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Tesla boss Elon Musk plans to sell his houses so that he owns none



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Bollywood actress Rakul Preet Singh spotted at Bandra in Mumbai on Wednesday. — PTI

6 Maoists killed in encounter with Greyhounds in AP

Amaravati/Malkangiri: Six members, including three women, of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) were killed in an alleged exchange of fire with the elite Greyhounds of Andhra Pradesh Police in Visakhapatnam district on Wednesday, while a fierce gunbattle took place between security forces and Maoists in neighbouring Odisha's Malkangiri district. The deceased included the district committee commander Sande Gangaiah, they said.

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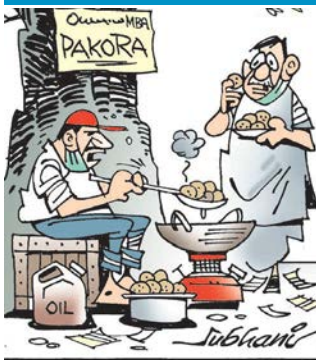
Hallmarking of gold comes into effect

New Delhi: The Centre on Tuesday said that mandatory hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts came into force from June 16 in a phased manner and initially will be implemented in 256 districts of the country. Jewellers in 256 districts will be allowed to sell only 14, 18 and 22 carats of gold jewellery. — PTI

12-yr-old lion dies of Covid at TN zoo

Chennai: An Asiatic male lion being treated for Covid-19 died on Wednesday, becoming the second carnivore to fall victim to the virus at the zoo near Chennai in two weeks, the first being a lioness. The 12-year old was housed in the safari area of the Arignar Anna Zoological Park at suburban Vandalur. ■ More on Page 4

COUNTERPOINT



I want to wind up this business too... I can't afford oil!

WEATHER

Max: 34°C
Min: 26°C
RH: 51%
Rain: 20%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Jyeshtha Shuddha Saptami till 9.55 pm
Star: Purvaphalguni till 10.08 pm
Variyam: 6.10 am to 7.45 ; 5.10 am to 6.43 am (Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.06 am to 10.58 am ; 3.19 pm to 4.11 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
SUNSET TODAY 5.23 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.21 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.27 PM
MOONSET TODAY 11.57 AM

'No newborn calf serum in Covaxin' ■ 62K new cases, 2,542 deaths in 24 hrs

Controversy erupts on gap between 2 Covishield jabs

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

India on Wednesday reported 62,224 new Covid-19 cases and 2,542 deaths. The nation's active case-load fell below nine lakhs for the first time in 70 days, while the recovery rate rose to 95.80 per cent and the daily positivity rate stands at 3.22 per cent. This has remained below five per cent for nine days running. With the pace of vaccinations picking up, the Centre hopes to check the daily cases and blunt a possible third wave.

A controversy has erupted over the gap between two Covishield doses. The Centre had increased the gap between the two Covishield doses from 8-12 weeks to 12-14 weeks in May, raising questions if it was done based on scientific evidence or due to the shortage of vaccines. The doses of the vaccines remain unchanged now even though Britain, which was quoted by Central government officials as an exam-



A man takes a selfie with his family at Taj Mahal that reopened after authorities eased some restrictions in the Covid-19 lockdown in Agra on Wednesday. — PTI

ple, decided to lower the gap.

Health minister Harsh Vardhan said Wednesday the decision to increase the gap between the two doses was "transparent and backed by scientific data". This clarification came after some members of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) said they had recommended only 8-12 weeks, but the government on its own

came out with a 12-16-week gap. It was initially 4-6 weeks.

Dr N.K. Arora, NTAGI's chairman, explained that the move to increase the gap between two Covishield doses from 4-6 weeks to 12-16 weeks lay in the fundamental scientific reason regarding behaviour of adenovector vaccines.

"In the last week of April 2021, the data released by

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Sisodia: Centre denied approval to probe deaths due to lack of O2

New Delhi, June 16: Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday said the Centre has denied approval to a committee set up by the Delhi government to probe deaths caused by lack of oxygen supply during the second Covid wave and award compensation to families of the deceased. He urged the Centre to not obstruct the formation of the four-



Manish Sisodia

Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal. "The Delhi government announced a compensation of ₹5 lakh for families of those who lost

member panel. The Delhi government had sent the file seeking approval for the committee to the Governor

their lives in incidents (of lack of oxygen supply). Following the directive of the (high) court, the Delhi government constituted a committee of health experts to ascertain what led to these deaths. It is extremely saddening that the Central government has dismissed this committee," he said in an online briefing. — PTI

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Twitter deliberately defied IT rules despite many chances: Prasad

New Delhi, June 16: IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday said Twitter failed to comply with intermediary guidelines and has "deliberately" chosen the path of non-compliance despite being granted multiple opportunities.



Ravi Shankar Prasad

Lashing out at the micro-blogging platform over non-compliance, Mr Prasad said that it is "astounding" that Twitter, which portrays itself as the flag bearer of free speech, chooses the path of deliberate defiance when it comes to the Intermediary Guidelines. "There are numerous queries arising as to whether Twitter is enti-

tled to safe harbour provision. However, the simple fact of the matter is that Twitter has failed to comply with the Intermediary Guidelines that came into effect from May 26," Mr Prasad said in a series of posts on homegrown microblogging platform Koo. The minister also tweeted on the issue.

Mr Prasad asserted that Twitter was given multiple opportunities to comply with the rules, but deliberately chose the path of non-compliance. "Further, what is perplexing is that Twitter fails to address the grievances of users by refusing to setting up processes as mandated by the law of the land. Additionally, it chooses a policy of flagging manipulated media, only when it suits its likes and dislikes," he said. The

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UP police books Twitter, journo, Cong leaders for circulating video

Ghaziabad (UP), June 16: Police here have booked Twitter, a news portal and six people, including journalists, for circulating a video in which an elderly Muslim man is seen being thrashed and asked to chant "Jai Shri Ram".

Police claimed that the video was circulated to create communal unrest. The FIR names Twitter, news website The Wire, journalists Mohammed Zubair, Rana Ayyub and Saba Naqvi, Congress leaders Dr Sama Mohammad, Salman Nizami and Masqoor Usmani.

The FIR was lodged at the Loni Border police station in Ghaziabad around 11.30 pm on Tuesday on the basis of a complaint lodged by a local policeman.

The police action came within hours of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath exchanging remarks on Twitter over the incident. In a video clip, the elderly Muslim man, Abdul Shamad Saifi, is heard saying he was thrashed by some young men and asked to chant "Jai Shri Ram".

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India needs jabs not lies of BJP: Rahul

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said India needs quick and complete vaccination and not the BJP's "brand of lies and rhyming slogans" to cover up the vaccine shortage caused by the government's inaction.

He also alleged that the government was trying to save the image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, attempts that are facilitating the virus and costing people's lives.

"India needs quick and complete vaccination- not BJP's usual brand of lies and rhyming slogans to cover-up vaccine shortage caused by Modi Government's inaction," the Congress leader said on Twitter.

— PTI

Ramdesivir: Sood, MLA face HC ire

Mumbai: The Bombay high court on Wednesday asked the Maharashtra Government to "seriously examine" the role of MLA Zeeshan Siddiqui and actor Sonu Sood regarding the alleged illegal distribution of crucial antiviral drug Remdesivir, through social media, noting that it seemed like a case of a parallel unauthorised agency. The court issued the direction while hearing a public interest litigation on management of distribution of Remdesivir to all States by Centre. **PAGE 4**

Eye on China: Rajnath calls for freedom of navigation in SCS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

With China listening, defence minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday called for freedom of navigation, overflights and unimpeded commerce in the South China Sea where the Chinese Navy is flexing its muscles.

Mr Singh called for an open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific based upon respect for sovereignty and the territorial integrity of nations while addressing the eighth Asean defence ministers meeting Plus. The ADM Plus is an annual meeting of the defence ministers of



India calls for a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific, based upon respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue. —Rajnath Singh

10 Asean countries and eight dialogue partner countries — Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the United States. Brunei is the ADDM Plus forum's chair this year. Mr Singh also

stressed on "peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue". "India calls for a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific, based upon respect for sovereignty and territorial

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■ Biden raises rights abuses in Russia, Putin mentions racist attacks in US

Biden, Putin to update nuke pact, deploy envoys

Geneva, June 16: Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he and US President Joe Biden agreed in a "constructive" summit on Wednesday to return their nations' ambassadors to their posts and begin negotiations to replace the last remaining treaty between the two countries limiting nuclear weapons.

Mr Putin said that there was "no hostility" during the talks that wrapped up more quickly than expected. The two sides had said they expected to meet for four to five hours but spent less than three hours together, including an opening meeting with just the two presidents and each one's top foreign aide. When it was over, Putin had first crack at describing the results at a solo



US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting at the 'Villa la Grange' in Geneva, Switzerland, on Wednesday. — AP

news conference, with Biden to follow with his own session with reporters.

Mr Putin acknowledged that Biden raised human rights issues with him, including the fate of Opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Mr Putin defend-

ed Mr Navalny's prison sentence and deflected repeated questions about mistreatment of Russian Opposition leaders by highlighting US domestic turmoil, including the Black Lives Matter protests and the January 6 Capitol insurrection.

Ordinance board to be split into 7 companies

Central govt staff to retain service terms

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

In a major decision, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the corporatisation of the country's main producer of weapons and military equipment, Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), under which it will be split into seven government-owned corporate entities that will be run by professional management. The existing 41 factories under the OFB will now be subsumed into seven corporate entities.

"Today's decision would allow these companies autonomy as well as help improve accountability and efficiency in the functioning of 41 factories under the new companies," a source said.

The Ordnance Factory Board is currently a subordinate office under the ministry of defence.

The functioning of the Ordnance Factory Board has come in for scrutiny by various high-level committees in the last two decades with the aim of improving their functioning and making these factories vehicles of self-reliance for defence preparedness.

Among the seven entities, the Ammunition and Explosives group will be mainly engaged in production of various calibres and explosives. The government believes it will have a huge potential to grow exponentially, for Make in India and also by making for the world.

The second entity, the Vehicles group, will mainly engage in production of defence mobility and combat vehicles such as tanks, trawls, BMPs and mine-protected vehicles.

The third entity, the Weapons and Equipment group, would be mainly engaged in the production of small arms, medium and large calibre guns and other weapon systems and is expected to increase its share in the domestic market through meeting domestic demand as well as product diversification.

In addition, the Troop Comfort Items group, the Ancillary group, Opto-Electronics group and Parachute group constitutes the entire structure. "The structure would help in overcoming various shortcomings in the existing system of OFB

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Mr Putin said that he and Mr Biden agreed to begin negotiations on nuclear talks to potentially replace the New START treaty limiting nuclear weapons after it expires in 2026.

Washington broke off talks with Moscow in 2014 in response to Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea and its military intervention in support of separatists in eastern Ukraine. Talks resumed in 2017 but gained little traction and failed to produce an agreement on extending the New START treaty during the Trump administration.

The Russian President said there was an agreement between the leaders to return their ambassadors to their respective postings. — AP

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SHORT TAKES

Mayors, deputies of NDMC, SDMC elected unopposed

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

The national capital's three municipal agencies - North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) and South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) found new mayoral candidates from the ruling BJP on Wednesday. The election was unopposed. Raja Iqbal Singh (GTB ward) is the new mayor of North Delhi and Archana (Holiambi Khurd) is his deputy. Both were elected unopposed in a session of the NDMC House held at the Civic Centre here, a senior official said. Mr Singh and Archana had filed their nominations from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the posts of mayor and deputy mayor respectively. In 2017, both the BJP and the SAD had contested the municipal elections as allies. While the BJP bagged 179 seats, the SAD won five seats. After taking over, the newly elected mayors said they will stress upon issues like sanitation, education and increasing multiple revenue resources to improve the financial condition of the civic bodies. For members of the NDMC panel, Jogi Ram Jain, Vijay Bhagat, both from the BJP, and Rajiv Yadav of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) were elected unopposed, the official said. Mukesh Suryan, (Councillor from Sagarpur West municipal ward) will be the new Mayor of SDMC.

Man kills wife as she objects to his extramarital affair

New Delhi: A 25-year-old man was arrested here on Wednesday for allegedly killing his wife and later misleading investigators by cooking up a false story, police said on Wednesday. Vikas killed his wife Priyanka as she had objected to his extramarital relationship with one of his sisters-in-law, they said. The couple also had differences over issues related to taking care of their newborn, they said. On Tuesday, Vikas had an argument with his wife, and in the night, he stabbed her to death with a knife, police said. After killing her, Vikas made an acquaintance of his call the police control room (PCR). He stated that a thief entered his house in south Delhi's Ranihola area and killed his wife, they said. When Vikas was questioned about minor injuries on his body, he could not give any satisfactory explanation and after sustained interrogation, he revealed that he had killed his wife as she used to frequently object to his extramarital affair, police said. — PTI



A commuter wades through the waterlogged road after rain near Azadpur Mandi in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Delhi receives light rains, will have to wait for monsoon

New Delhi, June 16: Parts of Delhi received light rains on Wednesday but the capital will have to wait more for monsoonal showers, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The city recorded a minimum temperature of 26.2 degrees Celsius, while the maximum temperature settled at 34.2 degrees Celsius, five notches below normal. Pitampura recorded 24.5 mm rainfall, while Najafgarh and Pusa gauged 0.5 mm precipitation. A westerly trough has impeded the rapid progress of the monsoon in northwest India, according to IMD officials. — PTI

Trial court defers order on plea for immediate release

3 student activists to remain in jail despite getting bail

New Delhi, June 16: Student activists Devangana Kalita, Natasha Narwal and Asif Iqbal Tanha will remain in jail despite being granted bail by the high court here in the North East Delhi riots 'conspiracy' case as a lower court on Wednesday deferred its order on a plea for immediate release.

Order could not be passed due to the heavy board of bail applications listed before the undersigned. Be put up for orders tomorrow at 11 AM. Additional Sessions Judge Revinder Bedi stated, after JNU students Kalita and Narwal moved the trial court here seeking immediate release from prison.

During the course of proceedings, the Delhi

'Preparing to move court over Ayodhya land deal'

New Delhi, June 16: Days after alleging corruption in a land deal of the Ram temple trust in Ayodhya, AAP leader Sanjay Singh on Wednesday said he is preparing to move court in the matter.

Addressing a press conference, Singh said, "I waited for three days for the Centre and the BJP to take action after I revealed this scam. I have understood that the BJP's faith lies in property dealers and not in Lord Ram. I am preparing to take this matter to court."

Singh has alleged that Champat Rai, the general secretary of Shriram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, purchased 1.208 hectares of land worth ₹2 crore in Ayodhya's Bag Bjaishi vil-



AAP leader Sanjay Singh at a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday. — G.N. JHA

lage for ₹18.5 crore with the help of trust member Anil Mishra. The land, he claimed, was purchased from people who had brought it for ₹2 crore just minutes before, Singh also sought a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement Directorate into the matter. — PTI

Delhi Dy CM appeals to Centre to stop 'unnecessary intervention'

Centre didn't allow probe into deaths due to O2 crisis: Sisodia

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday said the Centre has denied approval to a committee set up by the Delhi government to probe deaths caused by lack of oxygen supply during the second Covid wave and award compensation to families of the deceased. He urged the Centre to not obstruct the formation of the four-member panel. The Delhi government had sent the file seeking approval for the committee to Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal.

Talking about the oxygen crunch during the second wave in Delhi, Sisodia said oxygen supply was diverted to other places. There were also some deaths due to lack of supply of oxygen, he said. "The Delhi government announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh for families of those who lost their lives in incidents (of lack of oxygen supply). Following the directive of the (high) court, the Delhi government constituted a committee of health experts to ascertain what led to these deaths," the deputy chief minister said.

Twenty-one Covid patients had died at the Jaipur Golden Hospital



It is extremely saddening that the Central government has dismissed this committee. I don't understand why the Central government has an issue with the same

— Manish Sisodia, Delhi Dy CM

here in April as the hospital waited for oxygen to be replenished during the second wave. "It is extremely saddening that the central government has dismissed this committee. I don't understand why the central government has an issue with the same," he said in an online briefing.

He said that this is not just about Delhi, but many other states including West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand where the Centre is obstructing the work of the state govern-

Delhi receives fresh stock of Covid vaccines: Atishi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

A day after Delhi had to force-shut their vaccination centres due to shortage of vaccine, the national capital on Wednesday received a fresh stock of Covid-19 vaccines from the Centre for people in the 18-44 age group.

Issuing the daily vaccination bulletin, Atishi, the AAP MLA from Kalkaji said

that the youth can now book their slot on the CoWIN app for inoculation at government-run facilities. The city has received 62,160 Covaxin doses and 1,73,340 Covishield doses, taking the total number of doses available for the age group to 2,55,000. "The erratic supply of vaccines for the 18-44 age group has been the sole reason behind the slow rate of vaccination in Delhi," said Atishi.

ments. "There have been many incidents of unnecessary interference by the central government," he said, adding that it should not have any issue with a state government offering compensation to families of Covid patients who lost their lives due to lack of oxygen supply.

"This decision to dismiss the Delhi government committee is unreasonable and without any logic. I would like to request the central government to stop such interference," he added.

Questioning the Centre, he said why does it "like to obstruct any good step or

work being done by the state governments".

"As a responsible government, the Delhi government wants to offer compensation to the families of those who died and also investigate and confirm what led to these deaths. The Central Government is not letting this happen," he alleged.

Appealing to the Centre to stop its "unnecessary intervention and quit their childish practices", Sisodia said the people of Delhi want the government they elected to work without any obstructions, but the Centre "has continued to act as an objector against the rights of the people".

RESTORATION / INCREASE IN FREQUENCY OF TRAINS

It is notified for the information of passengers that Railways have decided to restore/ increase the frequency of the following special trains as per the details given below:-

RESTORATION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Name	Frequency	Restoration w.e.f. (JCO)
02011 New Delhi-Kalka Shatabdi Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
02012 Kalka-New Delhi Shatabdi Express Special		
02017 New Delhi-Dehradun Shatabdi Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
02018 Dehradun-New Delhi Shatabdi Express Special		
02013 New Delhi-Amritsar Jn. Shatabdi Express Special	Daily	01.07.21 to till further advice
02014 Amritsar Jn.-New Delhi Shatabdi Express Special		
02005 New Delhi-Kalka Shatabdi Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
02006 Kalka-New Delhi Shatabdi Express Special		
02046 Chandigarh-New Delhi Shatabdi Express Special	Daily (Except-Wed)	21.06.21 to till further advice
02045 New Delhi-Chandigarh Shatabdi Express Special		
02029 New Delhi-Amritsar Shatabdi Express Special	Daily (Except-Thu)	02.07.21 to till further advice
02030 Amritsar-New Delhi Shatabdi Express Special		
02265 Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Jammu Tawi Duronto Exp Spl.	Tue, Fri, Sun	02.07.21 to till further advice
02266 Jammu Tawi-Delhi Sarai Rohilla Duronto Exp Spl.	Wed, Sat, Mon	03.07.21 to till further advice
02462 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-New Delhi Sri Shakti Exp.	Daily	01.07.21 to till further advice
02461 New Delhi-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Sri Shakti Exp.		
04527 Kalka-Shimla Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04528 Shimla-Kalka Express Special		
04517 Kalka-Shimla Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04518 Shimla-Kalka Express Special		
04505 Kalka-Shimla Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04506 Shimla-Kalka Express Special		
04051 New Delhi-Daurai Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04052 Daurai-New Delhi Express Special		
04640 Firozpur Cantt.-Sahibzada Ajeet Singh Nagar Exp.Spl.	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04639 Sahibzada Ajeet Singh Nagar-Firozpur Cantt. Exp. Spl.		
02441 Bilaspur Jn.-New Delhi Express Special	Mon, Thu	24.06.21 to till further advice
02442 New Delhi-Bilaspur Jn. Express Special	Tue, Sat	22.06.21 to till further advice
04606 Jammu Tawi-Yoganagari Rishikesh Express Special	Sun	04.07.21 to till further advice
04605 Yoganagari Rishikesh-Jammu Tawi Express Special	Mon	05.07.21 to till further advice
04048 Delhi Jn.-Kotdwar Siddhabali Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04047 Kotdwar-Delhi Jn. Siddhabali Express Special		
04041 Delhi Jn.-Dehradun Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04042 Dehradun-Delhi Jn. Express Special		
04515 Kalka-Shimla Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04516 Shimla-Kalka Express Special		
04210 Lucknow-Prayagraj Sangam Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04209 Prayagraj Sangam-Lucknow Express Special		
04233 Prayagraj Sangam-Mankapur Jn. Express Special	Daily	21.06.21 to till further advice
04234 Mankapur Jn.-Prayagraj Sangam Express Special		
04231 Prayagraj Sangam-Basti Manwar Sangam Exp. Spl.	Daily (Except-Thu, Sun)	21.06.21 to till further advice
04232 Basti-Prayagraj Sangam Manwar Sangam Exp. Spl.		
05053 Chhapra-Lucknow Jn. Express Special	4 Days/week	01.07.21 to till further advice
05054 Lucknow Jn.-Chhapra Express Special		
05083 Chhapra-Farrukhabad Express Special	3 Days/week	29.06.21 to till further advice
05084 Farrukhabad-Chhapra Express Special		
05114 Chhapra Kachehari - Gomti Nagar Express Special	Daily	01.07.21 to till further advice
05113 Gomti Nagar - Chhapra Kachehari Express Special		
02595 Gorakhpur - Anand Vihar (T) Express Special	3 Days/week	17.06.21 to till further advice
02596 Anand Vihar (T) - Gorakhpur Express Special	3 Days/week	18.06.21 to till further advice

INCREASE IN FREQUENCY / RESTORATION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Name	Increase in Frequency	Restoration w.e.f. (JCO)
02458 Bikaner Jn.-Delhi Sarai Rohilla Express Special	Bi-weekly to Daily	18.06.21 to 30.06.2021
02457 Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Bikaner Jn. Express Special	Daily	20.06.21 to 30.06.2021
02471 Shri Ganga Nagar-Delhi Jn. Express Special	Bi-weekly to Daily	18.06.21 to 30.06.2021
02472 Delhi Jn.-Shri Ganga Nagar Express Special	Daily	19.06.2021 to 30.06.2021
04731 Delhi Jn.-Bathinda Kisan Express Special	Bi-weekly to Daily	18.06.21 to 30.06.2021
04732 Bathinda-Delhi Kisan Express Special	Daily	19.06.21 to 30.06.2021
02443 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Jodhpur/Degana Superfast Special	Bi-weekly to Daily	19.06.21 to till further advice
02444 Jodhpur/Degana - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Superfast Special	Daily	20.06.21 to till further advice

Note: For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table of Stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website: <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

RailMadad Helpline No. 139
Visit RailMadad website : www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in & download RailMadad app

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Visit us at : www.nr.indianrailways.gov.in

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Complaint of sexual assault filed against LJP leader's cousin

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

A woman has filed a complaint against Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) leader Chirag Paswan's cousin Prince Raj Paswan on alleged sexual assault charges at Delhi's Connaught Place police station.

As per Delhi Police sources, "On 15 June, a woman has filed a complaint at Delhi's Connaught Place police station on sexual assault charges against Chirag Paswan's cousin Prince Raj Paswan. The three-page complaint is being investigated upon. The police is yet to register an FIR."

On Tuesday, Chirag Paswan shared a letter dated March 29 that was addressed to his uncle in which he had mentioned the complaint of alleged sexual assault by a woman party worker against Prince Raj.

"A few days ago, a woman, who was associated with the party, was blackmailing Prince by accusing him of sexual abuse. Being the elder of the family, I consulted you on this subject but you also ignored this serious matter. After ignoring, I

City LJP youth wing protests against Paras

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

The Lok Janshakti Party faction headed by Chirag Paswan on Tuesday expelled the five MPs of the party who had rebelled against him, while the group led by his uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras removed him from the post of the party president. Both factions moved swiftly to take control of the party a day after Paras, the youngest brother of Ram Vilas Paswan, was recognised by the Lok Sabha secretariat as the leader of LJP in the House.

Dr Vikas Singh president of Delhi LJP youth wing along with his supporters staged a protest against Paras as "he along with the five MPs betrayed Late Ram Vilas Paswan."

advised Prince to go to the police so that the truth and the lies come out and whoever is guilty should be punished," wrote Chirag Paswan in the letter.

TEMPORARY CANCELLATION & DIVERSION OF TRAINS

In order to upgrade the infrastructure, Lucknow Division of Northern Railway will undertake the Pre-Non-Interlocking and Non-Interlocking work in connection with doubling of track between Jais - Fursatganj - Rupamau Stations on Lucknow - Rae Bareilly Jn - Partapgarh Jn - Varanasi Jn Section. To execute this work Lucknow Division will take suitable traffic blocks of different durations upto 25.06.2021. During this period following trains will be cancelled/diverted on the dates shown against each:-

CANCELLATION OF TRAINS		
Train No.	Train Name	Date of Cancellation (from originating station)
04265	Varanasi Jn - Dehradun Special Express Train	upto 25.06.2021
04266	Dehradun - Varanasi Jn Special Express Train	17.06.2021 to 26.06.2021
03005	Howrah Jn - Amritsar Jn Special Express Train	upto 24.06.2021
03006	Amritsar Jn - Howrah Jn Special Express Train	18.06.2021 to 26.06.2021
DIVERSION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Train Name	Diversion Route	Date of passing (from originating station)
03006 Amritsar Jn - Howrah Jn Special Express Train	Diverted via Lucknow - Sultanpur Jn - Varanasi Jn	on 17.06.2021
02875 Puri - Anand Vihar Terminal Neelachal Special Express	Diverted via Varanasi Jn - Sultanpur Jn - Utrailtia Jn	on 18, 20 & 22.06.2021
02876 Anand Vihar Terminal - Puri Neelachal Special Express	Diverted via Utrailtia Jn - Sultanpur Jn - Varanasi Jn	on 18, 20, 22 & 25.06.2021
02356 Jammu Tawi - Patna Jn Archana Superfast Special Express	Diverted via Lucknow - Faizabad Jn - Varanasi Jn	on 20 & 23.06.2021
02355 Patna Jn - Jammu Tawi Archana Superfast Special Express	Diverted via Varanasi Jn - Faizabad Jn - Lucknow	on 19 & 22.06.2021
02683 Yasvantpur Jn - Lucknow Festival Special Express Train	Diverted via Prayag Jn - Unchahar Jn - Rae Bareilly Jn	on 21.06.2021

For any other information passengers are requested to contact Railway Enquiry No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

Silent protests begin over Maratha quota

Mumbai: A silent sit-in protest was organised on Wednesday in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra for the Maratha reservation. The protest has been launched under the leadership of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Rajya Sabha member Chhatrapati Sambhajiraje, who is a descendant of legendary Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji. The MLAs, MPs and ministers cutting across the party lines have joined the protests to demand quota for the Maratha community. Several Maratha organisations in Maharashtra have extended their support to the protest. Meanwhile, chief minister Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government assured that it was doing everything to ensure reservations to the community even as the opposition BJP is blaming the state government for messing up the issue.

New Coast Guard chief for NE region

Kolkata: Inspector general M.V. Pathak has become the new northeast (NE) regional commander of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG). He took over the charge from his predecessor, A.K. Harbola, at ICG (NE) regional headquarters in Kolkata on June 14. In his previous assignment, Mr Pathak was the regional commander (Andaman & Nicobar) of the ICG at Port Blair for three years. He said that his priority would be to strengthen the coastal security mechanism through coordination with all state and central agencies and to make the seas safe for all fishermen and seafarers. An alumnus of the United States Coast Guard Academy, Connecticut, Mr Pathak underwent the IMO Course from the institute and has commanded all classes of Coast Guard ships during his illustrious career of more than three decades.

Young tribal couple thrashed for eloping

Chhotaudepur, Gujarat: A young tribal couple from a remote village in Gujarat's Chhotaudepur district was allegedly thrashed with sticks for eloping by five men, including family members of the teenage girl, in the presence of villagers, the police said on Wednesday, adding three accused were arrested. The incident, which occurred in Dhada village in Chhotaudepur district on Monday, caught the attention of the police after a video of the brutal assault went viral on social media. "A team of Rangpur police rushed to the village on Wednesday and arrested three members of the girl's family after registering an FIR for assault and rioting against six persons," the police said. — PTI

Bureaucratic power in J&K 'unbridled', alleges Omar

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, JUNE 16

Former CM and leader of NC Omar Abdullah, on Wednesday alleged that in absence of a political government the "unbridled hegemony" of non-native bureaucrats has pushed J&K into an unparalleled deranged situation wherein common people are battered and also do face greater hardships.

"One of the developments post-5 August 2019 measures have been emergence of a bureaucratic setup mostly non-local and unconnected who have become authority unto themselves in wake of the dilution of a viable democratic system in J&K," he said.

He said, "Here we have a man being jailed for saying that he can't have expectations from non-local officers. The incident should not be seen in isolation. It is a reality that the local populace is faced with post 2019 measures."

Last week, the police in Ganderbal had detained a 50-year-old trader, Sajad Rashid Sofi, and activist for being a "threat to peace". This came hours after he had at a meeting called by one of the advisers of the J&K L-G Manoj Sinha to interact with locals, said that he had no expectations from officers who belong to outside J&K but are posted in the UT.

Mr Sofi had led a delegation of about a dozen people from his area to a public "darbar" of adviser Baseer Ahmad Khan on Thursday last and reportedly told him, "I can have expectations from you because you are a Kashmiri and you can understand us. I can grab you by the collar and seek answers. But what expectations can I have from officers who are outsiders?"

Hearing it, Ganderbal's deputy commissioner Kritika Jyotsna, an IAS officer of the 2014 batch of the UP cadre sent to J&K on inter-cadre deputation, stood up from her seat and "strongly objected". The same evening Mr Sofi was detained.

Though a local court granted him bail on Saturday, the police refused to release him. He was instead taken into "preventive custody" under Sections 107 and 151 of the IPC for being a "threat to peace".

However, following public outrage and severe criticism by various political parties, Mr Sofi was released on Wednesday.

6 Naxals gunned down in AP

District committee commander killed ■ Rebels had escaped during last combing ops

V. KAMALAKARA RAO
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 16

Six members, including three women, of the banned CPI (Maoist) of the Galikonda area committee were gunned down by Andhra Pradesh Greyhounds in an exchange of fire in the Visakhapatnam Agency on Wednesday.

The deceased included the district committee commander Sande Gangaiah, the police said.

Visakhapatnam district police identified the deceased men as Ranadev alias Arjun, Sande Gangaiah alias Ashok and Santu Nachika. Two female bodies were identified as Lalitha and Paikie and the third body identity is yet to be ascertained.

Weapons including AK-47, carbine, 303, tapancha and country-made weapons, were recovered from

Many Maoists hurt in Odisha firefight

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 16

A fierce gunbattle took place between a group of Maoists rebels and security forces in a forest near Kulabedha in Odisha's Malkangiri district on Wednesday morning. Some of the rebels reportedly sustained injuries in the encounter.

the spot along with literature, kit bags belonging to the extremists.

According to sources, these extremists earlier escaped from the Greyhounds during the last combing operation at Pala Samudram in Koyuru mandal on May 20. Sources further said a

group of 30 Maoists had been roaming in the area for the last few months due to health problems arising out of Covid infections. They used to rely on locals for medicines and food. The police might have tracked them with the help of a few reds who

fire indiscriminately at the security forces. The jawan also retaliated in which some rebels sustained injuries," the SP said. However, the injured ultras managed to flee into the dense forest, he added.

During subsequent search, the forces recovered an INSAS rifle along with 34 rounds of bullets and magazines.

surrendered before the East Godavari police recently. Speaking to this newspaper, Visakhapatnam district SP B. Krishna Rao said that Wednesday's encounter was a major one after the five deaths of Maoists in a gunfight with the AP in September 2019.

RSS annual meet next mnth in MP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

The RSS's annual "prant pracharak" meeting will be held in Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh, next month, which will be attended by Sangh top brass including Mohan Bhagwat, Dattatreya Hosabale, Krishna Gopal, Arun Singh, Manmohan Vaidya among others.

The five day long meet from July 9, will see other senior leaders joining virtually due to Covid restrictions. From reviewing Sangh's Covid relief work to the upcoming Assembly polls to various socio-political issues will be deliberated during the meet. The RSS top brass will also review various other programmes of its affiliates during the meet.

Mithun grilled over poll speech on his 71st b'day

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JUNE 16

Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty faced questioning by the Kolkata police on his 71st birthday in a case against him for allegedly making explosive and provocative speeches during his campaign for the BJP in the West Bengal Assembly Election.

The session, which took place on a virtual mode on the direction of the Calcutta high court, lasted for around 45 minutes on Wednesday relating to the FIR against him under relevant sections of the IPC.

On May 6, a Trinamul Congress worker had lodged a complaint with the Manicktala police station against Mithun



for his comments "Marbo Ek hane Lash Porbe Shoshane (I will hit you here and the body will fall in the crematorium)" and "Ek Chhobole Chhobi (Just one snakebite will turn one into a photograph)" on March 7 at PM Narendra Modi's Brigade Parade Ground rally where he joined the BJP.

The police asked Mithun a list of around a dozen questions, according to sources. They questioned him about the contents of his speech, why he made the comments and whether he received any amount for his campaign.

In his reply, Mithun, however, claimed that he

joined the BJP inspired by its ideology and not for any financial benefits, sources revealed. He also told the investigating officer that he had given the popular dialogues of his Bengali films in his speech for mere entertainment of the crowd of his party supporters and not to create any provocation.

Meanwhile in another trouble for Suwendu Adhikari, the BJP MLA of Nandigram, the detective department of the city police has taken over the probe of a fake government job racket between June 2019 to December 2020 relating to his department when he was the state irrigation minister in the Mamata Banerjee government.

■ BJP youth wing protests against demand of probe into land deal

Sena, BJP men clash over Ayodhya deal

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JUNE 16

Shiv Sena and BJP activists clashed in front of Maharashtra's ruling party's headquarters in Dadar in Central Mumbai on Wednesday. The scuffle happened over the comments made by Sena leaders regarding the alleged scam in the purchase of Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The workers of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), BJP's youth wing, protested outside

Shiv Sena Bhavan against Saamana editorial's demand of a probe into "suspicious" land purchase deal by Ram Mandir Trust in Ayodhya.

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut had also demanded for a clarification from the Trust on the charges of corruption in the land purchased by it in Ayodhya.

To protest this, the BJYM workers held a march outside Shiv Sena Bhavan, to which Sena workers objected. A scuf-

fle broke out between Shiv Sena and BJYM activists during the protest.

At least 40 BJYM workers were detained by the police, who intervened in the clashes.

Shiv Sena MP Arvind Sawant called the protests a "stunt". Reacting on the clashes between both parties he said for "every action there is a reaction".

BJP leader Pravin Darekar said that in democracy, everyone has the right to protest. The

Shiv Sena has indulged in hooliganism by using its power in the state, he added.

AAP's Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh and a former minister in the Samajwadi government, Pawan Pandey claimed that the Shriram Jammabhooni Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai purchased a piece of land worth ₹2 crore at an inflated price of ₹18.5 crore for the Ram Temple premises and was aided by member Anil Mishra.

Ghaziabad video: UP police books Twitter, journos

Ghaziabad, June 16: The police has booked Twitter, a news portal and six people for circulating a video in which an elderly Muslim man says he was thrashed and asked to chant "Jai Shri Ram".

The UP police claimed that it was done to create communal unrest.

The FIR names Twitter Inc, Twitter Communications India, news website The Wire, journalists Mohammed Zubair and Rana Ayyub, Congress leaders Dr Sama Mohammad, Salman Nizami, Masoor Usmani and writer Saba Naqvi.

"These people did not verify the truth of the matter and shared it online with a communal angle with an intention to disrupt public peace and create a divide between religious groups," the FIR states.

The FIR was lodged at the Loni Border police station in Ghaziabad around 11.30 pm on Tuesday on the basis of a complaint lodged by a local policeman.

The police action comes within hours of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and UP CM Yogi Adityanath exchanging remarks on Twitter over the incident.

Meanwhile, the Press Club of India (PCI) also took note of the police action and demanded that

■ THE VIDEO shows an elderly Muslim man saying he was thrashed and asked to chant *Jai Shri Ram*

■ THE UTTAR Pradesh police says that it was done to create communal unrest

the FIR naming the journalists should be quashed because it shows vendetta of the Ghaziabad police to create a sense of terror in the media and society at large.

The PCI appeals to the government of UP to intervene in the matter at the earliest to ensure that journalists are not made easy targets of police high handedness by filing FIR against them, it said in a statement.

In a video clip, which surfaced on social media on June 14, the elderly Muslim man, Abdul Shamad Saifi, is heard saying he was thrashed by some young men and asked to chant "Jai Shri Ram".

However, the Ghaziabad police has ruled out a communal angle. It said the accused were unhappy about a "tabeez" (amulet) he sold to them.

Ghaziabad (rural) SP Iras Raja said on Wednesday that three people — Kalloo Gurjar, Parvesh Gurjar and Adil — have been arrested for assaulting Saifi. — PTI

Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority
 Plot No. 01, Knowledge Park IV, Greater Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh 201308.
 Website: www.greaternoidaauthority.in, Email: authority@gnida.in
 Ref. No.: 37569 Dated: 15/06/2021

**Request for Proposal (RFP) for
Empanelment of Architects/Urban Designers/
Urban Planners/ Landscape Architects for
upcoming projects in Greater Noida**

Detailed empanelment document is available on the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority's website [http://www.greaternoidaauthority.in]. The pre-bid conference will be held on 25.06.2021 (11:00 am) on Zoom (details shared in the document).
 Interested Applicants are required to submit proposals on or before 15/07/2021, 1700 hrs (IST). In case of any queries, the Applicants are invited to contact General Manager, Planning and Architecture, GNIDA, Plot No: 01, Knowledge Park IV, District: Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh 201308. Email: gmplanning@gnida.in, Phone: +91 120 2336011 General Manager, Planning/Architecture

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NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE
 Chief Engineer/TMC, Northern Railway, Headquarters office, Baroda House, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites 03 No tenders through E-Procurement system for supply of the following items:

S. No.	E-Tender No.	Description of item	Qty.	Due date Time
1.	A08P90STM2021	Rail Profile Weld Grinder	32 Nos.	12.07.2021 at 11:30 hours
2.	A13P90TMC2021	Steel Solid Bar & Bush Guide Hook	02 Items	12.07.2021 at 11:30 hours
3.	A19P90TMC2021	Relay & Potentiometric Device	02 Items	12.07.2021 at 11:30 hours
4.	A29P90TMC2021	Cable Assembly for Track Machine	04 Items	12.07.2021 at 11:30 hours

Note :- 1. The complete information of above E-Procurement tenders are available on website "www.ireps.gov.in". The firms, who desire to participate against E-Tenders, are advised to electronically register themselves on the above website for which they would be required to have a class-III digital certificate from certifying agencies authorized under IT Act 2000, by Govt. of India. Manual offers against E-Tenders will not be accepted.
 Tender Notice No. 219-S/1/TMC/08/2021-22 Dated : 15.06.2021 1322/2021

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Over ₹6Kcr siphoned off using fraudulent LoUs by Choksi firms

New Delhi, June 16: Companies owned by fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi have allegedly siphoned off over ₹6,344.96 crore from the PNB using fraudulent letters of undertaking and foreign letters of credit, a CBI investigation into the scam has detected.

The findings were submitted by the CBI in a supplementary chargesheet filed before a special court in Mumbai last week, where the agency said the PNB was conned by its employees who were allegedly hand in gloves with Choksi and his company executives and who facilitated the scam as part of a criminal conspiracy.

The PNB officials at the bank's Brady House branch in Mumbai issued 165 letters of undertaking (LoUs) and 58 foreign letters of credit (FLCs) during March-April 2017, against which 311 bills were discounted.

These LoUs and FLCs were allegedly issued to Choksi's firms without any sanctioned limit or cash margin and without making entries in the bank's central banking system to evade any scrutiny in case of a default.

LoUs are a guarantee given by a bank on behalf of its client to a foreign bank. If the client does not repay to the foreign bank, the liability



falls on the guarantor bank. "Since the accused companies did not repay the amount availed against the said fraudulent LoUs and FLCs, the PNB made the payment of ₹6,344.97 crore, including the overdue interest, to the overseas banks, which had advanced buyer's credit and discounted the bills against the fraudulent LoUs and FLCs issued by the PNB," the CBI's supplementary chargesheet has alleged.

The PNB had accused Choksi of duping it to the tune of ₹7,080 crore. CBI officials said the matter is still under investigation and the final figures of loss suffered by the bank can only be determined once all the LoUs are examined and the probe is complete.

In addition to the 18 accused named in the first chargesheet, the agency has named four new accused in its supplementary report, including the former international head of the Gitanjali Group of Companies, Sunil Verma, two PNB officials — single-window operator Sagar Sawant and AGM Sanjay Prasad — and a director of the Gili and the Nakshatra brands under the group, Dhanesh Sheth. — PTI

हरियाणा 600 दिन सरकार के प्रगति और विस्तार के
 Govt. of Haryana

“Our Government has defined the development and social welfare in the second year of its tenure, as a result, the public welfare schemes are reaching the eligible person. Along with inclusive development, the Government has given new dimensions to Svavlamban, Svabhiman, Suraksha, Svamitva, Sanrakshan, Svayata, Shiksha and Samadhaan. Upholding the spirit of Antyodaya, we have always taken care of every section of the state. These efforts will be continued in the future as well to make Haryana the best state of the nation.”

- Manohar Lal, Chief Minister, Haryana

Sushasan se Parinaam
 One time registration for Government jobs, Integration of 100 schemes and services with the Parivar Pehchan Patra portal, 'Operation Shudhi' in the Transport Department, Redressal of complaints through CM window, NDC Portal to obtain land-related no-dues certificate, Resolution of disputes related to arrears of VAT, GST, Transport taxes, Mining and stamp duty etc. with various departments and boards

Sanrakshan
 Restructuring of CADA to MICADA, Ground water and environment conservation schemes, Encouragement to sprinkler plant system, 'Oxy-Van' Panchkula and Karnal, Improvement in sex ratio

Better Health Facilities
 Adopted the policy of test-track-trace-treat, Setting up of covid care centres equipped with oxygen beds, Covid Sanjeevani hospitals are functional, Free covid vaccination, Health facilities at home for home isolated patients, Health and financial package implemented for covid affected patients

New dimensions of Svabhimaan
 Mukhya Mantri Antyodaya Parivar Uthhan, Mukhya Mantri Parivar Samridhi Yojana, Procurement of Maximum 11 Crops on MSP, Meri Fasal Mera Byora, e-Kharid Portal, Mera Pani Meri Virasat, Har-Hit Retail Store, Bhavantar Bharpayee Yojana, Promotion of horticulture commercial crops, Welfare schemes for SC/ST, Social Security Pension, Incentives to Divyang etc.

Right of Svamitva
 Haryana is the first state to implement 'Lal Dora' Mukht Yojana, Enabling the ownership of urban property for small shopkeepers

Ensuring Suraksha
 Narcotic Control Bureau, Student Transport Safety Scheme, Digital Testing and Technical Analysis Centre in Haryana

Shiksha for Better future
 Aim to implement the New Education Policy by the year 2025, Shiksha Setu App during Covid-19, Online education through Edusat and Sampark Baithak mobile application, Tele-counselling for children and parents, Coaching facility under Super-100 programme, Free passport to students, Digital Library/e-Granth Kosh

New definition of Svavlambhan
 Efforts for Skill development of youth, various vocational and industrial training opportunities, employment opportunities, Expansion of industries, Facilities to traders

Opportunities of Svayata
 Formation of inter-district council, Panchkula Metropolitan Development Authority, Formation of Haryana Smart Gram Pradhikaran, Reservation to women in panchayats, Formation of new municipal corporations, Councils and municipalities, Increase in financial resources of urban local bodies and panchayats.

Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana www.pharyana.gov.in @Cmohry @DiprHaryana

SHORT TAKES

Rare white deer spotted in Kaziranga

Nagaon: Spotting of a rare white hog deer in Kaziranga National Park has created widespread interest among wildlife conservationists and nature lovers with many flocking to the world heritage site to catch a glimpse of the animal. After spotting the deer, locals had informed nature photographer Jayanta Kumar Sarma who managed to capture the white deer on his camera in the Buraphar range of the park. Sarma spotted the animal at a grassland near the 12 line area of Amguri Tea Estate under the Kaliabor Sub-division in Nagaon district on Monday. Divisional forest officer (DFO) of Kaziranga National Park (KNP) Ramesh Gogoi said that this particular white deer was seen for the first time in the park a few days ago, and it sometimes comes out of the park and wanders with other brown deer to feed on grass, he said. — PTI

Odisha announces partial unlock plan

Bhubaneswar: With the state reporting a steady dip in Covid-19 cases, the Odisha government on Wednesday announced partial unlock plans to relax the restrictions imposed since May 1 this year. The partial lockdown will come into effect from June 17 morning and will continue till July 1 morning. Addressing a press conference, chief secretary Suresh Mohapatra said the Covid-19 infection rate has drastically declined and the test positivity rate dropped to 6 per cent this week. He attributed the drop in the infection rate to people's adherence to lockdown restrictions. "The peak period in the state is already over and I hope if people continue to coordinate with the state government, the situation can be completely brought under control in a few days," added the chief secretary Mr Mohapatra.

Assam Cabinet not in favour of exams

Guwahati: The Assam Cabinet on Wednesday observed that the Covid situation in the state has not improved to conduct Class 10 and 12 board examinations but the final decision will be taken by the education department in consultation with the stakeholders. Informing that in zero-18 years group about 25,000 children were infected by Covid in the state, Assam health minister Keshab Mahanta told reporters that state health department gave a detailed presentation before the Cabinet about the prevailing rate of positivity besides the possible congregation of people in case of holding the board examinations. The final decision will be taken on June 18.

PM invites world to invest in India

Praises start-ups, tech sector, says India offers what innovators, investors need

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday "invited the world to invest in India" based on its "five pillars of talent, market, capital, ecosystem, and culture of openness". Mr Modi also heaped praises for the tech and start-up sectors of the country. "India offers what innovators and investors need," he said.

Hailing France and Europe as India's key partners and speaking in the context of the pandemic, he also said "disruption does not have to mean

despair" and that "instead, we must keep the focus on the twin foundation of repair and prepare".

He made these remarks during his keynote address at the fifth edition of VivaTech 2021, one of the largest digital and startup events in Europe, held in Paris. "India offers what innovators and investors need. I invite the world to invest in India, based on the five pillars of talent, market, capital, ecosystem, and culture of openness. Indian tech talent pool is famous across the world. Indian youth have given tech solutions to some of the world's most pressing



Narendra Modi

problems," the PM said. "Today, India has 1.18 billion mobile phones and 775 million Internet users. This is more than the population of several nations. Data consumption in India is among the highest and cheapest in the world. Indians are the largest users of social media. There is a diverse and extensive market that

awaits you," he added.

He also called technology and digital as the two emerging areas of close cooperation with France among the many other wide range of topics.

"Many youngsters saw the French Open with great enthusiasm. One of India's tech companies, Infosys provided tech support for the tournament. Likewise, the French Company Atos is involved in a project for making the fastest supercomputer in India. Whether it is France's Capgemini or India's TCS and Wipro, our IT talent is serving companies and citizens all over the world," Mr Modi said.

Another lion dies of Covid in TN zoo

Chennai, June 16:

Another lion at the Arignar Anna Zoological Park (AAZP) in Vandalur near here, succumbed to SARS-CoV-2 on Wednesday morning. Confirming the death of the Asiatic male lion named Pathbanathan, aged 12 years, deputy director of AAZP said the lion was housed in the safari area of the park. "Samples of the said lion had tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 as per the report of National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases, Bhopal, communicated on June 3.

The lion has been under intensive treatment since then," he said. This is the second tragedy that struck the zoo which lost a nine-year-old lioness Neela due to Coronavirus on June 3.

Since the detection of the infection among animals, the zoo management has been involved in hectic efforts to prevent its spread among other animals. — PTI

Kolkata, June 16: The ruling Trinamul Congress in West Bengal Wednesday accused governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, who is on a visit to New Delhi, of violating constitutional norms and asked him not to return to the state.

The BJP, on the other hand, alleged that it is the TMC which has no respect for the Constitution and asked the Mamata Banerjee-led party to respect constitutional posts.

Mr Dhankhar, who shares a strained relationship with the state government, went to the national capital on Wednesday night for a four-day trip. He had not specified any reason for the visit.

However, on Wednesday, the governor said he met Union ministers Prahlad Joshi and Prahlad Singh Patel. "Had useful interaction with Union minister of coal, mines and parliamentary affairs of India @JoshiPrahlad on varied issues," he tweeted.

In another tweet, Mr



Jagdeep Dhankhar

Dhankhar said, "Had useful deliberations with Union minister for culture, tourism @prahladspatel Prahlad Singh Patel @MinOfCultureGoI on issues pertaining Victoria Memorial @victoriameemkol, Indian Museum @IndianMuseumKol @ezckolkata @asiatic.society aimed at enhancing impact of these bodies."

TMC leader Sougata Ray lashed out at Mr Dhankhar for allegedly violating constitutional norms and not taking the state government into confidence over various

decisions and statements he has made in the recent past.

"We have never seen such a governor who has no regard for the Constitution and its norms. He has been violating every constitutional norm.

"According to our Constitution, the governor is supposed to act as per the instructions of the council of ministers headed by the chief minister. But he doesn't follow any such norm and acts as per his whims and fancies," Mr Ray said.

Mr Ray's party colleague and MP, Mahua Moitra, asked Mr Dhankhar not to return to the state.

"Uncleji going to Delhi on June 15th he says... Do us a favour WB governor Sahib — don't come back," she said in a tweet.

The governor went to Delhi a day after a delegation of BJP MLAs petitioned him on alleged deterioration of the law and order situation in the state. — PTI

Projects face delays in production due to lack of approvals Govt to ease green nod to mine projects

New Delhi, June 16: The Centre on Wednesday said the government is planning to simplify the green clearances required for the quick operationalisation of mining projects, including coal.

It assumes significance as mining projects in various states face delays in production due to lack of approvals such as forest and environment clearance.

"(With regard to) EC (environment clearance) and FC (forest clearance), we are actually trying to do something with the ministry of environment

and forest (MoEF). I think some simplification is going to be done.

"The secretary MoEF, told us in a meeting that EC, FC norms are of course friendlier so that we will be able to have operation in a quicker way," coal additional secretary M. Nagaraju said.

He was speaking during the Virtual Chhattisgarh Mining Summit organised by the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The additional secretary also stressed that the state government should ensure that the mines that are allotted are opera-

tionalised at the earliest by hand-holding the allottees and holding regular meetings, among others.

"Expect these two clearances (EC and FC), rest of clearances come from the state government. In fact, for EC and FC, a lot depends on the efficiency of the state government's forest department.

"So, state governments, Chhattisgarh and other state government, they all need to partner the entrepreneurs in quicker operation of coal mines or any mines for that matter, because you should not lock the capital for long

time," Mr Nagaraju said.

Any delay in operationalisation of mines will give risk to the capital invested and it gives a bad reputation to the industry as such, he added.

"If there is a quicker operationalisation (of mines), the banking industry will also see that this (mining industry) is more efficient and they would be able to lend more," he said.

Mr Nagaraju also said there is a need to bring in small- and medium-scale entrepreneurs into the mining business. — PTI

Empty chair between Modi and Shivraj creates flutter

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JUNE 16

An empty chair left between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan during their meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday created a flutter in the political circle here with Congress describing it an "indication of widening gulf" between them.

The Congress circulated the photograph of a meeting between the PM and the CM with a chair lying vacant between them, saying that Mr Chouhan no longer enjoyed Mr Modi's confidence.

"Chief ministers of other BJP-ruled states such as Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Uttarakhand were seen occupying the chair next to the PM during their recent one-to-one meetings. But, Mr Chouhan was seen sitting on a sofa during his meeting with the PM with the chair between them found lying vacant. The ruling BJP should explain the unusual development. It indicates the PM has cho-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and MP chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in New Delhi.

sen to maintain a distance from Mr Chouhan," state Congress media wing chief Narendra Singh Saluja said.

Mr Chouhan on Wednesday apprised the Mr Modi on the pandemic situation in the state and briefed him on his government's vaccination plan.

The BJP has, however, given a different spin to Wednesday's development, saying that Mr Chouhan was courteous enough to maintain a respectable distance from the PM during their meeting unlike Congress veteran Kamal Nath who had thrown all decency to air by sitting on the chair

next to the PM putting one leg on the other during one of their meetings.

Meanwhile, the state government lifted more curbs in several cities including Bhopal by allowing the malls and gyms to reopen in the wake of "significant" improvement in the pandemic situation.

The interstate bus services have also resumed on Wednesday. Hotels and restaurants have been allowed to reopen with 50 percent capacity.

The places of worship have also been allowed to reopen. However, cinema halls will remain shut till further orders.

India, Pak clear visas for staff at missions

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

India and Pakistan on Wednesday approved fresh visas for each other's officials for their respective diplomatic missions, thereby defusing an ongoing simmering row on the matter, sources confirmed. This was after New Delhi was apparently miffed over Pakistan not issuing visas to Indian diplomats for fresh postings, according to reports.

It may be recalled that a year ago, in retaliation to the illegal custody and "barbaric treatment" then of two Indian high commission staffers by Pakistani security agencies, India had in June last year asked Pakistan to reduce its staff at its high commission in New Delhi by half.

In August 2019, Pakistan had "downgraded diplomatic relations with India", with Islamabad asking New Delhi to "withdraw" the then high commissioner Ajay Bisaria. This was after India had decided to bifurcate the then Jammu and Kashmir state into two Union Territories.

Find how Sonu Sood, MLA got Remdesivir: HC asks Maha govt

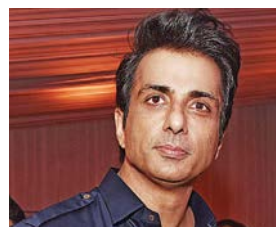
SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, JUNE 16

The Bombay high court on Wednesday asked the Maharashtra government to "seriously examine" the role of MLA Zeeshan Siddiqui and actor Sonu Sood regarding the alleged illegal distribution of crucial anti-viral drug Remdesivir, through social media, noting that it seemed like a case of a parallel unauthorised agency.

The bench comprising Justices S.P. Deshmukh and G.S. Kulkarni issued this direction while hearing a public interest litigation filed by Nilesh Navalakha through advocate Rajesh Inamdar on management of distribution of Remdesivir to all States by Centre.

On the last date of hearing, advocate Inamdar had pointed out how Remdesivir was supplied to people following requests made on social media to Mr Siddique and Mr Sood within hours, while the state complained of a shortage and several people were dying.

On Wednesday the court observed that the two seemed to have played a crucial role in facilitating the distribution of



Sonu Sood

Remdesivir as they were dealing with people on social media and directing them towards distributors without ascertaining the legality or genuineness of the drug.

The state informed the court that a criminal case was filed against BDR Charitable Trust and its trustees for supplying the drug to needy patients who approached the MLA through Twitter, but not against Mr Siddique.

As for Sonu Sood Foundation, the state said the matter was still under inquiry, but the drugs seem to have come from a store inside Lifeline Medicare Hospital in Goregaon, manufactured by Cipla. However, the drugs were not from the government's quota.

The bench said in both the situations the personalities were directly dealing with the public at large.

Controversy erupts on gap between 2 Covishield jabs

■ **Continued from Page 1** Public Health England showed that vaccine efficacy varied between 65%-88% when the interval was 12 weeks. This was the basis on which they overcame their epidemic outbreak due to the Alpha variant. The UK could come out of it because the interval they kept was 12 weeks. We also thought this a good idea, as there are fundamental scientific reasons to show that when the interval is increased, adenovector vaccines give a better response. Hence, the decision was taken on May 13 to increase the interval to 12-16 weeks. This also gives flexibility to the community since everyone can't come at precisely 12 weeks or so," said Dr Arora.

Dr Arora said the earlier four-week decision was based on the bridging trial data available then. He referred to studies by PGI Chandigarh and CMC Vellore which compared the effectiveness of partial versus full immunisation. "A PGI Chandigarh study very clearly shows that vaccine effectiveness was 75 per cent for both partially immunised and fully immunised. So at least in the short run, the effectiveness was similar whether you are partially or fully vaccinated. This was in relation to the

■ **THE MINISTRY** said the newborn calf serum was used only for preparation or growth of vero cells and was later washed away. It said this technique was used for decades in polio, rabies and influenza vaccines.

Alpha variant which had swept Punjab and northern India and came to Delhi. This also meant that even if you received only one dose, you are still protected," he said. The results from CMC Vellore were similar.

On any fresh proposal to reduce the Covishield dosage gap, Dr Arora said a decision will be taken on scientific grounds, giving prime importance to the health and protection of the community. "Covid-19 and vaccination are very dynamic. Tomorrow, if the vaccine platform tells us a narrower interval is better for our people, even if the benefit is 5-10 per cent, the committee will take a decision on its merit. On the other hand, if it turns out the current decision is fine, we will continue with it," he added.

The Union health ministry, meanwhile, contradicted social media claims that Covaxin contains the serum of a newborn calf. The ministry said the newborn calf serum was

used only for preparation or growth of vero cells and was later washed away. It said this technique was used for decades in polio, rabies and influenza vaccines too.

"Different kinds of bovine and other animal serum are standard enrichment ingredients used globally for vero cell growth. Vero cells are used to establish cell lines which help in the production of vaccines. This technique has been used for decades in polio, rabies and influenza vaccines. These vero cells, after the growth, are washed with water, with chemicals (also technically known as buffer) many times to make it free from the newborn calf serum. These vero cells are then infected with the coronavirus for viral growth," the ministry said.

It added the vero cells are completely destroyed in the process of viral growth. "Thereafter this grown virus is also killed (inactivated) and purified. This killed virus is then used to make the final vaccine, and in the final vaccine formulation no calf serum is used. The final vaccine (Covaxin) thus doesn't contain newborn calf serum at all and the calf serum is not an ingredient of the final vaccine," the ministry clarified.

Twitter deliberately defied rules

■ **Continued from Page 1**

minister said that what happened in Uttar Pradesh was illustrative of Twitter's "arbitrariness" in fighting fake news.

"While Twitter has been over-enthusiastic about its fact-checking mechanism, its failure to act in multiple cases like UP is perplexing as well as points towards its inconsistency in fighting misinformation," he said.

Mr Prasad said that Indian companies, be it pharma or IT or others that go to do business in the US or in other countries overseas, voluntarily follow the local laws. "Then why are platforms like Twitter showing reluctance in following Indian laws designed to give voice to the victims of abuse and misuse," the minister questioned.

In a major setback to Twitter, the microblogging platform has lost its "safe harbour" protection in India over non-compliance with IT

rules and failure to appoint key personnel mandated under the new guidelines, despite repeated reminders, and it will now be liable for action under Indian Penal Code for third party unlawful content.

Earlier this month, the government had given one last chance to Twitter to comply with the new IT rules, that came into effect on May 26, and had issued a stern warning that failure to adhere to the norms will lead to the platform losing exemption from liability under the IT Act.

The IT ministry had questioned Twitter over not providing information about the Chief Compliance Officer as required under the rules.

Also, the resident grievance officer and nodal contact person nominated by the company is not an employee of Twitter Inc in India as prescribed in the rules, the ministry had flagged. — PTI

Ordnance board to be split

■ **Continued from Page 1**

by eliminating inefficient supply chains and provide these companies incentives to become competitive and exploring new opportunities in the market including exports," the source said.

This restructuring is also aimed at transforming the Ordnance Factories into productive and profitable assets, deepen specialisation in product ranges, enhance competitiveness, improving quality and cost-efficiency, the source said.

In taking this decision, the government has ensured that the service conditions of the existing Central government employees of the OFB are protected. The government has decided all employees

of OFB (Group A, B & C) belonging to the production units would be transferred to the corporate entities on deemed deputation initially for a period of two years without altering their service conditions as Central government employees.

The pension liabilities of retirees and existing employees will continue to be borne by the government.

The government has also decided to delegate the Cabinet's authority to the Empowered Group of Ministers, constituted under defence minister Rajnath Singh, to decide on the matters relating to the implementation of the government's decisions on OFB and other incidental matters.

Rajnath calls for freedom in SCS

■ **Continued from Page 1**

integrity of nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international rules and laws," said Mr Singh in a video conference.

He said maritime security challenges are an area of concern for India, adding that sea lanes of communication are critical for peace, stability, prosperity and development of the Indo-Pacific region. "In this regard, developments in the South China Sea have attracted attention in the region and beyond. India supports the freedom of navigation, overflights and unimpeded commerce in these international waterways," said the defence minister.

He said that India hopes that the code of conduct negotiations will lead to outcomes that are in keeping with international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and do not prejudice the legitimate rights and interests of nations that are not party to these discussions.

Police calls HC order 'perverse'

■ **Continued from Page 1**

has also recorded perverse finding which are contrary to record" and that the high court "completely lost sight of the evidence and statements and it also discarded the evidence, which clearly made out a sinister plot of mass-scale riots being hatched by the three accused along with other co-conspirators."

In the sessions court, while seeking time to file the verification report for the release of the three student-activists, the police said that since Mr Tanha, Ms Narwal and Ms Kalita are permanent residents of Jharkhand, Assam and Rohtak respectively, it requires time June 18, 19 and 21 respectively to verify the three addresses.

Additional sessions judge Ravinder Bedi has reserved the order in the plea moved by the student-activists seeking their immediate release from Tihar jail. During the course of hearing, the sessions court abruptly removed all the media persons attending the proceedings from the virtual hearing link.

A defence lawyer said that the student activists were arrested from their residences in the city, which are listed in police's documents.

"Our work is to submit the bail bond. The high court order is clear... accused have to be released within 24 hours once they submit a bail bond... We have done our work. Can't be in jail because police haven't done their work," their lawyer said.

THE ASIAN AGE

17 JUNE 2021

HC upholds right to protest, dissent; offers a ray of hope

The order of the Delhi high court granting bail to three research students incarcerated for their alleged role in the Delhi riots of 2020 comes as a ray of hope for those who have been anguished by the government's propensity to use legal means against political opponents and the judiciary's proclivity to shut its eyes to executive excesses. The students, two from Jawaharlal Nehru University and one from Jamia Milia Islamia University, were charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, (UAPA), 1967.

The court has made significant observations on two important points that needed judicial clarification. One, the line that demarcates legitimate protests and terrorist activities and two, the police's unmindful application of laws such as UAPA on people and the lower judiciary's failure to apply their judicial mind to it. On the first, the court was categorical in assailing the state for blurring the line between the constitutionally guaranteed right to protest and terrorist activity in an attempt to suppress dissent. Such a mindset gaining traction would harm democracy, the court has observed. On the second, the court reminds the police that it was not the legislative intent of the UAPA that offences of the usual and ordinary kind, however grave, egregious or heinous in their nature and extent, to be covered by that law.

It defies the basic principles of the rule of law if the executive thinks that the process of law can be the punishment a citizen would face for defiance. There are far too many such people, including the 84-year-old priest Fr Stan Swamy, now languishing in jail under the very same law.

Referring to the constitutional scheme of things and the separation of powers under the Union, State and Concurrent Lists, the court pointed out that such laws are enacted for the defence of India, trashing the police act of booking students for shouting slogans. It has also found that the chargesheet reveals nothing to prove that the students were engaged in "terrorist activities" the definition of which was, according to the court, "vague". The court enjoined upon the courts to apply its mind when such laws are invoked on unsuspecting people instead of giving its assent to what the executive prescribes.

Governments may be uncomfortable with citizens asking questions, but that's the way democracy functions. It defies the basic principles of the rule of law if the executive thinks that the process of law can be the punishment a citizen would face for defiance. There are far too many such people, including the 84-year-old priest Fr Stan Swamy, now languishing in jail under the very same law.

Entries in the statute book cannot be allowed to be tools in the hands of a repressive government that has no compunction towards invoking the most stringent of laws against political opponents at the drop of a hat and muzzle dissent. The executive should be stopped from going beyond the legislative intent of the laws, and any transgression must be viewed from the point of view of the victim. It's the job of the judiciary to raise the protective covering of the Constitution when a vindictive government takes aims at a peacefully rebellious citizen. The Delhi high court has just done that. Every court must do it, should democracy survive and succeed; it should not be left to the individual judges to show the gumption.

BJP behind drama in LJP?

When the late Ram Vilas Paswan, once among the leading young Lohia socialist leaders of Bihar and the country along with Lalu Yadav and Nitish Kumar, figured that his best bet lay in emerging as a dalit leader, he created the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP). But he had a handicap. His base lay exclusively among the Dusadh community of dalits of Bihar. On that basis alone, it was not easy to be a long-distance runner.

But Mr Paswan survived with clever footwork, joining alliances which he changed with frequency to retain a position in the Union cabinet in a range of governments. He had a personal standing and was a well-liked politician. After the demise of the nine-term parliamentarian last October, the LJP has clearly lost its way.

The party had mostly become a family affair, with his son Chirag named its president, a brother and a nephew being bought to Parliament, and another nephew heading the party's Bihar unit. This lot is now busy fighting. The Lok Sabha Speaker promptly gave recognition to the breakaway group, which has five of the six party MPs, while only Chirag is out. So, the BJP's blessing to the move is a likely assumption.

Such parties usually do not last long. The split may have been brought about in the hope that one among the group may be made a Union minister in a Cabinet expansion. In the last Bihar Assembly election, Chirag had earned the enmity of chief minister Nitish Kumar by setting up candidates against his Janata Dal (United) nominees while remaining in the NDA at the Centre. It was the strangest of situations. Now, many think JD(U) may have exacted revenge by engineering the process of LJP's split or eventual vapourising. In any case, it is the BJP in Bihar to which the Dusadh community may gravitate. For socioeconomic reasons, this direction was manifesting itself in the late Ram Vilas Pawan's lifetime.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher

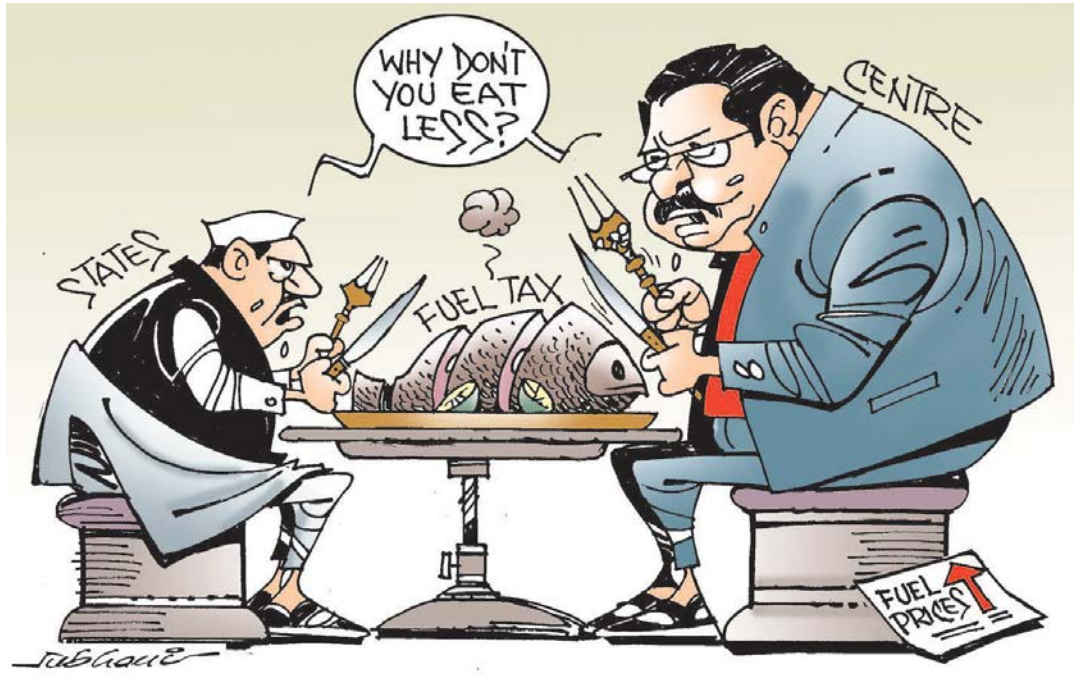
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Subhani



Covid-19 accountability: Making the dead count



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

In hyper-polarised India, it needs dollops of bravery for governments to admit that they got their Covid-19 death data wrong, that the magnitude of the problem they face in the time of the pandemic is more serious than they previously stated. Because political rivals are likely to pounce on such bursts of honesty as evidence of rank incompetence.

Nevertheless, some states are taking baby steps towards greater transparency of Covid-19 data. That is good news.

Bihar is in the spotlight. Covid-19 death figures in the state shot up from 5,478 on June 8 to 9,429 on June 9 in the wake of data revision. The dramatic jump in the number of coronavirus casualties did not happen because the Bihar government suddenly woke up to the need for good data. It was because the judiciary stepped in. The Patna high court demanded an audit of the figures after widespread allegations that the state government was underplaying the scale of infections and deaths.

Arguably, Bihar is not the only state which has faced such accusations. Ground reports by the media from crematoriums in many places, along with images of dozens of bodies dumped in rivers or buried in shallow graves have only bolstered the widespread belief that the official Covid-19 death count in the country doesn't tell the real story. Many states like Maharashtra and Telangana are revising their official death toll in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Interestingly, Jharkhand, one of India's poorest states, is setting an inspiring example by initiating an Intensive Public Health Survey. This is the first such door-to-door counting of deaths by any state during the second wave of the pandemic. It has revealed that

25,490 people died in the state in April-May 2021 — that is 43 per cent higher than the 17,819 total deaths officially registered across all 24 districts in the state in April-May 2019.

What should one make of this sudden rush for data integrity in many states even as the pandemic rages on? Will other states follow suit? Will the Narendra Modi government stop denying that India's official Covid-19 death toll is a massive undercount?

It is too early to tell. The pandemic is indeed making many countries finally acknowledge that they have been undercounting Covid-19 deaths. Peru did it. Mexico did it. But truth-telling may not be as contagious as the mutating coronavirus. Here in India, even as state governments start to revise their Covid-19 data, the Centre insists all is well. It recently lashed out at an international news-magazine for pegging the country's excess deaths due to the pandemic at 5.7 times the official figure.

But better late than never. Whatever be their motives, the states which are embracing greater data transparency deserve to be cheered even if by doing so, they push up India's official Covid-19 death count. As health economist Rijo M. John puts it: "Those brave states that are indeed doing this must be appreciated and I hope it motivates the rest to do so too."

Dr John cites the example of Maharashtra, which he says "has been relatively honest with the data right from the beginning, compared to many others". Now, more states are joining in.

In India, even in normal times, many deaths are not officially recorded. Globally two-thirds (38 million) of 56 million annual deaths are still not registered, according to the World Health

Organisation.

But the coronavirus pandemic may have set in motion a laudable trend; many governments are beginning to acknowledge that there has been a massive undercount of deaths. The science of death-counting is making headlines and the critical need for strong and developed death registries is a talking point.

Dr Hemant Shewade, a medical doctor specialising in community medicine and operational research, points to the uneven quality of even routine surveillance of deaths in the country. "The coverage of routine death surveillance (proportion of deaths registered along with medical certification of cause of death) is as high as 100 per cent in Goa and as low as 2.5 per cent in Jharkhand. One did not really expect 100 per cent accuracy in Covid-19 death reporting. We cannot improve routine death surveillance overnight. But in the time of the pandemic, the problem rose because the undercounting of deaths was way too high," he told me.

What is really unacceptable, says Dr Shewade, "is singling out certain states for contributing higher proportion of reported Covid-19 deaths. This creates an environment that encourages poor Covid-19 death reporting."

Why is accurate Covid 19 data so important?

Because poor data makes for poor planning. "The administration, as well as the public, become lax as the true picture is not presented. Then it takes a wave as large as the second wave to wake us up. By then any action is too little too late," says Dr Shewade.

What should be done? Public health experts

who have been tracking the Covid 19 numbers stress the importance of making an honest attempt to not "show less numbers" by reporting all Covid-19 deaths, captured by routine death surveillance. "Accepting that under-reporting is an inescapable reality in India, we need regular local estimates of under-reporting to guide us regarding the true estimate of mortality," says Dr Shewade. "This can be done through post-mortem surveillance of all Covid-19 deaths in sentinel sites. Every district should have one sentinel site (local data for local action). This should be explored. This is important because in a country like India it takes time for data on excess deaths to come out."

Alongside inaccurate data, there is the problem of inadequate data. Together, they create a fertile ground for the spread of misinformation which severely hampers the battle against Covid-19. Many public health experts say the Centre must proactively and regularly publish reliable all-cause mortality data in regular intervals at the national level so that studies using incomplete and unreliable data to measure the true extent of deaths become redundant.

Telling the truth may seem politically risky, but it's the only way out. Bad data causes reputational damage. India has already suffered heavily with its official Covid-19 data being widely questioned and public trust being dented. It's true that the Indian Council of Medical Research has issued a "Guidance for appropriate recording of Covid-19 related deaths in India", as the Centre likes to stress.

However, there are gaps. As Dr Rijo John tweeted last week: "Do you have data to show which states adhere to these guidelines & which do not? What actions have you taken against those who didn't?"

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com

LETTERS

ELECTION MANIA

A fiercely democratic nation we found franchise dearer than even life, as we voted through many elections for assemblies, city councils and panchayats, with complete disdain for a raging pandemic. The next set of elections are due in a few months. Not surprisingly, we seem far less concerned with prices of edible oil, pulses and fuel having shot up to new highs but a lot more on following pre-election partyhopping snippets. Not to be left behind, parties are busy shepherding their MLAs with no thoughts to the disastrously high unemployment rate or reclaiming a slipping economy. The media is helping them.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

IT'S RONALDO AGAIN

PORTUGAL'S ACE footballer, Cristiano Ronaldo, showed his class and goal-scoring ability yet again by striking a brace and leading his country to an impressive 3-0 win over Hungary in the Euro 2020 opener at the Puskas Arena in Budapest. The Juventus striker had now scored 11 goals in the tournament, surpassing the Euro record of nine set by French Great Michel Platini in 1984, when he led France to glory. Ronaldo, the first player to appear at five different Euros, is also just three goals shy of matching Iranian legend Ali Daei's all-time international scoring record of 109. Way to go!

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

LESSON UNLEARNT

WEST BENGAL chief minister Mamata Banerjee has very rightly extended the lockdown in her state, including suspension of local trains and Metro services, upto July 1. It's a step in the right direction to combat the scourge of Covid. She may have taken a lesson from her counterpart in Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, who, by relaxing restrictions far too soon, invited a huge and indiscriminate rush to public spaces. As a result, doctors are fearing yet another Covid explosion in Delhi for which the citizens themselves have to be blamed. There is no point in faulting the government for these avoidable indiscretions.

Bhaskar Roy
New Delhi

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

Mahir Ali



Bye bye Bibi: Netanyahu's exit may not spell change

Among the various heads of state and government who have seemed like permanent fixtures on the international political landscape in the past decade or so, no one's perch has looked as precarious as that of Benjamin Netanyahu. There's a degree of irony in the fact that Israel's longest-serving prime minister apparently ran out of steam midway through the presidential term of the most fervent White House admirer he could conceivably have attracted.

It's all relative, of course. Ever since its inception, Israel has never not had an ally in the White House, and occasional tensions have scarcely dampened US enthusiasm for — let alone hindered its munificence towards — what was identified early on as an invaluable satellite in a region once deemed broadly hostile to US interests.

The Obama administration, for instance, set a record in generosity, notwithstanding the toxic personal chemistry between Bibi and Barack. By then, it hardly looked like a case of

the tail wagging the dog. The transformation may not have been sudden, but Netanyahu had few qualms about treating America as the tail.

He was happy to do most of the barking until another top dog chimed in, determined, as the leader of the pack, to be louder than anyone else. And loyalty tagging along behind Donald was Jared Kushner. Even Trump and Kushner apparently balked, however, when Netanyahu talked about fulfilling his dream of annexing much of the occupied West Bank. Had the US flashed the green light, enabling him to pursue this project, Netanyahu would probably still be Prime Minister, and Israel would almost certainly be embroiled in a military campaign far more vicious than its most recent assault on the Gaza Strip.

The latter did not suffice to keep him in power — not least because a substantial proportion of Israelis are under the impression that he chickened out. Unable to pull together a coalition after Israel's fourth election in two years, Netanyahu predictably

ran against the alternative regime that was taking shape.

In the past couple of weeks he has ludicrously labelled his opponents as dangerous and far left. The new Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, is an extremist all right, but on the other end of the ideological spectrum. He has served Netanyahu as chief of staff and in various ministerial capacities, and throughout his political career has been described as even more right wing than his former master.

In the past he has not only enthusiastically hailed the idea of West Bank annexation but also proudly boasted about seeing "no problem" having "killed lots of Arabs in my life". Now, as a Prime Minister at the head of a disparate — and desperate — eight-party coalition, whose Yamina party boasts only six seats in the 120-member Knesset, he has indicated that there will be no movement on the Palestinian front. The idea that the status quo can indefinitely be maintained while the state-sponsored settlers (whom Bennett has been proud to represent)

keep gnawing away at what's left of the diminishing Palestinian territories is one of Netanyahu's proudest achievements. There's no need to bother with a deal, not even with an eagerly compliant Palestinian "authority" in place under Mahmoud Abbas, who put off his elections to ward off the likelihood of another triumph for Hamas.

That likelihood has only increased in recent months, but yet another Israeli election before the end of the year cannot be written off. After all, the Bennett-led coalition has the bare minimum parliamentary support necessary, and Netanyahu as Opposition leader will no doubt continue trying to topple his rivals. The 'Bye bye Bibi' placards displayed by jubilant demonstrators after his comeback may prove to have been premature. Does any of this matter very much? Not for the Palestinians. Sure, there is an Arab Islamist party on the fringes of the Bennett coalition, playing pretty much the sort of collaborationist role that the odd relatively unrepresentative black organisation did under South African

apartheid. It also includes the Meretz and Labour parties, which remain wedded, at least formally, to the fantasy of a two-state solution.

What's far more important is that the political centre has shifted sharply to the right — Netanyahu deserves some of the credit for that, but the narrowing of the political spectrum from the centre right to the far right is by no means an exclusively Israeli phenomenon. Hardly anywhere, though, is the political system more fractured: what once were factions have evolved into a plethora of parties, and one-party majorities are now a thing of the past.

Netanyahu has hitherto thrived on this dysfunction, but whether he can exploit it much longer remains to be seen. The criminal justice system may catch up with him. One thing that won't change, however, is what Joe Biden reiterated last week: "Israel has no better friend than the United States." Which in effect means nothing will really change.

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

EXTEND BREXIT SAUSAGE WAR DEADLINE: UK

London, June 16: Britain has asked the EU to extend a grace period for some post-Brexit trade rules in Northern Ireland, Brexit minister David Frost said Wednesday, as a sausage-centred dispute between London and Brussels sizzles on. Frost confirmed the UK has asked the bloc to delay an end-of-month deadline to implement a new trading regime around chilled meats in the British province, which could see Northern Irish imports of products like sausages banned.

"We have asked and suggested to the EU that the right way forward would be to agree to extend the grace period, at least for a bit," Frost told a British parliamentary scrutiny panel.

RECORD-BUSTING HEAT SPREADS ACROSS S-W U.S.

Phoenix (US), June 16: Dangerous, record-busting heat spread across the US Southwest on Tuesday and into parts of Utah, Montana and Wyoming as a dome of high pressure hovered over a large swath of the region, pushing temperatures into the triple digits this week and intensifying the risk for wildfires amid a long-running drought.

Some of the highest temperatures were seen in bone-dry Arizona, where the National Weather Service forecast a record high of 117 degrees (47 degrees Celsius) in Phoenix. The previous high for the date was 115 degrees (46 Celsius), set in 1974. "It is kind of early to see temperatures this high, that's for sure," said Marvin Percha, senior forecaster at the weather service's Phoenix office.

THINNER KIM LEADS TO HEALTH SPECULATION

Seoul, June 16: The health of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has long been a source of morbid fascination in rival South Korea, which sits in the shadow of Kim's 1.2-million-strong army and his growing arsenal of nuclear-armed missiles.

Has he gained even more weight? Is he struggling for breath after relatively short walks? What about that cane? Why did he miss that important state anniversary? Now, the 37-year-old faces fresh speculation in the South about his health again. But this time, it's because he's noticeably slimmer. Kim's health matters in Seoul, Washington, Tokyo and other world capitals because he hasn't publicly anointed a successor who would control an advancing nuclear programme targeting the United States and its allies.

2 CANDIDATES PULL OUT OF IRAN PREZ RACE

Tehran, June 16: Two days before Iran's presidential election, which is expected to be won by an ultraconservative cleric, two of the seven men vying for the post pulled out of the race on Wednesday.

Conservative lawmaker Alireza Zakani withdrew hours after reformist Mohsen Mehralizadeh had also thrown in the towel ahead of Friday's vote, Iranian media reported.

That leaves five hopefuls in the race, in which ultraconservative judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, 60, is seen as the clear favourite after other prominent politicians were barred from running. Zakani, 55, was quoted as saying of Raisi to a state television reporter: "I believe him to be qualified and will vote for him, and I hope that fundamental reforms take place in the country."

PIO NOMINATED CONNECTICUT FEDERAL JUDGE

Washington, June 16: US President Joe Biden has nominated Indian-American civil rights attorney Sarala Vidya Nagala as a federal judge in the State of Connecticut.

If confirmed by the Senate, federal prosecutor Nagala would become the first judge of South Asian descent to serve on the District Court for the District of Connecticut.

Nagala is currently serving as the Deputy Chief of the Major Crimes Unit in the US Attorney's Office in the District of Connecticut, a role she has held since 2017.

She joined the US Attorney's Office in 2012 and has served in a number of leadership roles, including as Hate Crimes Coordinator.

Previously, Nagala was an associate at Munger, Tolles, & Olson in San Francisco, California from 2009 to 2012.

AUSTRALIA COURT REJECTS FOREIGN INTERFERENCE LAW CHALLENGE

Canberra, June 16: Australia's highest court on Wednesday rejected a challenge to foreign interference laws in a case that involved a US conservative political organisation and free speech arguments.

China has condemned the laws introduced in 2018 that are widely seen as a means of preventing covert Chinese interference in Australian politics, universities and other institutions.

People working on behalf of a foreign powers have to be publicly registered with the Attorney-General's Department in the interests of transparency. But LibertyWorks Inc, an Australian libertarian think tank, objected to having to register while working on communications for the American Conservative Union ahead of conferences held in Australia. LibertyWorks promotes the American group's annual political conferences.

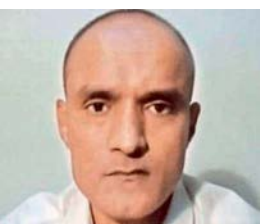
LibertyWorks argued the so-called Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act was not valid because it burdened the implied right to free speech in Australia.

LibertyWorks said the registration process was onerous and therefore deterred political communication. But six of the seven High Court judges found the law was valid and any burden was justified.

Even when the purpose of the foreign interference is not to damage or destabilise Australia, if left undisclosed it can impede the ability of decision-makers in Australia, Justices Susan Kiefel, Patrick Keane and Jacqueline Gleeson wrote. Attorney-General Michaelia Cash welcomed the ruling.

Foreign influence activities, when conducted in an open and transparent manner, can contribute positively to public debate and are welcome in Australia, her office said in a statement.

The scheme is not there to prohibit people or entities from undertaking these activities. Rather, it acknowledges that it is in the public interest that these arrangements are transparent, the statement added. LibertyWorks president Andrew Cooper could not be immediately contacted for comment. — AP



Kulbhushan Jadhav

JADHAV'S CASE ADJOURNED TILL OCTOBER 5

Islamabad, June 16: A Pakistani court has adjourned till October 5 the hearing of a government's plea to appoint a counsel for Indian death-row prisoner Kulbhushan Jadhav on request of the country's top law officer, according to a media report.

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.

India approached the International Court of Justice against Pakistan for denial of consular access to Jadhav and challenging the death sentence.

The Hague-based ICJ ruled in July 2019 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. On Tuesday, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) adjourned the hearing of the government's plea to appoint counsel for Jadhav till October 5 at the request of the Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Khalid Javed Khan. The Express Tribune reported. — PTI

Putin says summit 'constructive'

Despite worst US-Russia tensions in recent years, both Presidents struck positive notes

Authorities shove off journalists

Geneva, June 16: A first summit between US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart was "constructive", Vladimir Putin said Wednesday after the talks in Geneva ended. "The conversation was absolutely constructive", Putin told reporters, adding that the sides had agreed for their ambassadors to return in a small gesture of healing in their strained relations.

The ambassadors "will return to their place of work. When exactly is a purely technical question," Putin told reporters after the summit, which lasted about three and a half hours. Diplomatic relations between Moscow and Washington had all but broken down since Biden took office in January. After Biden likened Putin to a "killer", Russia in March took the rare step of recalling its ambassador Anatoly Antonov. The US envoy, John Sullivan, likewise returned to Washington.

Despite tensions, the summit at an elegant villa on the shore of Lake Geneva got off to a good start, with the two leaders shaking hands and striking cautiously positive notes. Biden, who was set to hold a separate press conference later, pressed Putin to replace the combustible US-Russian stand-off with a more "predictable" relationship between "two

great powers" capable of agreeing to disagree. He stressed his desire to take US-Russian relations off their increasingly unstable trajectory, in which Washington accuses the Kremlin of everything from meddling in elections to cyberwarfare.

"It's always better to meet face to face," he told Putin as they met in the villa's library, with a globe placed between them.

"We are trying to determine where we have a mutual interest, where we can cooperate; and where we don't, establish a predictable and rational way in which we disagree -- two great powers," Biden said.

Putin noted at the start of the meeting that "a lot of issues" need addressing "at the highest level" and that he hoped the meeting would be "productive". — AP

journalists for what's normally a few minutes of news media filming and shouting questions before talks start.

On Wednesday, however, Russian and United States security forces and officials initially blocked journalists as they tried to enter the site for the scheduled press meeting.

The scene then devolved into minutes of chaos inside the meeting room.

American journalists described Russian security and news media grabbing them by the arms and clothes to try to hold them back.

United States journalists tried to shoulder their way in, and a US reporter

was knocked to the ground.

Before the scene calmed, some in the crowd shouted they were being crushed in the melee.

Biden and Putin initially sat awkwardly in front of the press, but then watched and at times laughed at the tumult. — AP

Masks requirements vary in Geneva, say authorities

Geneva, June 16: The acting chief of protocol for the Geneva region says staff members at the villa where United States President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin are meeting will keep masks on during the summit even if the two leaders don't.

Geneva authorities require the wearing of masks in public, though there are exceptions. The requirement holds particularly in places with a lot of pedestrian traffic, such as shopping areas.

Marion Bordier Bueschi, who is managing the grand lakeside mansion that will serve as the summit site, told *The Associated Press* that staffers inside Villa La Grange were already wearing masks.

She said Putin and Biden would likely not wear masks during their talks on Wednesday. She noted that both leaders have been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Confirmed cases and deaths from Covid-19 have dropped across Switzerland, and authorities are planning steps to ease the mask requirement later this month.

Biden and his aides have made clear that he will not follow in the footsteps of his recent predecessors by aiming to radically alter the United States' ties to Russia. Instead, the White House is looking to move toward a more predictable relationship and attempt to rein in Russia's disruptive behaviour.

Biden will push Putin on Wednesday to stop meddling in democratic elections, to ease tensions with Ukraine and to stop giving safe harbour to hackers carrying out cyber and ransomware attacks. — AP

RUSSIA, U.S. TO HOLD TALKS ON CYBERSECURITY

Geneva, June 16: Russian President Vladimir Putin says that he and US President Joe Biden have agreed that their two nations will start consultations on cybersecurity.

After a meeting with Biden in Geneva, Putin said: "We believe that cybersecurity is important for the world in general, for the US in particular, and for Russia as well." The Russian president said that the two countries "just need to abandon various insinuations, sit down at the expert level and start working in the interests of the US and Russia."

Putin charged that "most of the cyberattacks in the world are carried out from the cyber realm of the United States," with Canada and Britain coming second and third.

However, the most damaging cyberattacks on record have been attributed by the United States and the European Union to Russia's GRU military intelligence agency, including the NotPetya virus. — AP

Sun, sea and sand



People enjoy the sunshine on Brighton beach, south east England, on Wednesday.

— AP

Israeli airstrikes target Gaza sites

Jerusalem, June 16: Israeli aircraft carried out a series of airstrikes at militant sites in the Gaza Strip early Wednesday, the first such raids since a shaky cease-fire ended the war with Hamas last month.

The airstrikes targeted facilities used by Hamas militants for meetings to plan attacks, the Israeli military said, blaming the group for any act of violence emanating from Gaza.

There were no immediate reports of casualties. On Tuesday, hundreds of Israeli ultranationalists, some chanting "Death to Arabs," paraded in east Jerusalem in a show of force that threatened to spark renewed violence.

Palestinians in Gaza responded by launching incendiary balloons that caused at least 10 fires in southern Israel.

The march posed a test for Israel's fragile new government as well as the tenuous truce that ended last month's 11-day war between Israel and Hamas. Palestinians consider the march, meant to celebrate Israel's capture of east Jerusalem in 1967, to be a provocation.

Hamas called on Palestinians to "resist" the parade, a version of which helped ignite last month's 11-day Gaza war. With music blaring, hundreds of Jewish nationalists gathered and moved in front of Damascus Gate. — AP

FATF to give Pak report next week

Islamabad, June 16: The global watchdog for money laundering and terror financing has prepared a preliminary report on Pakistan's progress on the implementation of the 27-point action plan and will present it at FATF's next plenary meeting from June 21, according to a media report.

The report has been prepared by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) International Cooperation Review Group (ICRG), which includes the US, the UK, France, China and India.

Currently placed on the FATF's 'grey list', Pakistan has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations by the global watchdog, a measure that officials

here fear could further hurt its economy.

The *Express Tribune* quoted sources in the Ministry of Finance as saying that Pakistan's progress was reviewed at a virtual meeting of the ICRG by international observers on Tuesday. According to the sources, Pakistan has implemented 26 of the 27-point FATF action plan.

"There is partial progress on the point of conviction. Relevant laws have been amended. Therefore, it is hoped that there will be good news for Pakistan at the FATF's Plenary Session starting from June 21 to 25," the report said.

Sources said that in view of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan is likely to remain on the grey list as it would require two to three more months to implement the remaining one

Russia orders mandatory vaccinations over case surge

Moscow, June 16: The mayor of Moscow on Wednesday ordered mandatory vaccinations for residents of the Russian capital working in the service industry, citing a "dramatic" rise in Coronavirus infections.

The announcement by Sergei Sobyannin — one of the first compulsory vaccination orders for a major world city — was a stark admission from a senior Russian official that authorities are struggling to bring the pandemic under control.

Russia lifted most restrictions last year, and the country has pressed ahead with large in-person events, like a recent economic forum in Saint Petersburg and Euro 2020 hosting duties.

President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly signalled Russia was moving be-

Two vax for kids show promise

New York, June 16: The Moderna Covid-19 vaccine and an experimental protein-based preventive proved to be safe and showed good antibody response against SARS-CoV-2 in a trial on baby rhesus macaques, scientists say.

The research, published on Tuesday in the journal *Science Immunology*, suggests that vaccines for young children are likely important, safe tools to

curtail the pandemic.

"Safe and effective vaccines for young children will help limit the spread of Covid-19 because we know children can transmit the virus to others, whether they get sick from SARS-CoV-2 infection or remain asymptomatic," said Sallie Permar from New York-Presbyterian Komansky Children's Hospital, US. — PTI

yond the Coronavirus and claimed his country — which has the sixth-highest caseload globally —

handled the global outbreak better than most others. — AFP

REGENERON THERAPY SAVES LIVES: STUDY

London, June 16: A new, experimental anti-viral treatment used for some worst-affected Covid-19 patients has been found to save lives, according to the results of a UK trial on Wednesday.

In the ongoing Randomised Evaluation of Covid-19 Therapy (RECOVERY) trial, Regeneron Pharmaceuticals' combination of drugs was found to benefit patients with severe symptoms of the virus. It not only cut down the numbers requiring a ventilator but also reduced the duration of their hospital stay. — PTI

The Yuan dynasty existed in what is now China in 13th, 14th centuries

Centuries-old shipwrecks found off Singapore

Singapore, June 16: Two centuries-old shipwrecks packed with ceramics and other artefacts have been found off Singapore in a rare discovery that will shed light on the city-state's maritime heritage, archaeologists said Wednesday. The prosperous island nation has long been a key trading hub on global shipping routes connecting the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

The wrecks were found off Pedra Branca, a rocky outcrop east of Singapore, according to the National Heritage Board and think tank the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, which worked together on the project.

The first wreck, discovered after divers accidentally came across ceramic plates in 2015, was carrying Chinese ceramics that possibly date back to the 14th century, when Singapore

was known as Temasek.

Some of the items were similar to artefacts found in archaeological digs on land, which showed that Singapore was a trading hub well before the arrival of British colonisers in 1819. Undersea excavations on the first wreck led to the discovery of the second, which is likely to be the Shah Munchah, a merchant vessel built in India that sank in 1796 while sailing from China to India.

Items recovered from the second wreck ranged from Chinese ceramics to glass and agate objects, as well as anchors and cannons, the heritage board and think tank said. The survey and recovery of artefacts from the two wrecks was completed this year.

Such cannons were typically mounted on merchant ships used by the East India Company — the

trading behemoth through which the British empire expanded in Asia — in the 18th and 19th centuries, they added.

The vessel discovered in 2015 was the first ancient shipwreck to be found in Singapore's waters.

It was carrying "more Yuan dynasty blue-and-white porcelain than any other documented shipwreck in the world," said Michael Flecker, a visiting

fellow at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute's archaeology unit.

"Many of the pieces are rare, and one is believed to be unique."

The Yuan dynasty existed in what is now China in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Much of the Chinese cargo in the second wreck was destined for eventual shipping to Britain, said Flecker. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,501.98	-0.51
Nifty 50	15,767.50	-0.64
S&P 500*	4,234.42	-0.29
Dollar (₹)	73.30	0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.48	-0.28
Euro (₹)	88.90	0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,814▼48	0.10
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	74.32	0.45
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.045	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.485	-0.014

* As of 8:30 PM IST

MF SIP asset base touches ₹4.67L cr in May

Assets under the systematic investment plan (SIP) touched an all-time high of Rs 4.67 lakh crore in May. Over the past five years, assets under management (AUM) of SIPs has grown 30 per cent annually, twice as fast as the growth in the overall mutual fund industry's AUM. According to Amfi data, SIP AUMs have seen a close to four-fold jump to Rs 4,67,366 crore as of May this year from Rs 1,25,394 crore as of August 2016.

Subsidies hiked for DAP, other fertilisers



The Union Cabinet raised the subsidies for DAP and some other non-urea fertilisers by Rs 14,775 crore to keep the prices low for farmers. After urea, di-ammonium phosphate is the most widely used fertiliser. Minister of state for chemicals and fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya "Farmers will continue to get DAP at the old rate of Rs 1,200 per bag." He said the subsidy for DAP has been raised to Rs 1,200 per bag from Rs 500.

Cost Inflation Index for LTCG notified

The income tax department has notified the Cost Inflation Index (CII) for the current fiscal beginning April 2021 for calculating long-term capital gains arising from sale of immovable property, securities and jewellery. The CII is used by taxpayer to compute gains arising out of sale of capital assets after adjusting for inflation. "The Cost Inflation Index for FY 2021-22 relevant to AY 2022-23 & subsequent years is 317.2," the CBDT said.

Video recordings must for stages of NH projects

The NHAI said it has made mandatory the use of drones for monthly video recording of national highway projects during all stages of development, construction, operation and maintenance. It said contractors and concessionaires shall carry out the drone video recording in the presence of team leader of the supervision consultant and upload comparative project videos on NHAI's portal 'Data Lake.'

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■ Three firms hit daily limit for the third day Adani stocks tumble more

NUPUR ACHARYA CHENNAI, JUNE 16

The slump in shares of companies controlled by Indian billionaire Gautam Adani deepened on Wednesday with three of them tumbling by the daily limit for a third straight day. Adani Total Gas Ltd, Adani Power Ltd and Adani Transmission Ltd hit the lower circuit after dropping 5 per cent each even as the group denied a local report on Monday that said accounts of three Mauritius-based funds that own the group's stocks were frozen. Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone tumbled 7.17 per cent and flagship Adani Enterprises tanked 5.77 per cent on the BSE. Adani Green Energy declined 3.10 per cent.

The dramatic rout marks a halt to the dizzying rally in shares of some of the Adani Group of Companies that had added almost \$40 billion to the billionaire's wealth this year through Friday that made him the second-richest person in Asia. His net worth, based on Tuesday's closing share prices, is \$71.5 billion.

The conglomerate refuted the reports that said National Securities Depository Ltd froze the accounts of Albulia Investment Fund, Cresta Fund and APMS Investment Fund. It called the report "blatantly erroneous" and followed up with another statement on

INVESTORS FRET OVER LITTLE-KNOWN FUNDS

NUPUR ACHARYA & P. R. SANJAI MUMBAI, JUNE 16

Confusion over three Mauritius-based funds that whipsawed shares of Adani Group companies this week has underscored a deeper risk for investors in such stocks owned by opaque entities. "It is important for investors and the regulator to be aware of the ownership in listed companies, especially when they originate from tax havens like Mauritius," said Hemindra Hazari, an independent research analyst in Mumbai. "The names of the funds are not very well known in the capital market and they have high concentration into a select number of stocks, which in itself is unusual."

Even as a massive share rally in the companies of the conglomerate has this year more than doubled the net worth of Adani to

\$73 billion, this week's events have pointed to a deeper pain point: opacity around the group and its key non-founder shareholders. There's also scant analyst coverage for Adani companies, highlighting the information lacunae could be a chronic issue.

"It is extremely crucial for the Adani Group to disclose relevant details regarding ultimate beneficial ownership of foreign portfolio investors," said Zulfikar Memon, managing partner of Mumbai-based law firm MZM Legal LLP.

Some of the group's listed stocks have soared more than six-fold in value since the start of 2020 on bets Adani's push into infrastructure will pay off as the economy revives. Adding to the tailwind was MSCI Inc including three more Adani stocks to its India benchmark index, taking the total to five.—Bloomberg

Tuesday citing communication from the national depository that the three funds' demat accounts are "suspended for debit."

The funds, registered at the same address in Port Louis, own more than Rs 43,500 crore (\$6 billion) in four Adani group firms, the report had said.

Dollar bonds issued by Adani group firms have pared some of the losses from earlier this week. Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone's dollar bond due 2031 fell by a record 3.3 cents on the dollar on Monday to 94.1 cents and is now trading at 95.4 cents. —Bloomberg

Most new loans are unsecured credit

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Unsecured credit has grown faster than secured products between 2017 and 2020. This could be a cause of worry for lenders in the aftermath of moratoriums.

Increasing consumerism and entry of large number of non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) in the segment have increased the share of unsecured credit among newly sanctioned loans to 85 per cent in 2020-21 till end February. Overall, the share of unsecured credit in the loan book increased from 15 per cent in March 2017 to 24 per cent as of February 2021. During the first wave of the pandemic, the share went up from 22 per cent to 24 per cent, as per a report by Experian India and Invest India.

In terms of number of loans, the unsecured category has increased its share to 71 per cent by February 2021 from 62 per cent in March 2017, indicating that consumers are looking to fund small purchases, including con-

sumer durables and holidays through credit, and the lending institutions have increased confidence in their borrowers' ability to repay and are thus willing to take more risk.

Unsecured products have seen an increase in loan book at a CAGR of 38 per cent compared to secured products that grew at a CAGR of 17 per cent over 2017-2020. An unsecured loan is supported only by the borrower's creditworthiness, rather than by any collateral, such as property or other assets.

Rising share of unsecured loans is a cause of worry, especially during the pandemic-induced financial crisis.

According to Icrs, the delinquencies for the retail loan pools that had seen a gradual reduction in Q4 FY2021 are now again expected to reach elevated levels.

Emkay Global Financial Services says, "Given the two rounds of moratoriums, we believe that the visibility of the asset quality pain in NBFCs had largely remain suppressed until Q2FY21."

SHYAM METALICS IPO SUBSCRIBED 121 TIMES, SONA 2.33 TIMES

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JUNE 16

Integrated metals manufacturer Shyam Metals and Energy's Rs 909 crore initial public offering received huge subscription demand as it got subscribed 121.40 times shares offered in the public issue. But another issue that closed on Wednesday, that of Sona Comstar, got subscribed by a modest 2.33 times.

In the Shyam Metals public offer, priced in the band of Rs 303 to Rs 306 per share, the portion reserved for retail investors was subscribed 11.64 times. The qualified institutional buyer category was subscribed 155.71 times, the non-institutional investor category was subscribed 339.98 times.

Shyam Metals received over 21.13 lakh applications across investor categories as per last update made available by sources close to the merchant bankers.

Automotive technology company Sona BLW Precision Forgings (Sona Comstar) Rs 5,250 crore IPO was subscribed 2.33 as per last update from the stock exchanges.

The portion reserved for retail investors was subscribed 1.61 times.

The qualified institutional buyer category was subscribed 3.54 times, the non-institutional investor category was subscribed 0.40 times as per the last update made available by sources close to the merchant bankers.

Sona Comstar received over 4.46 lakh applications as per the last update.

Cooking oil prices start softening

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 16

After more than doubling in the past one year, edible oil prices have started softening in the last one month. "Edible oil prices in India are showing a declining trend across a wide array of oils. As per data from the Department of Consumer Affairs, over the past month, the prices of edible oils are now coming down," an official statement said on Wednesday.

Palm oil prices have dropped 19 per cent from Rs 142 per kg on May 7 to Rs 115 per kg, sunflower oil prices dropped 16 per cent to 157 per kg, price of soy oil has come down from Rs 162 per kg to Rs 138 per kg in the past few weeks. Mustard oil was down 10 per cent, groundnut oil 8 per cent and vanaspati 8 per cent at Rs



157, Rs 174 and Rs 141 per kg, respectively.

"Expectations of a production recovery in Malaysia and Indonesia amid slowing demand have pulled down the prices. Due to the second wave, exports of edible oils were affected in these countries. In the case of soy oil, the surge in the interest for renewable energy too had supported prices. However, the market now finds that the

blending requirements in the US would be reduced due to the intervention of the environmental protection agency. This has cooled down prices," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

The international price trends are directly affecting the domestic edible oil market as India imports a significant quantity of the commodity to meet its demand. As per reports, India meets 56 per cent of its domestic demand through imports. The effective rate of import duties, including agriculture infrastructure and development cess and social welfare cess, ranges from 35 per cent to 59 per cent for edible oils. This too has led to higher edible oil prices in India.

Despite the rising prices, the industry has been asking the government not to cut the import duties.

Govt plans ₹50,000-cr loan guarantee for health infra

SIDDHARTHA SINGH CHENNAI, JUNE 16

The government is considering offering as much as Rs 50,000 crore (\$6.8 billion) of credit incentives to boost health care infrastructure in the nation hit by the coronavirus pandemic, according to people familiar with the matter.

The programme will allow companies to access funds for ramping up hospital capacity or medical supplies with the government acting as a guarantor, said the people, who asked not to be identified citing rules.

A finance ministry spokesperson could not be immediately reached for comment.

The government's loan guarantees will complement the central bank's efforts last month to boost credit for health care services and provide fresh lending to vaccine-makers.

The Reserve Bank of India had then announced an on-tap liquidity window for banks worth Rs 50,000 crore to extend credit to health services and vaccine manufacturers until March 2022.

The government also last month separately included airlines and hospitals in a \$41-billion emergency credit programme to cushion them from the impact of the pandemic.

—Bloomberg

RBI: 2nd wave hits domestic demand

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JUNE 16

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has hit domestic demand. Going forward, the speed and scale of vaccination will shape the path of recovery, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its monthly bulletin for June 2021 released on Friday. It observed that while vaccines will not end the pandemic by themselves, "the country will have to learn to live with the virus, complementing vaccines with ramping up investment in healthcare, logistics and research".

"The pandemic is a real shock with real consequences. Hence, there is a need to ensure that the recovery is built on a solid foundation of business investment and productivity growth. Life- and work-style transformation such as increased remote work and online shopping may likely endure. When patterns of demand shift, some firms may face closure. Some industries may become permanently smaller. At the same time, existing



firms in industries experiencing increased demand may expand and new ones will emerge. What matters is that resources are put to their best use and that reallocation occurs smoothly and with as few costs as possible," said the central bank.

An influential view identifies three sectors with the greatest growth potential in the post-recovery decade—digital technologies; biomedical science (along with its applications in health care); and technologies that address the various challenges to sustainability, especially those pertaining to climate change, said the RBI.

Commenting on the

state of the economy, the central bank has said that while the second wave has hit domestic demand, on the brighter side, several aspects of aggregate supply conditions—agriculture and contactless services—are holding up, while industrial production and exports have surged compared to last year amidst pandemic protocols.

"Going forward, the speed and scale of vaccination will shape the path of recovery. The economy has the resilience and the fundamentals to bounce back from the pandemic and unshackle itself from pre-existing cyclical and structural hindrances. Signs of the ebbing of the second wave of the pan-

dem are cautiously becoming evident. In fact, the data suggest that the second wave is rolling back almost as fast as it rolled in."

On June 14, 2021 India's daily cases fell to a seventh of their peak of 4,14,188 a month ago (May 6). The seven-day average, which smooths out daily fluctuations, also declined by a fifth from its peak of close to 4 lakh. This is also reflected in the doubling rate, which increased to 247 days from its trough of 34 days at the end of April.

The daily positivity rate, which had peaked at 22.7 per cent in early May, plummeted to 3.3 per cent, remaining below 10 per cent for the 14th consecutive day, and dipping even lower than the first wave's peak of 11.7 per cent at end-August 2020. Recoveries outnumbered fresh cases for the 36th day, taking the total number of recoveries in India past 2.8 crore.

On the fiscal framework and quality of expenditure in India, the RBI noted that the pandemic necessitated an overwhelming fiscal response.

NPPA ASKS DRUG FIRMS TO REDUCE PRICES IN WAKE OF GST RATE CUT



New Delhi, June 16: Drug pricing regulator NPPA has asked pharmaceutical companies and medical device makers to reduce prices on products on which the GST has been lowered in order to pass on the benefit to the consumers.

In a notification, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) noted that a change in tax rates has an impact on the fixation of maximum retail prices (MRP) of various drugs and formulations.

As per DPCO 2013, MRP of drugs and formulations are inclusive of taxes. Therefore, any downward change in tax or GST rates should be reflected in the MRP and benefit of the reduction should be passed on to the consumers, it noted. —PTI

ON THE BACK BURNER

SSRC receives lukewarm staff response

RBI quietly buries specialised cadre plan

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is learnt to have quietly shelved the plan for raising a specialised supervisory and regulatory cadre (SSRC) to strengthen its supervisory wing to check bank frauds and other regulatory violations in the system.

About a year ago, the apex bank had assured the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance about the cadre, but the plan hasn't made any headway since.

After Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam, questions were raised over the RBI's supervision of scheduled commercial

banks. In response, RBI had come up with a grandiose plan of creating an SSRC. Its Central Board had, in May 2019, approved the creation of such a cadre and the RBI had announced the creation of SSRC on November 1, 2019.

The RBI has silently buried the plan and even its latest annual report has no mention of the SSRC.

The RBI spokesperson is yet to respond to a mail sent in this regard.

Explaining the reasons for shelving the SSRC, the source, however, said the scheme drew a lukewarm response for several reasons. "Merely 5 per cent of its staff opted for the SSRC. The poor response

was mainly due to apprehension among the staff regarding the HR issues like lack of mobility, promotional avenues, etc. Besides, there was no proper communication or stakeholder consultation by top management. The unions also opposed the move," the source said.

Another reason is that "traditionally, the supervisory vertical is headed by a deputy governor, who comes from a commercial bank. This leads to obvious conflict of interest. He heads the department, which is supposed to examine his own performance as managing director of the commercial bank."

"There have been several instances in the past

where serious concerns, regulatory violation and even vigilance cases had to be dropped from the (assessment) report. Further, in many cases it has led to vindictive action even to the extent of blocking the promotion of the entire supervisory team examining the particular bank," the source said.

"Incidentally RBI is one of the very few public institutions in India, which does not have a whistleblower policy or effective grievance redressal system. Also, the RBI as a regulator, must display highest standards of corporate governance for financial institutions to emulate," the source said.

SHORT TAKES

Milkha is stable & out of Covid ICU

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is “stable” and he has been shifted out of Covid ICU to another section of the PGIMER hospital, a statement from his family said on Wednesday. The 91-year-old had contracted the dreaded virus last month. “Milkha is stable and is out of the Covid ICU, but is in the Medical ICU,” a spokesperson of the Milkha family said. “Thank you for your continued prayers and good wishes,” it added. PGIMER sources said that Milkha was “fine, stable and recovering”. “He has tested Covid negative after which he was shifted out of the Covid ICU,” the sources said. The sources further said that a medical team comprising senior doctors of the institute were closely monitoring his daily health progress. — *PTI*

Japan to set 10k spectator-cap

Tokyo: Japan is planning to set a cap of 10,000 fans at sports events ahead of the Olympics, a cabinet minister said on Wednesday, as organisers weigh how many domestic spectators can attend the Games. The proposed measure would come into force after a Covid-19 state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of the country ends on June 20, and would last until the end of August, said Yasutoshi Nishimura, the minister in charge of virus measures. It would limit spectators to 50 percent of a venue's capacity or 10,000 people, whichever is smaller, he said. The plan is expected to become official later this week. — *AFP*

Federer suffers defeat in Halle

Berlin: Roger Federer suffered a setback in his preparations for Wimbledon after crashing out of the second round of the ATP grass court tournament in Halle on Wednesday. Federer, who will bid to win a ninth title at Wimbledon which starts June 28, suffered a shock 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 defeat to 20-year-old Canadian Felix Auger Aliassime, who is almost half Federer's age. “It's amazing, for sure I didn't expect this,” Auger Aliassime said after beating one of his heroes at the first attempt on the ATP tour. “I wanted to win, but Roger Federer is my idol and it was a huge honour to play him.” Federer is exactly 19 years older than Auger Aliassime as the pair share the birthday on August 8. — *AFP*

IPL Aussie stars pull out of tours

Melbourne: Seven top Australian cricketers who recently played in the IPL have pulled out of the country's white-ball tour of West Indies and Bangladesh. The two tours are part of team's preparations for the T20 World Cup later this year. David Warner, Pat Cummins, Glenn Maxwell, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Marcus Stoinis and Daniel Sams have requested not to be considered for the tours for various reasons while Steve Smith has been rested to fully recover from an elbow complaint which flared during the IPL. Cricket Australia said in a statement. — *AFP*

Virat climbs to 4th spot in rankings

Dubai: India skipper Virat Kohli climbed to the fourth spot while Australia batsman Steve Smith reclaimed the top position in the ICC Test rankings released on Wednesday. Kohli has 814 points. — *PTI*

Live on TV

EURO
Group Stage: Ukraine vs North Macedonia from 6.30 pm;
Denmark vs Belgium from 9.30 pm;
Netherlands vs Austria from 12.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

COPA AMERICA
Group Stage: Colombia vs Venezuela from 2.30 am (Friday); Brazil vs Peru from 5.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1

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Shot in the foot

Germany go down as Hummels kicks into own net

Munich, June 16: World champions France beat Germany in a blockbuster Euro 2020 clash on Tuesday.

In Munich, a 20th-minute Mats Hummels own goal proved enough for 2018 World Cup winners France to beat 2014 World Cup winners Germany in Group F.

France deserved the win, with both Kylian Mbappe and Karim Benzema having second-half goals disallowed for tight offside calls while Adrien Rabiot also hit the post for Les Bleus.

“I knew my players would be ready and they were up for the fight,” France coach Didier Deschamps said.

“It's our first match, but this is a game that could have been a semi-final or a final and to take these three points in a group like this was important.”

The win was savoured by a small band of French fans among the crowd in the Allianz Arena, which was limited to just 20 percent of capacity because of Covid-19 restrictions.

It was also enjoyed by fans back home in France who packed into bars to see their team kick off their bid to add the European crown

POGBA PLAYS DOWN RUEDIGER 'BITE'

France midfielder Paul Pogba has played down Antonio Ruediger's apparent attempted bite on his back during their win over Germany.

Immediately after the incident, Pogba cried out and complained to Spanish referee Carlos del Cerro Grande, who did not punish the German, and the Manchester United star played it down after the game.

“I think he nibbled at me a little bit, but we've known each other for a long time. It was nothing big. We hugged after the game,” Pogba said.

— *AFP*

I'VE REACHED HERE BECAUSE OF CRITICISM, SAYS RAHANE

Southampton, June 16: Ajinkya Rahane doesn't mind a bit of “criticism” but has never been too overtly bothered by what people think about his game as he goes on with his job of winning Test matches for India.

Despite his blow-hot-blow-cold form over the last few years, India's Test vice-captain with 1095 runs in 17 games is team's top scorer in the two-year World Test Championship cycle leading to the final against New Zealand.

“It feels special,” Rahane said about emerging as the top scorer. But what about

the flak that he has faced because of poor run of scores? “I'm happy to take criticism. I feel it's because of the criticism I'm here. I always want to give my best whether people criticise me or not.

“For me, it's important to give my best for my country and contribute each and every time be it as a batsman or a fielder,” Rahane said.

Having played Test cricket for more than eight years, Rahane knows that public opinion is fickle and at best left alone with focus on controllables. — *PTI*

ENVY OF WORLD

Gavaskar says India's batting depth is highly admirable

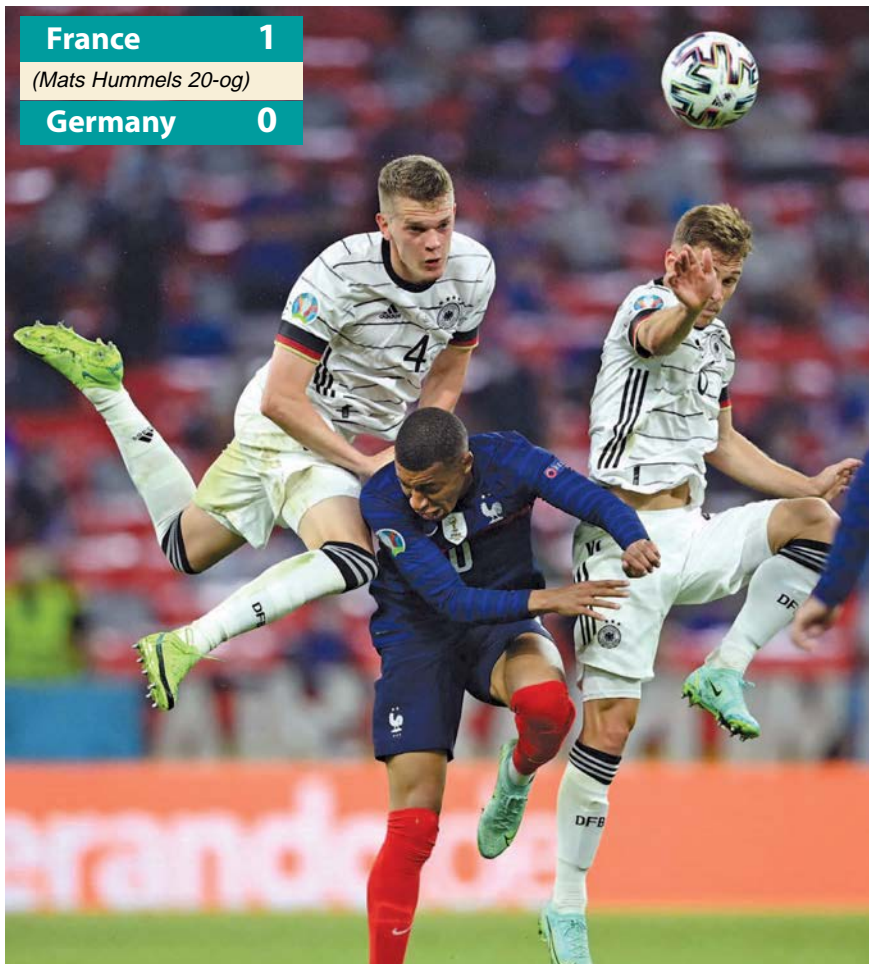
New Delhi, June 16: Former captain Sunil Gavaskar says India's batting depth helps them bounce back from tough situations, as they face an upbeat New Zealand in the World Test Championship final this week.

India have a host of batting stars in their line-up including skipper Virat Kohli, his deputy Ajinkya Rahane and dashing opener Rohit Sharma.

R. Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, both spinners who have six Test centuries between them while batting in the middle and lower-middle order, are also expected to take to the field in the title clash in Southampton starting Friday.

“With Ashwin and Jadeja playing so well, India's batting depth is the envy of the cricketing world,” Gavaskar, who is in England as a television pundit for the final said.

“Yes, there could be the odd bad-innings like Adelaide, Australia, but this team is like a won-



Germany's Matthias Ginter (left) vies for the ball with France's forward Kylian Mbappe (centre) during their Euro group match at the Allianz Arena in Munich. — *AFP*

Injury mars Russia win

St. Petersburg, June 16: A special goal by Aleksei Miranchuk allowed Russia to kickstart their Euro 2020 campaign with a 1-0 win over Finland in Saint Petersburg on Wednesday, but the game was marred by an injury to Mario Fernandes.

Miranchuk, of Serie A side Atalanta, produced a glorious finish in first-half stoppage time for the only goal of the game between the neighbours in Group B. It blows open the section after Russia,

Russia	1
(Aleksei Miranchuk 45+2)	
Finland	0

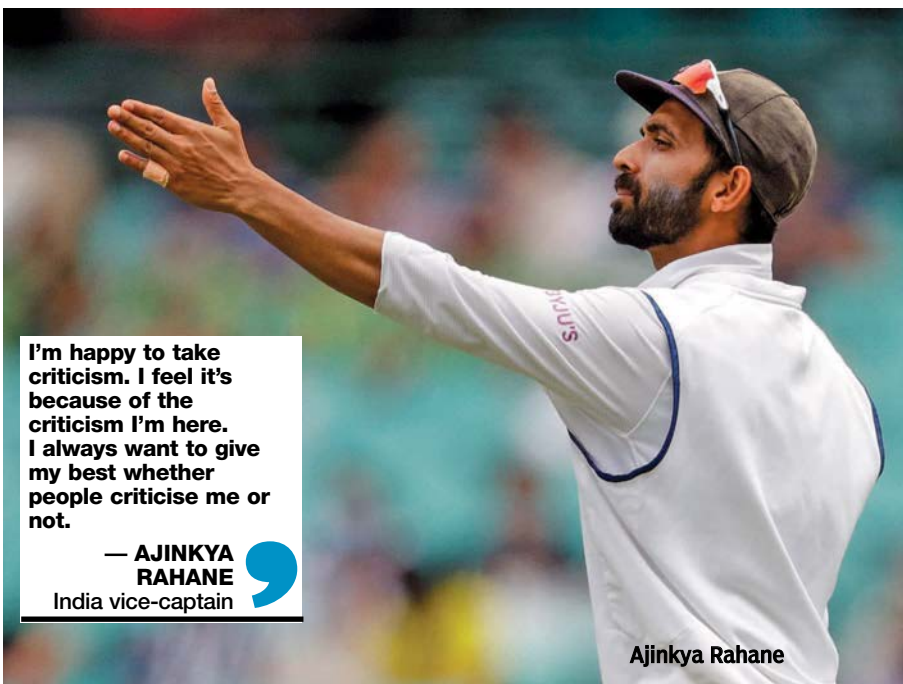
one of nine participating nations at the Euro playing matches at home, had lost 3-0 to Belgium in their opening game at the week-end.

Finland had beaten Denmark 1-0 on Saturday, a game completely overshadowed by Christian Eriksen's cardiac arrest.

Here it was Russia's Fernandes, the Brazilian-born CSKA Moscow right-back, who provided an injury scare.

The 30-year-old went up for a high ball in the Finland box in the first half and came down awkwardly, the back of his neck taking the full force of the landing. He needed to be stabilised and was stretched off before being taken to hospital.

The Russian team's Twitter feed said he was undergoing tests. — *AFP*



EMOTIONAL DENMARK TO FACE BELGIUM

Copenhagen, June 16: Denmark can take heart that Christian Eriksen is recovering and will be cheering them on along with the rest of the country as they try to salvage their Euro 2020 campaign against fancied Belgium in Copenhagen on Thursday.

Kasper Hjulmand's talented side know that their qualification from Group B will be in jeopardy if they get the same treatment that leaders Belgium dished out to Russia on Saturday, and they need to bounce back from their traumatic 1-0 defeat by Finland.

UKRAINE, MACEDONIA DESPERATE FOR WIN

Both Ukraine and North Macedonia conceded late goals in their opening matches at the Euro, and both lost because of them.

The teams will next play each other at Euro on Thursday, knowing another loss just might end their chances of advancement. “We have two more games to go and we will still play with the same energy,” said Ukraine captain Andriy Yarmolenko.

DUTCH & AUSTRIA EYE MOMENTUM

Netherlands will meet Austria in the team's second Group C match at the Johan Cruyff Arena.

Both the Dutch and the Austrians won their opening matches at Euro 2020, so both can advance with another victory.

The top two teams in each of the six groups advance to the knockout stage, along with the four best third-place teams.

— *Agencies*

Ronaldo breaks scoring record

Budapest, June 16: Cristiano Ronaldo netted a double to become the European Championship's all-time leading scorer as Portugal struck three times late on to beat a stubborn Hungary 3-0 in their Euro 2020 opener at a packed Puskas Arena on Tuesday.

The holders, who appear to have a much stronger squad than when they won their first major title five years ago, laboured for long periods in Budapest. But Raphael Guerreiro made the vital breakthrough in the 84th minute and Ronaldo slammed in a penalty shortly afterwards before tapping home in injury time.

“We didn't deserve a 3-0 defeat, with a bit of luck it could have been a point each, but it was an experience of a lifetime,” said Hungary goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi.

SURPASSES LEGEND PLATINI

Ronaldo netted his 10th and 11th goals at Euro, surpassing the previous record of nine held by France legend Michel Platini. The 36-year-old has

Portugal	3
(Raphael Guerreiro 84, Cristiano Ronaldo 87, 92)	
Hungary	0

Milestone man

■ All-time Euro top scorer with 11 goals and counting.

■ All-time top scorer for Portugal with 106 goals.

■ First player to appear in 5 Euro final tournaments.

■ First player to score at 5 consecutive Euro final tournaments.

now scored at five different European Championship finals tournaments and has 106 goals for his country in total, leaving him just three away from matching Iranian Ali Daei's all-time international scoring record of 109.

“I am really grateful to the team for helping me to score twice and be named man of the match,” Ronaldo said.

— *AFP*



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring a goal against Hungary in Euro 2020 on Wednesday. — *AFP*

CR7 snub takes fizz out of Cola

Budapest, June 16: Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo removed Coca-Cola bottles placed in front of him at a European Championships press conference here, which reportedly cost the global beverage giant a staggering \$4 billion.

A well-known fitness enthusiast, Ronaldo set aside two Coca-Cola glass bottles which lay in front of him during a press conference ahead of Portugal's opening Euro match against Hungary here on Monday.

In a video that has since gone viral, the 36-year-old Juventus striker picked up a bottle of water instead saying “Agua!” in Portuguese, seemingly urging people to choose water over aerated drinks.

According to media reports, the share price of Coca-Cola, one of the official sponsors of Euro 2020, slipped from \$56.10 to \$55.22 almost immediately after Ronaldo's gesture.

The market valuation of

Coca-Cola went from USD 242 billion to USD 238 billion, a fall of USD 4 billion.

Reacting to the incident, Coca-Cola in a statement said “everyone is entitled to their drink preferences” with different “tastes and needs”.

Ronaldo has spoken about his uneasiness with carbonated drinks earlier as well. In December last year, he had tweeted, “My son has potential, We'll see if he will become a great footballer.”

“Sometimes he drinks Coke and eats crisps and it irritates me.”

POGBA REMOVES BEER BOTTLE

On Tuesday, France midfielder Paul Pogba removed a bottle of Heineken beer that had been placed in front of him at a press conference.

Pogba, a practising Muslim, removed the bottle when he sat down to speak to the media after his side's 1-0 win over Germany.

— *PTI*

INDIA DISMISS BEAUMONT BUT ENGLAND CONSOLIDATE

Bristol, June 16: India women picked up the crucial wicket of Tammy Beaumont (66) in the second session but England women consolidated their position by reaching 162 for two at tea on the opening day of the one-off Test here on Wednesday.

After getting rid of Lauren Winfield-Hill (35) in the first session of the day, India toiled hard for most part of the post-lunch period before debutant off-spinner Sneha Rana picked up her maiden Test wicket.

She got rid of in-form of Beaumont, who was brilliantly caught by Shafali Verma at short leg. Beaumont faced 166 balls and decorated her innings with six fours en route to her second Test fifty.

Skipper Heather Knight (47 not out) batted cautiously and remained unbeaten in the company of Natalie Seiver (11 not out) as England made 76 runs off 28 overs in the second session.

Earlier, the hosts made a solid 86 for one in the opening session. The Indian pace duo of veteran Jhulan Goswami and Shikha Pandey made a promising start, doing just enough to trouble the English batswoman on more than one occasion.

— *PTI*

Brief scores: England 162/2 in 55 overs (Lauren Winfield-Hill 35, Tammy Beaumont 66, Heather Knight 47 (batting); Pooja Vastrakar 1/37, Sneha Rana 1/33) vs India.

SOUTHEE BATS FOR CHANGE OF FORMAT

Southampton, June 16: New Zealand pacer Tim Southee on Wednesday said changes can be made to the format of the World Test Championship final going ahead, instead of it being a one-off match.

“At the start of the two-year cycle, we knew that it was going to be a one-off final. Maybe it's something they can look at going forward and then potentially make changes,” Southee said.

“It was made clear two years ago at the start of the cycle, what was required to win the championship.

“It's been great to put context around the Test game, to have the two-year cycle. There have already been adjustments going forward to the next cycle. So, it'll be an evolving thing,” he added.

“It's been long time since we won the Champions Trophy in 2000. We've come very close in the last last couple,” added the premier fast bowler of New Zealand. — *PTI*

TAYLOR SAYS KOHLI & CO. HAVE SET BAR REALLY HIGH

Southampton, June 16: Senior New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor has said India have set the bar really high and considering their bench strength, it will be an extremely tough battle for his team during the World Test Championship final beginning June 18. “You go through the Indian line-up, all world-class players all through and whatever side they do decide to go with, they will leave out some world-class players as well. We know whatever XI we face will be very tough,” Taylor said.

“India have been a world no.1 side and they have kept the bar really high for a long period of time, everyone in the world had to catch up to and I don't see any difference, yes we had a couple of Tests here but playing India in home, away or neutral venue will be a tough opposition,” he said. — *PTI*

derful rubber ball, always bouncing back and keep on bouncing.”

India crashed to a record low of 36 all out in the first Test in Australia last year before bouncing back to win the four-match series 2-1 in a dramatic final in Brisbane in January.

New Zealand, led by the world's top Test batsman Kane Williamson, head

into the final with a recent 1-0 win over hosts England in a two-match series.

Gavaskar said once perennial underdogs New Zealand now have quality players in their team that have settled well in English conditions.

“New Zealand have invariably flown under the radar and thus underestimated by the opposi-

tion,” said Gavaskar.

“They have one of the greatest batsmen in the world in their team as well as a pace bowler who will be among the greatest left arm pacers too. They will be high on confidence after the win over England.”

India last played in March and are coming out of a stint in quarantine but Gavaskar believes the team would be hungry to perform.

“In terms of match practise, yes, the Indians may feel a bit under-cooked but they will be hungry to get into action,” said Gavaskar.

“And will have the drive and energy since they haven't played competi-