



A.P. Governor
Harichandan clears
capital, CRDA repeal Bills
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Surplus rain likely
in second half of
monsoon, says IMD
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Hong Kong leader Carrie
Lam postpones elections
by a year, citing COVID-19
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NEARBY



L-G Baijal rejects govt's
proposal to open hotels

NEW DELHI
Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal on Friday rejected the Delhi government's proposal to allow hotels and weekly markets to open as part of Unlock 3, resulting in another confrontation between the two sides in as many days.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

Let CBI take up Sushant
case: Bihar Deputy CM

PATNA
Political parties in Bihar have been unanimous in demanding a CBI probe into the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi alleged on Friday that Mumbai Police was not cooperating with Bihar in its investigation and so the CBI should take over the case.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

THE HINDU
greets its readers
on the occasion of
ID-UL-AZHA

Core sector output shrinks 15% in June, fertilizers buck trend

Economists say negative trend will continue for at least two more months

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The output of eight core sector industries shrank for the fourth straight month in June 2020, although the contraction eased to 15%, showing some recovery from the 22% fall in May, according to data released by the Commerce Ministry on Friday. Economists expect the negative trend to continue for at least two more months.

During April-June 2020-21, the sector's output dipped by 24.6% as compared to a positive growth of 3.4% in the same period previous year.

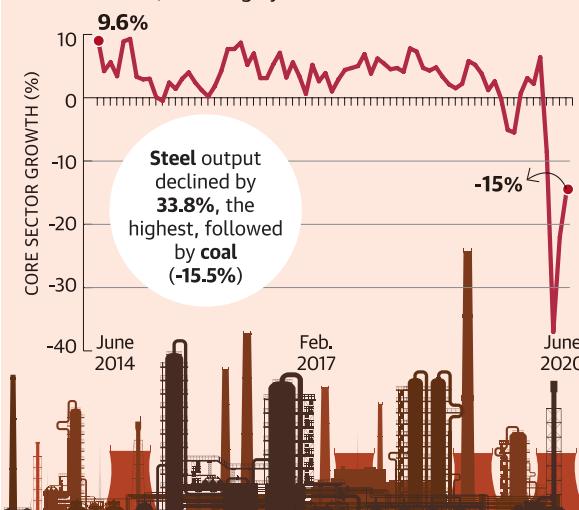
Monsoon boost

Of the eight core sectors, the fertilizer industry was the only one which saw actual growth in June, with output rising 4.2% in comparison to June 2019. This, however, is lower than the May 2020 growth of 7.5%, but reflects the positive outlook in the agriculture sector where a normal monsoon is leading to expectations of a bumper kharif crop.

The remaining industries showed contraction, with the steel sector continuing to remain the worst performer, with a 33% drop in production in comparison to the previous year. Cement production fell almost 7%, albeit

In negative zone

The output of the eight core sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilizers, steel, cement and electricity — contracted for the fourth consecutive month in June, declining by 15%



an improvement from the 22% contraction seen in May.

The energy sectors also showed negative growth, with coal production falling 15.5% and crude oil and natural gas production dropping 6% and 12% respectively.

Refinery squeeze

Petroleum refinery production, which carries the greatest weight in the core sector index, saw a contraction of almost 9% while electricity generation dropped 11%, he said.

Fiscal deficit touches 83% of full-year target

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Centre's fiscal deficit for the first three months of fiscal 2020-21 was ₹6.62 lakh crore, which is 83% of the budgeted target for the year, official data show.

Economists said given the government's additional borrowing plans, both to meet stimulus spending and bridge the revenue shortfall as a result of the pandemic, the fiscal deficit may end up as high as 8% of GDP, far exceeding the budget's goal of 3.5%.

The Union government has received ₹1.53 lakh crore (in terms of tax, non-tax revenue and loan recoveries) from April to June. This is less than 7% of budget estimates for the full year.

The Centre's total expenditure for the quarter was ₹8.15 crore, almost 27% of budget estimates for the year, according to the report published by the Controller General of Accounts on Friday.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

KVs unlikely to change medium of instruction

They cater to people in transferable jobs, say officials

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

NEW DELHI

The Centre is unlikely to implement its own National Education Policy (NEP) recommendations regarding the medium of instruction in Kendriya Vidyalayas, which are directly controlled by the Education Ministry, or in schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education.

Since the KVs and CBSE schools cater to the needs of people in transferable jobs, it would not be practical to use students' mother tongue or regional languages as the medium of instruction, senior officials said.

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



Fun time: A file photo of students doing gardening at a Kendriya Vidyalaya in Tiruchirappalli. ■ M. MOORTHY

cause of the variations that exist across the country.

Miniature India'

"For example, in KVs, any school, any class is like a miniature India. In that one class, you will find people from Jammu and Kashmir to Kanniyakumari. Because we are catering to the needs of Central government employees... they are posted anywhere. So which medium of instruction can we use? That is practically difficult for us. But the policy also says 'wherever possible'. We can teach as many languages as possible, but using them as the medium of instruction in KVs may not be possible for us."

'Fantastic idea'

A senior official in charge of the Kendriya Vidyalayas said this recommendation could not be implemented.

"Ideally, that is a fantastic idea, and academically that is very, very correct. Unfortunately, in our country, that doesn't happen. The child speaks one language at home and then it comes to school and is totally puzzled and confused when it is suddenly exposed to English,"

said the official, adding that the policy had not mandated the use of mother tongue be-

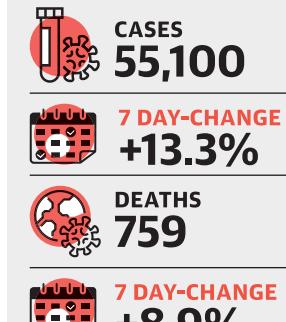
CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

RIGOROUS CONSULTATIONS

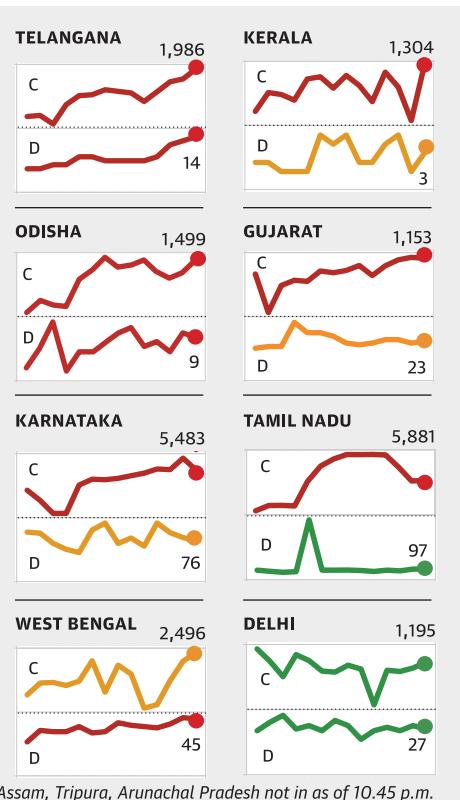
DONE: POKHRIAL ▶ PAGE 9

Viral tracker
India recorded 55,100 new COVID-19 cases and 759 deaths on Friday, taking the cumulative tally to 16,94,652 and 36,559 respectively. The graphs depict new cases and deaths in the last 14 days in select States. The States are classified based on where cases or deaths are rising (red), dropping (green), or showing a mixed trend (yellow).

NEW CASES AND DEATHS IN INDIA



Getting ready: Health workers setting up beds before the inauguration of a COVID-19 care centre in Delhi on Friday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



FIGURES ON THE GRAPHS DEPICT NEW CASES AND DEATHS RECORDED IN THE RESPECTIVE STATES ON FRIDAY

Cong. shifts pro-Gehlot
MLAs to
Jaisalmer

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

Congress MLAs supporting Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot during the ongoing political turmoil in Rajasthan were on Friday shifted from a hotel outside Jaipur to a luxury resort near Jaisalmer in chartered flights amid fresh allegations of horse-trading by the BJP.

While 53 MLAs left in the first batch for the Thar desert town, 560 km from Jaipur, others left subsequently by chartered flights in the evening.

AICC general secretary Avinash Pandey and Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala, who have been camping in Jaisalmer as central observers, joined a small group of MLAs.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 2

Spurious liquor kills 38 in Punjab

CM Amarinder Singh orders magisterial probe

Fourteen persons have died in the past 24 hours, allegedly after consuming hand sanitiser in COVID-19 hotspots of Kurichedu and Pamur in Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. While 11

persons, including two beggars, died at Kurichedu, three others reportedly died at Pamur. All liquor outlets in the two villages were shut following a surge in COVID-19 cases. ▶ PAGE 8

"As of Friday evening, 10 persons had died of spurious liquor consumption in Amritsar rural, nine in Batala and 19 in Tarn Taran. The death toll could rise further as the spurious liquor network was evidently spread across many areas," said the officer, adding that the questioning of the accused could lead to further arrests.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has ordered a magisterial inquiry by the Divisional Commissioner, Jalandhar, into the suspicious deaths in Amritsar, Batala and Tarn Taran districts, said an official government statement.

The CM has given the Divisional Commissioner the

liberty to co-opt any civil police officer or any expert to facilitate the expeditious conduct of the inquiry.

Capt. Amarinder also directed the police to launch a search operation to crack down on any spurious liquor manufacturing units that may be operating in the State, said the statement.

Judicial probe
The Shiromani Akali Dal, however, demanded a judicial probe by a sitting judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court into the matter.

SAD leader and former Minister Daljit Singh Cheema said the inquiry ordered by the Chief Minister was

"too little, too late and would not serve any purpose". He alleged that the supply of spurious liquor was widespread across districts and required a thorough investigation by an independent agency.

"The multiple hooch tragedies had exposed the underbelly of the illegal liquor trade in Punjab... The government should act on complaints with reports suggesting that the police failed to act despite complaints about sale of spurious liquor in Muchhal," he said.

The Congress' Rajya Sabha member Partap Singh Bajwa asked the Chief Minister for a time-bound judicial probe.

"@capt.amarinder_ji if you really want to unearth the truth behind the demise of 21 people due to spurious liquor and bring justice to their families, nothing other than a time bound inquiry by a sitting judge from the Punjab & Haryana High Court will suffice [sic]," tweeted Mr. Bajwa.

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IN BRIEF



JNTUA demands release of jailed students

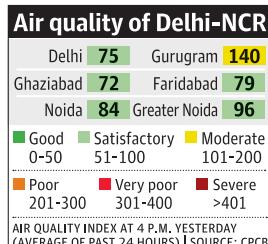
NEW DELHI

The JNTUA appealed to all relevant authorities to release JNU students – Sharjeel Imam, Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita – who are currently imprisoned for exercising their democratic right to critique, dissent and protest peacefully. The teachers said in the last fortnight, political prisoners like Akhil Gogoi, Bittu Sonowal, Varvara Rao and several others have been confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 and the students are also at risk.

Civic bodies extend payment of property tax

NEW DELHI

The North and South Delhi Municipal Corporations extended the last for payment of property tax till August end on Friday. Earlier, the last date of payment along with a 15% rebate was Friday, however, the date had been extended in order to facilitate genuine taxpayers who could not pay earlier as well as to ensure revenue for the corporation, said North Mayor Jai Prakash.



(AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) SOURCE: CPCB

Truck driver nabbed in ACP death case

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

A week after Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) was killed in a road accident in south-west Delhi, the police on Friday said they have arrested a truck driver in connection with the case.

An officer said based on the technical surveillance, they nabbed the accused from Haryana.

"We have called a forensic team to examine the truck to get confirmation. We will get the reports in a couple of days. We are questioning the driver to get more details," said the officer.

During investigation, the police checked records of vehicles that entered the city from Gurugram because the accident happened at Rajokri flyover on Gurugram-Delhi side.

The details of all heavy vehicles were gathered from nearby warehouses in Mahipalpur. It was found that four vehicles – scheduled to pick cargo from the warehouses – never arrived there.

The details of vehicles and driver were fetched and their locations were found near the accident spot.

Based on the eyewitness account and clue from CCTVs, the truck driver was held. The case is under investigation. The forensic report is awaited.

On July 24, 55-year-old ACP Sanket Kaushik died after he was hit by an unknown vehicle while managing traffic.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR SUPPLY OF BAMBOO C.N.C BOTTLE MAKING MACHINE

Tripura Rehabilitation Plantation Corporation Limited (TRPC) invites Expression of Interest for Supply of Bamboo C.N.C. Bottle Making Machine, 1 (one) no to be supplied at Surendranagar, Sub-Div: Mohanpur, Dist. West Tripura, State: Tripura. Expression will be received in the office of the TRPC Ltd. P.N. Complex, Gurkhabasti, Agartala, Tripura, till 3.00 PM on 10th August 2020.

Full text of the notice inviting expression of interest may be seen in the corporate office of TRPC at Agartala and in its Zonal Offices at Udaipur, Agartala, Kumarghat and Jawharnagar on all working days and also at www.tripurainfo.com along with the state and National leading news papers.

HC questions officer for issuing order to riot cases probe team

Special CP Ranjan had asked them to exercise caution while making arrests

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday asked the Special Commissioner of Police (Crime and Economic Offences Wing) Prawer Ranjan why he issued an order to all the investigating Officers and teams that are probing cases related to the north-east Delhi riots to exercise caution while making arrests.

Justice Suresh Kumar Kait's query came while hearing a joint petition filed by two individuals whose family members died in the riots claiming that the July 8 order of the Special CP caused "illegal interference" in the ongoing investigations with the intent of influencing the said investigations.

The petition cited the news article in which the senior officer allegedly stated that there was a degree of resentment in the Hindu Community against the arrest of certain Hindu persons, while directing investigating officers that they should be careful in the future when making arrests.

Special C.P. Mr Ranjan, who was present in the hearing,



Scene after the riots in north-east Delhi. The riots had claimed several lives. ■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

ing through videoconferencing, said it was a normal practice adopted by the police to sensitise the officials to exercise due care and precaution.

'Sensitisation exercise' Mr. Ranjan said that whenever any complaint or input comes to his notice, such a communication is issued to sensitise the officers so that they exercise due care and precaution during the investigation. He submitted that all cases of the riots have already been registered before the July 8 and hence no prejudice caused to any member

of any community.

When the Special CP said that the police have issued similar orders in the past, the High Court directed Mr. Ranjan to place five such orders or letters, in a sealed cover, which he or his predecessor has issued on receiving a complaint or representation.

During the hearing, advocate Amit Mahajan, representing Delhi Police, argued that the petition was highly mischievous.

Reacting to this, the court said the July 8 letter was also mischievous. Tell me what was the need to issue this letter, the court remarked. The

court also noted that "it is not in dispute that senior officers are duty-bound to guide their teams time and again" while posting the case for further hearing on August 7.

The petition filed through advocate Mehmod Pracha sought quashing of the July 8 order claiming that "it gives a clear indication to all the investigating teams to screen offenders if they belong to the Hindu Community".

The petition stated that on July 15, the office of Commissioner of Police tweeted a clarification to the news article, but does not deny that such an order was indeed passed by the Special C.P.

The plea quoted the clarification where the police said, "Tone and tenor of the article is highly misleading and seeks to give an impression of the police being biased".

"News item ignores the spirit of order where it has been specifically stated that any arrest irrespective of any class, community or religious group be done on the basis of evidence and does not give an impression of being arbitrary," the police had clarified.

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The petition filed through advocate Mehmod Pracha

Timings

DELHI

SATURDAY, AUG. 01	
RISE 05:43	SET 19:12
RISE 17:36	SET 03:09
SUNDAY, AUG. 02	
RISE 05:44	SET 19:12
RISE 18:29	SET 04:06
MONDAY, AUG. 03	
RISE 05:45	SET 19:11
RISE 19:16	SET 05:05

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 35 27
Safdarjung 35 27
Palam 34 27

Delhi Palam Today
35°C A spell of light rain likely to occur over the area with partly cloudy sky.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
35°C Warm and humid day with partly cloudy sky. Short spell light rain may occur.

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THE HINDU

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IN BRIEF

NDMC conducts drive to check dengue, malaria

NEW DELHI

The New Delhi Municipal Council is conducting a drive to check and control spread of dengue, malaria and chikungunya and checked 3,10,313 premises and issued 43 challans and 1,498 notices. "As many as 3,10,313 houses/premises have been visited and 5,67,408 water containers checked out, of which 1,541 were found positive for larva-breeding. As per the NDMC Act 1994, 1,498 notices and 43 challans have been issued till this weekend," a statement said.

Letter to CM over NOCs for unauthorised colonies

NEW DELHI

South Delhi Mayor Anamika Mithilesh on Friday said she has written to Chief Minister Arvind Kejirwal, demanding the clearance permissions for carrying out development work in unauthorised colonies. An NOC is needed from the Delhi government to carry out development work, but no action has been taken in this regard, the Mayor said.

COVID-19 care facility opens at Timarpur

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 100-bed COVID-19 care facility was inaugurated at Balakram Hospital in Timarpur by North Delhi Mayor Jai Prakash and other corporation officials on Friday.

The Deendayal COVID Centre was built with assistance from NGOs, such as Bharat Vikas Parishad and Rotary Club, the Mayor said. He also hit out at the Delhi government, saying that it did not provide any assistance to the corporation.

BJP vice-president Shyam Jaju, who was also present, appreciated the corporation's efforts.

1,195 cases take Capital's COVID-19 tally to 1,35,598

City has 1,20,930 recoveries and 10,705 active cases at present

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

As many as 1,195 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 1,35,598, stated a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Friday.

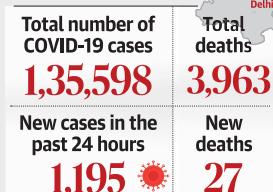
Also, 27 more deaths have been reported, taking the total number of deaths to 3,963.

Of the total cases, 1,20,930 people have recovered, while there are 10,705 active cases.

Though Health Minister Satyendar Jain had earlier this month said that the government would start another serological survey from August 1 to find the percentage of people who have developed antibodies against COVID-19, no order in this regard was issued till Friday evening.

Officials of different districts said that there was no

Virus spread



hours, 70.5% of the tests were rapid antigen tests, which have shown a low positivity in the city compared to RT-PCR tests.

The number of people admitted to COVID-19 hospitals has also been decreasing. On July 1, a total of 5,892 beds in COVID-19 hospitals were occupied and the number decreased to 2,932 on Friday.

During the same period, the number of COVID-19-positive people in home isolation has also decreased from 16,703 to 5,763.

Also, the positivity rate has dropped from 12.2% to 6.2%.

The number of containment zones was 692 on Friday.

The Delhi government, in an order issued to all hospitals on Friday, directed to strictly comply with "rational use of PPE" available on the website of Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Court drops UAPA charges against four IS suspects

NIA asked if it cited proof with regard to offences under Act

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A court has dropped charges under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against four alleged Islamic State (IS) suspects, who were arrested by Delhi Police Special Cell in January after a brief exchange of fire.

The case was later transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which filed a chargesheet against the suspects on July 6. After the chargesheet was filed,

Additional Sessions Judge Praveen Singh found it to be "lacking clarity" and specific questions were asked regarding "availability of evidence".

In an order dated July 22, the court asked NIA if it cited "any evidence with regard to the offences under the UAPA except the disclosure statements and pointing out memo of the accused". Charges have also been filed under

other sections of the IPC and the Arms Act against the suspects.

An NIA spokesperson did not respond to queries on the court dropping charges under various sections of the UAPA against the four suspects.

The next date of hearing is August 14.

The suspects in the case have been identified as Khaja Moideen, Abdul Samad, Syed Ali Nawas and Jaffar Ali.

Moideen (52) is wanted by the NIA in two other cases. The two cases that were registered by the Tamil Nadu police on December 28 last year and Bengaluru police on January 10 this year were also transferred to the NIA.

In a chargesheet filed on June 23 against 12 IS suspects in the Chennai case, including Moideen, the NIA said, "Investigation revealed that after the release of the key conspirator and ISIS/Daish terrorist named Khaja Mohi-

deen on bail in a case relating to the murder of a Hindu leader from Central Prison, Puzhal in February, 2019, he had conspired with one Liyakath Ali with the intention of furthering the activities of ISIS/Daish in India."

NIA said Moideen and Ali allegedly procured large number of SIM cards fraudulently activated by accused Pachaiappan and Rajesh at Chennai between September and December, 2019.

"In furtherance of the conspiracy, Khaja Moideen and Mahboob Pasha also procured through the co-conspirators, countrymade firearms and prohibited ammunition besides jungle camping equipment, pursuant to their intention to establish a wilayah [province] of ISIS/Daish near forests in South India with a view to wage violent jihad on behalf of the global terrorist organization," the NIA said in its June 23 chargesheet.

Anticipatory bail to former DMC chief

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday granted anticipatory bail to Zafarul Islam Khan, former chief of the Delhi Minorities Commission, in connection with a sedition FIR lodged against him over his social media post.

Justice Manoj Kumar Ohri passed the direction after the Delhi police said the 72-year-old was not required for further investigation. The court, however, asked Mr. Khan to continue cooperating with the investigation.

The High Court was informed that Mr. Khan has appeared before the police on two occasions in relation to the case. His laptop was also seized, the court was told.

Mr. Khan, in his anticipatory bail plea said he suffers from heart disease and hypertension and was highly susceptible to COVID-19 infection, which can have fatal consequences for him.

Man beaten in public over 'beef' suspicion

1 held; they also attacked police vehicle

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

A young man transporting meat in his vehicle was chased by a gang of motorcyclist for around half-an-hour before being waylaid and beaten up in full public view near Jama Masjid main market off Jail Road here on Friday. The police suspect the man, a Muslim, was beaten up on suspicion of transporting beef.

Gurugram Police Spokesperson Subhash Boken said one of the accused, Pradeep, 26, was arrested. "The motive behind the attack is not clear, but it could be prompted by suspicion over transportation of beef. The samples of the meat are taken."

Subhash Boken
Gurugram Police Spokesperson

shop at Jama Masjid main market when he realised that he was being chased. The motorcyclists even tried to waylay him near Sector 56 traffic signal, but he sped up the vehicle, according to the First Information Report. Meanwhile, he called Tahir for help.

Attacked others too

Soon after I received a call from Lukmaan, I rang the Police Control Room seeking their help immediately. I called up the police four times till Lukmaan, being chased by the men, reached the Masjid Market, but no one turned up. I again called up the PCR for the fifth time while he was being beaten up with iron rods and hammers, but the police reached 15 minutes after they had driven away with him," said Tahir, the president of the Masjid Market. He said the assailants attacked those who tried to intervene.

While he was being thrashed near Jail Mor, a policeman informed at Badshahpur, a man can be seen kicking Lukmaan on the face while he is surrounded by the public. A police man also features in the video trying to prevent the man from attacking the victim.

Lukmaan was driving towards Gurugram from Nuh's Ghasera village around 9 a.m. carrying the meat to be delivered at Tahir Qureshi's

HC stays jail term to Jaya Jaitly in corruption case

Court issues notice to CBI on her plea challenging trial court's judgment on conviction

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday stayed the four-year jail term awarded to Samata Party president Jayalakshmi Jaitly in a corruption case related to a purported defence deal.

Justice Suresh Kumar Kait said that keeping in view the facts that Ms. Jaitly "was not arrested in the present case, however, without comment-

ing on the merits of the appeal, I am of the view that the appellant [Ms. Jaitly] deserves suspension of sentence during the pendency of the appeal".

The court has also issued notice to CBI on Ms. Jaitly's plea challenging the trial court's judgment of July 21 and order on sentence of July 30 where Ms. Jaitly has been sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for four

years with fine of ₹50,000 for the offence punishable under Section 120-B of the Indian Penal Code and Section 9 of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

Ms. Jaitly and two others were held guilty of corruption in a 2000-01 case related to a purported defence deal. It was argued by Ms. Jaitly's counsel that she was neither caught red-handed accepting the money nor she is benefici-

ary of the money as alleged. Moreover, she was not arrested and faced the trial and continued to appear before the trial court as and when directed, her counsel stated.

"In addition, during the present pandemic situation, the appeal is not likely to be heard, anytime soon, therefore, the sentence of the appellant may be suspended during pendency of the appeal," her plea stated.

Six arrested for duping people of ₹10 crore

One claimed to be Home Minister's PA

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Six persons were arrested on Tuesday for duping a businessman and several others on the pretext of securing loans for them on low interest rates, the police said on Friday.

The accused claimed that they had connection with senior politicians and lured businessmen on the pretext of arranging hefty loans from politicians, who they said, "had black money", on very low interest rates, said a senior police officer.

During investigation, the accused confessed to having had cheated more than 30 people to the tune of ₹10 crore. They used to target businessmen by convincing them that the politicians whom they knew had a lot of black money that they could not deposit in banks. They would also charge "1% brokerage".

Meeting at AICC HQ
They accused used to call their targets at the AICC headquarters and the first meeting was held inside the premises. The victims had never met any politicians or

officer-bearers, they said. Thereafter, negotiations were held at a farmhouse that the gang's kingpin Rakesh Tiwari had taken on rent that cost him ₹5 lakh per month.

The kingpin used to claim that he was the PA to the Union Home Minister. The gang was busted after one of the victims reached the office of the Minister and told him that he had been duped, said a police officer.

"The gang members were questioned in police remand. They will be produced before a court on Saturday. We are gathering details of all the people who fell prey. We have enough evidence. They had hired private security persons for ₹1,200 a day," said the police officer.

An SUV, two pilot gypsies and mobile phones have been seized from the possession of Rakesh.

He used to lead a lavish life in order to attract businessmen. At his farm house, walky talkies, hand-held metal detectors and door frame metal detectors were used to make it look like some VIPs stayed there.

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RETAINS
ESSENTIAL
MINERALS

'Officials said they will move residents to a permanent place in 10 days'

HEMAMI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI

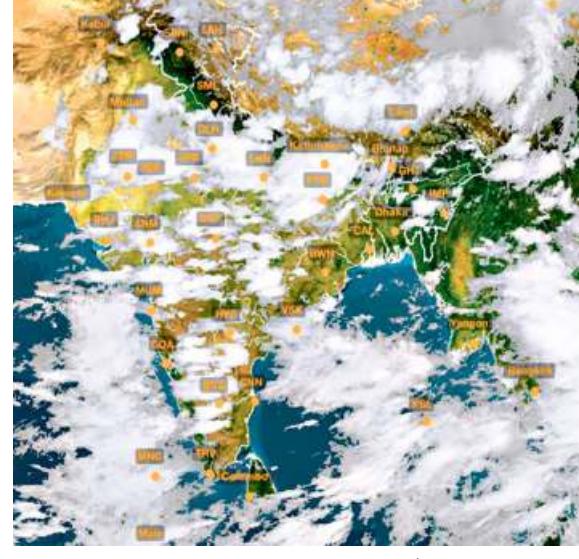
Twelve days after 12 houses were swept away at Anna Nagar JJ cluster, after which residents started living in open tents, they have been shifted to a school in Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg on Friday morning.

The development comes after *The Hindu* reported how the residents were liv-



WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Saturday: Heavy/very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, west Uttar Pradesh, central Maharashtra, Konkan & Goa, coastal Karnataka, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Kerala, Mahe and Andaman & Nicobar Islands

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... -35.5	27.3	23.3	Kozhikode	... 15...	27.6...	24.4
Ahmedabad	10.2	36.2	26.6	Kurnool	22.9	33.7...	24.4
Aizawl	... 4...	24.6	19.6	Lucknow	1...	32.9...	26.3
Allahabad	22.3	35.5	26.3	Madurai	... -38.0	26.5	24.5
Bangalore	... 29.6	21.4	18.8	Mangaluru	10...	28.4...	23.4
Bhopal	... 34.6	25.2	21.8	Mumbai	8.5...	32.3...	25.4
Bhubaneswar	... 37.2	26.5	21.0	Mysuru	2.5...	27.9...	21.0
Chandigarh	16.8	34.1	27.3	Patna	0.8...	34.8...	27.3
Chennai	... 35.4	27.6	21.0	Port Blair	86...	28.1...	24.2
Coimbatore	... 32.8	23.0	18.8	Puducherry	0.9...	36.7...	26.1
Dehradoon	1...	32.1	23.4	Pune	... -32.9	22.1	18.8
Gangtok	42.2	19.6	17.8	Raipur	... -35.4	27.0	21.0
Goa	24...	27.2	24.4	Ranchi	... -32.6...	24.8	20.0
Guwahati	0.4...	31.5	25.6	Shillong	... -25.8	18.0	13.0
Hubballi	... -27.0	22.0	17.0	Shimla	12.7...	24.0	17.0
Hyderabad	0.1...	32.7	24.5	Srinagar	... -32.0...	19.4	13.0
Imphal	0.1...	31.1	22.5	Tiruchi	... -37.2...	26.2	20.0
Jaipur	... -35.2	26.2	21.0	Vijayawada	... -32.2...	27.4	20.0
Kochi	23...	29.6	24.0	Visakhapatnam	... -34.7...	28.0	20.0
Kolkata	1.2...	25.0	18.4				
	... -35.5	27.7	21.0				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	15.52	.27	...83	...—	...—	■■■■■
Bengaluru	.9...	.11	.42	...57	...50	■■■■■
Chennai	.4...	.12	.103	...56	...—	■■■■■
Delhi	6...	.33	.51	...82	108	■■■■■
Hyderabad	.7...	.53	.20	...18	...22	■■■■■
Kolkata	11...	.18	.31	...31	...57	■■■■■
Lucknow	.3...	.21	.82	...39	...88	■■■■■
Mumbai	16...	.27	.12	...23	...62	■■■■■
Pune	14...	.51	.13	...13	...13	■■■■■
Visakhapatnam	11...	.18	.27	...51	...13	■■■■■

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Nanded, Gulbarga recorded overall AQI score of 171 indicating a moderate level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 13.

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI score)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

With 10,320 fresh cases, State's active numbers cross 1.50 lakh

It records highest testing of 60,000 samples in 24 hours; death toll reaches 14,994

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

PUNE

Maharashtra reported 10,320 new COVID-19 cases on Friday, taking the State's total number of cases to 4,22,118. This is the second consecutive single-day jump of more than 10,000 cases and also the third time in less than 10 days, with Thursday recording the highest at 11,147 cases.

As many as 265 more deaths saw the fatality toll rise to 14,994.

The State's active case figure crossed the 1.50 lakh mark to reach 1,50,662, with a record 60,000 samples being tested in the last 24 hours, State Health Department officials said.

With 7,543 patients discharged on Friday, the cumulative recoveries till date have gone up to 2,56,158.

"Till date, of a total 21,30,098 laboratory samples, 4,00,651 (19.87%) have been tested positive with nearly 48,000 samples across the State tested in the



New normal: A youth wearing a mask walks past a graffiti in Mumbai on Friday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

last 24 hours," State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate said, adding that the State's recovery rate had risen to 59.84% while its case fatality rate had marginally reduced to 3.61%.

1,085 cases in Mumbai

With 1,085 new cases reported on Friday, Mumbai's total case tally has reached 11,4,284, of whom only 20,563 are active though.

With 53 more deaths, the city's death toll has risen to 6,353. The surge in new cases continued in Pune district, which reported another massive spike of more than 3,000 fresh cases and 71 fatalities as its total cases reached 89,231, while its death toll rose to 2,099. As per the district administration, though, the number of active cases stands a little over 29,000.

The Mumbai Metropolitan

Region saw a sharp spike in fatalities and cases, with Thane district reporting 25 more deaths, taking the fatality toll to 1,008. With a surge of 519 new cases, the district's total cases have crossed the 34,000 mark.

The Kalyan-Dombivli civic body reported 13 fatalities to take its total death count to 438 while another 376 cases took its total tally to 22,662.

In the Navi Mumbai civic body region, 412 new cases pushed its total tally to 17,070. Eight more deaths saw its cumulative toll climb to 445. Kolhapur district in western Maharashtra, which has seen a case spike in the last fortnight, reported 489 fresh cases, taking its total tally to 5,060, of whom 3,365 are active cases. Ten more deaths took the district's fatality toll past the 100 mark to reach 105.

Solapur district in Pune division reported eight deaths and more than 250 new cases.

Specify benefits for kin of frontline workers: HC

Court was hearing PIL seeking martyr status for those who die on COVID-19 duty

SONAM SAIGAL

MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Friday directed the Maharashtra government to specify what benefits it would extend to the kin of frontline workers who succumb to COVID-19.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Sarang Kotwal was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by former journalist Ketan Tirolkar seeking to waive off the post-graduate examination

for MD and MS degrees. It also sought that members of medical fraternity succumbing to COVID-19 in line of duty be declared as martyrs and they be granted a worthy compensation package.

Advocate Aparna Vhatkar appearing for Mr. Tirolkar told the court that the State must recognise the sacrifice made by frontline workers and declare them martyrs. To this the court replied, "The executive can take this decision. Why should judiciary do it? State

or the Union can apply its mind." The court then asked additional solicitor general Anil Singh if there is any provision for granting such titles.

Mr. Singh said the Centre did not have any legal powers to grant such a title to civilians. Honours like Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan were all awards and not mere titles, the court said.

Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, informed the court that Maharashtra government had

already issued a government resolution on April 11 saying the families of doctors and policemen, who die of COVID-19, would be given ₹50 lakh.

He then said the State had also extended the benefit of the Centre's Pradhanmantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, an insurance scheme, to several frontline workers.

The judges then said that the benefits of the GR are not clear and directed the State to file a detailed affidavit by August 4.

Yoga institutes, gyms to reopen in Rajasthan, Punjab from August 5

State govts. issue guidelines for Unlock 3.0



Health workers collecting a sample from a woman in Amritsar on Friday. ■ AFP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR / CHANDIGARH

be held with giving prior information to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, and the maximum number of guests shall not be more than 50. The number in Punjab cannot be more than 30 for marriages and 20 at funerals.

The order states that there shall be no restriction on inter-State and intra-State movement of people and goods.

Schools to remain shut

Schools, colleges, educational and coaching institutes in both the States will remain closed up to August 31. Cinema halls, swimming pools, entertainment parks, bars, auditoriums and assembly halls shall remain closed. Social, political, sports and cultural events will not be permitted.

During the curfew period in Punjab, the movement of individuals for all non-essential activities shall remain prohibited. All examinations, admission/entrance tests conducted by universities, boards and public service commission are allowed with social distancing. Shopping malls, shops, barber shops, saloons, beauty parlours and spas will be allowed to open between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.

"Independence Day functions will be allowed only by following health protocols," a Home Department order said.

Marriage-related gatherings in Rajasthan may also

No vending machines for sanitary napkins set up under ASMITA scheme: State to HC

SONAM SAIGAL

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government told the Bombay High Court on Friday that no vending machines for sanitary napkins have been installed across any location, school or institution under a scheme to ensure access to quality and affordable sanitary napkins through a network of women self-help groups (SHGs).

R. Vimala (54) filed an affidavit on behalf of the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission, Rural Development department, to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by law student Nik-

ita Gore and law research associate Vaishnavi Gholav. The PIL has sought implementation of "The Menstrual Hygiene Management National Guidelines, 2015", to recognise sanitary napkins as an essential commodity, and to add it to the schedule of the Essential Commodity Act.

The 16-page affidavit said, "The Rural Development department initiated the implementation of ASMITA Yojana in Maharashtra to ensure that women and young adolescent girls in rural areas have access to quality and affordable sanitary napkins at ₹24 per pack," the affidavit said.

It said no vending machines have been installed across any location, school or institution under ASMITA Yojana.

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Towards a new normal

With a vaccine not yet in sight, easier, cheaper testing can help protect the vulnerable

The Centre has announced further relaxations in the lockdown that began on March 25 to combat the COVID-19 pandemic although the numbers are unrelenting. The third phase will now take effect from August 5. At nearly 17 lakh, India stands third among countries with the highest number of cases; a third of these cases are currently active. With over 36,000 deaths, India's case fatality rate of 2.16% is relatively low. The possibility of wider prevalence indicated in serology surveys in Delhi and Mumbai suggests that the death rate could be even lower than current estimations. The disease spread has been uneven within the country. The responses of States and cities have also remained inconsistent. Along with the number of cases, overworked health-care professionals experiencing fatigue and the public showing impatience with restrictions are also on the rise. This is not a pleasant mix of circumstances, and utmost vigil must continue. By now, it is also evident that complete lockdowns that disrupt economic activities cannot be sustained over long periods of time. Gyms and yoga centres, but not educational institutions, metro rail, and large gatherings, will be allowed in the next phase. Movement of people and goods across borders will be easier as per the Centre's guidelines. Random restrictions on movement such as those in Tamil Nadu, where an e-pass is required for intra- and inter-State travel, must now be done away with.

As a vaccine or a cure is not yet visible, it is time the focus on adaptation got sharper. Though many questions about COVID-19 remain, certain measures are evidently helpful in managing the pandemic better and bringing fatalities down. The coming phase of unlocking must prepare the country for complete opening. For that, first of all, testing should be unlocked and made available on demand as close to home as possible. For those infected to not step out of home is a far superior measure in preventing spread, compared to inadequate mask usage. With most cases turning out to be asymptomatic, wider and cheaper availability of testing must be a thrust area for the government now. Easy, early diagnosis of infections, even when asymptomatic, will go a long way in containment. The concerns regarding increased dependence on rapid antigen tests in some places must be addressed. Second, real time epidemiological data should be unlocked. Just as weather data is freely available, and allows for cropping practice readjustments, disaggregated real time data enables micro-planning and localised behavioural response. The proclivity shown by some States and cities to conceal data has been self-defeating. Even official death counts do not match with the numbers available with other sources. There must be efforts to harvest accurate data, and with ease of availability. Normalcy, albeit a new one, could be reached faster with the right efforts.

War and talks

The Taliban's ceasefire is an opportunity to kick-start intra-Afghan peace talks

The Taliban's decision to cease fire for three days during Id-ul-Adha has come as a relief for Afghans who have seen unabated violence despite a peace agreement between the insurgents and the U.S. This is the third official respite since the war started in 2001. In June 2018 and May this year, the Taliban had briefly ended hostilities to mark the end of the holy month of Ramzan. On both occasions, it refused to extend the ceasefire, returning to war as soon as the celebrations were over. This time, however, hopes are high that the truce could be extended as Kabul and the insurgents are preparing to launch the intra-Afghan talks that were promised in the U.S.-Taliban deal. According to the pact, talks were to begin in March. But both sides failed to reach an agreement on prisoner exchange, which the U.S. had agreed with the Taliban. The insurgents complained that the government was not complying with the terms of the agreement, while officials of the Ashraf Ghani administration said the Taliban's demands were unacceptable. Finally, President Ghani decided to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners, which was followed by the Taliban's ceasefire announcement. Both sides have now agreed to kick-start talks after Id and they could do it in a peaceful environment if the ceasefire is extended.

While the cessation of hostilities is welcome, there are underlying issues that continue to plague the peace process. When the U.S. entered into talks with the insurgent group, it did not insist on a ceasefire. So the Taliban continues to engage in war and talks simultaneously. Worse, the Americans, badly looking for a way out of the conflict, kept the Afghan government out of the peace process. After the U.S.-Taliban agreement was signed in February, according to which the U.S. agreed to pull out its troops in return for security assurances from the Taliban, the onus was on a weakened Afghan government to start talks even as the Taliban continued attacks. According to the government, 3,560 government troops and 775 civilians have been killed in conflict since the deal was signed. Also, infighting made matters worse for the government. Last year's presidential election saw a record low turnout. The results, announced months later, were contested by the main Opposition candidate, Abdullah Abdullah, who formed a parallel administration. He backed off, but only after being appointed the head of the High Council for National Reconciliation that will lead talks with the Taliban. These factors allowed a resurgent Taliban to maintain the upper hand – in war and in talks. This will be the government's key challenge when its representatives and that of the Taliban, which sees itself as the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan and has not recognised the country's Constitution, would be holding talks.

Diluting the EIA process spells a path of no return

The draft environmental impact assessment 2020 is a brazen attempt to weaken critical checks and balances



SUHRITH PARTHASARATHY

On July 12, Fridays for Future India (FFF), a collective of young environmental campaigners, received a notice from the Delhi police that accused it of committing offences under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Its alleged crime: "sending too many emails" to the Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Prakash Javadekar, with subjects tagged "EIA 2020". Over the last few weeks, the FFF has organised a sustained protest against a proposed new notification, which aims to replace the existing model of conducting environmental impact assessments (EIA) in India. The notice the group received claimed that the campaign's details published on its website contained "objectionable contents" and constituted "unlawful activities or terrorists act[s]" which were "dangerous for the peace, tranquillity and sovereignty of India".

Even though the notice was eventually withdrawn, after the police cited a "clerical" error, that the country's anti-terror law can be invoked with such facile ease is a shuddering thought. But equally this must also make us wonder what it is about the FFF's campaign that drew such ire out of the government. Is the new draft EIA policy so critical to the state's programme that even the slightest acts of dissent are to be quashed with maximum force?

The wreckage of COVID-19, one would have thought, would have

given the government a chance to reassess what its goals towards climate justice ought to be. After all, the pandemic has had a searing effect on how we lead our lives. It has altered our relationships not only with each other but also with the environment. During this time, the decades of pitiful investment in public health and education have clearly been brought to the fore, as has the fragility of our basic infrastructure.

But the responses to the crisis seem to mirror the failures of the past: the more that goes wrong, the more we want to do the same things again, as though all that we desire is a return to a pre-pandemic status quo. What we do not seem to understand is that the supposed normality that we are craving does not mean that there are no fresh disasters ahead. And those disasters, as every sign demonstrates, are likely to be all the more catastrophic unless we contend with the deplorable neglect that we have shown towards the environment. It is time we recognised, as Bill McKibben wrote in *The New Yorker*, that "normal is the enemy".

Culture of disregard
Yet, the proposed new EIA policy symbolises a rush to restore society to where it was before COVID-19 halted its motor of progress. The draft notification takes an already inadequate system and seeks to infuse it into a culture of disregard. It is almost as though, to the state, the global climate emergency is operating in a parallel universe of its own.

Around the world, legislative interventions mandating EIAs began to burgeon in the late 1960s. The basic credo of these measures was to ensure that the state had at its possession a disinterested analysis

of any development project and the potential impact that it might have on the environment. It took India, though, until 1994 before it notified its first set of assessment norms, under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. This policy mandated that projects beyond a certain size from certain sectors – such as mining, thermal power plants, ports, airports and atomic energy – secure an environmental clearance as a precondition to their commencement. But the notification, subject as it was to regular amendments, proved a failure.

Abandoning rigour

In 2006, a new EIA programme was conceived, ironically on the back of corporate pressure. There was a belief that the 1994 system hindered speedy growth. The new draft attempted to decentralise the process. It increased the number of projects that required an environmental clearance, but also created appraisal committees at the level of both the Centre and States, the recommendations of which were made a qualification for a sanctioning. What is more, the programme also mandated that pollution control boards hold a public hearing to glean the concerns of those living around the site of a project.

But, in practice, the 2006 notification also proved regressive. The course remained mired in opacity. The final EIA report, for example, was not made available to the pu-

blic; the procedure for securing clearances for certain kinds of projects was accelerated; and there was little scope available for independent judicial review. When clearances were challenged, the courts treated the views of the assessment authorities as sacrosanct. In the process, EIAs, far from serving as a bulwark for environmental justice, came to be regarded as a mere inconvenience, as a bureaucratic exercise that promoters of a project had to simply navigate through.

Now, as we find ourselves amidst not just a pandemic but also a global climate emergency, it is hard not to despair at the nature of changes that we need to make, to not merely our laws and regulations, but also to how we lead our lives. Yet, the government is on a warpath to further weaken an already fragile system. As many campaigners have highlighted, the new draft is riddled with problems. It enables a sweeping clearance apparatus to a number of critical projects that previously required an EIA of special rigour; where some industries require expert appraisal under the existing 2006 notification, they will, under the new notification, be subject to less demanding processes. These include aerial ropeways, metallurgical industries, and a raft of irrigation projects, among others.

Damaging fundamental tenets

What is more, the new proposal does nothing to strengthen the expert appraisal committees on which so much responsibility is reposed, leaving the body rudderless. It also does away with the need for public consultation for a slew of different sectors, negating perhaps a redeeming feature of the 2006 notification. But, most

egregiously, the proposal opens up a window for securing post-facto clearances. That is, companies which have commenced a project without a valid certificate will be allowed to regularise their operations by paying a fine. If there is a singular logic to the EIA process, it is that an environmental clearance is a prerequisite to the launching of a project. But here the government wants to reverse that fundamental tenet.

There is no doubt that a mere strengthening of the existing EIA norms will not by itself be sufficient. We need a renewed vision for the country, one that sees the protection of the environment as not merely a value unto itself but as something even more foundational to our democracy. To that end, we must begin to imagine a future where, as the American law professor, Jedediah S. Purdy, argues, our ecological and egalitarian projects can fuse together.

For this to happen, though, we have to see ourselves as not distinct from the environment that we live in, but as an intrinsic part of it. Under such a model, our economic solutions will have to necessarily subsume a commitment to our natural surroundings. To achieve this broader vision we will need deeper thinking, greater political initiative, and a leap of faith.

But, in the meantime, to allow the government to weaken the EIA process has the potential to make things irredeemable. And here, Wendell Berry's words are worth recalling: "Whether we and our politicians know it or not, nature is party to all our deals and decisions," and it "has more votes, a longer memory, and a sterner sense of justice than we do."

Suhirth Parthasarathy is an advocate practising at the Madras High Court



The COVID-19 crisis as a metropolitan battle

The absence of comprehensive and integrated urban planning is starkly visible in the pandemic



V.R. VACHANA

COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges to India's metropolitan cities, yet again highlighting their limited capabilities to self-govern. India's top metropolitan cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad – now account for nearly half of the country's cases of COVID-19.

No governance architecture
This fallout has an obvious public health angle. India's public health expenditure in 2018 was a mere 1.28% of GDP. According to the World Bank, India's out-of-pocket health expenditure was 62.4% in 2017, while the world average was 18.2%. Additionally, manpower in the health sector is low with India's doctor-population ratio being 1:1,457 which is lower than the World Health Organisation norm of 1:1,000.

Complimenting an inequitable public health system is a larger governance issue. Governance has a bearing not just on the response to COVID-19 but also in preparedness for other natural and man-made disasters and contingencies. Specific systemic factors underlying city governance include spatial planning, municipal capacities, empowered mayors and councils and inter-agency coordination, and ward-level citizen participation.

Twenty-seven years have

passed since the enactment of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, but these reform agendas continue to be on slow burn.

Lack of robust integrated spatial planning: The Constitution mandates formation of Metropolitan Planning Committees (MPCs) in all metropolitan areas with a million-plus population. MPCs are envisioned to ensure integrated planning for the entire metropolitan area, and are responsible for the preparation of draft development plans, synthesising priorities set by local authorities, State and Central governments. In reality, MPCs are either not constituted or are defunct. Janaagraha's Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (ASICS) 2017 report found that only nine out of 18 cities assessed had constituted MPCs even if paper.

The absence of comprehensive integrated planning is starkly visible in the COVID-19 crisis. Poor housing, sanitation, and a lack of access to meaningful social security are a reality for the urban poor. Only medium- to long-term spatial planning that focuses on equal access to opportunities and services can avoid a repeat of such disasters.

Weak municipal capacities: India's metropolitan cities have weak capacities in finance and staffing. Bengaluru's average percentage of own revenue to total expenditure is 47.9%, Chennai 30.5%, Mumbai 36.1% and Kolkata at 48.4%. According to ASICS 2017, Mumbai has the highest number of officers per lakh population at 938. However, this is abysmally low compared to global cities such as Johannesburg with 2,922 officers and New York with 5,446 offic-

ers per lakh population.

COVID-19 resurfaces the poor capacity of municipalities in delivering infrastructure and services, and managing disasters; highlighting the urgency to bolster the capability of municipalities to self-govern.

Need for authority

Weak mayor and council and fragmentation of governance: The leaders steering India's metropolitan cities are toothless. No big metropolitan cities with 10 million-plus population has a directly-elected Mayor. Mumbai's Mayor has a tenure of 2.5 years, Delhi and Bengaluru, a mere one year. Furthermore, Mayors do not have full decision-making authority over critical functions of planning, housing, water, environment, fire and emergency services in most cases. Our metropolitan cities are far from being local self-governments. Parastatal agencies for planning, water and public transport report directly to State governments. The State government also largely controls public works and police.

It is imperative that citizens are able to hold one political authority accountable in the city, and that political authority cannot be the

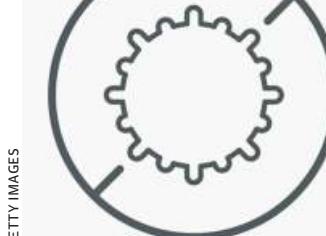
COVID-19 is primarily a metropolitan battle; and, owing to their

size and complexities, come with a higher scale of challenges and opportunities. Studies by the Centre for Policy Research point that India's spatial feature exhibits the growth of small towns beyond the economics of large agglomerations. This indicates that while India's urban vision should focus on its metropolitan cities to reap the benefit of scale, it shouldn't ignore smaller cities.

Globally, metropolitan cities are steered by a directly-elected leader, with robust mechanisms to reduce fragmentation in governance. Evolved examples include the Tokyo metropolitan government, and recent experimental models such as combined authorities in the United Kingdom and Australia. India needs home-grown solutions suited to its context and political realities, while imbibing lessons from global examples.

The challenges posed by COVID-19 offer a glimpse into various other future threats of climate change, natural disasters, etc. which will further strain Indian cities. It is time the Central and State governments lead efforts towards a metropolitan governance paradigm. The first steps should include empowered Mayors with five-year tenure, decentralised ward level governance, and inter-agency coordination anchored by the city government. India should use the current pandemic as an opportunity to introspect and reform the way its metropolises are governed.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Education revamped

The government's new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seems to be a wanton exercise in futility. The fact that the NEP, an item in the BJP's 2014 election manifesto, could take shape only in 2020 shows that the government itself is unsure of its education policy. Two, the NEP was not placed before, or debated or approved by Parliament. Three, there is no efficacy in increasing the tenure of undergraduate courses and watering down postgraduate programmes. There is no robust reasoning for any of these changes. It is the same as far as the sudden abolition of an erudite study like the

M.Phil programme is concerned. Instead, Classes 11-12 could have been revamped for collegiate education such as the re-introduction of the former pre-university course and pre-medical course, and introducing a fresh pre-engineering course or pre-legal course. The only redeemable feature of the NEP is that it does not disturb the three-language formula system.

MANOHARAN MUTHUSWAMY,
Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu

■ The first thing that strikes the eye is the proposed Higher Education Commission of India that dispenses with every other autonomous regulator in the

sector. Notwithstanding its unconcealed proclivity for ideological ascendancy on education per se, the BJP, in NEP, has but added frills to the 1986 Education policy without altering the main motif. The continuity is welcome. In doing away with rigid separations between arts, commerce and sciences; curricular and extra-curricular activities; vocational and academic streams, the reshaped policy is akin to converting overnight medical clinics to multispecialty hospitals.

Students would now select subjects across the streams. This would exponentially drive the needs be it infrastructure, funds, quantity, variety and quality

of faculty. Taken together, the management of such involved matrix of matching each course to resources, would need first-rate professional administration. Our education spend is to be boosted. Our enduring incapacity to improve our health-care spend has been mercilessly exposed by COVID-19. One hopes the government will have the will to fund two major sectors simultaneously.

R. NARAYANAN,
Navi Mumbai

■ Contempt proceedings
I write this as a retired Judge of the Madras High Court. Contempt of court is a kind of 'nuclear arsenal' which courts unleash without

accountability. One has only to observe what happened in the case of former Chief Minister of Kerala E.M.S. Namboodiripad and author Arundhati Roy. Has the dignity of courts risen one bit? No. When a person wanted the Supreme Court of India to initiate contempt proceedings against then Law Minister P. Shivashankar for "making statements against the Supreme Court which are derogatory to its dignity, attributing this Court with partiality towards affluent sections, and in language which is extremely intemperate and undignified", the Court instead chose the path of calling for institutional introspection. It is worth

reading the chapter, 'Contempt of Court', by Supreme Court judge O. Chinappa Reddy in his book, *The Court and the Constitution of India: Summits and Shallows*. Here, the learned Judge has noted that the Supreme Court has held that criticism of a decision however strong and stinging should not be the subject matter of contempt. A litigious judge is not a free judge, he adds. Hence, the proceedings against lawyer-activist Prashant Bhushan should be dropped in keeping with constitutional values.

D. HARIPARANTHAM,
Chennai



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D. HARIPARANTHAM,
Chennai

In Assam, a trail of broken barriers

Flood waters have breached dykes and embankments time and again, wreaking havoc on the State. **Rahul Karmakar** reports on a vulnerable State's struggle to mitigate the damage

Rabindra Hajong had sensed trouble the evening before when he saw muddy water threatening to overtop the road to Lakhipur town, about 165 km west of Guwahati. Lakhipur is the headquarters of Lakhipur Revenue Circle in western Assam's Goalpara district, sandwiched between Meghalaya and the Brahmaputra river.

In about nine hours since Hajong raised the alarm, a 50 ft-wide body of water erased a culvert and portions of the road at Sigri near Lakhipur and rushed toward Dhamor Reserve about 2 km away. It took moments for about 95% of some 800 houses to be submerged early morning.

Floods in Assam come in waves dictated by the rivers. What hit Dhamor Reserve village on May 25 was a mini tsunami from the hills of Meghalaya.

"Most of us did not sleep that night. We had packed our important documents and other valuables and tried to keep them above the water level before we could move to safety or be rescued," says Hajong, the Dhamor Gram Panchayat president.

But they could not save their most precious asset – the harvest-ready paddy they had toiled over for almost six months.

"We are used to floods, but the water level in the past used to rise gradually. That gave us enough time to reap the paddy and store it for the year ahead. We did not suffer as much in 1998 when Assam experienced bad floods," says Sujit Hajong, a farmer whose crop on four bighas of land was destroyed.

The Hajong community was settled in Dhamor Reserve as refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan in 1964-66. Each family has an average of three bighas of land for farming.

"Goalpara saw flash floods in 2014 and earlier, but in the eastern part bordering the North Garo Hills district of Meghalaya in areas along three tributaries of the Brahmaputra. The devastation this time came to the western part following a cloudburst in Meghalaya's West Garo Hills. Some 50-odd villages of Lakhipur Circle bore the brunt. We hardly had time to react but rescue personnel did a fast job of taking the marooned to safety, some of them to a relief camp," says Varnali Deka, Goalpara's Deputy Commissioner.

The villagers did not have to stay away from their submerged houses for long; the water subsided in four days. They returned home only to be caught in an inundating 'wave' on July 6. The cause of their misery this time was a breach in the 37 km-long Kharmuja-Nichinpur dyke that was expected to protect Dhamor Reserve and scores of other villages from the fury of the Brahmaputra.

The fluctuating water level has since made 262 of Dhamor Reserve's 2,861 people stay on at the Baungaon Lower Primary School, a relief camp by the roadside. The others made their own arrangement or took shelter at the houses of relatives on highlands.

Refugees again
At Ghoshpara-Sahapara village about 5 km southwest of Baungaon, betel leaf trader Madhab Saha had raised his semi-concrete house by one metre after a "not-so-damaging" flood 13 years ago. The "safe height" did not insure his house and those of 71 neighbours from the dyke breach at Chilarvita, an average of 8 km northwest of both Ghoshpara-Sahapara and Dhamor Reserve.

Kharmuja-Nichinpur is one of two Brahmaputra dykes or B-dykes that Assam's Water Resources Department (WRD) manages in Goalpara district. The other one is 2 km long for the protection of Goalpara town. The department also handles four embankments on three tributaries in the district.

According to WRD officials, newly constructed barriers to keep rivers in check are embankments while the older ones needing repairs and periodic maintenance are dykes.

"We expected to stay in this relief camp for a week at most, not for almost a month," says Madhab's wife Uma Saha at Lakhipur's Nidanpur Sabita Adarsha Prathamik Vidyalaya, where anganwadi workers keep her two children engaged in pre-school activities.

The plight of relief workers and service providers is no different from the inmates of the camps. The Baungaon school's anganwadi worker Durgabati Das wades 2 km from her house, now shin-deep in water, every day "for the relief camp children who need to be in good spirits". The Lakhipur house of Samin-uz-Zaman, an accountant with the Integrated Child Development Scheme, is in knee-deep water. Lakhipur's anganwadi supervisor Sukurana Begum is luckier; the flood spared her elevated house but not her surroundings.

All of them had raised their houses after the 1998 flood level they thought would be difficult to surpass. The devastation in Lakhipur Circle happened that year because of a breach in the same dyke at Haguripara, about 6 km east of



A family moves from their submerged village in Kothaguri village in Morigaon district of Assam. (Below): Women try to save their corn in Morigaon district. • RITU RAJ KONWAR



Chilarvita where the Brahmaputra tore off a section of the dyke on July 6.

Sahabuddin Mondal, former Gram Panchayat president of Haguripara, recalls how the 1998 breach changed the area comprising five villages forever.

"These were revenue villages famous for growing quality paddy, oilseeds, pulses and vegetables. Merchants used to drive to Haguripara from far for bulk buying. The 1998 flood turned the villages into smaller, disconnected chars (river sandbars). Some 80% of the once-prosperous farmers turned daily-wagers in far-flung areas while some families relocated elsewhere in Goalpara and other districts," he says.

From 150 bighas of farmland two decades ago, Mondal and his six brothers now own about 10 bighas. He has to use a boat to travel to the 'mainland' almost throughout the year. But they are "still better off" than other Bhatias - Bengal-origin Muslims - who relocated to districts such as Darrang and Bongaigaon only to end up being suspected as 'Bengalis' and served 'D-voter' (doubtful voter) notices. Election Commission officials mark people they suspect to be foreigners as D-voters who are then referred to Foreigners' Tribunals for ascertaining their citizenship.

The five villages under Haguripara Gram Panchayat have about 7,000 people now. Mondal says some 30% of the nearly 6,000 who relocated are yet to be cleared of the D-voter tag for inclusion in the updated National Register of Citizens. The rest of those who relocated and all those who stayed back made it to the register.

The Haguripara script of 1998 is now playing out for Chilarvita and the adjoining villages under the Tarangapur Gram Panchayat. "A channel of the Brahmaputra was 25 metres from the dyke. The rising river first eroded a 150-metre stretch and suddenly about 2 km of it was gone, washing away more than 350 houses in the nearest village," says Tarangapur Gram Panchayat secretary Abu Bakker Siddique. "These villages began turning into chars a few years ago. The process has perhaps been completed this year to force more people to live on the mathauri (dyke) for the rest of their lives," he adds.

Flood-prone farmers are not the only ones to have undergone a change of fate in Lakhipur area, says Goalpara's veterinary officer Nurul Islam. "Most members of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, the British-era zamindar of Lakhipur, have relocated outside," he says. Some amount of flood, he insists, has traditionally been necessary for recharging the soil of Lak-

hipur circle. "But things are getting too unpredictable, erratic and damaging," he says.

Blame it on the embankments

Lakhipur is not the only part of Assam to have suffered from brittle embankments. Data provided by the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) say 220 embankments were damaged or breached this time. Officials admit this has been a major factor in 56.71 lakh people being affected and in the death of 108 people across 30 of Assam's 33 districts between May 22 and July 30.

"The intensity, damage and death in the last two decades have been proportional to the breaching of embankments, and it is getting worse every year," says Partha Jyoti Das, who heads the water, climate and hazard programme of Guwahati-based NGO Aaranyak. "This also indicates how the entire flood management is heavily dependent on ad hoc embankments."

For instance, 64 people died and 39.81 lakh were affected in 2016 when 26 embankments were damaged. In 2018, 25 embankments were damaged, 45 were killed and 13.22 lakh affected. Das says planners and engineers laid the "foundation of disaster" with the dyke-oriented National Policy for Flood four years after the great earthquake of 1950 that affected the courses of some major rivers. No time, energy or resources were spent on studying the hydrological, geo-morphological and climatic conditions of the rivers as the embankments came up all over. The embankments outlived their utility and began collapsing from the 1990s, rapidly by the turn of the millennium. There was patchwork maintenance of the old dykes, and agencies other than the WRD began building embankments haphazardly without any scientific input.

"The British colonialists began building elitist embankments in eastern Assam to protect their tea gardens, oil wells and urban settlements more than a century ago. Post-Independence, Assam continued with this idea that kept hitting the marginalised hard. In course of time, it became an embankment eco-

nomy embellished with a dam economy in the upstream of rivers and a dredging economy for increasing the depth of the rivers without studying their silting nature," says Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, researcher at Delhi's Institute of Chinese Studies, who has been working on the sociological impact of river and flood management in Assam.

The Brahmaputra Board, formed in 1980 to "integrate management of flood and basins of interstate and international rivers in the northeast", came up with the idea of building big storage dams to contain the rivers upstream. High-volume discharge of water from hydropower dams in Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan during the monsoon season has added to Assam's flood problems.

The "engineering ego" that dissuades planners from seeking scientific inputs and makes them ignore traditional knowledge of living with floods has not only complicated disaster management but also the adaptability of locals to changing conditions, Rahman says. "The Mising community, for instance, has lived in the flood-prone areas of eastern Assam for ages, the water level never reaching the floor of their elevated houses on wooden stilts. They could predict floods until the embankments affected their survival skills. Many don't have a clue about the fast-changing moods of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, leading to the desertification of large swathes of hitherto fertile flood plains," he says.

Hydrologists point out that while the emphasis has been on building dyke after dyke, often to save one from the other, no thought has been given to how to properly drain water from the floodplains.

"One has to understand that floods also happen because excess water cannot recede from the floodplains in time due to obstructions such as roads, embankments, unplanned human habitations, excessive sand and gravel mining and encroachment or blocking of wetlands, streams and channels," says Das.

Ironically, some of Assam's leading centres for ecological studies are built on reclaimed wetlands. They include the Gauhati University, Indian Institute

of Technology-Guwahati and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Consequently, wetlands that once acted as "sponges" for absorbing excess water have been under pressure. They include Deepor Beel, a Ramsar Site on the western edge of Guwahati whose area has shrunk from 4,000 hectares to 500 hectares in two decades.

According to Rahman, one of the reasons for the obsession with inherently-flawed embankments is their profitability. "Floods actually mean a lot of money to a lot of people and many feed off the contractor lobby," he alleges.

It is high time, says Das, for discourses on long-term strategies that are not based on putting up barriers in a bid to tame rivers and make them flow in a straight line instead of letting them meander at will. After the flood devastation across eastern India in 2004, the Centre had set up a Task Force that made several recommendations such as community-based management of dykes. These were soon forgotten.

"No amount of planning can succeed unless we discuss river basins, encompassing in the case of the Brahmaputra the catchments in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Tibet and other north-eastern States. For that, we have to first ensure inter-district cooperation in Assam, go on to coordinated measures involving the neighbouring States, and then think of international collaboration. We must also be ready to spend time on research and development and wait 10-15 years for alternative plans to be in place," he says.

But when a temporary solution like an embankment becomes accepted as a permanent one, the government should invest in stronger and durable protection systems, he adds.

Lessons from the past

Through a Right to Information application, the Society for Socio-Economic Development had found that the cumulative length of embankments was 4,459 km till 2007 and 93.5% of them had been constructed before 1980. The official length now is 4,474.42 km comprising 423 embankments, 295 of which have outlived their lifespan.

But WRD officials say they are invariably blamed for embankments built by departments such as Soil Conservation and Agriculture as well as Panchayat and Rural Development that dole out projects under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). In Goalpara, for instance, about 15 km each of embankments along the banks of both the Krishnai and Duhdhoi rivers were done under MGNREGS.

"Of the 220-odd embankments that were damaged this time, 48 had breached including 17 of ours. Some of these were plugged.. The problematic embankments are usually the ones done locally without adhering to certain specifications and not maintained," says a senior WRD officer in Guwahati.

The specifications include using cohesive, good-quality soil that can with-

stand water pressure, proportionate river-side and countryside slopes from the crest of an embankment that is up to 7.5 metres wide for major rivers and 4.5 metres for tributaries," says Asad Hussain, WRD's assistant executive engineer in Goalpara.

But things are moving in the right direction, the government claims. There are discussions about inter-departmental synergy in handling conventional methods of flood mitigation. Officials say they have been focussing on research and development in addition to execution of flood management work and collection of hydro-meteorological data.

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The government has also sanctioned the formation of a committee to study how floods happen, how to go about managing them, and how to mitigate an issue that "cannot be stopped" given Assam's geographical position - largely low-lying and surrounded by the hills of Meghalaya, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram from where the rivers flow down.

"Fresh ideas have gone into flood mitigation. Child-friendly spaces in relief camps, in coordination with UNICEF, were made compulsory at every relief camp this time along with guidelines for maintaining COVID-19 protocols. Such spaces are helping lessen the stress that displaced children undergo," Manivannan says. "We are planning for the years ahead too. We have decided to set up material banks strategically at flood-prone places to store emergency items. The materials include life jackets, 150 of which have been ordered, for use by flood-affected people. We have put up a Bailey bridge on the road near Lakhipur where the flashflood from Meghalaya washed away a culvert on May 25," he says. The Bailey bridge, provided from the State Disaster Response Fund, was put in place by the Public Works Department (Roads) in 10 days. For the locals, the Bailey bridge was a throwback to the British era when the spot sported a steel bridge that was replaced by a wooden bridge in 1980. It gave way to a concrete culvert three years ago.

"The future of managing floods in Assam is perhaps in the lessons from the past. If we do it right, we can have long-term, more nature-friendly solutions. If not, we will be back to square one, discussing the same issues next year and the next without a solution in sight," says Rahman.



FROM PAGE ONE

Fiscal deficit touches 83% of full-year target

The Centre has also transferred ₹1.34 lakh crore to States as their share of taxes, which is ₹14,588 crore lower than the previous year.

"The 83% figure is not surprising because it is using a denominator that has already been exceeded," said D.K. Srivastava, chief economist with Ernst and Young, and a member of the advisory council to the 15th Finance Commission. "The Centre has already announced plans for additional borrowing that amounts to about 5.7% of GDP, and then on top of that, some more stimulus spending may be undertaken in the latter part of the fiscal year. So I expect that the Centre's fiscal deficit... might cross even 6.5%," he added.

D.K. Pant, chief economist at India Ratings, estimated a fiscal deficit of 7.6%, while Madan Sabnavis, chief economist of CARE Ratings, said it could go as high as 8% of GDP. "When economic activity has been stopped because of the pandemic and lockdown, government revenues are also going to come down," said Dr. Sabnavis. "We have been noting the positive trade surplus, but when imports are down, customs revenue is also lower. And consumers have also cut down on discretionary spending," he added.

However, Dr. Srivastava found room for cheer in the 40% growth in the first quarter capital expenditure to ₹88,273 crore. "Looking at data for the last 20 years, we find that this is historically high, in terms of year-on-year percentage growth for the first quarter."

KVs unlikely to change medium of instruction

A senior official at the CBSE reiterated this view. "Education is in the concurrent list. The CBSE is only an examination body. We have schools all over the country and in 25 foreign countries as well."

The CBSE school in Tamil Nadu will have to follow the State government guidelines, based on the common Policy," said the official. "Most of the CBSE schools are catering to the requirement of people in transferable jobs, so it will not be possible to teach in local

Cong. shifts pro-Gehlot MLAs to Jaisalmer

The Gehlot camp has been claiming the support of 102 MLAs, including the Independents, in the 200-member Assembly. The legislators are likely to stay in Jaisalmer until the Assembly session, summoned by Governor Kalraj Mishra after much persuasion by the government, begins on August 14. Mr. Gehlot told reporters at Jaipur's Sanganer airport that the MLAs supporting

him had started getting calls with "threats and inducements" soon after the date for commencement of the Assembly session was announced.

"When the Home Ministry is after us, we have to make all efforts to save the government with people's support. Home Minister Amit Shah is in the forefront of bringing down the elected governments," he said.

Sajad Lone released from detention after a year

Responding to the decision extending Ms Mufti's detention, her daughter Iltija said: "Anything is expected from this regime. The petition challenging her unlawful detention has been pending in SC since February 26. Where does one seek justice?"

Reacting to the development, M.K. Stalin, president of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), in a tweet said, "I unequivocally condemn the continued detention of Ms. Mufti and other Kashmiri leaders. It is almost one year since they were taken into custody and voices of democracy were

stifled. The DMK stands against the misuse of PSA to silence political opponents."

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader and former Union minister Saifuddin Soz on Friday said he was allowed to meet his sister but denied a meeting with his daughter by the police. Stating that the police "produced and released a video showing that he was a free man", "This version of the police is nothing more than a white lie," Mr. Soz said. "I confirm the fact that I am under house-arrest. The government version that I was a free man is wrong."

e-darshan is no darshan, SC tells Jharkhand

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday questioned the logic behind keeping places of worship closed even post lockdown, saying "e-darshan is no darshan".

"When the country is opening up, why are only religious places shut? It is different if there is a complete lockdown. But when other things are being opened, temples, mosques and churches should also be opened, at least on important occasions," Justice Arun Mishra, heading a three-judge Bench, said orally.

The court was hearing a plea by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey against a Jharkhand High Court order restricting

worshippers to virtual darshan at Baidyanath temple in Deogarh during Shravani mela.

"These [places of worship] are places of importance. Why not allow darshan on a limited basis? At least that is expected of a Welfare State," Justice Mishra asked senior advocate Salman Khurshid, who led the Jharkhand government side. Mr. Khurshid, who spoke to the CMO, said the State had serious concerns about the spread of COVID-19. "This is a matter of more serious concern," Mr. Khurshid submitted. He asked the court how the State could be expected to "select" devotees to be allowed into the temple.

A.P. records over 10,000 new cases for third day

27 residents, six nuns in home for the elderly in Kerala test positive; 5,483 new cases, 84 deaths reported in Karnataka

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala recorded 1,310 fresh cases, taking its cumulative numbers to 23,613 on Friday.

Of the new cases, 885 were reported on Friday, while 425 were added from Thursday's data. The Health Department could not update data from Thiruvananthapuram, Palakkad and Kasaragod districts on Thursday due to technical

COVID-19

problems. Of the 1,310 new cases, 1,207 were locally acquired infections, and 36 had no identified source of infection. Twenty healthcare workers were affected.

Three deaths were officially confirmed, two in Ernakulam and one in Kollam, taking the toll to 73.

On Friday, 864 recoveries were reported, among 13,027 reported till date, and 10,495

patients were in hospitals.

Thiruvananthapuram led among districts, with 320 cases, all except one being locally acquired infections. Thirty-five people in Shanti Bhavan, an old-age home run by the Missionaries of Charity at Kochuthura tested positive. The patients included 27 senior citizen residents with co-morbidities, six nuns, and two employees. Six police officers tested positive.

The number of persons under treatment in the district swelled to 3,078.

Telangana reported 1,986 cases, taking the total to 62,703 while test reports of 1,216 persons were awaited. Fourteen more deaths were reported during the day, taking the total to 519.

There were 16,796 active cases, the Health Department said. A total of 21,380 samples were collected on Thursday. Greater Hyderabad reported 586 cases on

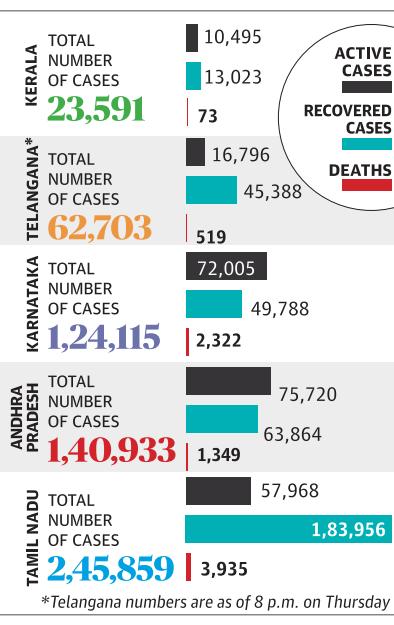
Divine route

Places of worship in some States have opened doors to devotees by maintaining COVID-19 protocol. The graph shows the spread of the pandemic in the southern States



Seeking blessings: Devotees wearing face mask arriving for prayers during Varalakshmi Vratham at Sri Bhagyalakshmi temple in Hyderabad on Friday.

■ NAGARA GOPAL



*Telangana numbers are as of 8 p.m. on Thursday

galuru Urban. There were 84 COVID-19 deaths over the past day, taking the total to 2,314. Seven of the 84 patients passed away at home.

On Friday, 36,936 tests were conducted in the State, of which 22,164 were rapid antigen tests, while the remaining were RT-PCR tests.

97 deaths in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu recorded 5,881 new cases of COVID-19 infection on Friday taking the overall tally to 2,45,859, of which 57,968 were active cases.

The State also recorded the deaths of 97 patients including that of three persons in their 20s, taking the toll to 3,915.

Chennai saw a marginal dip in coronavirus infections with 1,013 cases, but its overall tally was close to the one lakh-mark.

(With inputs from Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Bengaluru and Chennai bureaus)

14 die after consuming hand sanitiser in two A.P. hotspots

Liquor vends are shut due to the rise in COVID-19 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
ONGOLE

Fourteen persons died after consuming hand sanitiser in COVID-19 hotspots of Kurichedu and Pamur in Prakasam district. While 11 persons, including two beggars, died at Kurichedu, three others reportedly lost their lives at Pamur, in the last 24 hours.

All liquor outlets in the two villages had been shut in the two villages in the wake of a surge in cases as part of measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

Some tipplers, most of them labourers, initially started sanitiser mixed with soft drink or water. At least 20 persons in the village



Fatal drink: Police seizing the leftover sanitizer consumed by some tipplers in Prakasam district on Friday. ■ KOMMURI SRINIVAS

consumed hand sanitiser one after the other in the last 10 days, said Darsi Deputy Superintendent of Police K. Prakasa Rao.

One of the affected per-

sons said they were addicted to liquor, which had gone out of their reach due to the lockdown. Hence, they went for the cheap and easily available hand sanitiser.

Appeal in SC to lower Mullaperiyar's level

Danger of quake, says Idukki resident

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear an appeal by a resident of Idukki district of Kerala to lower the water level of Mullaperiyar dam to 130 feet as there is a danger of earthquakes and floods in the area as monsoon progresses in the State.

The Tamil Nadu government, however, countered before a three-judge Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar that the plea has become infructuous and Mr. Joy has a similar petition pending in the court.

"Two years have passed and a similar matter is pending since 2018," advocate G. Umaphathy submitted.

Advocate Wills Mathews, for Mr. Joy, said six districts in the State were under the threat of floods and earthquakes.

Pleas tagged

The Bench finally tagged the new plea along with the 2018 one and agreed to hear them on August 24.

In early August 2018, on Mr. Joy's plea, the Supreme Court had agreed with the conclusion of the disaster management sub-committee that the water level in the reservoir should be maintained two or three feet below the permissible limit of 142 feet till August 31 as an immediate precaution against floods or other disasters.

'Sabarimala pilgrim season to be exacting'

The coming Mandalam-Makaravilakku pilgrimage at Sabarimala is going to be exacting for both pilgrims and the Travancore Devaswom Board in view of the pandemic outbreak. TDB president N. Vasu told *The Hindu* that the pilgrimage would not be a normal one. The board is exploring the possibility of permitting the annual pilgrimage with stringent restrictions.

Bengaluru gets new Police Commissioner

The Karnataka government has changed the police leadership in the city, posting Kamal Pant as the new Commissioner. The outgoing Commissioner, Bhaskar Rao, led the city police during the pandemic and lockdown for nearly two months. He has now been posted as ADGP, Internal Security Division. B. Dayananda, who was ADGP, economic offences wing at CID, replaces Kamal Pant as the State intelligence chief.

Widespread rainfall in Kerala from Aug. 3: IMD

Kerala is bracing for widespread rainfall in the first week of August with the likely formation of a low pressure area in the north Bay of Bengal by August 4. This is expected to aid the revival of the southwest monsoon. The India Meteorological Department said an increase in rainfall activity is expected over Kerala from August 3.

11 held for smuggling gold in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD Customs enforcers of the Air Intelligence Unit on Thursday night arrested 11 passengers at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad, for smuggling in 3.1 kg of gold from Dammam, Saudi Arabia. The passengers arrived in Hyderabad by a Vande Bharat Mission flight, as part of the COVID-19-triggered evacuation.

Kerala not to start long-distance services

KOZHIKODE The Kerala State Road Transport Corporation has revoked its decision to resume long-distance inter-district bus services in the wake of the increase in COVID-19 cases in the State. The earlier plan was to resume such services from Saturday considering the struggle of passengers.

BJP serves legal notice on Congress

Corruption charges unsubstantiated'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU/MANGALURU

Even as the Congress intensified its campaign on Friday alleging corruption in COVID-19 management in Karnataka, the BJP served legal notice on Leader of the Opposition Siddaramaiah and State Congress president D.K. Shivakumar asking them to not only withdraw their allegations but also apologise for making "unsubstantiated charges" or face legal action.

Mr. Shivakumar on Friday held the first in a series of press interactions in Mangalore on the alleged corruption in COVID-19 management. He also released a booklet titled *Coronadalli*.

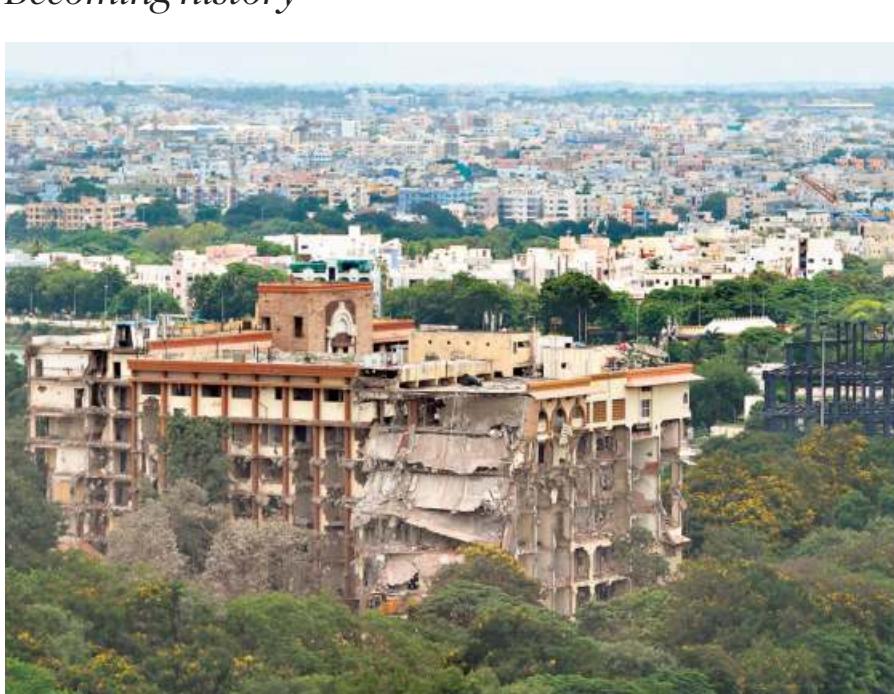


KARNATAKA

Bhrashtachara; BJP Sarkara Samskara. He reiterated the demand for a judicial probe by a sitting High Court judge. The government, he alleged, had failed to even ensure the decent burial/cremation of deceased persons while "making money" in the purchase of equipment.

Meanwhile, N. Ravikumar, general secretary, BJP, served legal notice to Mr. Siddaramaiah and Mr. Shivakumar. Describing the allegations as "calculated to lower the image of the party and the government" without any proof, it said the BJP would pursue legal action if the allegations were not withdrawn and a public apology was not made.

Becoming history



Giving way: The old Secretariat complex in Hyderabad in the process of being pulled down on Friday in order to build a new Telangana Secretariat. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

A.P. Governor clears three capital, CRDA repeal Bills

Focus on development of Amaravati, Kurnool and Vizag

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

In a major turning point in the history of Andhra Pradesh, Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan on Friday gave his assent to the A.P. Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions and A.P. Capital Region Development Authority Repeal Bills - 2020.

The clearance of the decentralisation Bill facilitates the development of Amaravati, Kurnool and Visakhapatnam as the Legislative, Judicial and Executive Capitals respectively.



ANDHRA PRADESH

The repeal of the CRDA paves the way for the formation of the Amaravati Metropolitan Region Development Authority. The government is free now to give the "three capitals" proposal a tangible shape while a batch of petitions that challenged the two Bills is pending adjudication by the High Court.

As per the Decentralisation Bill, Visakhapatnam will have the Raj Bhavan, the Secretariat and offices of the Heads of Departments, and Amaravati will be the seat of the Legislature. Regarding the judicial capital, the Bill says: "The seat of all State

judicial institutions established under the State legislation, shall, as far as practicable, be located in Kurnool."

Accordingly, the principal seat of the High Court will be located in Kurnool and Benches constituted as per the procedure laid down in the A.P. Reorganisation Act, 2014. The Bills were considered as "deemed to be passed" as one month has elapsed after their introduction in the Legislative Council for the second time, as per Clause 2 of Article 197 of the Constitution notwithstanding the fact that they were not cleared by the Upper House.

He allegedly stole the phone

INTERVIEW | RAMESH POKHRiyAL NISHANK

'Rigorous consultations done before framing new National Education Policy'

Education Minister says there will be a major effort from both the Centre and the States to invest in a large number of teachers in all regional languages

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NISTULA HEBBAR

The State governments will take a decision on the medium of instruction in schools under their jurisdiction, Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank says on the new National Education Policy (NEP). He expresses concern over a severe scarcity of skilled language teachers and the policy's recommendations on governance and financing reforms.

Is the policy decision to make the mother tongue the medium of instruction till Class 5 going to be implemented mandatorily across the country, or is it optional for each State Education Department to adopt? Has the Centre taken the States' views on board on this issue? Have any States raised concerns on implementing this?

■ The Ministry of Education has conducted a rigorous consultation process to ensure an inclusive, participatory and holistic approach while framing the NEP. Over two lakh suggestions from 2.5 lakh gram panchayats, 6,600 blocks, 6,000 urban local bodies (ULBs), 676 districts were received.

Most developed countries have made an earnest effort to ensure that the child studies in the mother tongue so

that both parents and children participate in education in the early years of the child. Young children learn and grasp non-trivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue.

Thereby, the New Education Policy states that, "Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/ local language/ regional language." The RTE Act 2009 also states that the medium of instruction, as far as practicable, shall be the mother tongue.

The decision regarding the medium of instruction in schools coming under their jurisdiction is to be taken by the respective State governments.

What is the timeline for

implementing this decision? Are there sufficient teachers trained for this in all regional languages?

■ There has been a severe scarcity of skilled language teachers in India. There will be a major effort from both the Central and State governments to invest in large numbers of language teachers in all regional languages around the country, and, in particular, for all languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. States from different regions of India may enter into bilateral agreements to hire teachers in large numbers from each other, to satisfy the three-language formula in their respective States, and also to encourage the study of Indian languages across the country.

Language teaching too must be improved to be more experiential and to focus on the ability to converse and interact in the language and not just on the literature, vocabulary, and grammar of the language. Languages must be used more extensively for conversation and for teaching-learning.



C The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in the education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest

A number of initiatives will be adopted to foster languages in school as well as higher education. Strong departments and programmes in Indian languages, comparative literature, creative writing, arts, music, philosophy, etc. will be launched and developed across the country, and degrees including four-year B.Ed. dual degrees will be developed in these subjects.

Will the private and public

schools affiliated to the CBSE and the ICSE be asked to mandatorily convert to teaching in the mother tongue only till Class 5? How about Kendriya Vidyalayas that are directly controlled by the Centre?

■ The beauty of this policy is flexibility. The intent of the policy follows the mandate given under the Right to Education Act. We will try to take everyone along in the process of making a vibrant India.

The NEP mentions traditional Indian knowledge systems to be included in the curriculum. What are some of the topics and themes you think need to be included, and who are the experts that the Centre will rope in to ensure that this is done?

■ We have just come out with the policy. This will be the mandate of the National Curriculum Framework Committee to decide what topics constitute traditional Indian knowledge systems. "Knowledge of India" will include knowledge from an-

cient India and its contributions to modern India and its successes and challenges, and a clear sense of India's future aspirations with regard to education, health, environment, etc. These elements will be incorporated in an accurate and scientific manner throughout the school curriculum wherever relevant.

The original NEP draft from Dr. K. Kasturirangan's panel had proposed a Rashtriya Shiksha Ayog as an apex body to oversee all education in the country to be headed by the Prime Minister. Why was this removed from the final policy?

■ Upon conducting several rounds of consultations, it was decided that there is a dire need to strengthen and empower the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) which will have a much greater mandate and not only be a forum for widespread consultation and examination of issues relating to educational and cultural development.

The remodelled and rejuvenated CABE will be responsible for developing, articulating, evaluating, and revising the vision of education in the country on a continuous basis, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the corresponding apex bodies of States. It shall also create and continuously review the institutional frameworks that shall help attain this vision.

The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill has been at the draft stage for over a year now. When will it be introduced in Parliament?

■ The Ministry of Education is almost ready with the Cabinet note for the same and will take approval of the government soon.

■ Will the proposed increase of public funding for education to 6% of GDP be sufficient to finance all the proposed reforms? If not, how does the Centre propose to raise the needed funds for implementation?

■ The Centre and the States will work together to in-

crease the public investment in the education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest.

In particular, financial support will be provided to various critical elements and components of education, such as ensuring universal access, learning resources, nutritional support, matters of student safety and well-being, adequate numbers of teachers and staff, teacher development, and support for all key initiatives towards equitable high-quality education for underprivileged and socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

■ Why was it important to change the name of the Ministry from Human Resource Development to Education?

■ The name shifts the focus to the core work of the Ministry. The core work is imparting education to the millions of children and youth of the country. Now every personnel working in the Ministry will have this constant vision before him to improve the education system of the country.

NGT conveys discontent to Environment Ministry

Panel flags lack of effective monitoring

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Friday rapped the Environment Ministry for failing to strengthen the monitoring mechanisms pertaining to the compliance of conditions mentioned in clearances granted for various projects. Stating that the lack of effective enforcement reflected the Centre's "insensitivity" to the issue, the green panel directed the Ministry to take appropriate steps.

Taking note of an affidavit furnished by the Ministry, a Bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said, "This only shows insensitivity to the vital constitutional obligation despite repeated directions. Repeated plea of merely

having such proposals without effective enforcement on the ground can hardly be held to be satisfactory."

Following submissions made by the Ministry, that "meaningful steps" had been taken after the filing of the affidavit, the Bench said, "We cannot accept such a statement. If steps have been actually taken, we fail to understand why the same could not be produced at least during the hearing. We record our dissatisfaction at the attitude of the MoEF&CC on the subject."

The observations came when the green panel was hearing a plea moved by Sandip Mittal seeking directions to devise effective monitoring mechanisms for compliance of conditions of environmental clearance.

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI



Different camps now: Sachin Pilot and Mahesh Joshi, right, at a protest against the Centre in Jaipur in June. ■ ROHIT JAIN PARAS

Mr. Joshi said the High Court, however, had intervened at the stage of notice in the disqualification action and even before any harm befell Mr. Pilot and other legislators. Mr. Pilot and others had jointly moved the High Court against the anti-defection notices issued by the Speaker on July 14. The writ petitions filed by them were "premature and

non-maintainable".

"There was absolutely no adverse order of any kind against the respondents [Pilot and other 18 MLAs]", the petition said. It argued that by challenging the constitutionality of Paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule, which mandates that "voluntarily giving up membership of party" amounts to defection, Mr. Pilot was attempt-

ing to "emasculate" the anti-defection law itself.

"The writ petition filed by the respondents seek to raise the question of constitutional validity of Para 2(1)(a) of Tenth Schedule. These prayers were also ex facie non-maintainable as the validity of the Tenth Schedule was extensively considered, deliberated and upheld by the Supreme Court in Kihoto Hollohan... Even otherwise, mere pendency of a challenge to a statutory/constitutional provision in a writ petition cannot and could not have the effect of negating the provision itself", the petition argued.

The chief whip's appeal comes after Speaker C.P. Joshi's plea, which said the "status quo" order of the High Court had crossed the "Lakshman Rekha".

Ban on international flights extended till Aug. 31

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Union government on

five countries — U.S., France, Germany, UAE and Kuwait — allow the airlines of both countries to operate a limited number of non-stop flights.

Separately, India is operating repatriation flights under the Vande Bharat Mission. Over 2,500 such flights have been permitted so far.

INDIAN COUNCIL OF FORESTRY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION
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'Modi govt. empowered Muslim women'

Naqvi says August 1 will be observed as Muslim Women Rights Day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Friday said August 1 should be recorded as "Muslim Women's Rights Day" in the country as the day marked the anniversary of the law making triple talaq a criminal offence.

Mr. Naqvi was addressing a virtual function organised by his Ministry to mark the first anniversary of the passage of the law. It was attended by Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani.

"Several bold and big reforms are a reflection of our honest and effective efforts, which have delivered better



Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi

results," he said.

"August 1 is a day that made Muslim women free from the social evil of triple talaq; it has been recorded in the country's history as 'Muslim Women Rights Day'. August 1 will remain as a golden moment of Indian democracy and parliament-

tary history," he observed. The Modi government, he asserted, had ensured gender equality and strengthened constitutional, fundamental and democratic rights of Muslim women by bringing law against the social evil of triple talaq.

"Triple talaq or Talaq-a-Biddat was neither Islamic nor legal. Despite the fact, it was given 'political patronage' by 'merchants of votes,'" he stated.

"The law against social evil of triple talaq could have been passed in 1986 when the Hon'ble Supreme Court gave the historic judgement in the Shahbano Case. The Congress had absolute majority in Parliament with more than 400 out of 545

Lok Sabha members and more than 159 out of 245 members in the Rajya Sabha. But the then Rajiv Gandhi government used its strength in Parliament to make the SC judgement ineffective and deprive the Muslim women of their constitutional and fundamental rights," he said.

Decline in talaq cases The Modi government made the law against triple talaq to make effective the SC judgement.

"One year has passed since the law against triple talaq was passed and there is a decline of about 82% in such cases thereafter. If any such case was reported, the law had taken action," he noted.

In SC, UGC pushes for exams by Sept.-end

Petitions filed by over 30 students challenging conduct of exams amid pandemic

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) orally made a submission in the Supreme Court on Friday that students should not break their preparation for final year exams to be conducted "by the end of September 2020".

Though a UGC affidavit filed on July 31 said the exams were scheduled "by the end of September 2020" to give varsities sufficient time to make arrangements amid the pandemic, the same affidavit also goes to inform

the court that information received from 818 universities show that 603 varsities had conducted their final year exams or were in the process of conducting exams during August-September 2020.

Keep on studying: SG On Friday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the UGC, by means of abundant caution, said "let nobody be under the impression that final exams will be stayed because Supreme Court is hearing the case.

Crucial step in career The hearing is based on a bunch of petitions filed by over 30 students challenging

the conduct of exams amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The court ordered the Maharashtra and NCT Delhi governments to submit reports on the ground situation in the fight against COVID-19 from their respective State Disaster Management Committees within a week. It posted the case for August 10 for further orders after examining the reports.

In its response, the UGC said the "final year/terminal semester exams is a crucial step in the academic career of a student".

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Trials for 30-second COVID-19 tests begin

India, Israel working on 4 rapid tests

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Ambassador of Israel to India Ron Malka visited Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, the trial site for 30-second COVID-19 tests, a joint venture between India and Israel, here on Friday. He was accompanied by K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser, Government of India.

RML Hospital is one of the testing sites, which have started trials of four different kinds of technologies that have the potential to detect COVID-19 in as less as 30 seconds, noted a release issued by the Israel Embassy.

It added that these non-invasive technologies include a voice test that uses artificial intelligence to iden-

tify changes in the patient's voice, a breath analyser test that requires the patient to blow into a tube and detects the virus using terra-hertz waves, isothermal testing that enables identification of the virus in a saliva sample, and a test using poly-amino acids that seeks to isolate proteins related to COVID-19. "These trials are being conducted on a large sample of patients in India. If the results validate the effectiveness of the tests, they will be mass manufactured in India and marketed to the world by Israel and India jointly," said the release.

"If even one of these tests is successful, it will be the biggest breakthrough in COVID-19 identification," Mr. Malka said.

'India's fatality rate among world's lowest'

A record 6,42,588 COVID-19 tests conducted in the last 24 hours, says Health Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Of the total COVID-19 active case load, 0.28% patients are on ventilators, 1.61% patients required ICU support and 2.32% are on oxygen support, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Friday following the 19th meeting of the Group of Ministers (GOM) on COVID-19.

He added that India has one of the lowest case fatality rates globally, which is also steadily decreasing.

Active cases

"India has conducted a record 6,42,588 COVID-19 tests in the last 24 hours. The active cases under medical supervision are only 33.27% or approximately one-third of the total positive cases. India's case fatality rate is also



Patient wait: A health worker waiting for patients inside a quarantine centre in Mankurd on Friday. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

progressively reducing and currently stands at 2.18%, one of the lowest globally," the Minister said.

National Centre for Dis-

countries with the highest case load, said the overall recovery rate for India was 64.54%.

"The highest recovery rate is being recorded by Delhi at 89.08%, followed by Haryana [79.82%]. Karnataka has the lowest recovery rate of 39.36%," he said.

Reduce mortality

Dr. Singh added that efforts were being made to reduce mortality in high case-load districts and cities as also cities showing recent upsurge like Pune, Thane, Bengaluru and Hyderabad, among others.

"The measures to be taken include revamping the strategy for effective management of containment zones through stricter perimeter control; widespread

Rapid Antigen Tests; intensive and rapid door-to-door search; more isolation facilities for suspects/cases; standard case management protocols along with increase in oxygen supported beds and ventilators and assessing true burden through planned sero-surveys," a release issued by the Health Ministry said.

The GoM was also apprised of the ramping up of the domestic production capacities of various sectors for manufacturing PPE, masks, ventilators and drugs such as hydroxychloroquine (HCQ). In terms of healthcare logistics, 268.25 lakh N95 masks, 120.40 lakh PPEs and 1,083.77 lakh HCQ tablets have been distributed to States/Union Territories and Central institutions.

India could rise to top spot in cases'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Friday said India could touch 55 lakh COVID-19 cases by September end if cases continued to rise at the present rate.

Mr. Chidambaram said India could rise to the top spot going by the present rate of increase in infection. "India will record over 33 lakh infections by end August 2020 and over 55 lakh infections by end September 2020," he tweeted.

"India may get the first spot among all countries in the number of infections. What does this say about the Modi government's strategy from day one... It has been a TOTAL FAI-LURE," he said.

IN BRIEF



LJP opposes Bihar polls amid pandemic, floods

NEW DELHI

With the double whammy of the COVID-19 pandemic and the floods, Bihar is currently not in a position to hold Assembly elections, key NDA ally Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) told the Election Commission (EC) on Friday. The LJP was replying to a letter sent by the EC on July 17 to political parties in Bihar, seeking their views on holding the Assembly elections in the time of the pandemic.

Cong. cites Jaya Jaitly case to rake up Rafale

NEW DELHI

Congress spokesperson Jaiye Shergill said on Friday that the verdict in the Jaya Jaitly case highlighted the need to investigate the truth of the Rafale deal. "The capability of Rafale does not give immunity to BJP from accountability on the issues of inflated costs, bypassing rules and regulations and giving preference to a 'zero experience private player over a Public Sector Undertaking,' he said.

Prem Bhattacharya award winners announced

NEW DELHI

Indian Express reporter Dipankar Ghose and the People's Archive of Rural India, a non-profit journalism website dedicated to reporting on rural India, has won this year's Prem Bhattacharya award for outstanding journalism. Mr. Ghose has been given the award for his coverage of the migrant labour crisis and other COVID-19-related issues. The People's Archive of Rural India has been awarded for its extensive field reporting, including its coverage of the effects of climate change.

Doctors' quarantine days must not be marked leave: SC

Ensure dues for health workers are cleared, court tells govt.

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday expressed shock when doctors and health workers complained that the days they spent in quarantine after performing COVID-19 duty was being marked as holiday by authorities.

"They are being compulsorily quarantined after duty... And you are taking advantage and taking away their leave?" Justice M.R. Shah, one of the judges on the Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, said. The court directed the Centre, represented by Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, to look into the issue.

The court was also informed that five States – Tripura, Maharashtra, Punjab, Delhi and Karnataka – had not paid full salaries to doctors and health workers. The court had on June 17 di-



Many health workers are compulsorily quarantined.

rected States to pay the full salaries within the next 24 hours.

The court asked the Centre to ensure, even by using its sweeping powers under the Disaster Management Act, that doctors and health workers get their full salaries within a week.

On June 17, the court, acting on a petition filed by Dr. Arushi Jain, had also ordered States to provide appropriate accommodation and implement quarantine

guidelines uniformly among medical staffers and doctors, regardless of the nature of their exposure to COVID-19 patients.

The court had taken exception to how quarantine was done away with for medical workers except those in high-risk categories.

It had said no distinction could be made between health workers in high-risk areas and others as far as quarantine was concerned. Senior advocate K.V. Vishwanathan, for petitioner Dr. Arushi Jain, said in most cases medical staffers had their aged parents staying with them.

Dr. Jain has questioned the Centre's new standard operating procedure (SOP) of May 15 for frontline COVID-19 Health Care Workers (HCWs) by which it has ended the 14-day mandatory quarantine for them.

Surplus rain likely in two months

Rainfall during August and September is likely to be 104% of the LPA, says IMD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

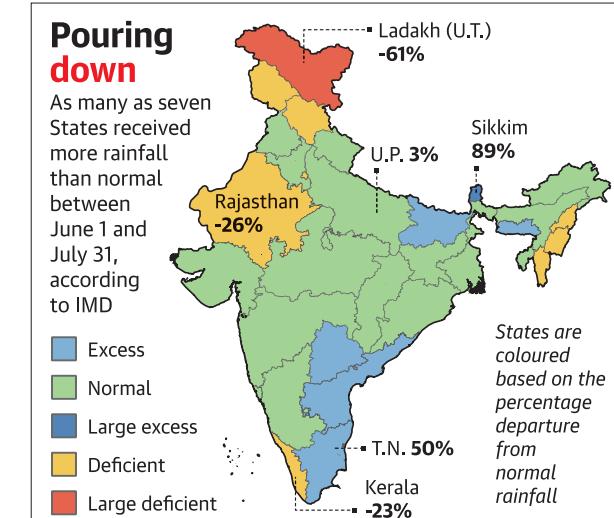
NEW DELHI

The monsoon rainfall in August and September is likely to be more than anticipated with chances of a particularly active September. Rains during June and July have so far been textbook-like with India getting 44.7cm (until July 30) as opposed to the historical normal of 44.3.

This has contributed to farmers sowing more than what they did in the corresponding period last year.

In a forecast update on Friday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that rainfall in the "second half of the monsoon" is likely to be 104% – another of their models puts it at 106% – of the Long Period Average (LPA), a 50-year average of what is usual for that period. Rain within a 4% window of what is forecast are considered to be 'normal' by the IMD.

However, rainfall in August is likely to be only 97%



of its LPA, the IMD said, sticking to a forecast estimate from June. August, like July, is a key month for the monsoon as it contributes about 30% of the overall monsoon rainfall. (July tops with 33%). September is the month when the monsoon is on the wane, and contributes only about 16%.

Were the IMD's forecast to hold, this would imply that September rains could be significantly more than what's normal and go up to as much as 20%.

Subdued July

"July rainfall was below what we had expected [the IMD forecast 103% LPA] and sub-

dued rainfall over Central India is likely to continue until August 5," said Mrityunjay Mohapatra, Director-General, IMD.

"Extended range models show a pickup thereafter and September rains too are likely to be on the higher side," he added.

Another IMD scientist said that by the second half of the season, La Niña-like conditions, or a cooling of the Central Equatorial Pacific, is likely to commence. "In August, though the forecast is for 97%, the inbuilt error of the forecast model is +9%. And given the conditions emerging, there are chances of more rain than expected. September too is likely to see good rains," D.S. Pai, head, Climate Research and Services, IMD, Pune told *The Hindu*.

Data from 685 districts show that nearly 38% registered normal rains, 33% deficient or no rains and 29% excess rains.

Pandemic a chance for a new world order

We have choice to build a new system, Muhammad Yunus tells Rahul Gandhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The COVID-19 pandemic has given the world a chance to reflect and take "outrageously bold decisions" to create a new order, Nobel laureate and founder of the Grameen Bank Muhammad Yunus said in a virtual conversation with former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday.

Instead of being eager to "get back to where they were," Mr. Yunus said the pandemic has given societies to think anew and create a



Muhammad Yunus

world order where "there is no global warming, no wealth concentration and no unemployment".

The conversation with the Nobel laureate is part of the dialogue series launched by

Reflecting on the plight of the poor and migrant workers, Mr. Yunus, who revolutionised the world of micro-credit financing with the Grameen Bank, asserted that financial systems are designed in ways that do not recognise the poor. "Economics doesn't recognise these people. They call it the informal sector. If we can finance them they will move up the ladder," he said.

Mr. Gandhi said the pandemic was an opportunity for societies to re-imagine and press the reset button.

1947 pact on Gurkha soldiers redundant: Nepal Minister

India should respond to request for talks on Kalapani row'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The 1947 agreement among India, Nepal and the United Kingdom that deals with the military service of Gurkha soldiers has become "redundant," Foreign Minister of Nepal Pradeep Kumar Gyawali said on Friday.

In an online interaction organised by the Nepal Institute of International Relations, the Minister also said India should respond to Ne-

pal's request for talks on the Kalapani dispute to prevent the issue from impacting people-to-people relations.

"Gurkha recruitment was on the one hand the first window that was opened to Nepali youth to go abroad... In the changed context, some of those provisions have become questionable. Tripartite agreement of 1947 has become redundant," said Mr. Gyawali. He spoke of a possible "bilateral" ar-

rangement with India regarding the Gurkha soldiers.

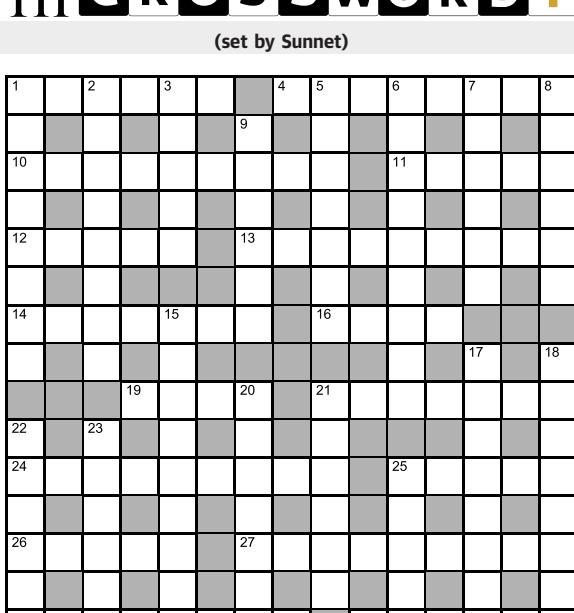
The 1947 agreement divided the Gurkha regiments of the British empire between India and the United Kingdom. However, Gurkha veterans have been alleging that the U.K. has been discriminating against them. Mr. Gyawali did not spell out the specific terms that Nepal wishes to discuss with India on the Gurkha soldiers in the Indian military.

CROSSWORD

+ 13003

(set by Sunnet)

Feeling down in lockdown?
Get across to our Crossword site.
@ <https://qrgo.page.link/jptn>



ACROSS

- Exact note sent back by air (6)
- Fool to return before dark? Ok (8)
- Unwanted growth in cold, tossed macaroni (9)
- Wrong a girl (5)
- Block China's trade corridor? With a blank check? (5)
- Transport frames and hollow protective cover for ship (9)
- Jittery one ran out of election meeting in the COVID-19 era (7)

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

No. SS739 Distribution

IN BRIEF



Bhutan King thanks Assam Chief Minister

GUWAHATI
Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar has written to Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, thanking him for allowing movement of vehicles carrying essential commodities to the neighbouring country amid the lockdown and ensuring the well-being of the people. The King termed the gesture as a true reflection of the friendship and brotherhood between the people of Assam and Bhutan.

ED searches 7 locations in Ambience Group case

NEW DELHI
The Enforcement Directorate on Friday conducted searches on the premises of Aman Hospitality Private Limited, other companies of the Ambience Group, and its directors in connection with a bank fraud case. The searches were carried out at seven locations in Delhi, including the residential premises of directors, Raj Singh Gehlot, Dayanand Singh, Mohan Singh Gehlot. The ED seized ₹16 lakh in cash and ₹24 lakh in foreign currency from Mr. Raj Singh Gehlot's house.

Two BJP workers found dead, party for CBI probe

KOLKATA
Bodies of two Bharatiya Janata Party workers were recovered in two districts of south Bengal in a span of 48 hours, prompting the State leadership of the party to seek the intervention of Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday. Two party MPs Saumitra Khan from Bishnupur and Nitish Pramanik representing Coochbehar Lok Sabha seat met Mr. Shah in New Delhi and asked for a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

Indian bid for airport too high: Dhaka

Chinese firm awarded Sylhet contract for technical, financial reasons: Bangladesh Foreign Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen on Friday said the contract for building an airport terminal at Sylhet was not awarded to an Indian firm because of a high bid and therefore, went to a Chinese firm.

"From what I have heard, the Chinese are technically qualified and have the lowest rates. India's offer was too much and as a result they could not make it," Dr. Momen was quoted as saying by the *Dhaka Tribune*.

The *Hindu* and other news outlets had earlier reported that the construction

From what I have heard, the Chinese are technically qualified and have the lowest rates. India's offer was too much and as a result they could not make it

A.K. ABDUL MOMEN

BANGLADESH FOREIGN MINISTER



workers in the area has given rise to security concerns.

Tender norms

"The question arose, why the job was given to China and not India. In this case, work is given considering the technical and financial aspects by following the tender process," Dr. Momen said.

Addressing the media ahead of Id, the senior Minister referred to several issues related to India and China, and said New Delhi had not reached out to Bangladesh seeking support on the border standoff with China.

Dr. Momen said India had not communicated nor had it delivered a diplomatic note to Dhaka regarding the situation in Ladakh where Indian and Chinese forces have faced-off for the last three months.

Galwan and after

Referring to the incident in the Galwan Valley on June

15, Dr. Momen said, "few" Indian soldiers had died. But he cited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comment and said as per the Indian leader, the Chinese have not occupied "an inch" of Indian territory.

"The Indian government did not send us any verbal notes that any of their people have died. As a result, naturally we did not make any statement," the Foreign Minister said when asked about Dhaka's studied silence on the issue. Dr. Momen had earlier told *The Hindu* that his country advocated dialogue and regional peace.

pal – under its territory. Mr. Oli stoked another controversy this month by claiming that the "real" Ayodhya lies not in India but in Nepal.

The spokesperson of Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) and member of the powerful Central Secretariat Narayan Kaji Shrestha described Mr. Oli's statements as "undiplomatic".

"Prime Minister Oli has committed a blunder by making irritating remarks against India, at a time when there is a need for resolving the border issue through dialogue," he said.

'Oli's remarks against India undiplomatic'

Nepal's ruling party leader slams PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KATHMANDU

Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli has committed a blunder by making irritating remarks against India, a senior leader of the ruling Communist Party has said.

Last month, Mr. Oli alleged that India was conspiring with his political rivals to throw him out of power.

His remark came over a week after Nepal approved a Bill to redraw the country's map demarcating the Lipulekh mountain pass, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura – the area at the centre of the dispute between India and Ne-

Lockdown weight



Wait continues: A worker cleaning equipment at a gym in Delhi on Friday. With the Delhi government partially relaxing COVID-19 curbs, the fitness industry is hoping for a green signal. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

No word from U.K. on Mallya case

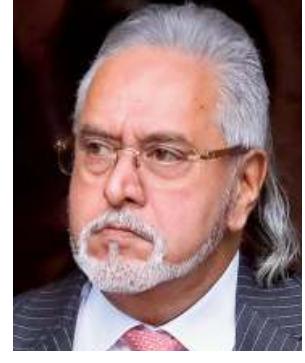
CBI and ED have sought the extradition in connection with IDBI Bank fraud case

DEVESHE K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has not yet received any official communication from the United Kingdom authorities on reasons for the delay in giving final clearance to the extradition of businessman Vijay Mallya.

Over two months ago, the U.K. High Court of Justice turned down his application seeking permission to move the Supreme Court against the dismissal of his appeal countering the lower court's approval to his extradition to India. The issue had to be finally decided by the U.K. Home Office.

"We are not aware of any decision taken by the U.K. authorities in the matter so far. They have not even informed us about any pending legal issue involved in the process," said a senior ED official.



In June, a British High Commission spokesperson said Mr. Mallya could not be extradited at that stage as the U.K. needed to resolve a "confidential" legal issue.

Asylum plea reports

Shortly thereafter, there were reports that he had applied for asylum in the U.K. under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which pertains to

protection against torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Appeal dismissed

On April 20, a division bench of the U.K. High Court dismissed Mr. Mallya's appeal against the Senior District Judge's judgment on December 10, 2018, allowing his extradition.

It held that a *prima facie* case was made out against him on accounts of fraud, misrepresentation to the bank in securing credit facilities, conspiracy and money laundering.

The CBI and the ED have sought the extradition in connection with the IDBI Bank fraud case. As alleged,

between September 1, 2009, and January 24, 2017, Mr. Mallya conspired with the others to commit cheating. They fraudulently got loans sanctioned for the now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines.

Mr. Mallya was also allegedly involved in false representation to the bank on the company's financial condition and the value and/or availability of securities to be relied upon for sanctioning credit facilities. The funds so raised were diverted and laundered.

Wilful loan defaults

Mr. Mallya and others stand accused of wilful loan defaults to the tune of ₹9,000 crore. He had flown out of India on March 2, 2016. After the CBI charged him in the IDBI case, the Indian government made an extradition request on February 9, 2017.

Subsequently, he was arrested by the U.K. Police and released on conditional on April 18, 2017. Based on the ED's request in the money laundering case, he was again arrested on October 3, 2017, and then bailed.

Shun violence and come for talks, Manipur CM tells rebels

Three outfits claim responsibility for Wednesday's ambush

A CORRESPONDENT
IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren on Friday appealed to armed rebels to eschew the path of violence and come to the negotiating table to thrash out all contentious issues. "There is no room for violence in a democracy," he said.

He was speaking at a brief ceremony at the Imphal international airport to pay last respects to Ratan Salam of 4 Assam Rifles, before his body was taken to his home in Kakching district for cremation. Mr. Salam was one of the three personnel killed in an ambush on Wednesday near Khongtang village in Chandel district.

Three proscribed armed outfits – PLA, the military wing of the Revolutionary People's Front, the Manipur



N. Biren Singh

Naga People's Front and the United Liberation Front of Assam (Independent) – claimed in a statement that a joint team had carried out the ambush.

Three killed

Three personnel were killed and five others suffered grievous injuries in the ambush.

Mr. Biren and Assam Rifles officials were present to honour the three personnel whose bodies were brought here in helicopters.

Solatium to be discussed

Mr. Biren said efforts were on to arrest those involved in such violent activities. He appealed to the armed insurgents to stop violence and come to the negotiating table for talks. He promised to take up the issue of solatium for the slain personnel at the next Cabinet meeting.

Officials said an elder brother of Mr. Ratan Salam, identified as Tarun Salam, had also been with the Assam Rifles. He was among those killed in an ambush some years ago while returning from election duty in Ukhrul district.

Nine legislators in the State – eight from the BJP and one from the Congress – have contracted the disease. Mr. Chouhan, BJP State president and MP V.D. Sharma, BJP State general secretary (organisation) Suhas Bhagat and Minister Arvind Singh Bhardwaj, who travelled together to Lucknow to pay their last respects to Governor Lalji Tandon, have tested positive.

Earlier, Rajya Sabha MP Jayantidya Scindia had also been infected.

Mr. Mishra said COVID-19 cases in the country were peaking. "At all places, it has doubled. The same is being witnessed in Madhya Pradesh. However, even today we have enough ventilators, oxygen cylinders and ICU beds."

In an attempt to dispel rumours regarding the extension of lockdown, he said: "It will be enforced wherever it is felt to be necessary. Currently such a situation is not seen anywhere in the State."

Job cards, the sole hope of migrant returnees

Flood adds to Assam's lockdown woes

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GOALPARA

Dharmeswar Banai of Pub Zira village was one of some 10,000 migrant labourers who returned home in Assam's Goalpara district, mostly from southern and western India after the lockdown began on March 25.

Not keen on migrating again for work, he applied for a job card at the central screening centre before the combination of flash flood from the adjoining hills of Meghalaya and a major breach in an embankment on the Brahmaputra devastated the district.

He is among 1,041 such applicants given job cards with a skill test over the past couple of months.

Assam has since May 22

lost 109 people to several waves of floods affecting 56.72 lakh people.

"I have lost the entire investment of toil and money for the year. There are hardly any jobs because of this corona and lockdown. The government has promised Gandhi (MGNREGS) work, and the job card I have is the only hope now," said Sujit Hajong, who lost his entire paddy crop.

Gopalpara has a total of 142,803 job card holders.

Most of them are not sure when they would be engaged in rural development projects. "Such work will have to wait till the flood season is over, it seems," said Aftabul Ambia, member of district's Takimari Zilla Parishad.

The Bihar police launched an investigation after the actor's father Krishna Kumar

Political parties in Bihar have been unanimous in demanding a CBI probe into the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput.

Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi alleged on Friday that Mumbai police was not cooperating with Bihar in its investigation and so the CBI should take over the case.

The actor was found hanging in his flat in Bandra on June 14.

"Mumbai police is placing obstructions in the way of fair investigation by the Bihar police... BJP feels that the CBI should take over this case," tweeted Mr. Modi.

The Bihar police launched an investigation after the actor's father Krishna Kumar

Singh lodged an FIR against the actor's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty and five others at the Rajiv Nagar police station here on July 25. He has accused them of cheating and abetment of suicide. A four-member team of the Patna police is currently in Mumbai.

Ms. Chakraborty subsequently filed a plea in the Supreme Court to transfer the case from Patna to Mumbai. The Bihar government has roped in former Attorney-general Mukul Rohatgi to oppose Ms. Chakraborty's plea.

Earlier, Lok Janshakti Party chief Ram Vilas Paswan

and other leaders across party lines had demanded a CBI probe. LJP president Chirag Paswan even spoke to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar assembly Tejashwi Yadav, along with leaders of the Congress and other

ED begins probe into money laundering case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday filed a money laundering case in connection with an FIR lodged by the father of actor Sushant Singh Rajput,

Sushant Singh Rajput

Sushant Singh Rajput

Sushant Singh Rajput

Sushant Singh Rajput

alleging cheating, criminal conspiracy and abetment of suicide. "The role of all those named in the police case will be investigated under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act," said an ED official.

The chorus for a CBI probe has baffled many in the State. "Is it all because Assembly elections are just round the corner and no political party wants to go against a popular sentiment?" wondered political observer Ajay Kumar. "Wasn't it the same CBI that has been unable to conclude the famous Navrana Chakravarty case even after getting 10 extensions from the Supreme Court?" Twelve-year-old Navrana was kidnapped on the intervening night of September 18-19 in 2012 from her home in Muzaffarpur town, allegedly by those belonging to the land mafia-political nexus.

In an attempt to dispel rumours regarding the extension of lockdown, he said: "It will be enforced wherever it is felt to be necessary. Currently such a situation is not seen anywhere in the State."

No public events in M.P. for two weeks

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra said on Friday that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had directed all public representatives to not hold public events until August 14, in view of several legislators and BJP leaders having contracted COVID-19.

"If necessary, they can do it virtually. More than five persons can't visit public representatives together," Mr. Mishra told reporters here.

On Thursday, he appealed to all political parties not to hold protests, public meetings or rallies. "Wearing a facemask or a towel is compulsory, whether it is a Minister, an MLA or an MP, otherwise they will be fined. This rule also applies to all officials," said Mr. Mishra.

Nine legislators in the State – eight from the BJP and one from the Congress – have contracted the disease. Mr. Chouhan, BJP State president and MP V.D. Sharma, BJP State general secretary (organisation) Suhas Bhagat and Minister Arvind Singh Bhardwaj, who travelled together to Lucknow to pay their last respects to Governor Lalji Tandon, have tested positive.

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Instapick

#ChallengeAccepted: Wondering why so many women have been sharing black-and-white images of themselves? The movement originated in Turkey, with the aim of raising awareness about their high femicide rates, which have been soaring during the lockdown. It was also used to support US representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez when a lawmaker verbally abused her. On Instagram, the hashtag has over 6.3 million posts and counting.



Talking point

Rakhis: With Raksha Bandhan coming up on August 3, brands are scrambling to join in. Beauty products from Nykaa, Body Shop and Juicy Chemistry, 'rakhi edits' from Jade by MK, Payal Singhal and Ilaria, and hampers from the Ferns and Petals chain are just some of the options. There is even a digital 'rakhi' from doctor consultation app M-Fine that has a QR code linked to a health check-up! Now let's see if sibling bonding can break the retail drought.

Pick of the week

Concerts, stand-up and other online events you just can't miss.
The event preview and calendar will resume in a few weeks.



The big designer sale

More than 100 Indian designers – including Sabyasachi, Tarun Tahiliani, Masaba and Anamika Khanna – come together to support artisans across the country under the **Baradari** project. The core team includes Tina Tahiliani Parikh, founder of boutique Ensemble, while actor **Kareena Kapoor Khan** lends her support as brand ambassador for the sale that goes live from August 7 to 15, on ensembleindia.com. Proceeds will be donated to weavers and embroiderers' communities, with a focus on those affected by Cyclone Amphan.



Virtual stockroom

Over 100 designers and labels, including Abraham & Thakore, Anju Modi, Ka-Sha, Doodlage and Pankaj & Nidhi come together for Fashion Design Council of India's (**FDCI**) online sale. The fourth edition of **'Designer Stockroom'** – which was a staple of fashion week – features dresses, tunics, saris, menswear and jewellery at 70% off. The initiative is aimed at assisting cash-strapped businesses in modernising their work and creating an e-commerce portfolio. Till August 2 on fdc.org



Clay and doodles

DakshinaChitra is offering an online course on **clay modelling** led by ceramist Portarasan. Learn pinch pottery, coil method, slab technique and surface decoration over eight sessions, from August 13 to 16 and August 20 to 23. The fee of ₹10,000 includes terracotta clay, basic tools and delivery charges. Call for details and registration. +91 940672154. For freestyle doodle art, **Chandrima Mandal** is conducting a beginners workshop today, covering the basics. At ₹299 per person. Register on insider.in.



Talking of theatre

Actor **Jim Sarbh** and the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) Theatre & Films head, **Bruce Guthrie**, go live on Instagram today. They'll discuss their approach to theatre and their working relationship on two **NCPA** productions *Sea Wall* by Simon Stephens and *Constellations* by Nick Payne. From 6 pm @nccpamumbai. **Alchemy Theatre** Productions presents *All The World's A Stage* on August 8. It is based on five significant monologues written by Shakespeare. At 7 pm. Tickets at ₹149 on in.bookmyshow.com



Parenting chronicles

Parenting expert **Alpana Deo** has two new Hindi podcasts. In **Baton Baton Mein**, she discusses everything from stage fright to finding your identity. **Mother's Gurukul** offers parenting advice and information. Tune in every Friday on ivmpodcasts.com. **Twice Treasured**, a Chennai-based startup, focusses on sustainable usage and reselling of children's products. From cribs to car seats, they have a range that is either new or gently used, featured on their Instagram page @ShopTwiceTreasured.



#LockdownWithWeekend

On @thehinduweekend IGTV channel, catch author **Janaki Lenin** in conversation with **Aparna Karthikeyan**. They chat about Lenin's latest book, *Every Creature Has A Story*, and share amusing anecdotes about animals from octopuses to honeybees, and how climate change is affecting evolution. An interview with actor **Vidya Balan** on her recent film, *Shakuntala Devi*, is also available. If you missed our **webinar** on how restaurants can up their delivery game, watch it on @THeaderconnect on Facebook.



(Clockwise from left) Twinkle Khanna and interiors from her home
• DABOO RATNANI, @TWINKLERKHANNA AND @TWEAKINDIA ON INSTAGRAM

Hope in a gin bottle

Twinkle Khanna is a do-it-yourselfer, and has cheery vases and embroidery hoops to prove it

KENNETH ROSARIO

In the last four months, Twinkle Khanna's go-to-home embellishment has been money plant saplings in empty alcohol bottles. "I have a lot of gin bottles because I have been drinking a lot of it during the lockdown. They are my new vases," says the 46-year-old writer, columnist

and interior designer. The human eye, she says, is naturally oriented to see life in the colour green, more so now, when we are confined in our homes due to the COVID-19 pandemic that's hit the world.

Closely linked to our emotions, colour can be instrumental in uplifting our mood, says Khanna, who is partial to all shades of blue. "I'm al-



CM YK

ways wearing [the colour] and have blue around me." She talks about updating living spaces with colour, and this includes the bathroom, which doesn't have to be a "boring and sterile white". The ambassador for American bath design brand, Kohler, says, "It is only now that we are realising how important a bathroom is. It is almost like a sacred space because it is the only place you are alone, especially if you have kids."

DIY memories

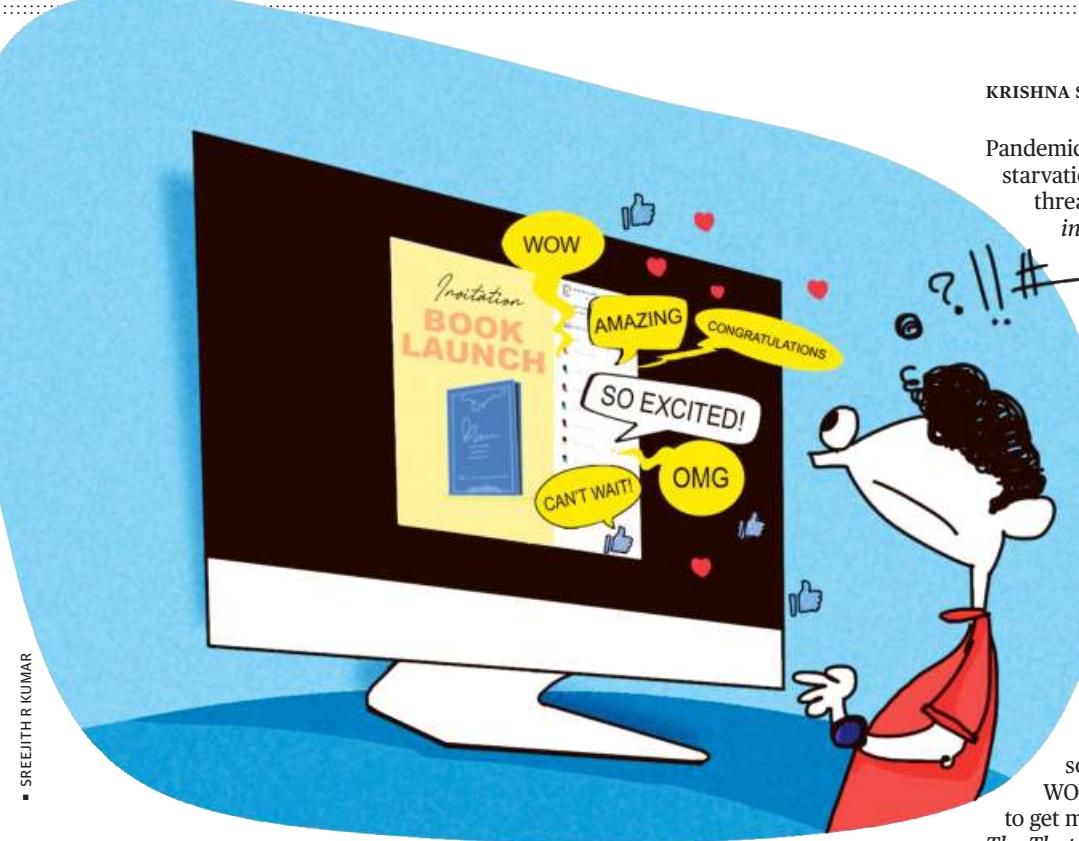
That said, Khanna has ensured that her children have been a part of home improvement activities during the lockdown. "As a child, I had learnt to crochet and embroider, and I've been doing embroidery hoops with my children. Hopefully we will make something that will have value, if not materially, then as a memory of doing this activ-

ity together at a time like this," she says. Quick DIY tips like using old shawls as upholstery have worked well for Khanna, who believes recycling household items is the best way to usher in some change at the moment.

As an interior designer, she has held sustainability and durability in high regard. "Construction itself is non-sustainable," she observes. "But within that framework, we have to maximise output by incorporating elements like rainwater harvesting and solar energy, for instance." When she started her brand, The White Window, they had no access to western designs, compelling her to look at homegrown artisans. "We have the best carvers and artisans in India. We are [now increasingly] looking inwards, not just in designs but also in culture," she says.

As residences are doubling up as office spaces during lockdown, Khanna resorts to making an armrest of pillows on her bed and using them as a table to break the monotony of a desk routine. She calls it a pillow fortress. It is a hack she recommends, especially if your job is to write. "It is quite ergonomically viable," she observes. "For me, headphones are also vital because I get distracted by noise. I put them on while writing and play white noise or sounds of a washing machine or the air conditioner or the rain, so I drown out screaming children and the chaos behind me."

Currently working on her fourth book, the author of *Mrs Funnybones* and *Pajamas Are Forgiving*, found it easier to focus on her writing at the start of the pandemic. "Back then we were a lot more hopeful," she recalls. Writing has become progressively challenging. "It is like those sugarcane stalls on roadsides. There is no sugarcane left any more for the juice to be extracted; the mind is not stimulated enough," she quips. She is, therefore, occupying herself with a long reading list of books and watching their cinematic adaptations, in the hope that they spark inspiration.



SPLIT TAKE

The this thing of the that thing

What gets writers most excited?

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI

Pandemics, lockdowns, downturns, poverty, starvation, mental illness, locusts, the threat of war, tranquiliser darts - nothing can deter the Indian writer from the job at hand: book promotion. Given below is an excerpt of the social media exchange between a writer friend and her writer friends.

Writer: Super-excited to share the cover design of my new book, *The This Thing Of The That Thing*, that is coming out shortly. So totally excitedly super-duper excited.

Writer Friend 1: OMG, I just peed a little in excitement looking at the cover. The orangutan in a Fabindia *kurti* playing a cello is so lyrical. A violin would have made it... ho-hum. And the subtle touch of the man in silhouette mercilessly clubbing a soft toy in the background, like **WOW!** This is literary fiction. So dying to get my hands on *The This Thing Of The That Thing*.

Writer Friend 2: Oh My Double Super God! I am writhing excitedly spurred by your excitement, WF1. Did you notice the title font? It is so achingly beautiful. I'm getting two copies of the book. I'll read the recto pages from the copy in my right hand. And vice versa ... SWIDT! LOL!

Writer: ROFLMAO!! You are like PG Wodehouse crossed into Yogi Babu. God, I so love that you love my book so.

Writer Friend 3: Hey, WF1 and WF2, I am dying to witness with my own eyes both your excitements based on Writer's original excitement. Let's do a super-excited FB Live reading of our joint and individual excitements. I'll read the copyright page.

Writer: Awww. You're making me cry. I'm super-excited already by the imminent

release of my book which led to WF1's incontinent excitement. Then WF2 says *this*. And, you, WF3, you had to outdo that with the FB live idea. How much love can a best-selling writer take in one day.

WF1: Hey, I haven't even begun. I am so super-excited by the book, I'm going to have the opening para tattooed on the back of my neck.

Writer Friend 2: Cool. But make sure the typo in para 1 is corrected (I just read the preview on Amazon). In line three, it says 'excited' instead of 'excited'.

Writer: OMG, really? Thanks, WF2. You have a keen eye. You caught this one just like I caught the 'yatch' one in the title of your debut book, *Purple Yatch On The Poignant Backwaters*, LOL!

WF2: Thanks for reminding me, Writer. Too sweet, you are. I changed it in the reprint (sold 19,238 copies, but who's counting).

WF3: Yes, you did. But the spelling of 'poignant' became 'poingant'. Poing! Like a cartoon sound effect. LOL. But hey, who cares, right? You got the Siromani Wet Grinders Debut Fiction Award.

Writer: Erm, let's not get diverted, sweetsies, let's do the FB Live, no? So ultra-super excited.

WF1: Hey, can I talk a little bit about my last book then? As you may remember my *The Unbearable Heaviness Of Being... Kumbhakarna* was nominated for Udupi Shri Shanti Vilas' Best Second Book By A First-Time Writer Award.

Writer: Er, okay, but how is it relevant? Yours was a futuristic mythological cookbook. Mine is a performance-poetic semi-fictional self-improvement literary memoir. Let's keep it about me, no, for a bit?

WF1: TTYL. The corporation guy is at the door to take our temperatures.

WF2: BFN. Hubby calls.

WF3: Me, too. Kiss kiss.

Krishna Shastri Devulapalli is a satirist. He has written four books and edited an anthology.

THE DIGEST



Food apps rising

As lockdowns across states continue, five-star hotel chains are upping their game with their own food delivery apps. The ITC Group has added a signature Gourmet Couch menu – drawing from their various restaurants – to their app. This has been implemented at properties across the country. The latest to reach us is Taj Hotels' Qmin, an online portal (qmin.co.in) and app to indulge in their signature dishes at home. Also in the works is a gourmet QminShop offering, which will curate epicurean specialities and artisanal brands. Both chains have an in-house delivery fleet and are available on iOS and Android. Meanwhile, Hyatt's addition of delivery options on their existing app is in beta testing mode. More details on these apps below.



Launch date:

July 27

Cities covered:

Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi

Coming up in:

All ITC Luxury

Collection Hotels

Cuisines:

Asian, Italian, Frontier

Signatures: Dal Bukhara, stir-fried sliced pork, tiramisu

Min order: ₹4,000 + taxes

USP: 30 km delivery radius (chargeable based on distance); gift a meal in other cities

Offline delivery:

City hotel landline



Launch date: July 25

Cities covered: Mumbai

Coming up in: Chennai, Delhi, Bengaluru

Cuisines: European, Thai, Mediterranean

Signatures: Gili biryani, prawn ghee roast, asparagus paruppu usili

Min order: ₹1,500 + taxes

USP: Biodegradable packaging with customised insulation

Offline delivery: 1800 266 7646

Other cities: 1800 266 7646



Fashion for your peloton

If you are planning on joining the global shift towards cycling, then our handy guide will have you looking like a pro — with Italian bikes and clipless pedals



Accessories

As a general rule, the more expensive the cycle, the less it comes with. Forget a stand or a carrier, not even pedals are supplied with the top-end stuff. So you will need bottle cages (₹500 each) and lights (₹500) at the very basic. Bontrager is a great premium brand but frankly, just get anything that is bright, USB-rechargeable, doesn't weigh a ton and can be locked snugly in place. Too expensive and they are bound to get stolen, especially the lights. Mudguards are debatable. I don't have any; I'd rather have stained clothes on a rainy day than a tarnished pro image.

MAGANDEEP SINGH
I loathe golf almost as much as I loathe... no, wait, there's nothing I loathe more. Not even the sport of curling. That said, what I do admire about it is how spiffy you can look no matter whether you are a pro or a noob who keeps swinging with all their might but only ends up unearthing divots of grass.

This, by the way, never happened.

Another sport which allows us to dress up is cycling. Sure there is the unsightly issue of your belly and other areas of fat protruding through the fitted gear, but MAMILs (middle-aged men in lycra) are as common as people walking about with hair transplants and nose jobs in Istanbul, so not to worry.

This is good because the ongoing pandemic has had an odd outcome — people the world over now have a sudden penchant to pedal their way everywhere. Cities in the West are having to allocate new dedicated lanes for



cyclists and, as one journal put it, "Cycles are selling out faster than toilet paper!" Well, it is a buyers' market and having been a cycling enthusiast since before the Corona effect, I am a tad more well-informed than most about how to turn up for your first ride looking like you just won the previous stage at the Tour de France.

Cycles

The most basic of requirements, budgets range from a paltry ₹5,000 to well, the Eastern European black market price of

two working kidneys. Find your sweet spot and settle in. Italy is the spiritual hub of everything on two wheels so, just like with your dinner order, when in doubt, go Italian. Pinarello and Colnago (₹3 lakh+) are my top brands, but there is also Bianchi (₹50,000+) and Cipollini. Others such as Cervelo (₹2 lakh+) sound Italian but are actually Canadian. So is Argon (Canadian, that is) and way too speedy to be inert (like the gas). The US has some top brands, Trek being the worldwide leader for quality premium bikes. Their latest, Madone (₹3.5 lakh), is an American product with Italian appeal, much like Frank Sinatra. Giant is reliable but 'mass' — you can get a great bike cheap. Me, I ride a Specialized, which sits somewhere in the one arm and half a leg price zone.

Computers
You will need this because

if you don't record and post about a ride, did it even happen? The range is vast, but you'd do well to stick with the leaders: Garmin or Wahoo. How much data you want depends on how nerdy you are and how deep the pockets go. A basic Garmin 130 (₹20,000) will resolve most biker needs, but an 830 or a 1030 (₹60,000) will show you coloured maps. Wahoo comes in two versions: Bolt (₹24,000) and Roam (₹37,000), and here too the bells and whistles go up with the price. Of course, there are others, from Sigma and Lezyne to Cateye, which are significantly cheaper. I settled for the 130 because it does it all.

Shoes

Sidi is the way to go: Italian and stylish, even if a little loud and fiendishly expensive. Shimano, Fizik, Specialized and Bontrager would be my other equally-laudable options. Expect to spend upwards of ₹7,000 on a good pair. The higher you go the lighter they get, as also snugger which means your foot gets to transfer all your force to the wheel, and convey all the pain of wearing such stiff shoes directly to you!

(Clockwise from top left)
Ashish Sachdeva of Trek Bikes,
Assos Mille GT LS Jersey, Look
Keo pedals, Bontrager Helmet,
Garmin 830, Sidi
shoes and the
Madone SL 6



FOOD SPOT

Wenger's, even in the new normal

The writer plays back melt-in-mouth memories and thinks ahead to a time he can order again from the bakery that was once a restaurant



RAHUL VERMA



member its cutlets and even the face of a server). The last two downed their shutters long years ago. Thankfully, Wenger's carries on.

So, the moment I found that I could get some of my favourite snacks delivered from there, I placed an order online (Wengers.in/store). Two of our all-time favourites had to be there, of course. So I asked for chicken patties (₹80) and mutton shhammi kebabs (₹80). Then we thought we'd have a chicken quiche, a ham and pineapple pizza, and a mushroom and cheese pizza. I also asked for a loaf of sundried tomato bread (₹70). With a stiff upper lip, I didn't look at the dessert section. One

Forever young (From top to bottom)
sundried tomato bread, shhammi kebabs, ham and pineapple pizza

*SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

must keep a stern eye on one's health. All told, the bill, including shipping and processing fees, came to ₹1,006, and served as three happy meals.

The food arrived on the designated day, at the designated time. The pizzas, kebabs and quiche were our dinner; the bread (with a chicken paste from Licious) was our breakfast the next day, and we had the patties with tea. Wenger's pizzas are special: They are not thick or flour-laden, like some of the mass produced ones. A little smaller than the MNC fare, they are also a lot cheaper. The ham-and-pineapple pizza costs ₹150, and the mushroom one is at ₹130. The crust is thin yet substantial, and the toppings are superb.

I couldn't get to taste the ham in the ham and pineapple pizza (if they were there, they were camouflaged well), but the pineapple had melted into the cheese, and the sweet and salty flavours together did a glorious act. The mushroom pizza was oozing with toppings, and two pizzas and a kebab each were enough for the three of us. The kebabs were the way I remembered them: thick and juicy.

The quiche was a pleasant surprise. I had thought it would be large enough for three, but it was just right for one. It was outstanding though, with juicy bits of chicken embedded in the creamy bed and a crunchy crust. The bread was fresh and pitted with sundried tomatoes and olives. And the patties were buttery and flaky, as they are meant to be. The shredded chicken stuffing had all the right flavours, too.

I am going back to the site. This time, there will be a quiche for each one of us. And, maybe, if the stiff upper lip uncurls a bit, even an éclair or two.

The writer is a seasoned food critic



I felt like a part of Picasso's Blue Period — except that I was green — when a friend told me how he'd been spending his time. One day, he informed me with some glee, he'd visited Wenger's in Connaught Place, and had eaten all kinds of goodies from there. I was instantly green with envy and quickly checked to see if they would deliver in East Delhi. In the next moment I was my golden sunny self when I learnt that they did indeed.

This has to be said out aloud from rooftops: Wenger's is the best. I have had delicious patties and pastries from elsewhere, but few can outdo the magic that this old bakery wields. I also have nostalgic links with Wenger's. In the early '60s, when I was a wee lad, my mother would occasionally take me there. Sometimes we sat in its restaurant that was right above and where they served Chinese and Continental fare (it later became the American Express office). Those days there were three places that we used to go to: Wenger's, Tea House and Nanking (I re-

make numbers look scintillating, the film uses a visual element of flying digits on the screen. Some appear as if they are sketched on a blackboard, while others are either levitating on-screen or revolving in a circle. The purpose of this cartoon-like visual aid is to make numbers look attractive, much in sync with Devi's lifelong efforts. But unlike Devi's innate charm and sass, the visual gimmick in the film symbolises a desperate attempt to appear upbeat

FILM REVIEW

Loud, mawkish and joyful

Shakuntala Devi opts for a visual tone that matches the high octane personality of the late mathematician but becomes an over-the-top cliché

KENNETH ROSARIO

Shakuntala Devi had a famously high octane personality — full of laughter, quirk, impudence and wit. She turned a conventionally drab skill of nimble calculations into a stage performance and added oodles of drama and oomph to it. Anu Menon's biopic on the late mathematical genius takes the essence of her public persona to construct an upbeat, bright and loud tone for the film, while also revealing the not-so-positive and lesser-known aspects of her private life, using the same audio-visual aesthetic.

This contradiction is a

captivating approach, but

there's a thin line between

paying homage to the vi-

bancy of a personality

and being an over-the-top

cliché. *Shakuntala Devi*

keeps oscillating between the two.

To make numbers look

against patriarchy is en-

joyed rather than beatified,

and that only adds to the

admiration one feels to-

wards the mathematical

genius, who was also a

prolific writer, astrologer

and politician.

An audience watches a

biopic not so much to wit-

ness a reenactment of

what we already know

about a public figure, but

what happens when the

curtains drop. *Shakuntala*

Devi explores the mathe-

matician's relationship

with her daughter, parents

and husband, and illus-

trates how the three are

closely linked to each other.



A still from the film *Shakuntala Devi* • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and positive. Menon opts for an easy way out instead of doing the hard work of eliciting the same emotions through characterisa-

tion.

The actors perform

comically in sync with the

film's exaggerated tone, es-

specially all the Caucasian

actors in London during

the flashbacks to the '50s,

when Devi landed in En-

gland to make a living. Vi-

dyा Balan maintains the

same high energy but it's

apt considering she plays

Devi, who was known for

her vibrancy. Balan, who

has previously essayed

real-life personalities like

Silk Smitha, has the ability

to smoothly transition bet-

ween age and appearanc-

es, but even she can't sal-

vage a rather mawkish

to the film.

The upside of all the over-

the-treatment is that the

film has no dearth of joy.

There's a lot of fun to be

had, especially when Balan

is bringing out Devi's tem-

perity and an innate sense

of defiance. Her stance

against patriarchy is en-

joyed rather than beatified,

and that only adds to the

admiration one feels to-

wards the mathematical

genius, who was also a

prolific writer, astrologer

and politician.

There's so much to Devi's life and the film doesn't

try to cramp in everything

but follows a thematic

thread of 'you can't have it all'.

The film is also fairly

critical of Devi as a mother

and wife, which — contrary

to its glossy and bright texture — is quite refreshing to

see in a biopic, which can

be an easy trap for glorifi-

cation. It's certainly a film

that makes you want to

know more about Devi, af-

ter seeing her in all her

Shakuntala Devi

DIRECTOR: Anu Menon
RUNTIME: 127 minutes
CAST: Vidya Balan, Jishu Sengupta, Sanya Malhotra, Amit Sadh, Prakash Belawadi
STORYLINE: *Shakuntala Devi* struggles to balance her family life with her desire to travel the world and perform her astounding mathematical skills to a global audience.

adjusted, embellished and altered when we grow up. The film makes this rather pertinent point, and is reflective of the unfettered access given by Anupama to the filmmaker. Devi's relationship with her husband, Paritos Banerji (Jishu Seng

TNA faces biggest test in post-war decade as Sri Lanka gears up for election

The Alliance goes to the polls amid a growing disenchantment among Tamil voters who, 11 years after the war, are still demanding justice and greater powers

MEERA SRINIVASAN
JAFFNA

As Sri Lanka gears up for the August 5 parliamentary election, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) – the main grouping representing minority Tamils living in north and east – is facing its biggest test yet in its constituency, since the war ended a decade ago.

Though the Tamils have repeatedly given a huge mandate to the TNA, whether in the 2013 Northern Provincial Council election or the parliamentary polls of 2015, the Alliance – which secured 16 seats in the 225-member Parliament in 2015 – is contesting this election amid what seems a growing disenchantment among voters.

"No matter who gets elected nothing changes in

our lives. We vote because it's our duty, not in eager anticipation that our situation will get better," said Yesudas Jenova, seated outside her small home just outside Palai town in Kilinochchi district. Jaffna and Kilinochchi together form one of the two northern electoral districts, while Vanni – including Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya – is the other.

Ms. Jenova's sentiment, echoed by many across the Northern Province, stems from many reasons. Eleven years after coming out of a war that resulted in huge losses to life and property, the Tamil community is still demanding justice and greater political powers that much of the Sinhala polity does not want devolved to them. The TNA bears the additional baggage of the

failed promises of the previous Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe government that it backed, especially on delivering a constitutional settlement.

Meanwhile, the Tamils' economic distress has only grown, with governments in Colombo and their own TNA-led Northern Provincial Council failing to revive a war-ravaged economy by creating jobs and livelihoods. Registering their disappointment over the TNA's governance record in the north, they gave a sizeable vote to candidates from the competing Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) in the 2018 local authority polls.

Perhaps recognising this criticism and uncertainty of the Rajapaksa administra-

tion delivering a convincing political solution, the TNA for the first time prominently included development and livelihoods in its manifesto. However, for northern voters, who unambiguously rejected President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in last year's presidential polls, making up their mind isn't as simple this time.

Fragmented polity

To start with, the general election comes during a pandemic that has forced all parties into a muted campaign. Further, the choices before voters are from a fragmented Tamil polity whose members speak varying degrees of Tamil nationalist politics. The divisions are on all sides.

On the one hand is the TNA, which is witnessing



Supporters of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna at a rally in Colombo. • AFP

heightened tensions within, seen in the vitriol targeting some contestants, and facing an increasingly sceptical electorate. On the other are critics of the TNA, including former Northern Province Chief Minister and retired Supreme Court judge C.V.

Wigneswaran, who broke away from the Alliance, and the ACTC, led by lawyer-politician Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam – both known to have some support in urban Jaffna – who are contesting separately, as different camps.

Vying for the same parliamentary seats in the northeast are politicians aligned to the Rajapaksa ruling party, such as EPDP leader Douglas Devananda, a Cabinet Minister in the Rajapaksa administration with a traditional support base in Jaffna and the islands off the peninsula, and Angajan Ramanathan of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

Past and present

While navigating this political landscape, voters are thinking about both their

long-standing demand for political rights, justice and accountability, as well as their pressing everyday concerns over land, housing, joblessness and indebtedness. And to them, neither is less important.

A range of voter concerns came to the fore at a pocket meeting where a union of hairdressers in Jaffna met prominent TNA contestant and former Jaffna legislator M.A. Sumanthiran, near Valvettithurai, the birthplace of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

In the nearly 30 minute-long meeting, union members quizzed the former MP mostly about the TNA's bargaining power in the south, India's "waning influence", prospects for federalism, and Mr. Sumanthiran's position on the armed struggle.

that his critics had widely criticised following a recent interview.

"We would like the TNA to remain united as one force and represent us," said A. Udayasankar, president of the federation of hairdressers' unions, voicing a view more trusting of TNA's capacity for national politics.

Seated with a group from Thondaimanaru town, a young man asked the TNA contestant why the Alliance, which holds considerable power in the local body, could not lay roads in the area despite repeated appeals.

"When our own Tamil leadership is unable to address our basic needs, how can we expect the Sinhala political leadership to deliver on larger issues?" asked S. Brindan, a student of law.

Citing pandemic, Hong Kong delays polls

China's Parliament will decide how to fill the legislative vacuum, says Chief Executive Carrie Lam

REUTERS
HONG KONG

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam on Friday postponed a September 6 election to the Chinese-ruled city's legislature by a year because of a rise in coronavirus cases, dealing a blow to the pro-democracy opposition, which had hoped to make huge gains.

The decision came after 12 pro-democracy candidates were disqualified from running for perceived subversive intentions and opposition to a sweeping new security law imposed by Beijing, prompting questions among many about whether the pandemic was the real reason for the delay.

"Postponing the September elections for a year is a cynical move to contain a political emergency, not a public health one," said Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights



Health concerns: Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam, centre, at a press conference. • GETTY IMAGES

Watch. "This simply allows Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam to deny Hong Kong people their right to choose their government."

The Opposition had aimed to ride a wave of resentment over the national security law to win a majority in the Legislative Council, where half the seats are di-

rectly elected with the other half filled mostly by pro-Beijing appointees.

Safeguarding health

Ms. Lam said she had to invoke an emergency law to make the postponement and no political considerations were involved. China's Parliament would decide how to

fill the legislative vacuum, she added. She said the decision was aimed at safeguarding people's health. "We have 3 million voters going out in one day across Hong Kong, such flow of people would cause high risk of infection," Ms. Lam said.

Hong Kong has reported more than 3,000 COVID-19

cases since January, far lower than in other major cities around the world. But the number of new infections has been in the triple-digits for the past 10 days.

Rival finance hub Singapore, which has had a larger virus outbreak, held an election in July. Many pro-democracy activists had suspected Ms. Lam would use the virus to delay the polls.

The poll would have been the former British colony's first official vote since Beijing imposed the security law to tackle what China broadly defines as secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces, with punishment of up to life in prison. Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" formula guaranteeing freedoms not enjoyed on the mainland. Critics of the new law say it undermines that autonomy.

cording to officials. "The U.S. government has been providing consular assistance to Mr. Nasim and his family since his detention in 2018 and has called the attention of senior Pakistani officials to his case to prevent the type of shameful tragedy that eventually occurred," State Department spokesman Cale Brown said.

"We urge Pakistan to immediately reform its often abused blasphemy laws and its court system, which allow such abuses to occur, and to ensure that the suspect is prosecuted to the full extent of the law," he said.

Persecuted sect

The Ahmadiyya have long faced violence in Pakistan, which forbids community members from self-identifying as Muslims. In Peshawar, senior police officer Mansur Amaan said authorities were investigating how the attacker managed to get his hands on a firearm inside a courtroom.

The sect, which is rooted in the subcontinent and shuns violence, is considered heretical by many orthodox Muslims for challenging the Islamic belief that Mohammed was God's final messenger.

Up to 80 people are known to be imprisoned in Pakistan on blasphemy charges, half of whom face life in prison or the death penalty, according to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

The State Department has put Pakistan on a blacklist over religious freedom, pointing to the blasphemy cases.

+

The State Department has put Pakistan on a blacklist over religious freedom, pointing to the blasphemy cases.

In Peshawar, senior police officer Mansur Amaan said

Three-day Afghan Id truce begins

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

Afghans offered prayers marking the Muslim festival of Id al-Adha on Friday as a three-day ceasefire between Taliban and government forces began, with many hoping the truce will lead to peace talks.

A car bomb that killed at least 17 people in the country's east just hours before the ceasefire started underlined the scale of the challenge that lies ahead, although the Taliban denied any involvement.

The halt in fighting is slated to last for the duration of Id and is only the third off-

cial truce in nearly 19 years of war. As the ceasefire commenced, hundreds of worshippers went to mosques across the capital where they were patted down by armed guards before going inside.

Beginning peace talks

President Ashraf Ghani and the Taliban have both signalled that peace talks could begin straight after Id, and there are widespread calls for the warring parties to extend the ceasefire.

Under a deal signed by the Taliban and the U.S. in February, "intra-Afghan" talks were slated to start in

March, but were delayed amid political infighting in Kabul and as a contentious prisoner exchange dragged on. That swap will see Kabul free 5,000 Taliban fighters, while the insurgents claimed late on Thursday they had fulfilled their pledge of freeing 1,000 government forces. In a speech, Mr. Ghani said another 500 prisoners will be released in a bid to "accelerate the peace talks."

However, the 500 inmates are not on the original list of 5,000. Authorities have released 4,600 of those prisoners but are hesitating over the final 400, deeming them too dangerous.

Vietnam reports first COVID-19 death

Country had seen 100 days without infection before cluster emerged in Danang

REUTERS
HANOI

Vietnam recorded its first death from COVID-19 on Friday after winning plaudits worldwide for one of the most successful national responses to the pandemic.

The country of 96 million had gone 100 days without infection before an unexpected cluster of new cases of unknown origin surfaced in the resort city of Danang a week ago. The Health Ministry on Friday reported 82 new infections, 26 of which were imported, marking the country's biggest single-day

jump. On Thursday, Hanoi started mass COVID-19 testing. By noon on Friday, 21,732 people had been tested in the capital, the Hanoi

Centre for Disease Control said. Around 21,000 tested negative, it said.

Hanoi on Thursday also banned large gatherings and

urged tens of thousands of domestic travellers to report to authorities. It shut bars and nightclubs, extending those closures to street food stalls and karaoke lounges from midnight on Friday.

Patient 428, a 70-year-old man who appears to have contracted the disease in Danang, died on Friday, the official Vietnam News Agency said. The most recent cases were linked to three hospitals and two clinics in Danang, according to the Health Ministry, which overnight sent a task force of health experts to the city.

Is Trump empowered to delay the election?

According to the U.S. Constitution, it is Congress, not the President, that decides the timing of the poll

STANLY JOHNY

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday triggered a new controversy by suggesting that the November elections be delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"With Universal Mail-In Voting (not Absentee Voting, which is good), 2020 will be the most INACCURATE & FRAUDULENT Election in history... Delay the Election until people can properly, securely and safely vote???" he tweeted.

Though rumours were doing the rounds for some time, this was the first time Mr. Trump suggested that the elections should be postponed. Does he have the powers to do so? He doesn't. According to the U.S. Constitution, it is Congress, not the President, that decides the timing of the elections. A federal law approved on January 25, 1845 has unambig-



Donald Trump. • AP

uously set the election timing. "That the electors of President and Vice President shall be appointed in each State on the Tuesday next after the first Monday in the month of November of the year in which they are to be appointed," states the law, referring to the selection of the Electoral College. This falls on November 3 this year. It can be changed only by passing a new law, which needs the approval of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and will be subject to legal challenges.

The House is now controlled by the Democratic Party and the Senate by the Republicans. Senior leaders of both parties have dismissed Mr. Trump's suggestion to postpone the election.

What if it's delayed?

While the possibility of postponing the elections is very, very low, even if lawmakers agree to change the date, in

here, the terms of both President Trump and Vice-President Mike Pence will expire on January 20. The House Speaker is the next in the line of succession. But the two-year term of the current House expires on January 3, 2021. So, Speaker Nancy Pelosi cannot assume the presidency.

The next in the line is the 'president pro tempore' of the Senate, largely a ceremonial position. According to Article 1, Section Three of the Constitution, the Vice-President is the president of the Senate, and the Senate should choose a president pro tempore to act in the absence of the Vice-President.

Currently, senior Republican Chuck Grassley is the president pro tem. But if elections are not held in November (in which 23 Republican Senate seats and 12 Democrat seats are up for grabs), the current equation of the Senate would change. Ordinarily, if the presidency is vacant, the Vice-President assumes charge. But

'Spear phishing' was used in Twitter hack

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SAN FRANCISCO

The hackers who accessed dozens of high-profile Twitter accounts in mid-July gained access to the system with an attack that tricked a handful of employees into giving up their credentials, according to a company update.

Twitter said in a security

update late on Thursday that the July 15 incident by bitcoin scammers stemmed from a "spear phishing" attack which deceived employees about the origin of the messages. The hackers "targeted a small number of employees through a phone spear phishing attack," according to a statement.

The massive hack of high-

profile users from Elon Musk to Joe Biden affected at least 130 accounts as part of an effort to dupe people into sending hackers the virtual currency bitcoin.

Faked tweets were sent from 45 accounts, according to Twitter, and the hackers accessed private messages of 36 and downloaded Twitter data from seven.

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S. No.	Name of the posts/ No. of posts	Group	Pay level (as per 7th CPC)	Pay level (as per 6th CPC)	Reserved for UR SC ST OBC EWS PWD	
1	Scientific Officer / 02 Nos.	A	Level - 10 PB-3, GP:5400	01 00 00 01 00 00		
2	Scientific Assistant / 02 Nos.	B	Level - 06 PB-2, GP:4200	01 00 00 01 00 00		
3	Laboratory Assistant / 02 Nos.</					

MARKET WATCH

	31-07-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	37,607	-0.34
US Dollar	74.81	0.04
Gold	54,538	1.26
Brent oil	43.14	1.03

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	315.20	2.70
Asian Paints	1715.50	-27.85
Axiscity Ind	431.65	5.80
Bajaj Auto	3004.95	-44.00
Bajaj Finserv	6205.90	28.30
Bajaj Finance	3251.30	33.00
Bharti Airtel	554.85	2.15
BPLC	413.80	-5.30
Britannia Ind	3823.60	17.65
Cipla	720.15	34.20
Coal India	129.25	0.65
Dr Reddys Lab	4521.05	4.45
Eicher Motors	20638.70	-562.65
GAIL (India)	96.65	0.05
Grafin Ind	633.05	30.10
HCL Tech	705.20	9.75
HDIFC	1781.95	-28.70
HDIFC Bank	1032.80	-17.85
HDIFC Life	627.10	-8.00
Hero MotoCorp	2676.50	-27.45
Hindalco	163.10	1.10
Hind Unilever	2209.90	14.30
ICICI Bank	346.80	1.85
IndusInd Bank	523.75	3.90
Bharti InfraNet	192.10	-0.40
Infosys	966.00	4.55
Indian Oil Corp	88.45	-0.10
ITC	194.15	0.80
JSW Steel	220.25	5.90
Kotak Bank	1365.75	-19.25
L&T	913.45	5.20
M&M	606.45	8.10
Maruti Suzuki	6262.75	-2.65
Nestle India Ltd.	16522.20	-1.80
NTPC	87.00	0.40
ONGC	78.30	0.60
PowerGrid Corp	178.30	1.45
Reliance Ind	2067.10	-41.75
State Bank	191.45	4.90
Shree Cement	21711.15	316.05
Sun Pharma	531.70	21.75
Tata Motors	104.65	1.00
Tata Steel	366.30	-0.30
TCS	2381.40	1.90
Tech Mahindra	681.65	6.90
Titan	1043.25	-1.40
UltraTech Cement	4117.30	-38.25
UPL	478.15	13.55
Wipro	280.95	-3.15
Zee Entertainment	138.75	-1.45

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	74.61	74.93
Euro	88.35	88.73
British Pound	97.80	98.22
Japanese Yen (100)	71.17	71.47
Chinese Yuan	10.69	10.74
Swiss Franc	82.08	82.48
Singapore Dollar	54.37	54.61
Canadian Dollar	55.55	55.81
Malaysian Ringgit	17.59	17.68
Australian Dollar	53.59	53.83

Source: Indian Bank

Forex reserves swell almost \$5 bn in the week

MUMBAI India's forex reserves climbed by \$4.99 billion in the week to July 24, helped by currency accretion and increase in value of gold reserves, RBI data showed. PTI

Pharma exports grow 7% in Q1

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD

India's pharma exports rose more than 7% year-on-year to \$5,412.12 million in the quarter ended June 30, a growth that came in the backdrop of the lockdown for COVID-19 and associated challenges, especially on the logistics front.

As per Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India Director General Ravi Udaya Bhaskar drug formulations and biologicals powered the growth with a 15.1% increase to \$4,138.97 million.

Bulk drugs and drug intermediates, the other major category, declined 8.38% to \$895.77 million.

Surgicals and vaccines, two promising categories, also reported a decline in export, Mr. Bhaskar said.

Cotton season may end with high inventory

M. SOUNDARIYA PREETHA COIMBATORE

The 2019-2020 cotton season is expected to end in September with huge stocks, both with traders and the industry.

Ashwin Chandran, chairman of Southern India Mills' Association, said the country has never had such a high inventory at the end of the season in the recent past. Consumption by textile mills should 80 lakh bales to 100 lakh bales less than the estimate because of the lockdown and fall in demand after that.

The association estimates the closing stock to be 125 lakh-150 lakh bales. The government should come out with special package to incentivise yarn and fabric exports. Only then will demand pick up and cotton consumption increase, he said.

SBI net jumps 81%, NPAs shrink

Net interest income rises 16% to ₹26,642 cr. while non-interest income climbs 18%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

State Bank of India (SBI) reported first-quarter net profit increased 81% to ₹4,189 crore, aided by an improvement in asset quality and gains from sale of a stake in its life insurance subsidiary.

Net interest income rose 16% to ₹26,642 crore, India's largest lender said on Friday. Non interest income climbed 18% to ₹9,497 crore.

"We have delivered a strong performance despite the difficult circumstances," chairman Rajnish Kumar said. "As of today, things are fine but we can't tell anything about the future. We are monitoring the situation. Loan sanctions and disbursements are showing an upward trend.



Upbeat in a pandemic: Loan sanctions and disbursements are showing an uptrend, says Rajnish Kumar. ■ SOMASHEKAR G.R.N

bank would arise from extended working capital cycle and waning cash flows," SBI

Chairman Rajnish Kumar said. "As of today, things are fine but we can't tell anything about the future. We are monitoring the situation. Loan sanctions and disbursements are showing an upward trend.

The sale of a small stake in SBI Life yielded a one-off gain of ₹1,539.73 crore.

Loan loss provision decreased 19% to ₹9,420 crore.

The bank made a COVID-19-related provision of ₹3,000 crore during the quarter, Mr. Kumar said.

"Major challenges for the

Total deposits grew 16% to ₹34,19,363 crore in April-June period as credit rose 6.6% to ₹23,85,639 crore.

Gross NPAs declined 23% to ₹1,29,661 crore, while net NPAs decreased 35% to ₹42,704 crore.

Net NPA ratio at 1.86% eased 121 basis points (bps) from 3.07% in the year-earlier period. Gross NPA ratio at 5.44% slid 209 bps.

Tata Motors' Q1 loss more than doubles to ₹8,438 cr. CV, PV sales plunge; JLR no exception



Yash Mahajan, head institutional business, Reliance Securities said, "While we believe lower capex and the government's stimulus would support JLR, focus on cost control would improve margins going forward."

Forced decoupling will hurt India and China: Chinese envoy

Economies interwoven, interdependent, says Sun Weidong

ANANTH KRISHNAN CHENNAI



As India reassesses its trade relations with China and considers a range of moves to reduce dependencies, China has called for 'equal' treatment for its firms and described 'forced decoupling' between the two economies as being harmful to both.

India has rolled out moves to more tightly regulate Chinese investment and to dilute the presence of Chinese companies in certain apps, including TikTok.

Speaking at a webinar, China's Ambassador to India, Sun Weidong, said the trend of increasing dependencies would be 'hard to reverse' and that 'forced de-

coupling' would hurt both the economies.

"The Chinese and Indian economies are interwoven and interdependent," he said, citing statistics from 2018-19 showing that 92% of Indian computers, 82% of TVs, 80% of optical fibre, 85% of motorcycle components are imported from China."

Countless examples like this are the reflection of globalisation," he said. "Whether you want it or not, the trend is difficult to reverse."

The envoy, speaking at an event hosted by the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) on Thursday, said "forced decoupling of the Chinese and Indian economies is against the trend and will only lead to a lose-lose outcome."

Mukesh Ambani seeks urgent steps to scrap 2G

Bharti Mittal pitches for lower levies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI



India's, comes about 15 days after the announcement that RIL's Jio Platforms, had developed 5G technology that would be deployed in India next year.

Mr. Mittal added, "Telecom resources like spectrum, leviess should become a source for the exchequer, but should become a force multiplier in ensuring economic momentum becomes faster and gets accelerated."

Taro drags Sun Pharma to ₹1,656 cr. loss

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd. on Friday reported a consolidated Q1 net loss of ₹1,656 crore due to one-time exceptional item of ₹3,633 crore (\$479 million) towards settlement and related charges at its Taro unit in the U.S.

Consolidated sales from operations were at ₹7,467 crore, down by 9.6% over the same quarter last year. India sales grew by 3.2% to ₹2,388 crore. U.S. finished dosage sales were down by 33.5% at ₹828 million.

Emerging market sales fell 10.5% to \$173 million. Rest of the World sales were down 18.5% at \$136 million, the company said in a filing. Sale of branded formulations in India for Q1FY21 was ₹2,388 crore, up by 3%, and accounted for 32% of total sales.

IOC Q1 profit almost halves, revenue slides

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

"SBI delivered a sturdy show at the core characterised by robust NII [net interest income] growth, resilient fee performance, restricted cost growth and prudent utilisation of higher operating and treasury income towards augmenting provision coverage," said Rajiv Mehta, lead analyst, institutional equities, Yes Securities.

Lend some comfort' "Improved disbursement activity from June in retail segment, about 90% of term loan customers having paid two or more EMIs and negligible SMA1/2 exposure lend some comfort on future outcomes," Mr. Mehta added.

Provision coverage ratio improved 698 bps to 86.3%.

Slippages eased 77% to ₹3,633 crore. Capital adequacy improved 51 bps to 13.4%.

Centre working with RBI on need for loan restructuring: FM

'Banks can't deny credit to MSMEs under emergency facility'

Nirmala Sitharaman said the government is working with the RBI on need for restructuring loans to help industry tide over the impact of COVID-19.

"The focus is on restructuring," she said while addressing a FICCI event.

"The Finance Ministry is actively engaged with the RBI on this. In principle, the idea that there may be a restructuring required, is well taken," Ms. Sitharaman said.

The Finance Minister also said the decision on reducing GST rates on healthcare and other products will be

taken by the GST Council.

She said the Ministry was working with the RBI on demand from the hospitality sector for extension of moratorium or restructuring.

To help borrowers deal with the liquidity crunch

during the pandemic, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had announced a three-month loan moratorium in March, which was later extended by another three months. Borrowers opting for loan moratorium can defer payment of the interest and principal component of the loan during this period.

On the difficulties faced by the MSMEs in taking loans under the government's Emergency Credit Guarantee Scheme, she said: "Banks cannot refuse credit to MSMEs covered under the facility. If refused, such instances must be reported. I will look into it."

During the pandemic, the Reserve Bank

