

IN BRIEF

3 arrested for selling used surgical gloves

New Delhi: Three men were arrested in Dwarka for allegedly selling used surgical gloves after washing and repacking them, police said on Thursday. The accused were identified as Manish Kumar (30), Arun Shrinivasan (37) and Dinesh Kumar (28), they added. Preliminary investigation has revealed that used surgical gloves were procured from scrap markets and hospitals through a dealer based in the Tikri area, the police said, adding that efforts are underway to nab him. According to the police, a team led by SHO, Dabri, Surinder Sandhu raided two godowns in Dabri and Bindapur on Tuesday and seized 848 kg of surgical gloves. The used surgical gloves were mostly sold to factories, salons and hotels at cheap rates at washing and repacking, a senior police officer said. "On Tuesday, our team at picket duty received information through an informer that used gloves are being repacked after washing at two buildings in Dabri and Bindapur. A raid was conducted by our team and 848 kg used surgical gloves recovered," DCP (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said.

2 held for beating stray dog to death

New Delhi: A 23-year-old man has been arrested and a juvenile apprehended for allegedly beating a stray dog to death, police said on Thursday. The video of the incident, that took place on Wednesday evening, was widely shared on social media platforms, they said. In the purported video, the accused Jaivinder and his juvenile accomplice can be seen beating a stray dog with stick while another dog is seen barking, police said. Based on a complaint from Gaurav Gupta, the animal welfare officer of an NGO named "People for Animal", a case was registered under sections 429 (mischievous killing or maiming cattle, etc of any value) and section 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) and other sections of Prevention of Animals to Cruelty Act and Epidemic act, police said.

Delhi records max temperature of 41.2°C

New Delhi: Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 41.2 degrees Celsius on Thursday, a notch above the season's normal, the meteorological department said. The minimum temperature settled at 22.2 degrees Celsius, five notches below the season's average, while the humidity at 5.30 pm was 22 per cent, it said. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had predicted mainly clear sky on Friday with the minimum and maximum temperatures hovering around 24 degrees Celsius and 40 degrees Celsius, respectively. — PTI

2 COMMITTEES FOR 3RD WAVE OF COVID: GOVT

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI MAY 27

The Delhi Government formed 2 different committees to keep a check on issues pertaining to Covid-19 which would oversee issues like an action plan for possible third wave, devise a strategy for mitigation and management of the third wave of Covid and assess cases of Covid patients who died due to lack of oxygen recently in the national capital for grant of compensation. While a 13-member committee which has been set-up by Delhi government on Thursday would prepare an action plan for a possible third wave of Covid after assessing the current status and projected requirement of the health infrastructure such as hospitals, oxygen plants and drug supplies in the city, another eight-member expert committee has been set up to devise a strategy for mitigation and management of the third wave of Covid. Both the committees will be chaired by IAS officer Satya Gopal, ACS (Power) and Nodal Officer (Covid). The 13-member committee will "assess the present status and projected requirements of the different verticals of health infrastructure such as hospitals, oxygen plants, drug supplies etc and prepare an action plan for the 3rd Wave", an order issued by the health department said.

Jabs for 18-44 yrs remain suspended for 4th day in Delhi

New Delhi, May 27: Around 34,000 people were vaccinated in Delhi on May 26 and the majority of jabs were provided by private hospitals, AAP MLA Atishi said on Thursday, highlighting the acute shortage of vaccines the city government has been grappling with. She also said 42 per cent of the people (24.32 lakh) in the 45 plus category have received at least one dose of vaccine.

"This is the fourth consecutive day that the vaccination drive for the 18-44 age group has remained suspended," Atishi said.

It's a cause for serious concern. Delhi has not received any more doses from the manufacturers so far. The makers have made it clear that they have been supplying vaccine to states according to the directions by the Centre, she said.

"As many as 34,147 people got vaccinated on May 26. Of this, most of the jabs were given at private hospitals," Atishi said.

She appealed to the central government to immediately approve vaccines such as Moderna, J&J and Pfizer which have been approved for use by around 60 countries.

A total of 52.25 lakh doses have been administered in Delhi so far since the inoculation exercise started on January 16. As many as 11.79 lakh people have received both the doses.

"Delhi government has exhausted its Covaxin stock for people over 45 years while that of Covishield will last only 12 days," she said. —PTI



Volunteers distribute food to needy people during the lockdown amid Covid-19 pandemic near Safdarjung hospital in New Delhi on Thursday.

Delhi declares 'black fungus' epidemic

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI MAY 27

The Delhi government on Thursday declared black fungus as an epidemic. With the city witnessing over 600 cases of Black fungus, L-G Anil Baijal issued regulations declaring it an epidemic under the Epidemic Diseases Act to contain and manage cases of the deadly mucormycosis in the city.

The Delhi Epidemic Diseases (Mucormycosis) Regulations, 2021, which will be valid for a year from the date of publication, states that all health-care facilities, govern-



Anil Baijal

ment or private, will report each and every suspected or confirmed cases of black fungus in the national capital to the city health department.

All healthcare facilities in Delhi will follow guidelines for screening, diagnosis and management of black fungus issued by the health ministry, it said.

"No person or institution or organisation will spread any information or material for the management of black fungus without prior permission

of the health department," the new regulation stated.

The regulations further said that any person or institution or organisation disobeying these new norms on black fungus shall be deemed to be committing an offence under Indian Penal Code's Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant).

While Mr Kejriwal does daily press conferences to do his "politics" and engages in a battle of "one-upmanship", the fact is that his government has on its own provided for only 13 per cent of the total vaccination done in the national capital so far. Patra said, adding that the Centre has given over 45 lakh doses free to it.

Nothing that exactly a month back, the Aam Aadmi Party leader had announced that the city will have 44 oxygen plant, including eight from the Centre in a month, Patra sought his response on how many plants his government has established

BJP says pvt hospitals procured more vaccines than Delhi govt

Pfizer should be procured as soon as possible: Kejri

New Delhi, May 27: The BJP on Thursday said private hospitals in Delhi have procured more Covid vaccines than the Delhi government has done on its own as it sought to put the Arvind Kejriwal dispensation in the dock over its inoculation programme and claims about ramping up oxygen production in the city.

BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said the Delhi government has directly procured over 8.17 lakh doses while private hospitals have bought over 9.04 lakh doses, and wondered if the private facilities are stronger than a government.

While Mr Kejriwal does daily press conferences to do his "politics" and engages in a battle of "one-upmanship", the fact is that his government has on its own provided for only 13 per cent of the total vaccination done in the national capital so far. Patra said, adding that the Centre has given over 45 lakh doses free to it.

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AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday sought procurement of Pfizer Covid vaccine as soon as possible to inoculate children.

This comes after the US pharma company sought fast-track approval for its jab in India.

The US major has told Indian authorities that its vaccine is suitable for everyone aged 12 years or above and can be stored for a month at 2-8 degrees Celsius, sources had said.

"We should procure this vaccine asap for our children," Mr Kejriwal tweeted, citing a news story on fast-track approval sought by the company.

The Delhi chief minister has been requesting the Central government

so far.

The BJP leader also accused him of spreading misinformation over his demand that the Centre should procure vaccines for children as soon as possible after pharma giant Pfizer claimed that its jab has been proved



Arvind Kejriwal

to explore suitable vaccine options, citing opinion of experts that a possible third wave of Covid in coming months may affect children.

The Delhi government has also suggested that the Centre should vaccinate students and teachers if it decides to conduct class 12 Board exams delayed due to the second wave of the virus.

suitable for everyone over 12 years of age.

Mr Patra said as of now nowhere in the world children are being vaccinated.

"We cannot use children as guinea pigs. Kejriwal should not drag them into his politics," Mr Patra said. —PTI

Centre approves ₹5L aid for kin of 26 journos who died of Covid

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

The Centre, on Thursday, approved the proposal of the Press Information Bureau's (PIB) Journalist Welfare Committee (JWC) to provide ₹5 lakh each as financial relief to the families of 26 journalists who died due to Covid-19 this year. In the financial year 2020-21, the Central government provided assistance to families of 41 journalists who died due to the infection.

Such aid has now been extended to the kin of a total of 67 media persons. The PIB, under the guidance of Union minister Prakash Javadekar, had compiled and collated the details of journalists who lost their lives due to the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 and started a special drive to provide assistance to their families under the JWC.

In its meeting, the JWC decided to provide ₹5 lakh each to the families of 26 deceased journalists. The JWC meeting was chaired by I&B secretary Amit Khare. Joint secretary Vikram Sahay and PIB Principal DG Jaideep Bhatnagar were also present in the meeting.

The PIB reached out to the families of many journalists who lost their lives to Covid-19 and guided them about the scheme and filing of claims. The committee also decided to hold JWC

Black fungus: HC allows duty free import of drug

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

The Delhi High Court on Thursday allowed duty free import of Amphotericin B, used for treating black fungus patients, primarily those affected by it after recovering from Covid-19, on furnishing of a bond by the importers till the Centre takes a final decision on waiving the customs duty on it.

The court said the medicine is required to save lives of thousands of people suffering from Mucormycosis and the central government shall seriously consider waiver of customs duty till the drug is in short supply in India.

A bench of Justices

Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh said: "We direct that if any import is made by any person of this drug (Amphotericin B), it shall be allowed on a bond furnished by the importer without the actual duty being paid, till a decision is taken by the Centre..The bond shall have the undertaking that in case the import duty is not waived, the duty shall be paid by the importer."

Mucormycosis or black fungus is a complication caused by a fungal infection. People catch mucormycosis by coming in contact with the fungal spores in the environment. It can also develop on the skin after the fungus enters the skin through a cut, scrape, burn, or other types of skin trauma.

meetings on a weekly basis so that the applications for financial assistance under JWC can be processed expeditiously.

The committee has also considered the applications of 11 families of those journalists who had passed away due to reasons other than Covid-19. The PIB has given a link on its website where a journalist or the family members can write to the government for help.

In a suo-motu move, the I&B ministry and the

PIB under the guidance of I&B minister Prakash Javadekar had compiled and collated the details of the journalists who lost their lives to coronavirus in 2020 and this year, and started a special drive to provide assistance to their families under the JWS scheme, the ministry said.

Journalists and their families can apply for financial assistance under the JWS scheme through the PIB website, it added.

1,072 cases, 117 more deaths in Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

Delhi recorded 117 more Covid fatalities, the lowest since April 15, and 1,072 new cases on Thursday, while the positivity rate dipped to a nearly two-month low of 1.53 per cent, according to the daily health bulletin.

This is the fifth day in a row when the daily cases in Delhi have remained below 2,000 and the second consecutive day when the cases are below 1,500.

The number of deaths reported on Thursday (117) is the lowest since

▶ **THIS IS** the fifth day in a row when the daily cases in Delhi have remained below 2,000 and the second consecutive day when the cases are below 1,500.

April 15 when the national capital had reported 112 fatalities, while the positivity rate (1.52 per cent) is the lowest since March 23, when it was 1.31 per cent, official data showed.

The national capital had recorded 1,491 cases and 130 fatalities on Wednesday with a positivity rate of 1.93 per cent.

HC agrees to hear plea to restrain 'media trial' of Sushil Kumar

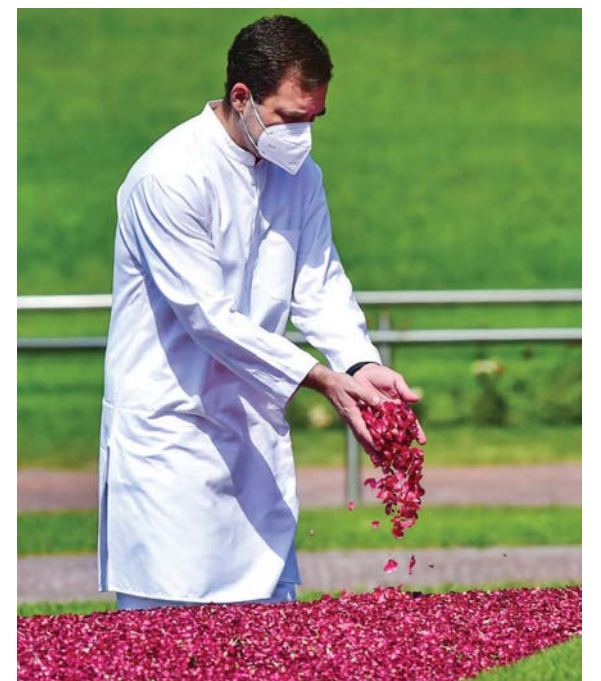
BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 27



nection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of the 23-year-old wrestler.

On May 23, a Delhi court sent Kumar to 6-day police custody for interrogation in connection with the killing of a fellow wrestler, saying the allegations against him are serious in nature and that no one is above the law.

Kumar and his associates allegedly assaulted wrestler Sagar Dhankar (23) and two of his friends, Sonu and Amit Kumar, at the Chhatrasal stadium here on the intervening night of May 4 and 5. Sagar succumbed to the injuries later.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi paying floral tribute to India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on his death anniversary at his memorial Shanti Van in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

YouTuber held for video of 'flying dog'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

A 27-year-old YouTuber was arrested for cruelty against animals after he uploaded a video showing his pet dog floating in the air with helium gas balloons tied to its collar, the police said on Thursday.

The accused, Gaurav Sharma, who has 4.15 million subscribers on his YouTube channel, is a resident of Panchsheel Vihar in South Delhi's Malviya Nagar, it said.

In the video shot on May 21, Sharma can be seen with his pet dog in a park. The dog is strapped to a bunch of balloons and is set loose to fly.

In the same video, the YouTuber sits on top of a four-wheeler in a narrow street and flies his dog up in the air using



Screengrab of the video showing a pet dog tied to helium balloons.

hydrogen balloons. The dog is seen floating up to a balcony on the second floor of a building.

A case was lodged against Sharma under Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code, the Disaster Management Act, and relevant sections of the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act on the complaint of Gaurav Gupta, a member of the People For Animals (PFA) society, deputy commissioner of police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said, adding that the footage was deleted.

After receiving criticism for the video, the

accused uploaded another one with apologies the following day.

On Sunday, the video was taken down and Sharma posted another video to explain why he pulled down the original. He pointed out that he told his viewers that safety precautions were taken to keep the dog safe.

"I apologise if you felt bad after watching the Dollar video. I won't try such things again. Those who're getting influenced by such things, please don't get influenced. If sentiments have been hurt, I truly seek your apology," Gaurav said.

He said that he took adequate safety measures while shooting the video featuring his pet dog, Dollar, and assured his viewers that he would not repeat it in the future.

IMPORTANT NOTICE						
This is notified for the information of rail passengers that the timings of the following Special Trains will be revised as under:-						
Train No. & Name	Station	Existing Time		Revised Time		Date (from Originating Station)
		Arr.	Dep.	Arr.	Dep.	
02269 Chennai Central - Hazrat Nizamuddin Duronto Special Train	Jhansi Jn.	05:35	05:40	05:30	05:35	Ex. Chennai Central from 28.05.2021
	Gwalior Jn.	06:38	06:40	06:33	06:35	
	Hazrat Nizamuddin	10:50	--	10:40	--	
02270 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Chennai Central Duronto Special Train	Gwalior Jn.	19:29	19:31	19:18	19:20	Ex. Hazrat Nizamuddin from 29.05.2021
	Chennai Central	20:45	--	20:50	--	

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

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

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Station damaged as train passes through

Bhopal: A railway station in Burhanpur district in Madhya Pradesh suffered damages soon after a superfast express train passed through it on Wednesday afternoon. Signal room of Chandni railway station suffered damages, leading to disruption of train movement in the route for some time. "The incident took place just a few minutes before the Mumbai-Lucknow Pushpak Superfast Express passed through the railway station. The train had to be halted for around 30 minutes at the outer of the railway station following damage to panels in the signal room in the incident", railway sources said. "The incident took place at around 4 pm on Wednesday. Signal room of the Chandni railway station suffered damages", Central railways public relations officer Jeevan Choudhury told this newspaper on Thursday.

NCP legislator's son held for murder bid

Pune: Pimpri Chinchwad police in Pune district has arrested the son of NCP MLA Anna Bansode in a case of attempt to murder and kidnapping, an official said on Thursday. The case was registered on a complaint by Tanaji Pawar, manager at a solid waste management firm who himself was arrested for allegedly opening fire on the premises of the Pimpri MLA's office on May 12. Mr Pawar claimed that two of Bansode's men kidnapped him from his office in the Akurdi area on the morning of May 12 and took him to a place in Chinchwad where Sidharth Bansode (21), the MLA's son, and 10 to 15 others thrashed him using iron rods, leather belts and sticks. — PTI

Aircraft lands on UP e-way, nobody hurt

Mathura: A two-seater training aircraft made an emergency landing Thursday on the Yamuna Expressway near here after developing a snag, the police officials said. Both the trainee pilot and the instructor were safe after the aircraft landed on the expressway in the afternoon, the officials said. The Aligarh-bound Cessna-152 touched down as vehicles ran on the highway, one of the most modern in the country. The small plane was returning from Narnaul in Haryana, an official said. The pilots of the two-seater aircraft made an emergency landing near the 72nd milestone of the Yamuna Expressway after it developed a snag around 1.15 pm, the SP said. — PTI

Mamata govt to spend ₹1,000cr for Yaas relief

To meet Modi today ■ Bengal estimates damage at ₹15,000cr ■ 5 killed as heavy rains lash state

RAJIB CHOWDHURI and PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, MAY 27

A day after "very severe" Cyclone "Yaas" ravaged West Bengal, heavy rains due to depression left five persons dead and injured five others in the state as chief minister Mamata Banerjee estimated the extent of damage due to the natural disaster at around ₹15,000 crores. She also announced to spend ₹1,000 crores as *Duare Traan* (relief at your doorstep) in line with her key initiative *Duare Sarkar* (government at your doorstep) to rehabilitate the affected.

Among the five victims, two each were from East Midnapore, one of the four worst affected districts, and Murshidabad while one was from Nadia.

At the state secretariat Nabanna, the CM said, "A preliminary assessment estimates the damage caused by the cyclone at ₹15,000 crores. We are allocating ₹1,000 crores for immediate relief to house building and to meet the agricultural losses among others. Once the water recedes in the villages in the next seven days, our government will run *Duare Tran* camps like *Duare Sarkar* for the enrollment of the affected from June 3 to 18 and verify their claims of losses from June 19 to 30. From July 1 to 8 the funds will be distributed to the beneficiaries through the direct bank transfer mode. No one else can conduct the relief work."

2 babies born during 'Yaas' named after it

Bhubaneswar: Two babies in Odisha who were born during Cyclone 'Yaas' on Wednesday have been named after the storm. The state government had shifted pregnant women of the vulnerable areas to cyclone shelters and nearest hospitals before the storm.

As many as 95 babies were born during the storm in various districts of Odisha under active surveillance of state health and family welfare department officials.

The Trinamul Congress supremo, who embarks on a two-day aerial survey of the devastated areas in three districts from Friday, will also meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the afternoon when he lands at Kalaikunda Air Force Station in West Midnapore after taking stock of cyclone-hit Odisha.

"From Odisha, the PM will fly over Digha to take stock of the extent of the damage before returning to New Delhi via Kalaikunda. I will discuss the situation with him at a review meeting there at around 2.15 pm," she said. Asked if she would demand any special relief package from the Prime Minister, Ms Banerjee, who often alleges of no financial assistance from the Centre, however, kept it secret. "How can I tell you beforehand about what I would tell him?" she wondered.



People wade through a flooded road in the aftermath of Cyclone Yaas at a village in North 24 Pargana district, West Bengal, on Thursday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Flood threat looms large in Odisha as rains batter state

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BALASORE/ KENDRAPARA, MAY 27

As the cyclone-hit people in Odisha's coastal districts tried to collect their belongings and hard-earned treasures buried deep under the rubbles of their houses that collapsed on Wednesday under the influence of Cyclone Yaas' 150 km per hour gusty winds, a threat of flood loomed large over the state as water levels in major rivers increased on Thursday.

The rivers are in spate since Wednesday due to cyclone-induced heavy downpours in their upper

catchments and basins. According to reports, water levels in the rivers Budhabalang, Salandi, Subarnarekha and Baitarani were rising, causing inundation of low-lying areas, including farmlands.

While majority of the rivers were still flowing below their danger marks, the Baitarani touched the red level at Anandpur in Keonjhar district.

"Water levels in some major rivers are rising. But there is no reason to panic as it is the peak summer and the water will flow down to the sea in the river beds without causing any harms to embankments," said special relief commissioner

P.K. Jena. He, however, assured that engineers of water resources department were at work to ensure that no breaches occur at places.

Chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday made an aerial survey of the cyclone-hit areas and later reviewed post cyclone relief and restoration work at a high level meeting.

The chief minister has asked collectors of the affected district to submit their cyclone damage reports by Friday evening.

Reports last came in said the water level in Baitarani is above 38.36 metres at Anandpur.

Assam police releases images of culprits, announces award Girl tortured by 5, video goes viral

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 27

A video posted by the official handle of the Assam police showing a young girl being brutally tortured by five men in Assam has gone viral on social media. The video shows five unidentified men thrashing and torturing a young girl.

However, the time or place of this incident is not clear. In view of the viral video, the Assam police has released the images of the five suspected culprits and sought more information from the public leading to their arrest.

The police has also announced a reward for



those who have any information about the culprits. "These images are of 5 culprits who are seen brutally torturing and violating a young girl in a viral video. The time or place of this incident is not clear.

Anyone with information regarding this crime or the criminals may please contact us. They will be rewarded handsomely," the Assam police

said in a post from its Twitter handle. In the viral video, the culprits can be seen slapping the girl, believed to be from the northeast, and also hitting the victim's face before stripping her naked.

Taking the note of the viral video Union minister Kiren Rijiju in his social media post through his official Twitter handle

said, "The viral video of a girl from Northeast being brutally raped and tortured by 4 men & 1 woman is not related to Jodhpur suicide case. I had a detailed discussion with the Police Commissioner of Jodhpur. However, there must be all-out efforts by all State Police to catch the devils."

The special commissioner of Delhi police, Robin Hibru, told reporters that police is trying to ascertain the identities of the criminals.

He also clarified that this video has nothing to do with the late Lovikali Sumi, a Nagaland resident who had committed suicide in Jodhpur, Rajasthan where she worked.

India keeping a close watch on China-backed project in Lanka

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

Government sources on Thursday said India is keeping a very close watch on developments regarding the Chinese-backed Colombo port city project in neighbouring Sri Lanka, adding that New Delhi hopes that concerns raised by Sri Lankans themselves on the project are looked into.

Sources also said the project should be transparent and respect the sovereignty of Sri Lanka, and hinted that if it is purely commercial, then there could be no objection. However, New Delhi has not yet formally

raised the issue with Colombo, sources said.

The views reflect New Delhi's concerns about the increasing Chinese footprints in the island nation amid apprehensions from certain quarters that the project could also be utilised by the Chinese military at a later date.

Sources also pointed out that the final text of the project bill has not yet been made public. The Rajapaksa brothers — President Gotabaya and Prime Minister Mahinda — are seen as pro-China.

According to media reports, the Sri Lankan Parliament recently approved the controver-

sial Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill, with the island nation's government saying the Chinese-backed project would bring in investment and boost the island-nation's economy. The Sri Lankan Opposition parties reportedly alleged the bill would lead to the creation of a Chinese colony in Sri Lanka.

Sources, meanwhile, also said India was watching political developments in Nepal closely, adding that the impression in some quarters that New Delhi was tacitly backing embattled Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli was not correct.

Save Lakshadweep, its future under threat, Rahul tells Modi

■ Continued from Page 1
ecological sanctity is evident in the draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation.

"Livelihood, security and sustainable development are being sacrificed for commercial gains... Under the guise of development and maintaining law and order in a low crime union territory, the draconian regulations penalise dissent and undermine grassroots democracy," his letter said.

The administrator has also taken over the control of the local administrative powers of the elected Zilla panchayat regarding education, health care, agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries. He also gave a nod to opening liquor bars in the island, a non-alcoholic zone due to its Muslim population, to promote tourism, and introduced a beef ban while eliminating non-vegetarian food from the menu of Anganwadi children. The tribal population of Lakshadweep is about 95 per

▶ THE CONG had demanded the immediate removal of the Lakshadweep administrator, alleging he is not only destroying the peace and culture of the islands, but also 'harassing' the people by imposing arbitrary restrictions

cent and beef is part of their regular diet.

Mr Gandhi wrote, "The administrator has unilaterally proposed sweeping changes without duly consulting elected representatives or the public. The people of Lakshadweep are protesting against these arbitrary actions."

The Congress leader alleged that proposed changes to the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation 2021, Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation 2021 and lifting of restrictions on sale of alcohol are a deliberate assault on the cultural fabric of the local communi-

ty. He further wrote, "I request you to intervene in this matter and ensure that orders are withdrawn. The people of Lakshadweep need a developmental vision that respects their way of life and reflects their aspirations."

The Congress had earlier demanded the immediate removal of the Lakshadweep administrator, alleging he is not only destroying the peace and culture of the islands, but also "harassing" the people by imposing arbitrary restrictions.

Lakshadweep was a Covid-19 green zone during the first wave of the pandemic in India. Protesters allege that loosening quarantine and travel rules by Mr Patel has led to Lakshadweep having the "highest positivity" rate. Lakshadweep reported its first Covid-19 cases on January 18. It now has over 7,000 cases of Covid-19. According to Census-2011, Lakshadweep has a population of less than 65,000.

Patient with Covid-19 has 'white fungus'

■ Continued from Page 1
Sciences. The doctors immediately placed a tube inside the abdomen and drained about one litre of bile-stained pus.

A team of surgeons led by Dr Samiran Nundy of the hospital's surgical gastroenterology and liver transplantation department did emergency surgery on her the next day, which revealed a perforation in the lower end of the

food pipe. A part of the small intestine had developed gangrene and sloughed off, and the patient had multiple thinned-out patches in the wall of the colon with one small leak, Dr Nundy said.

The perforations were closed, and the gangrenous segment was resected in a difficult four-hour surgery, after which a piece of intestine was sent for biopsy, he said. The biopsy revealed severe

ulceration of the intestinal wall with resultant perforation and necrosis caused by invasive white fungus, Dr Arora said. Her antibody levels were markedly elevated, and after she was put on antifungals showed remarkable improvement, he said. But five days later she had to undergo a second surgery for a small leak from the anastomotic site and is currently recovering.

Keep Covid norms in force till June 30: Govt

■ Continued from Page 1
under a strict lockdown since April 17, has been seeing a significant decline in fresh infections. On Thursday its new cases came down to 1,072, and the positivity rate dipped to 1.53 per cent, while there were 117 deaths. It is likely that Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal might announce a graded easing of the lockdown from June 1. However, several states have extended the lockdown till June 15, including West Bengal.

Maharashtra, which has faced the worst of the pandemic, decided not to lift all Covid-19 restrictions as 21 districts still have a positivity rate of more than 10 per cent. "Relaxations could be given in districts where the cases are declining, but not in the entire

state. The guidelines will be issued in a few days," Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope said.

With India's vaccination drive for the 18-44 age group almost coming to a halt and second-dose vaccination for the 45-plus also being stretched in the absence of sufficient vaccine doses with the states and UTs, the Centre has started pursuing global vaccine players more vigorously. The Union health ministry said Thursday it was in talks with companies like Pfizer, Johnson and Johnson and Moderna.

"We are engaged with Pfizer as they have indicated the availability of a certain volume of vaccines in the coming months, possibly in July. They have requested indemnity

against liability to all nations. We are examining this request. There is no decision as of now," said Dr V.K. Paul, Niti Aayog's member (health).

The Centre has said it "proactively" eased the entry of vaccines approved by America's FDA and the British, European Union and Japanese health regulators, as well as those on the WHO's Emergency Use Listing into India, and these vaccines will not need to undergo prior bridging trials. The provision has now been further amended to waive off the trial requirements altogether for all well-established vaccines manufactured in other countries and no application of any foreign manufacturer for approval was pending

with the drugs controller.

Officials said many rounds of discussions have taken place with Pfizer, J&J and Moderna, and all assistance was offered to have them supply or manufacture their vaccines in India. "However, it is not that their vaccines are available in free supply. We need to understand that buying vaccines internationally is not similar to buying "off-the-shelf" items. Vaccines are in limited supply globally, and companies have their own priorities, gameplans and compulsions in allocating finite stocks," officials said.

Shobana Kamineni, Apollo Hospitals' executive vice-chairperson, said the Sputnik V Russian vaccine will be available to beneficiaries through

the Apollo Hospitals from the second week of June.

Meanwhile, Dr Paul said the Centre was contemplating holding trials on giving cocktail doses of vaccines to people on a trial basis. However, he said as per protocol, vaccinators must stick to the same dose of vaccine as the first one. "You ask me if a person can get inoculated with a vaccine different from the one he received in the first dose, scientifically and theoretically it is possible. But recommending this is an evolving situation and there is no robust scientific evidence. Only time will tell," Dr Paul said when asked about the incident in Siddhartha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, where 20 villagers were given two different vaccine doses.

Follow law, don't defame India: Govt to Twitter

■ Continued from Page 1
allegations to defame India and was dictating terms to the world's largest democracy. The ministry of electronics and IT issued a statement saying, "Twitter's statement is an attempt to dictate its terms to the world's largest democracy. Through its actions and deliberate defiance, Twitter seeks to undermine India's legal system."

Stating that Twitter has refused to comply with the new digital rules requiring identification of the originator of a flagged message and appointing grievance

redressal officers, the ministry said the purported commitment of the US-based firm to India not only sounds hollow but completely self-serving.

"Twitter needs to stop beating around the bush and comply with the laws of the land," the ministry said without saying what action it could take in case non-compliance continued. Police said Twitter's statement was "mendacious" and designed to impede a lawful inquiry.

Twitter and the Government of India have been on a collision course since the social networking

site marked several tweets by ruling BJP leaders on the alleged "Congress toolkit" — purportedly a strategy document to target the government over Covid — as fake or "manipulated media". This led to the Delhi Police raiding Twitter's empty offices in Delhi and Gurgaon late on Monday. Twitter India's employees have been on work-from-home mode since March 2020.

In its statement on Thursday, the Delhi Police said Twitter was purporting to be both investigating and adjudicating authority and had "taken

upon itself, in the garb of terms of service, to adjudicate the truth or otherwise of documents in public space". The reference being to the alleged "toolkit" which was tagged as "manipulated media". Twitter uses fact-checking websites.

The Delhi Police is investigating the allegedly fake "toolkit" on a complaint filed by the Congress.

Delhi Police said it had gone to the Twitter office to ask its India head to join the investigation as the messaging platform seemed to have information based on which it

declared the "toolkit" manipulated media.

"Twitter has a large user base in India, it earns significant revenue from its Indian operations but is also the most reluctant to appoint an India-based grievance redressal officer and mechanism, chief compliance officer and nodal officer to whom its own users can complain when they are subjected to offensive tweets," the IT ministry said. It went on to say that Twitter employees are safe in India and there is no threat to their personal safety and security. — Agencies

THE ASIAN AGE

28 MAY 2021

Stop govt repression of Lakshadweep residents

The quiet life of about 70,000 people in Lakshadweep, an archipelago of 36 islands in the Arabian Sea about 300 km off the Kerala coast, has been in turmoil for the last six months, in direct consequence to the efforts of Praful Khoda Patel, a BJP leader from Gujarat, who landed in the Union territory as administrator in December last year. Mr Patel has been working overtime to overturn, both through legal and administrative measures, every system that has been existing there — some for centuries, some recent — creating deep resentment among the people.

The administrator has taken over the powers of the local self-governments with respect to agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, health and education, virtually denuding the elected representatives of whatever little say they have in the administration of their society. The newly introduced Lakshadweep Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation 2021 provides for preventive detention of people whom the administration feels engaged in or preparing for activities which include crimes are normally tried under IPC and Information Technology Act, 2000. That the goonda act, as the new regulation is called, is sought to be imposed in a place which has reported hardly a heinous crime in decades shows the intentions of the administrator in poor light. The Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation 2021 the administrator has introduced seeks to ban cow slaughter and consumption or sale of beef in any form in a place where an estimated 65 per cent of the population consumes meat. The draft Lakshadweep Town and Country Planning Regulation 2021 virtually ends the rights of landowners once that land falls under the development plan of the administration.

Apart from the legal route, Mr Patel has launched a series of administrative actions that has left the islanders high and dry. Among them are the demolition of makeshift-yards where the fishermen keep their boats to save them from the marauding cyclones which never fail to touch the island and the introduction of bureaucratic procedures for emergency evacuation of medical cases to Kerala, depriving the people of their assurance of emergency medical help.

Union territories are formed with a view to taking to tiny communities the benefits of the best of Indian democracy; it is undemocratic, unfair and unjust to serve them the worst of it. Every single act of Mr Patel is aimed at unsettling the lives of the people with little regard to their welfare or opinion. It is nothing less than an assault by the mighty Indian State on a hapless people and an attempt to impose its will and lifestyle on a society which is made up of 93 per cent indigenous people who have been classified as Scheduled Tribes.

The Union government must immediately recall Mr Patel and stop the process he initiated in the island at the earliest. The government must instead strengthen its local self-government system to administer the people taking the best of Indian democratic traditions.

Lakshadweep and its people are geo-politically and strategically important to India. Short-sighted, thoughtless and haphazard acts of administrators sent from Delhi should not be allowed to play havoc with it. The Union government must act, and act quickly and undo the damage the administrator has done.

Minimise curbs on social media

The new IT laws that have kicked in seek to moderate content on social media and most major platforms are planning to fall in line. Accountability in hosting content in media is desirable but the grave danger is the government, in its zeal to thwart what it sees as content aimed at denigrating its leaders, might use the laws to abridge the freedom of expression which has been a great feature of Indian democracy.

The reaction to WhatsApp going to court on the premise that users will lose their privacy protection has been projected as a challenge to India's sovereignty, which it is not. As a platform that essentially enables communications, WhatsApp has apprehensions regarding its end-to-end encryption which ensures confidentiality of messages shared between individuals and groups. There is a need for further engagement on this count as over 500 million users, including many departments of the Government of India, use WhatsApp regularly.

If a law challenged is seen as an affront to official India it only betrays the authoritarian nature of government. What is needed is a more nuanced approach to find a balance between the right to privacy and the need to allow action against malicious content, like those which have harmed Indian society as in rumours spread on internet platforms leading to the exodus of northeastern people, the lynching of "child kidnappers", and denigration of minorities, etc.

As the county with the most recorded objections to social media content, India must realise it needs to liberalise laws on content that are way too draconian, respect the right to privacy in matters that do not transgress the laws of the land and face up to the Internet age freedoms without trampling upon them.

The knotty issue involving those wishing to establish a wholesome degree of control over social media just to aggregate more power and the millions of Indians who use global platforms for their sheer convenience must be resolved by placing the most reasonable restrictions on fundamental rights through fair grievance redressal mechanisms.

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Subhani



7 yrs of PM Modi: Can he lead us out of the abyss?



Karan Thapar

As I See It

As we approach Narendra Modi's seventh anniversary as Prime Minister I think I've realised why so many are disappointed with him. The one quality we looked for when we voted for him in 2014 — and which some believe they had found in the immediate years thereafter — is what is missing today when we most need it. And it's called Leadership.

Let me explain what I mean. I'm not simply referring to assertiveness and conviction. They are necessary but not sufficient. What I have in mind is the capacity to paint a vision for the future, convince the country to ascribe to it and then boldly lead towards its realisation. It might sound fanciful but it's not unlike Moses leading the Israelites through the parted waters of the Red Sea to the promised land he had committed himself to deliver.

Think back to 2014. Perhaps he was misunderstood but Dr Manmohan Singh was widely perceived as a paralysed Prime Minister. Not just silent but also a prisoner of his own coalition and, even, his own party. He was not his own man and, therefore, could not be our leader either. The country saw him as Mrs Sonia Gandhi's "poodle" and he did precious little to change that impression.

Mr Modi, on the other hand, presented himself as the chief minister who had worked miracles in Gujarat. Many accepted that as fact and refused to entertain any doubts because they wanted a saviour. Here was a self-made man who had risen by his own efforts and talent. He didn't carry the burden of family nor the taint of compromise. He also had the gift of oratory and thus knew how to pre-

sent himself. During the 2013-14 campaign he sold himself to us and we readily bought him.

Yet behind this truth lies another and it's possibly more important. Each of us saw in him what we wanted to see even if it wasn't there. The Narendra Modi that we voted for was probably more our creation and less of his own making.

So you could say disappointment and disillusionment were perhaps inevitable. The real Narendra Modi was bound to be different from the image we had created and convinced ourselves we were acquiring. But in the early years so strong was our belief in him that we overlooked — foolishly and myopically — the first signs our faith had been misplaced. We found excuses for his impetuous and thoughtless demonisation. We accepted his silence when Muslims were baited and lynched or dalits thrashed for being uppity, on the grounds that the Prime Minister can't speak on every occasion. Indeed, most people didn't even pay heed when he mistook mythology for science. Finally, the way the diaspora cheered him and foreign leaders like Barack Obama, Theresa May, the Asean heads of government and Middle Eastern potentates courted him convinced us that this was

Mr Modi defied his own scientists and continued with massive political rallies and shahi snans. He didn't care this could fan the flames. Ultimately, when the pot boiled over, he handed the problem to the state governments.

quite a man.

Even when the scales began to drop — and for some they did fast and furiously — there was a reluctance to accept that the Prime Minister lacked the one quality we so badly wanted: Leadership. His promises of a \$5 trillion economy or doubling farmers' incomes in five years were a beguiling illusion many refused to see through. His boast of standing up to Pakistan and making India feel good again was bombast but we failed to recognise it as hot air. His talk of reform was tantalising — because we knew we needed it badly — but he didn't deliver, yet many kept hoping that he would.

Of course, there's no doubt on some things he has made a difference — Swachhh Bharat, Jan Dhan, Ujjwala Yojana, rural roads and houses, medical insurance and electricity in villages. We applauded him for this, forgetting that it's what governments are elected to do. These aren't extraordinary achievements. They are just the simple expectations of needy people. Perhaps this is why he gets little credit for them today.

It was against this background the Covid-19 pandemic hit us and we suddenly realised that our colossus has feet of clay. He had nothing to say beyond the trite and the foolish. He reduced us to banging dishes and lighting candles, all in the hope this "mahabharat" could be won in 21 days. Even his fabled oratory took flight. In the early months he didn't stop speaking, but what he said was leaden. I suspect he realised this because he soon opted

for silence.

The last year has revealed a Prime Minister who has failed repeatedly and has only himself to blame. He failed to anticipate how many vaccines we need and we are, as a result, woefully short. Yet all he had to do was enhance capacity by supporting our own vaccine manufacturers. It would have been "atma nirbhar", but he didn't do it. After that he defied his own scientists and continued with massive political rallies and shahi snans. He didn't care this could fan the flames. Ultimately, when the pot boiled over, he handed the problem to the state governments. He told them to acquire their own vaccines, knowing it would be both expensive and difficult to do, whilst exacerbating the problem by opening up vaccinations for every adult in the country although he knew the jabs did not exist. In one single stroke he made a bad problem considerably worse.

So if I were to say our great leader — the man we thought could be our Moses — has led us into a blind alley, would I be wrong? If I were to say the qualities of strength and decisiveness that we identified in 2014 have turned into obstinacy, defiance and recklessness, would I be wrong? If I were to say the power of speech that mesmerised us when we heard it from Madison Square Garden has become theatrical and, even, exasperating, would I be wrong?

Now the only question is this: Is Mr Modi the Prime Minister to lead us to the other shore? The truth is that we have no other. We have to believe he is. We have three years to find out, but for all our sakes I hope he has it in him. We can't change captains mid-sea, particularly when we don't know if there is another cyclone heading our way. But when we reach dry land, we must ask ourselves two simple questions: Why did we err in our judgment? And can we be certain it won't happen again?

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

MOMENT OF TRUTH

The WhatsApp messaging service, owned by Facebook, has approached the Delhi high court against India's new rules for intermediaries. One key requirement for large social media providers is that under certain conditions, they will have to trace the originator of a message. The fear is that if an option is given to break the end-to-end encryption used by WhatsApp, it will lead to mass surveillance. The case by WhatsApp could lead to a reckoning on the right to privacy as it pertains to online platforms and on the safe harbour provisions for social media. It will be a moment of reckoning.

C.K. Jayanthi Maniam
Navi Mumbai

REINVENT EDUCATION

TO BE OR NOT to be is no longer a Shakespearean dilemma. It has been endlessly nagging the Indian high school student for two years now. Assuming that we all do arrive at a remarkable solution and hold the exams, do we then go back to the ever-confusing college admissions system with impossible cut-offs set at 99 per cent. Here, Covid-19 provides India an opportunity to reinvent higher education per se and college admissions in particular.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

GANDHIAN DEPARTS

THE DEATH of centenarian H.S. Doraswamy removes from the scene a freedom fighter, citizen activist, journalist and anti-corruption crusader. He joined the freedom struggle at a young age and was jailed during the Quit India Movement and the Emergency. Strongly influenced by Gandhian ideology, Doraswamy remained a committed Gandhian until the end and never craved any official position. May his tribe increase!

N.J. Ravi Chandrer
Bengaluru

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

Devi Kar



Blame schools if India's kids can't show creativity or be innovative

We often hear educators lamenting the lack of creativity and innovativeness in Indians as a whole. Indeed, it is shocking that hardly any inventions have emerged from India in the past 50 years. However, we can't continue to blame our colonial shackles for the lack of creativity in terms of inventions and patents.

It is upsetting to learn from the latest data compiled by WIPO, the Geneva-based World Intellectual Property Organisation, that in 2019, companies like Samsung and Huawei filed more international patent applications each than the whole of India. India was responsible for less than one per cent of the total global applications for patents that year. It is also disturbing to know that unlike colleges and universities abroad, our higher educational institutions have no presence at all in this area. It has been inferred that not only do these figures indicate the sad state of innovative initiatives in India, they also confirm the low spending in research and development by our government. It is important to explore the reasons for this sad state of affairs.

There are many deep-rooted reasons

for this intellectual famine that our country has been experiencing. Most people cite rote learning in schools, which steadily destroys imagination and creativity in young minds, as the main culprit. This article will deal with a single major reason — that is the unconscious but constant reinforcement of plagiarism in our entire educational system.

First, the very concept and awareness of plagiarism is woefully absent in our school education. This year, when we announced in school that we would be tackling the issue of plagiarism, one of our senior students spoke up, saying: "No offence meant, but why is it we were not warned about this when we produced cut-and-paste projects and presentations in the lower classes?" She was spot on. Schools always looked out for factually correct and visually attractive presentations rather than original work. Unfortunately, our board examiners too reward students who produced attractive portfolios, the contents of which were gleaned from the Internet. Before the advent of the Information Age, the cut-and-paste jobs were carried out with the help of illustrated books and magazines, scissors

and glue.

Forget about projects and presentations, even answers to questions and essays have been written with the help of readymade notes and guidebooks. Since these fetched enviably high scores, including in the board exams, they were in great demand, making it unnecessary for students to think for themselves and to do their own research or write their own notes. I remember an oft-repeated joke that you could write a good essay on almost any topic if you prepared just a single essay on God. So, if you were asked to write an essay on "a rainy day", you could write about God's natural creations, which included the sky and earth, sun and of course rain, and then move on to a rainy day. Moreover, students have always been encouraged to quote at length, to enhance the richness of an answer or essay. Even in undergraduate class, students quoted writers to support an argument, but seldom presented research-based evidence of his or her own.

In art class children have been made to copy images and patterns. Imaginative composition — if set as an assignment — was usually "corrected"

and modified to conform to the teacher's ideas. Where music is concerned, how many children are encouraged to compose their own tunes? It is a shame that creative writing is not part of the regular school curriculum. In language and grammar classes, a child's originality is killed at the primary level itself. A schoolboy, asked to write a sentence with "mother", had his simple sentence: "My mother has big eyes". But this was crossed out with a thick red marker and changed to: "My mother is a noble lady". The next sentence, "I hate drinking milk", using the word "milk", was rejected in favour of: "Milk is a nutritious drink". The poor boy was being set in a mould created by his unimaginative teacher.

Also, looking upon the prescribed textbook as the students' Bible causes considerable damage to creative minds. If an answer was based on the subject-related textbook, it was marked correct, but if certain "key" phrases and terms were not used but explained in the student's own words, it was more than likely that the student would be heavily penalised. This is what defeats the making of independent minds.

It is extremely urgent today that we

correct all these mistakes and the lacunae of the past and begin by introducing the concepts of plagiarism and intellectual property right from the junior classes. It is true that much of early learning happens by observing and imitating. But children are imaginative too. We teachers must learn to foster this natural gift and be less rigid about the need to conform. As Picasso said: "All children are born artists. The problem is to remain an artist as we grow up."

As children grow older, they could be taught to consciously acknowledge the sources from where they have taken content. This practice, if well inculcated in our young, will go a long way to making them intellectually honest. Apart from developing academic honesty, educators should encourage and celebrate original work. When our children join school in the kindergarten, they are curious, imaginative and creative. It is we adults who cramp their style and freedom by straitjacketing them. The fault that India does not produce inventors lies in ourselves.

The writer is a veteran school educator based in Kolkata

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD TENSE
AFTER MILITIA
COMMANDER HELD

Baghdad, May 27: Tensions mounted in Iraq's capital after the arrest of a militia commander on terrorism charges, prompting a dangerous showdown by the detainee's paramilitary supporters and the Iraqi government.

The confrontation began on Wednesday after Iraqi security forces arrested at dawn militia leader Qassim Mahmoud Musleh based on a judicial investigation and arrest warrant on terrorism charges, Iraq's military said in a statement.

Musleh is the head of the Popular Mobilisation Forces in Anbar province. Shortly after the arrest, forces affiliated with the PMF which maintains offices inside the heavily fortified Green Zone, were deployed surrounding Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's headquarters. Tensions reached fever pitch when Iraqi security forces and the elite Counter-Terrorism Service were deployed to protect the government and diplomatic missions.

HAWKING'S
ARCHIVE, OFFICE
ACQUIRED

London, May 27: London's Science Museum and the Cambridge University library said Wednesday they have acquired a large collection of items belonging to late physicist Stephen Hawking, from his personalised wheelchairs to landmark papers on theoretical physics and his scripts from his appearance on *The Simpsons*.

The entire contents of Hawking's office at Cambridge, including his communications equipment, memorabilia, bets he made on scientific debates and office furniture, will be preserved as part of the collection belonging to the Science Museum Group.

Hawking occupied the office at the university's department of applied mathematics and theoretical physics from 2002 until shortly before his death in 2018. Highlights will go on display at the London museum early next year. Museum officials are also hoping to create a touring exhibition in the UK before setting up a permanent display in London.

3 JAILED OVER
'17 BARCELONA
ATTACKS

Madrid, May 27: A Spanish court on Thursday imposed prison sentences ranging from 8 to 53 years on the three surviving members of an extremist Islamist cell that killed 16 people and injured 140 others in two consecutive attacks in and near Barcelona in 2017.

The three convicted by Spain's National Court were accused of forming part of the cell or aiding it, but not of directly carrying out the attacks. Two cell members, including a Muslim cleric believed to have been the ringleader, died in an apparently accidental blast at a country house while preparing explosives before the attacks.

Six more were shot and killed by police after driving vehicles into groups of bystanders in Barcelona and the nearby coastal town of Cambrils. The Islamic State group later claimed responsibility for their actions. A panel of judges convicted Mohamed Houli Chemlal, a 24-year-old Spaniard who survived the explosion days ahead of the attacks, and Driss Oukabir, 32 and originally from Morocco.

U.S. RESIDENT
SOUGHT BY CHINA
FREED IN DUBAI

Dubai, May 27: A permanent resident of the United States wanted by China was freed by Dubai on Thursday, taking off on a flight to Turkey after spending weeks in detention.

Beijing had sought Wang Jingyu over his online comments about a deadly confrontation between Chinese and Indian forces last year.

Activists and his supporters say plainclothes police officers arrested the 19-year-old student as he came off an Emirates flight in April at Dubai International Airport, trying to connect onto New York.

The State Department acknowledged his arrest, described the case as a human rights' concern and warned that he could have faced extradition to China.

He was freed just hours after *The Associated Press* began asking questions about his case.

Wang's case comes as the United Arab Emirates, long a US defence partner in the Mideast, has drawn closer to China in recent years in trade and in efforts to combat the Coronavirus pandemic.

UK health min defends virus record

Hancock responds after ex-aide Cummins alleged govt's poor Covid response caused deaths

London, May 27: Britain's health minister on Thursday defended his handling of the Coronavirus pandemic after a former top government aide alleged the government's botched response had led to tens of thousands of needless deaths.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock hit back after Dominic Cummings singled him out for criticism in an excoriating attack on the government. In testimony to lawmakers on Wednesday, Cummings accused Hancock of lying to the public and said he "should have been fired" for mistakes including testing failures that saw patients with the virus discharged from hospitals to nursing homes.

Thousands of people died with Covid-19 in British care homes in the first months of the outbreak. Hancock said "the unsubstantiated allegations around honesty are not true." "I have been straight with people in public and in private throughout," he told legislators in the House of Commons.

"Every day since I began working on the response to this pandemic last January, I've got up each morning and asked: What must I do to protect life?" Cummings, who left his job as Prime Minister Boris Johnson's top adviser in November, claimed the government's slow and chaotic initial response, and Johnson's failure to learn from mistakes, meant that tens of thousands of people had died unnecessarily.

He said Johnson was "unfit for the job" of prime minister. Johnson brushed aside the criticism, saying "some of the commentary I have heard doesn't bear any relation to reality." "What people want us to get on with is delivering the (reopening) road map and trying, cautiously, to take our country forward through what has been one of the most difficult periods that I think anybody can remember," he told reporters on Thursday. Opposition Labour Party health spokesman Jonathan Ashworth said that, whether or not Cummings' allegations were true, the government had questions to answer.

"These allegations from Cummings are either true, and if so the secretary of state (Hancock) potentially stands in breach of the ministerial code ... or they are false and the prime minister brought a fantasist and a liar into the heart of Downing Street," he said. —AP

3 cops wounded
in Dallas shooting

Flower Mound (US), May 27: Three officers were shot and wounded Wednesday night while answering a report of a suicidal person in a Dallas suburb, police said.

The three officers were responding to a 911 call about 7 p.m. Wednesday at a house in a Flower Mound residential neighbourhood about 25 miles (40.23 kilometres) northwest of Dallas. According to a police statement, they were trying to contact the man, who was alone in the house, when gunfire erupted from inside.

The officers returned fire, but police have had no contact with the man since a standoff ensued.

POLITICAL | TSUNAMI

Ankara, May 27: Millions of Turks have been glued to their screens, watching a crime boss tell wild stories about international drug smuggling, murders and the murky ties between politicians and the mafia.

But the gang boss starring in these videos is real, and his claims have set off a political tsunami that has unsettled President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, leaving his popular interior minister particularly exposed.

The accusations thrown



A waiter sets up tables at an outdoor dining area of a restaurant in Islamabad on Thursday as restaurants prepare to reopen for outdoor dining following a lift on a nationwide lockdown imposed to curb the spread of the Covid-19. — AFP

Melbourne set for fourth
lockdown as cluster grows

Canberra, May 27: Australia's second-largest city was set to enter its fourth lockdown Thursday as concern grew over the rapid spread of infections from a Coronavirus variant. The seven-day lockdown for Melbourne and the rest of Victoria state comes after a new cluster in the city rose to 26 infections, including a person who was in intensive care.

Another 10,000 people have had some degree of contact with those already

infected. "Unless something changes, this will be increasingly uncontrollable," Victoria Acting Premier James Merlino said. The federal government declared Melbourne a hot spot, which entitles the city to additional federal resources. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said 218 military personnel were in Victoria helping in pandemic operations and more would be sent if Merlino asked. Additional vaccine doses were also

being sent to Victoria.

Only 3.9 million vaccine doses have been administered among Australia's population of 26 million. Health Minister Greg Hunt described the lockdown as "highly regrettable, but necessary restrictions under the current circumstances." People will only be able to leave home to shop for food and essential items, provide or receive care, exercise, work or study if they are unable to do so from home. —AP

Garcetti US 'envoy' to India

Washington, May 27: President Joe Biden is expected to nominate Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, a trusted political ally, as America's next ambassador to India, according to media reports.

Biden is expected to announce the names of political ambassadors, including for India, as soon as next week, according to a report in Axios.

President Biden, a Democrat, is also expected to announce Nicholas Burns as the ambassador to China and Rahm Emanuel and Tom Nides as ambassadors to Japan and Israel respectively, the report in the American news website said on Wednesday.

Garcetti, 50, who served as the co-chair of Biden's presidential campaign,

PIO VENKATARAMAN NOMINATED TO
KEY BIDEN ADMINISTRATION POST

Washington, May 27: US President Joe Biden has announced his intent to nominate Indian-American trade expert Arun Venkataraman to a key position in his administration related to foreign commercial service.

Venkataraman is the nominee for Director General of the United States and Foreign Commercial Service and Assistant Sec-

retary for Global Markets, Department of Commerce, the White House said on Wednesday.

With over 20 years of experience in advising companies, international organisations and the US government on international trade issues, Venkataraman is currently the Counsellor to the Secretary of Commerce.

Politicians accused of corruption, ties to drug trafficking, rape, murders

Wild claims of crime boss shake Turkish govt

by Sedat Peker at close Erdogan allies — including a former prime minister, top officials and their relatives — range from corruption and drug trafficking to rape and multiple murders. Peker's message, delivered with dramatic flare and punctuated by occasional tweets, appears to have gripped the imagination of so many because of his own reputed role in Turkey's underworld.

Speaking with the air of a man who knows everything about everyone, Peker is an ultranationalist co-

nvicted of multiple crimes, including fraud and running a criminal organisation. He fled Turkey last year to avoid prosecution and now claims to live in the United Arab Emirates, where he speaks into a camera from a carefully arranged desk and chuckles while telling a particularly juicy tale.

After only addressing the allegations obliquely, Erdogan on Wednesday forcefully defended his government's record on tackling organised crime.

"We have crushed crimi-

nal organisations one by one for 19 years," Erdogan said in parliament. "We follow criminal gang members wherever they may flee to in the world." No heads have rolled and the position of Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu — the anti-hero of Peker's stories — still seems to be secure. Erdogan has insisted he stands "side by side" with his nationalist minister. But while the allegations remain unproven, they come at an inopportune time for Erdogan, who is losing ground in

opinion polls because of a depreciating currency and runaway inflation.

Peker, 49, has already posted seven videos to his YouTube account, each about an hour long — the latest, posted Sunday, has had more than 14 million views — and he says he is planning several more.

They are all meticulously staged, with a big screen in the background showing still images and a different book on the table in each episode. One of them features a biography of Bob Dylan, entitled

FB reverses course, won't
ban laboratory virus theory

Washington, May 27: Facebook has reversed its policy banning posts suggesting Covid-19 emerged from a laboratory amid renewed debate over the origins of the virus, raising fresh questions about social media's role in policing misinformation.

The latest move by Facebook, announced late Wednesday on its website, highlights the challenge for the world's largest social network of rooting out false and potentially harmful content while remaining open for discourse.

"In light of ongoing investigations into the origin of Covid-19 and in consultation with public health experts, we will no longer remove the claim that Covid-19 is man-made or manufactured from our

● A RECENT Wall Street Journal report said three researchers from China's Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick in November 2019, ahead of the wider outbreak of the disease.

apps," the statement said. "We're continuing to work with health experts to keep pace with the evolving nature of the pandemic and regularly update our policies as new facts and trends emerge." The new statement updates guidance from Facebook in February when it said it would remove false or debunked claims about the novel Coronavirus which created a global pandemic killing more than three

million.

The move followed President Joe Biden's directive to US intelligence agencies to investigate competing theories on how the virus first emerged — through animal contact at a market in Wuhan, China, or through accidental release from a research laboratory in the same city.

Biden's order signals an escalation in mounting controversy over the origins of the virus which emerged in Wuhan.

A recent *Wall Street Journal* report, citing a US intelligence report, said three researchers from China's Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick in November 2019, ahead of the wider outbreak of the disease.

— AFP

Taiwan struggles
with test backlog

Taipei, May 27: Facing Taiwan's largest outbreak of the pandemic and looking for rapid virus test kits, the mayor of the island's capital did what anyone might do: He Googled it. "If you don't know, and you try to know someone, please check Google," Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je quipped.

Praised for its success at keeping the virus away for more than a year, Taiwan had until May recorded just 1,128 cases and 12 deaths.

But the number of locally transmitted cases started growing this month

and it soon became clear that the central government was ill prepared not only to contain the virus, but to even detect it on a large scale due to a lack of investment in rapid testing. That left officials like Ko scrambling to catch up as the number of new infections climbed to some 300 a day.

Ko's search put him in contact with six local companies who make rapid tests and his government was soon able to set up four rapid testing sites in a district that had emerged as a virus hotspot.

— AP

FDA NOD TO THIRD ANTIBODY DRUG

Washington, May 27: US health officials have granted emergency authorisation to a third antibody drug to help reduce hospitalisations and deaths due to Covid-19.

The FDA said Wednesday it authorised the drug from GlaxoSmithKline and Vir Biotechnology for people with mild-to-moderate cases of Covid-19 who face extra risks of severe illness, including seniors and those with

underlying health problems.

There has been low demand for two similar drugs already available, due mainly to the logistical hurdles of delivering them and confusion about their availability. US health officials have been trying to raise awareness of the treatments, connecting people who test positive for Covid-19 with information about nearby providers.

— AP

GERMANY LAYS
1ST STONE FOR
'HOUSE OF ONE'

Berlin, May 27: Religious leaders and politicians in Berlin laid the foundation stone Thursday for a new multi-faith place of worship which aims to bring Christians, Jews and Muslims together under one roof.

"The idea is bigger than the building," project director Roland Stolte said at a ceremony to mark the beginning of construction work on the so-called "House of One". Conceived a decade ago, the ambitious project is scheduled to open by 2025 on Museum Island in central Berlin.

Built on the site of a former church which was demolished under the former East German communist regime, the building will contain three separate places of worship for Christians, Jews and Muslims.

Yet the mosque, the synagogue and the protestant church will be connected by a large communal hall designed to host communal events and festivals. "It's a very symbolic step forward for us," said Kadir Sancı, who will be the imam of the future mosque.

"In these times of polarisation which cast a huge shadow on the world, the 'House of One' embodies the constructive spirit of faith and spirituality," he added. It would be "a place of peace and security" at a time when tensions between Berlin's Jewish and Muslim communities have flared.

— AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,115.22	0.19
Nifty 50	15,337.90	0.24
S&P 500*	4,206.76	0.26
Dollar (₹)	72.59	0.27
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.49	0.63
Euro (₹)	88.49	0.78
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,223*319	0.66
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.16	0.42
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.987	0.25
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.617	0.043

* As of 8:30 PM IST

US first quarter GDP unchanged at robust 6.4%

The US economy grew at a robust annual rate of 6.4 per cent in the first three months of this year, unchanged from the government's initial estimate. The recovery from last year's deep recession gained steam at the beginning of this year, helped by vaccines to combat the virus and trillions of dollars in government assistance. The rise in the GDP was the same as the government's first look one month ago.

Sun Pharma Q4 net zooms over 2-fold to ₹894 cr



Sun Pharmaceutical Industries reported a more than two-fold jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 894.15 crore for the March quarter, from Rs 399.84 crore a year ago, mainly on a robust performance in the Indian market. Consolidated total revenue from operations stood at Rs 8,522.98 crore against Rs 8,184.94 crore. For the full year 2020-21, Sun posted a net profit of Rs 2,903.82 crore against Rs 3,764.93 crore.

Ikea launches shopping app in India

Swedish home furnishing retailer Ikea announced the launch of its shopping app in India, in a bid to expand its omni-channel approach in the country. The Ikea app would be available on both iOS and Android platforms and will offer 7,000 home furnishing products, Ikea said in a statement. Customers from cities Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Surat, and Baroda will be able to buy products with the app, Ikea said.

BPCL says no plans to sell stake in Petronet, IGL

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) said it has no intention to sell a part of its stake in Petronet LNG Ltd and Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL) to help its new owner avoid making an open offer for the two gas companies. "We have no intention to pare down our stake in IGL or Petronet. Any parring down will be value destruction," BPCL director (finance) N. Vijayagopal said at an earnings call with investors.

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Health crisis more pervasive and debilitating than financial crises Near-term outlook clouded: RBI

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 27

The Covid-19 pandemic has unleashed a once-in-a-lifetime crisis on the world economy and the outlook remains grim. India's near-term outlook is clouded, with an accentuation of downside risks and potential externalities of global spillovers, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its annual report for 2020-21, published on Thursday. Faster vaccination holds the key to an escape from the pandemic, said the RBI. The central bank warned that compared to "financial crises, a health crisis can be more pervasive, persistent and debilitating in its impact on the real economy. Letting down the guard is perilous; it is best to prepare for future waves."

It also rued the fact that private investment is the missing piece in the story

FROM THE RBI ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

- ▶ RBI balance sheet size increased by ₹3.72 lakh crore to ₹57.07 lakh crore as on March 31, 2021, up 6.99 % from ₹53.34 L cr on June 30, 2020
- ▶ Covid 2.0 biggest risk to growth forecast
- ▶ For a self-sustaining GDP growth trajectory post-Covid, a durable revival in private consumption and investment demand would be critical as they account for around 85% of GDP
- ▶ Services sector contraction unprecedented in Indian history
- ▶ Inflation remains a key concern, constraining monetary policy from using any available room to support growth

of the Indian economy in 2020-21 and reviving it awaits an environment in which 'animal spirits' are rekindled and entrepreneurial energies are released so that backward and forward linkages and multipliers prepare the ground for a durable investment-

driven recovery.

"Embattled by new waves of infections and mutant strains of Covid-19, the slow pace of inoculation in several parts of the world and visceral vaccine protectionism, the global and domestic outlook has once again turned grim and

overcast with extreme uncertainty and downside risks," the RBI said.

The central bank said the impact and the duration of the second wave of the pandemic are the biggest threats to its growth estimates for the country for the ongoing financial year, with consensus gravitating towards its earlier forecast of 10.5 per cent.

The report said the deterioration in major fiscal indicators in 2020-21 may be attributed to the pandemic superimposed on a cyclical slowdown in tax revenues and a counter-pandemic fiscal push through higher government expenditure.

"Going forward, as growth revives and the economy gets back on track, it is important for the government to adhere to a clear exit strategy and build fiscal buffers, which can be tapped into in events of future shocks to

growth," the RBI said.

It also said that it will ensure a comfortable level of liquidity in the system during the current financial year and monetary transmission will continue "unimpeded".

The apex bank asked banks to closely monitor their bad loans and prepare themselves for higher provisioning in the wake of the second wave and the Supreme Court order lifting the ban on classification of non-performing assets. The waiver of compound interest on all loan accounts which opted for moratorium during March-August 2020 may put stress on banks' financial health. The RBI, however, noted that banks are better positioned than before in managing stress in their balance sheets in view of higher capital buffers, improvement in recoveries and a return to profitability.

Prices of edible oils, pulses to pressure inflation

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 27

The sharp price rise in edible oils and pulses had led to historically high inflation in March. Pressure from these food items is likely to persist in view of supply-demand imbalances, says the RBI.

Oils and fats went through a sharp price build-up, leading to a historically high inflation of 24.9 per cent in March 2021. Precautionary buying on account of the pandemic and rise in interna-

tional prices of edible oils led to this adverse development. In fact, international food prices firmed up from June 2020, primarily led by palm oil, sunflower oil and soybean oil prices, driven by supply shortfalls as well as depreciation of the US dollar, the RBI said in its annual report.

In order to contain the price escalation, basic customs duty (BCD) on crude palm oil was revised down to 27.5 per cent from 37.5 per cent with effect from November 27, 2020. However, it got revised fur-

ther to 32.5 per cent when the agricultural infrastructure development cess was introduced in the budget. Increasing global prices, increase in export levy on crude palm oil by Indonesia from December 2020 and imposition of 8 per cent export tax on crude palm oil by Malaysia from January 2021 kept prices high.

Similarly, prices of pulses recorded a 45-month high inflation of 22.8 per cent in April 2020 primarily led by tur and urad. Prices witnessed robust

growth during the months of April-May and September-November 2020, reflecting stockpiling by consumers, lockdown and rain related supply disruption and a decline in kharif pulses production, higher exports and lower imports during April-February 2020-21.

The government released 2 lakh tonnes of tur from the buffer stock through open market sales, extended the time limit for import of tur under an import quota of 4 lakh tonnes for 2020-21 as

on December 31, 2020, expedited imports of urad under the already issued import quota of 1.5 lakh tonnes and extended the MoU with Mozambique for import of 2 lakh tonnes of tur for another five years. With pulses production rising by 6 per cent for 2020-21 over 2019-20, tur, gram and masur prices eased during December 2020-February 2021.

However, the RBI expects that pressures from pulses and edible oils might persist in view of supply-demand imbalances.

BEZOS WILL PASS BATON TO NEW CEO ON JULY 5



Jeff Bezos Andy Jassy

New York, May 27: Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has picked a date to step down as CEO.

Bezos, who grew Amazon from an internet bookstore to an online shopping behemoth, said on Wednesday that Amazon executive Andy Jassy will take over the CEO role on July 5.

"We chose that date because it's sentimental for me," Bezos said during an Amazon shareholder meeting. He explained that it was exactly 27 years ago on that date in 1994 that Amazon was incorporated.

Seattle-based Amazon.com Inc announced that Bezos was stepping down as CEO in February, but didn't provide a specific date. Jassy, his replacement, currently runs the company's cloud-computing business.

— AP

Cadila seeks human trial nod for antibody cocktail

May 27: Zydus Cadila has sought regulatory approval for clinical trials of its antibody cocktail to treat mild Covid-19, as the country grapples with a shortage of medicines and vaccines needed to effectively tackle a devastating second wave of the pandemic.

The treatment candidate, ZRC-3308, was earlier shown to reduce lung damage during animal trials, the drugmaker said, adding it was found to be safe and well-tolerated.

The therapy is a cocktail of two monoclonal antibodies, which mimic natural antibodies that the body generates to fight infection.

"At this juncture, there is a critical need to explore safer and more efficacious treatments to combat Covid," Zydus Cadila's managing director, Sharvil Patel, said in a stock exchange filing.

The company is seeking permission to conduct early-to late-stage human clinical trials from the Drugs Controller General of India.

The US FDA has given emergency use authorisations to similar treatments developed by Vir Biotechnology and GlaxoSmith-Kline as well as ones made

Paytm eyes \$3 bn IPO, more than \$25 bn valuation

SARITHA RAI MAY 27



Vijay Shekhar Sharma

Paytm, India's leading digital payments provider, is aiming to raise about Rs 21,800 crore (\$3 billion) in an initial public offering late this year, according to a person familiar with the deal, in what could be the country's largest debut ever.

The startup, backed by investors including Berkshire Hathaway Inc, SoftBank Group Corp and Ant Group Co, plans to list in India around November and its offering could coincide with the Diwali festival season, said the person, asking not to be named because the details are private.

Paytm, formally called One97 Communications Ltd, is targeting a valuation of around \$25 billion to \$30 billion. The One97 board plans to meet this Friday to formally approve the IPO, said the person. Paytm declined to comment in response to emailed questions.

If successful, Paytm's initial share sale would surpass Coal India Ltd's offering, which raised more than Rs 15,000 crore in 2010 in the country's largest IPO so far. Banks shortlisted to run the Paytm offering include Morgan Stanley, Citigroup Inc and JPMorgan Chase & Co, with Morgan Stanley the leading contender, the person said. The process is expected to get rolling in late June or early July. The banks did not immediately respond

to requests for comment.

The public market debut will include a mix of new and existing shares to meet regulatory obligations in India. The country's regulations require that 10 per cent of shares are floated within two years and 25 per cent within five years. Paytm, led by founder and chief executive officer Vijay Shekhar Sharma, has been focusing on ramping up revenue and monetising its services over the past year. It's expanded beyond digital payments into banking, credit cards, financial services, wealth management and digital wallets. It also supports India's financial payments backbone, the Unified Payments Interface or UPI.

Paytm has fended off stiff competition from a swathe of global players including Walmart Inc-owned PhonePe, Google Pay, Amazon Pay as well as Facebook Inc-owned WhatsApp Pay. It has the biggest market share of India's merchant payments. Paytm has over 20 million merchant partners and its users make 1.4 billion monthly transactions. — Bloomberg

ASCI ASKS INFLUENCERS TO DISCLOSE PAID BRAND PITCHES



Dolly Singh

Mumbai, May 27: Come June 14, 'influencers' with wide following on social media who advertise brands from their accounts will have to disclose paid partnerships, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) said on Thursday.

The self-regulatory body pegged the size of the digital influencers industry at \$150 million, with digital marketing coming a long way over the past few years.

It has been engaged in stakeholder interactions since last year and released a draft of the influencer advertising guidelines in February 2021.

Dhruv Chitgopekar, founding partner of the Collective Artists Network and the chief executive of Bigbang.Social, who was among those consulted, told reporters that influencers started off as "guerillas" on the marketing scene but are now at the forefront.

He exuded confidence that the guidelines will not result in any dip in revenues for such influencers and there will be better transparency.

Dolly Singh, a digital influencer, admitted that she has seen a dip in engagement ever since she started disclosing a paid partnership but urged everyone to be more optimistic.

ASCI secretary-general Manisha Kapoor said the organisation has hired technology firms to trawl content to identify non-disclosure.

Its chairman Subhash Kamath said so far it has seen 95 per cent compliance with its actions after flagging norm violations, and if nothing works, the body can also escalate it to the sectoral regulators. — PTI

EXTRAORDINARY | YEAR

Consumer staples, healthcare sectors generated highest listing gains

IPOs give decadal high listing returns in FY21

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 27

The RBI annual report, released on Thursday throws light on primary equity market dynamics as FY20-21 proved to be a year of decadal high average IPO listing returns at 36 per cent, which according to the RBI, might have been fuelled by oversubscription along with other factors in play, like underpricing of IPO as well as consumer-focused businesses attracting listing premium.

"The exuberance witnessed in the secondary market gripped the pri-

mary market, with the year 2020-21 turning out to be an extraordinary one for initial public offers (IPOs) by Indian companies, as 21 out of 29 IPOs have generated positive returns for investors on listing," the RBI said.

"A sector wise analysis of 201 IPOs over the last 10 years (2011-12 to 2020-21) indicates that IPOs from consumer staples and healthcare sectors generated the highest listing gains in India."

Main board IPO average listing returns in the last 10 years (sector-wise) were —consumer staples (27.5 per cent), healthcare (21.4

per cent), industrials (16.5 per cent), materials (15.4 per cent), information technology (15.2 per cent), consumer discretionary (14.6 per cent), financials (12.7 per cent) and communication services (4.3 per cent).

"The firm specific characteristics are found to be not statistically significant in explaining the price run-ups on the IPO listing day," RBI said and felt oversubscription as a major factor for the listing gains/returns.

"Thus, the decadal high average IPO listing returns of 36 per cent realised during 2020-21



might have been fuelled by an average oversubscription rate of 71.3 times of IPO issue size."

Delving on underpricing of IPOs as one of the reasons for higher listing gains, the RBI said, "Information asymmetry is regarded as the root

cause of underpricing wherein the issuer deliberately under prices its IPO to attract uninformed investors. Other reasons are providing compensation to investors by the issuers for undertaking ex-ante uncertainty risk."

"Intuitively, a higher oversubscription rate is a signal to the investors in the secondary market on the potential increase in share prices and expected returns."

The primary segment witnessed increased activity during 2020-21. Resource mobilisation through IPOs, follow-on public offers (FPOs) and rights issues increased by 43.1 per cent to Rs 1.1 lakh crore during 2020-21 from Rs 76,965 crore in the previous year, the RBI said.

Of these, Rs 46,060 crore were mobilised through 57 IPO/FPO issues, out of which 27 issues amounting to Rs 246 crore were listed on the SME platform of BSE and the NSE. Resource mobilisation through rights issues rose to Rs 64,059 crore in 2020-21 from Rs 55,642 crore.

SHORT TAKES

Nadal, Djokovic & Roger in same half

Paris: Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer, the three most successful men in Grand Slam tennis history, were on Thursday all drawn in the same half of the French Open.

Having slipped to number three in the world, it was always likely that Nadal, the 13-time champion, would face top-ranked Djokovic before the final. The two great rivals could now meet in the semi-finals this year.

Djokovic is top seed and could possibly face 2009 winner Federer in the quarterfinals. All three men are chasing history at the French Open which starts on Sunday. Nadal and Federer are locked on 20 Grand Slams each while Djokovic, who has 18, can become the first man in over half a century to win all four majors on more than one occasion. — *AFP*

Nagal misses French Open cut

Paris: India's top player Sumit Nagal could not make a hat-trick of Grand Slam main draw appearances following a straight-set defeat in the second round of the French Open Qualifying event here. The Haryana youngster crashed out of the Clay Court major with a 3-6, 3-6 loss to Alejandro Tabilo from Chile, last night. In the engrossing contest that lasted one-and-a-half-hours, Nagal could break the serve of his rival, ranked 23 places below him at 146, only twice while he himself dropped his serve five times. With the defeat of the 23-year-old from Jhajar, India's challenge has ended in the Qualifiers. Ramkumar Ramanathan, Prajnesh Guneshwaran and Ankita Raina have already exited from the tournament. — *PTI*

Osaka won't talk to media in France

Paris: Tennis star Naomi Osaka says she is not going to speak to the media during the upcoming French Open. The world's highest-earning female athlete wrote in a Twitter post on Wednesday that she hopes the considerable amount that I get fined for this will go towards a mental health charity. The French Open is scheduled to begin Sunday in Paris. Osaka heads into the clay-court tournament ranked No. 2 in the world. The 23-year-old Osaka has won four Grand Slam titles. That includes last year's U.S. Open and the Australian Open this February. "I've often felt that people have no regard for athletes mental health and this very true whenever I see a press conference or partake in one," wrote Osaka. — *AP*

Athletes to be vaccinated for Oly

New Delhi: Indian Olympic Association (IOA) on Thursday said all the Tokyo Games-bound athletes and officials have got their first Covid-19 vaccine and they will get their second doses before their departure from the country for the multi-sporting spectacle.

"The IOA is ... ensuring that all the participants through the IOA for the Tokyo Olympics including athletes, technical officials and delegate members will follow all precautions and will be vaccinated before leaving for Japan," the IOA said. "... presently each of the above (athletes, technical officials and delegate members) has had the first vaccination and 2nd will happen as per vaccination protocols," IOA President Narinder Batra and Secretary General Rajiv Mehta said in the statement. — *PTI*

76ers exorcise Wizards 120-95

Los Angeles: Ben Simmons silenced the critics with a 22 point, nine rebound, eight assist performance as the Philadelphia 76ers routed the Washington Wizards 120-95 to grab a 2-0 playoff series lead on Wednesday. Joel Embiid also scored 22 points and grabbed seven rebounds while Tobias Harris garnered 19 points. — *AFP*



Villarreal players celebrate winning the Europa League final against Manchester United in Gdansk, Poland, on Wednesday.

— AP

WILL-A-REAL!

Gutsy Villarreal kill Man U with last kick in sudden death

Gdansk (Poland), May 27: Villarreal defeated Manchester United 11-10 on penalties to win their first major trophy after a 1-1 draw in the Europa League final as goalkeeper David de Gea missed the decisive spot-kick in a remarkable shootout.

Gerard Moreno gave Villarreal the lead 29 minutes into the Spanish club's first European final, but Edinson Cavani equalised early in the second half before Unai Emery's team prevailed on spot-kicks, extending United's four-year trophy drought.

Eric Bailly replaced the injured Harry Maguire in central defence, with the United captain surprisingly named among the substitutes despite suffering ankle ligament damage two weeks ago.

De Gea started ahead of Dean Henderson in goal, while Paul Pogba took up a more orthodox midfield role as Fred was only deemed fit enough for a spot on the bench.

An early collision between Juan Foyth and Pogba left the former Tottenham defender bloodied but both sides were slow to click into gear on a damp and chilly night on the Baltic coast.

Carlos Bacca's clever rabona cross created an opportunity for Pau Torres, the centre-back linked with a summer move to United, while



Villarreal players throw their coach Unai Emery into the air as they celebrate winning the Europa League final match against Manchester United in Gdansk, Poland, on Wednesday.

— AP

Marcus Rashford tested Geronimo Rulli with a dipping effort from distance.

Jeremy Pino scuffed wide on the counter, but Villarreal were soon ahead.

Dani Parejo swung in a free-kick from the left and Moreno peeled away from Luke Shaw and Victor Lindelof, steering beyond De Gea as the Swede desperately tugged at his

shirt. Moreno's 82nd goal for Villarreal equalled the club record of former Manchester United forward Giuseppe Rossi.

United continued to dominate possession as Villarreal soaked up the pressure, but the Spaniards remained a threat as Torres curled over at the end of normal time.

Weariness and a raft of

substitutions slowed the tempo in the closing stages as the rain intensified with penalties almost inevitable.

The first 21 penalties were successfully converted before De Gea had his attempt palmed away by Rulli as United lost for the sixth time in seven shootouts, handing Emery a record fourth Europa League crown.

— *AFP*

ZIDANE RESIGNS AS REAL COACH WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT

Madrid, May 27: Zinedine Zidane has resigned as Real Madrid manager with immediate effect, the Spanish club said Thursday just days after they were beaten to the La Liga title by Atletico Madrid.

The Frenchman's departure comes at the end of a disappointing campaign for the 13-time European champions, who also lost to Chelsea in the Champions League semi-finals, as they failed to win a trophy for the first time in 11 seasons. "We must now respect his decision and express our gratitude for his professionalism, dedication and passion over the years and what he means to Real Madrid," a club statement said.

Only 10 days ago Zidane, who has a contract until 2022, denied press speculation he had already told his players he would be leaving at the end of the season. "How am I going to tell my players that I am going now? It's a lie," he said after a 1-0 win at Athletic Bilbao.

"I'm focused on this season. There is a game left and we are going to give everything," he said.

— *AFP*

Mark not happy with ECB's take

London, May 27: Former opener Mark Butcher feels the ECB should have agreed to the BCCI's request to change the Test series schedule to accommodate the remaining games of IPL as it would have given the England Board the leverage to get top Indian players for its 'Hundred' tournament.

The Indian Board had informally made a request to shift the five-match Test series between India and England, starting August 4, by a week in order to accommodate the remaining 31 IPL games but it has not met with any favourable response from England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

"Well, listen. I take a deep breath here ... as does the nation. I think it's a massive missed opportunity," Butcher said during the latest Wisden Cricket Weekly Podcast.

Butcher said accepting the request would have given ECB the leverage to get top Indian cricketers such as Virat Kohli and M. S. Dhoni for 'The Hundred' tournament, the ECB's flagship project.

"...the ECB is absolutely desperate to make this (Hundred) work. They have to be, they have bet the house on The Hundred, but at every turn, it seems

a greater power doesn't want it to happen," said Butcher.

"And so for me, this was the opportunity where you'll say 'Okay we'll bite the bullet... We would do this for the BCCI on the proviso that we get Kohli, Dhoni, whoever we like, signed up for three years to play in The Hundred, starting 2022'," he added.

The inaugural edition of 'The Hundred', a 100-ball tournament involving eight men's and women's teams, was scheduled to take place last year but was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"And you have leverage for the first time ever; you have something that they need, that they want. Obviously, the BCCI will lose a lot of money if they don't get the IPL in the window," Butcher said.

"You also have the extraordinary spectacle of the IPL being finished at the behest or because of English cricket. And you use that lever in order to get something you desperately need. So I think there's an opportunity missed," he added.

The IPL was suspended early this month after multiple Covid-19 cases were reported inside its bio-bubble.

— *PTI*

ASIAN | BOXING

Mary stands tall, cruises into final

Dubai, May 27: Six-time world champion M. C. Mary Kom (51kg) and Sakshi (54kg) stormed into the Asian Boxing Championship finals after notching up gruelling victories in their last-four stage bouts here on Thursday.

While Mary Kom prevailed 4-1 over Mongolia's Lutsaikhana Altantsetseg, two-time youth world champion Sakshi upstaged top-seeded Kazakh Zholaman 3-2.

However, Monika (48kg) settled for a bronze medal after going down 0-5 to second-seeded Alua Balkibekova of Kazakhstan. The top-seeded Mary Kom dug from her huge reservoir of experience to outwit the sprightly Altantsetseg.

The veteran's right hooks were particularly impressive in a compelling performance. She fought with a perilously low guard despite the aggressive intent shown by her rival and relied on her sharp reflexes to score on counter-attacks.

The 38-year-old will now be gunning for her sixth gold medal at the continental showpiece. She will be up against Kazakhstan's Nazym Kyzaibay.

Sakshi also endured a tough one against Zholaman but came out trumps, riding on her grit.

Earlier, in an intense contest, Monika just could not keep pace with Balkibekova, who craftily dodged the Indian's attacks and connected some eye-catching combination punches to dominate the proceedings.

On Wednesday night, Ashish Kumar (75kg) lost 2-3 to Asian Games silver-medallist Abilkhan Amankul of Kazakhstan in the quarterfinal. Also going down in the quarters was Narender (+91kg). He lost 0-5 to Kazakhstan's Kamshibek Kunkabayev.

On Friday, five Indian men — Amit Panghal (52kg), Varinder Singh (60kg), Shiva Thapa (64kg), Vikas Krishan (69kg) and Sanjeet (91kg) — will fight it out in the semifinals.

— *PTI*

CHANDHOK SUBJECTED TO RACISM

New Delhi, May 27: Denied entry into a restaurant on the basis of his skin colour recently, former Grand Prix driver-turned TV expert Karun Chandhok says more awareness needs to be created against racism through Formula 1 though it has already taken "impressive" steps to address the issue.

Chandhok competed in Formula 1 between 2009-2010. He is now a well-respected commentator and alongside seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, one of the few non-white faces seen in the paddock.

After posting about his recent experience at a restaurant during the Monaco GP last week, Chandhok said on social media that he would not dwell on the past but focus on contributing to make the sport more diverse including having more Indians on board. He didn't reveal in which country the incident took place.

"I'm not really interested in talking about the past (about that incident) — the key is to talk about the future," he said. — *PTI*

Haryana Government's Relief Schemes Related to Covid-19

Free of Cost Treatment to COVID-19 Positive Patients

- Free treatment to every COVID-19 patient in all Government Medical Colleges and Hospitals** (including Remdesivir injection and other expensive medicines).
- Free treatment to patients of all BPL families** in private hospitals also. Complete payment to these private hospitals through <https://gmdahrheal.in/> portal by the Government.
- For other COVID-19 patients also the **Maximum Rates Prescribed** for Tests, Oxygen Beds, Ventilators, I.C.U. beds, Ambulance etc. in private hospitals.
- Financial assistance of Rs. 1000 per patient per day to private hospitals.

Free Vaccination by Haryana Government for the people of age group of 18 to 45 years

Financial Assistance in Case of Death Due to COVID-19

- Financial assistance of a lump sum amount of Rs. 2 lakh** to BPL families, in case of death of a family member between 18 to 50 years of age due to COVID-19 after March 1, 2021
- The Government will pay or reimburse insurance premium of Rs. 330 per person under **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana**, for BPL families so that they could be provided with **financial assistance of Rs. 2 Lakh**, in case of any natural death.

Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana

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

Sh. Manohar Lal, Chief Minister, Haryana

Financial Assistance to Home Isolated COVID-19 Positive Patients

Financial Assistance of Rs. 5000 per patient through D.B.T. to those Home Isolated COVID-19 positive patients of BPL families who have been infected after March 1, 2021

For more information, contact below helpline numbers

8558893911 (For Entire State)

& 1075 (Except Gurugram & Faridabad)

करते हैं आश्वास, होंगे सभी स्वस्थ