



India is in the grip  
of a weak monsoon  
spell, says IMD  
page 8



Mamata seeks recusal  
of HC judge Kausik  
Chanda from poll case  
page 9



Jailed anti-virus  
software pioneer  
John McAfee ends life  
page 11



Williamson says it's a  
really good feeling to be  
World Test champion  
page 13

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## NEARBY



Four students arrested in  
Israel Embassy blast case

NEW DELHI  
The Delhi Police Special Cell has arrested four students from Ladakh in connection with the Israel Embassy blast case. They were arrested from Kargil and brought to Delhi on transit remand.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 8

## HC grants relief to Twitter India chief

BENGALURU  
In a temporary relief to Twitter India's managing director Manish Maheshwari, the Karnataka High Court on Thursday restrained the U.P. police from taking any coercive action against him till June 29 in a criminal case.

SOUTH ▶ PAGE 5

## Notify Class 12 assessment plan, SC tells State Boards

Announce results by July 31, orders court

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed State Boards to notify their respective schemes for internal assessment of the final marks of Class 12 students within the next 10 days and ordered them to declare the results by July 31.

A Bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari refused to entertain a plea for a "uniform scheme" of assessment to be made applicable across Boards in the country. The court said each Board, whether the CBSE, ICSE or State Boards, was "autono-

## Court criticises A.P. govt.

The Andhra Pradesh government, which was planning to conduct Class 12 examinations, has decided to cancel them.

Earlier on Thursday, the Supreme Court criticised

mous and independent". They could formulate their own schemes after consultation with experts.

However, the Bench clarified that allowing Boards to form their own independent schemes did not preclude the court from judicially reviewing their correctness and validity when an occasion arose.

By directing the State Boards to declare their re-

sults before July 31, the court ensured that students across the country get a level playing field in college admissions and other opportunities for higher studies.

Earlier, the CBSE and the ICSE had agreed in the Supreme Court to announce the internal assessment results of their Class 12 students by July 31.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Farmers to observe 'Save democracy day'

Protests planned outside Raj Bhavans tomorrow to mark 46<sup>th</sup> year of Emergency

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GURUGRAM

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, a coalition of hundreds of farmer unions, will observe June 26 as "Save Agriculture and Save Democracy Day" to mark the 46<sup>th</sup> year of Emergency and seven months of their ongoing agitation against the Centre's farm reform laws.

Making this announcement at a press conference in Rohtak on Thursday, the SKM leaders said that farmers across the country would protest outside Raj Bhavans on June 26 and submit a memorandum to President Ram Nath Kovind through the Governors.

Swaraj India national pre-



Farmer leaders Yogendra Yadav and Inderjit Singh addressing the media on Thursday. ▶ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Sident Yogendra Yadav, addressing the press conference, said under the Narendra Modi government Emergency has become the

new normal and it has become imperative for the farmers' movement to save democracy along with seeking the repeal of the three laws and guarantee for Minimum Support Price.

**'History repeating itself'**  
All India Kisan Sabha, Haryana, vice-president Inderjit Singh said history is ironically repeating itself as the same BJP leaders, who had been projecting themselves as victims of Emergency all these years, are now running the country under "undeclared Emergency". Himself a Maintenance of Internal Security Act detainee in 1976, Mr. Singh cited how the Constitution was systematically

subverted by the BJP.

Farmer leader Prem Singh Gehlawat recalled how Prime Minister Narendra Modi had "deceived" the people with populist slogans before the elections and was now "blatantly serving the corporate sector at the cost of toiling people".

Satyawan, another farmer leader, said agriculturists from Haryana would assemble at Nadda Sahib Gurdwara before marching towards Raj Bhavan to submit the memorandum urging the President to prevail upon the Union government to amicably settle their demands.

RJD CHIEF URGES PM TO END  
IMPASSION FARM LAWS ▶ PAGE 9

## Awash with faith



Prayer power: Shree Jagannatha Temple servitors taking part in the bathing ceremony or Snana Yatra festival at Puri in Odisha on Thursday. ▶ BISWARANJAN ROUT

## Monuments see poor footfall in first week of reopening

Tourists unable to visit on weekends due to local lockdown restrictions

DAMINI NATH  
NEW DELHI

Some of the major Centrally protected monuments that reopened on June 16 after a closure due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic saw only about 1% to 7% of their average pre-pandemic daily footfall in the first eight days of the reopening, according to Archaeological Survey of India data.

The Union Culture Ministry on June 14 ordered that all monuments under the ASI be opened to the public from June 16, subject to local administration rules, including

State-wise weekend lockdown orders. The monuments, sites and museums of the ASI had been closed since April 15.

From June 16 to Wednesday, Taj Mahal in Agra was open for five days due to the weekend lockdown in Uttar Pradesh. The daily footfall ranged from 2,128 on June 16 to 4,322 on Monday, according to ASI data accessed by *The Hindu*.

In February 2020, before the pandemic, the UNESCO World Heritage Site used to receive 16,000 to 17,000 visitors on an average, with the

numbers increasing on weekends and holidays, said an ASI official.

**Cap on tickets**  
While tickets are sold only to maintain crowd control and social distancing, the number of visitors at Taj Mahal was not limited, ac-

cording to the official. In Delhi, however, tickets at each monument were capped between 7,000 and 10,000 a day.

In Delhi, popular tourist destinations such as Humayun's Tomb, Qutub Minar and Red Fort saw a few hundred visitors a day on an average, down from the thousands

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Jailed anti-virus  
software pioneer  
John McAfee ends life  
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Williamson says it's a  
really good feeling to be  
World Test champion  
page 13

## PM backs delimitation exercise, grassroots democracy in J&K

First outreach meeting with political leaders held in a cordial atmosphere

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated his government's commitment to fostering grassroots democracy in Jammu and Kashmir during his meeting with 14 leaders of eight mainstream political parties even as he sought their cooperation in first completing the delimitation exercise for Assembly seats in the Union Territory, which would eventually lead to elections.

He said this at the first outreach meeting between the Union government and mainstream political leaders of Jammu and Kashmir – a meeting, which by all accounts, was held in a cordial atmosphere.

Both Mr. Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah reiterated their previous public commitments to restoring statehood, government sources said.

The sources said in his address, Mr. Modi said, "Dilli ki doori kam honi chahiye aur dil ki doori bhi" (The distance from Delhi – the seat of central power – and the distance between hearts should both be reduced) to convey the spirit in which the meeting was called.

While every party spoke about the restoration of statehood, the contentious



One step at a time: Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeting Jammu and Kashmir leaders in Delhi on Thursday. Also present were Home Minister Amit Shah and J&K L-G Manoj Sinha. ▶ PTI

Hope this is the beginning of a process, says Omar

PEERZADA ASHIQ  
SRINAGAR

National Conference (NC) vice-president Omar Abdullah on Thursday said he hoped the Prime Minister's dialogue initiative was the beginning of a process.

"There has been a breach of trust between Delhi and Srinagar and requires measures from the Prime Minister. It is the Centre's duty to

restore it [trust]," the former Chief Minister said.

Mr. Abdullah, who described the August 5, 2019, move as "unacceptable", said, "People do not like Jammu and Kashmir's status to be reduced to a Union Territory. They want the full State and J&K cadre restored."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## 4,340 containment zones, 1,797 active cases in Delhi

NIKHIL M BABU  
NEW DELHI

Delhi has 4,340 active containment zones but only 1,797 active COVID-19 cases, according to government da-

till June 22.

The number of such zones is higher as an area can be removed from the list of containment zones only after a 28-day period of no new CO-

VID-19 cases, as per Central government rules.

"Even if there are no active cases, we cannot delist an area. But we start de-escalation process after 14 days

from the last positive case and people can start moving out of the containment zone after 14 days," an official said.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 3

## Nod to cutting, transplanting over 1,500 trees

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has given permission for cutting or transplantation of 1,639 trees for redevelopment of General Pool Residential Accommodation at Netaji Nagar.

Of these trees, 325 will be felled and 1,314 will be transplanted, according to a notification issued by the Delhi government. The project is part of the redevelopment of seven government colonies in the city. NBCC (India) Limited is doing the construction, and compensatory plantation of saplings, which is mandatory, has been done.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 3

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Slow recovery: A worker sanitising the 'Diana bench' as tourists visit the Taj Mahal on Thursday. ▶ PTI

visitors seen earlier. On average, Humayun's Tomb had 631 daily visitors from June 16 to Wednesday, with June 20, a Sunday, seeing a spike with 1,770 visitors. The official said Humayun's Tomb used to receive 7,000 to 8,000 visitors a day on average before the pandemic. Similarly, Qutub Minar had an average of 743 daily visitors, ranging from 432 on June 16 to 1,677 on June 20, which was around 7% of the 9,000 to 10,000 visitors on an average pre-COVID-19. Red Fort, which remains closed on Mondays, had an average of 152 daily visitors over seven days, around 1%-2% of its 7,000 to 9,000 daily visitors prior to the pandemic.

A ND-NOE

Man arrested for helping gang member flee custody

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 28-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly helping gangster Kuldeep alias Fajja escape from police custody from Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, the police said on Thursday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Rohini) Pranav Tayal said that the accused has been identified as Amit Mathur, a resident of Karala. Amit was arrested from his residence.

He is a friend of Deepak alias Titar, an active gang member of Jitender alias Gogi gang, the police said, adding that Amit helped Kuldeep on Deepak's instructions, the DCP said.

On March 25, Kuldeep, a member of Jitender gang escaped from police custody. One gangster was killed and another was injured in police action on the day of the incident.

## DU final-year classes to begin from July 20

Registration process for new session likely to start from July 15

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Delhi University on Thursday announced that classes for fifth-semester students will begin from July 20 and examinations are likely to be held from November 30.

Due to the pandemic, examinations were conducted only for terminal-year students this year. The current batch of second-year students will begin their final-year classes from July end, according to a notification issued by the university.

The academic calendar released also states that sixth-semester classes will begin on January 1 with dispersal of classes on April 28, 2022, and theory examinations to be held from May 11 next year.

Earlier, the university had said that third-semester classes for the current batch



The Arts Faculty at Delhi University wears a deserted look due to the ongoing pandemic crisis. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

of first-year students will begin from August 31 while those taking admissions for the 2021-22 academic session will begin classes from November 18.

Admissions to the university were delayed last year as well due to the pandemic and classes for the first-semester students had begun only in November. With their second-semester examinations due between Au-

gust 12 and August 24, classes for this batch is expected to begin from August 31.

The varsity is expected to begin the registration process for admissions to undergraduate courses from July 15, even as several boards have cancelled the Class 12 examinations. The university, however, is yet to release details on the process of admission to be followed this year.

**Single-entry points**  
DMRC spokesperson Anuj Dayal said, "The long queues are caused as only

## Long queues due to reduced carrying capacity, says DMRC

Train frequency similar to pre-pandemic times, it says

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Following long queues outside several metro stations since the resumption of services, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Thursday said that the current frequency of trains is similar to pre-pandemic times.

The public transporter attributed the long queues to reduced carrying capacity of the Delhi Metro network due to government guidelines.

Metro services resumed on June 7 after a hiatus of nearly a month due to the COVID-19-induced lockdown. Guidelines issued by the Delhi government stated that the metro can run only at a 50% capacity.

**Single-entry points**  
DMRC spokesperson Anuj Dayal said, "The long queues are caused as only



**C** The long queues are caused as only single-entry points are permitted at most of the metro stations

ANUJ DAYAL  
DMRC spokesperson

single-entry points are permitted at most of the metro stations, as in a mass transit system it is difficult to regulate the number of persons inside the system once entry is permitted. At present, the carrying capacity of the Delhi Metro as per existing guidelines is in the range of 10%-15% only."

The DMRC also said that 5,100 train trips were being run every day with a frequency of 2.5 minutes to 5 minutes on all major corridors. "This was the same fre-

Dust storm hits Capital; rain expected today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

A dust storm hit Delhi on Thursday afternoon, bringing the maximum temperature down to 38.2 degrees Celsius, one notch below the normal, the Indian Meteorological Department said.

The minimum temperature in the morning was recorded at 28.3 degrees Celsius, normal for this time of the year, it said. The relative humidity at 5.30 p.m. was recorded at 45%.

The weatherman has predicted thunderstorm accompanied by rain for Friday, with the minimum and maximum temperatures expected to hover around 28°Celsius and 38°Celsius, respectively. Delhi's air quality was in the 'moderate' category on Thursday evening. Data from the Central Pollution Control Board showed that the hourly air quality index at 7.05 pm stood at 140.

## Two fake call centres busted, 30 arrested for duping U.K. citizens

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Two fake call centres operating from Rohini have been busted and 30 persons arrested for allegedly duping U.K.-based residents over tax dues by posing as revenue officials.

Deputy Commissioner of

Police (Outer North) Rajiv Ranjan Singh said that the centres were being operated by Parvinder Singh and his three accomplices Paramjeet Singh, Gagandeep Singh and Manthan Arora, who were also arrested along with six women.

The police said they duped them by claiming themselves as personnel from the Department of Justice, United Kingdom and H.M. Revenue and Customs.

called up U.K.-based residents.

The police said that the accused induced fear in victims by telling them that a criminal case had been filed against them for tax dues. When the victims asked them for a remedy, they told them to transfer amount to a

U.K.-based account by providing the account number of facilitators in the U.K. Half of the transferred amount was being kept by the facilitators and the remaining was received by the accused through hawala transactions or by Bitcoins, police claimed.

## HC issues notice to Centre on harassment complaint by officer

Court tells officers to attempt resolution on their own

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has issued notice to the Centre on a petition by a senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, who has complained of sexual harassment against the Director General of the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D), claiming that the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) in her case was not properly constituted.

Justice Anup Jairam Bhambhani also issued notice to BPR&D while posting the case for further hearing on June 25.

In the meantime, the High Court asked if the parties involved, being very senior officers of a uniformed force, could attempt to resolve the issue on their own.

**Proceedings under way**  
The High Court's direction came on a plea by the senior IPS officer who said proceedings in her complaint are under way before the ICC constituted by BPR&D.



Senior advocate Rebecca John, representing the senior IPS officer, argued that the petition was only concerned with the constitution of the members of the ICC, which was constituted by an order of May 21, this year.

### ICC members

Ms. John contended that members of the ICC are subordinate in rank to the person who is subject matter of the complaint before such committee.

She explained that an internal complaints committee must not comprise members who are subordinate in rank to the person who is subject matter of the complaint before such committee.

"This, it is submitted, violates the very constitution of the ICC and all proceedings being conducted before it; and is against the principles of justice and fair play," Ms. John argued.

In the meantime, Centre's counsel Monika Arora suggested that considering that both the complainant and the person against whom ICC proceedings are pending, are very senior officers of a uniformed force, an attempt be made to resolve the issues that have arisen.

Ms. John also did not oppose the suggestion. "Accordingly, counsel may attempt resolution of the matter, if possible; and report on the next date of hearing," Justice Bhambhani said.

## Taekwondo coach found dead

In note, deceased blamed school authorities for salary dues

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 46-year-old man was found dead at his residence in Outer Delhi's Mangolpuri, allegedly over non-payment of pending salary by a private school where he used to work as a taekwondo coach, the police said on Thursday.

A note has been recovered. The police said the victim had been unemployed for over a year now. He was found dead by his family members on Tuesday.

### Two named

The police said that in the recovered note, the victim had mentioned names of two persons from the school management and accused

the authorities over non-payment of his pending salary. He wrote that he was disturbed because of the situation.

### Filed case last year

The police said he had also filed a case in the Labour Court against the school management last year over non-payment of salary.

The police said that one of the deceased's former colleagues has informed them that the victim was taking online classes since March last year but discontinued later following a dispute with school authorities because of salary issue.

The colleague allegedly told the police that two

months after taking online classes last year, when the victim has asked for salary, the authorities had said that they were waiting for the children to pay fees. However, when teachers asked a few months later, the school management allegedly told them to resign. Teachers then moved court against the school.

A senior police officer said that all the allegations are being looked into and the matter is under inquiry. No case has been registered so far, he added.

*Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday (10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.)*

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**PUNCHKUAN ROAD, Garwal Bhawan, (Near Jhandewalan, Gole Chkr.)**

**WAZIRPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)**

**JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543**

**NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP**

**LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing**

**Punjab Government**  
led by  
Chief Minister  
**Capt. Amarinder Singh**  
pays glowing tributes  
to the  
**Legendary Sikh General**  
**Baba Banda Singh Bahadur**  
on his  
**305<sup>th</sup> Martyrdom Anniversary**



Supreme sacrifice of  
Dasmesh Pita Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji's  
great disciple and the founder of  
1st Sikh Raj stands out as an  
unparalleled and iconic moment  
in India's history

Department of Information & Public Relations, Punjab



Timings <small>DELHI</small>		
<small>FRIDAY, JUN. 25</small>		
RISE 05:26	SET 19:23	
RISE 20:17	SET 05:38	
<small>SATURDAY, JUN. 26</small>		
RISE 05:26	SET 19:23	
RISE 21:15	SET 06:43	
<small>SUNDAY, JUN. 27</small>		
RISE 05:26	SET 19:23	
RISE 22:04	SET 07:50	

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	38	28
Safdarjung	38	28
Palam	40	27

**Delhi Pilm Today**  
37°C An easy morning turn very warm and humid day with partly cloudy sky. Duststorm and thunderstorm likely with light rain at some places.

**Delhi Pilm Tomorrow**  
38°C Rain or thunderstorm with gusty winds likely at some places. Hot and humid day with partly cloudy to cloudy sky.

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## IN BRIEF

### 15-day Van Mahotsav to begin on June 26

**NEW DELHI**  
The Delhi government will hold a 15-day Van Mahotsav from June 26, and Cabinet Ministers, MLAs, NGOs and resident welfare associations will participate in this mega tree-plantation campaign, Environment Minister Gopal Rai said on Thursday. Mr. Rai will launch the campaign from Garhi Mandu on the banks of the Yamuna.

### CM building lavish home from taxpayers' money: BJP

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

The BJP on Thursday accused Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of squandering taxpayers' money on a "lavish official residence for himself" at Flagstaff Road.

**₹10 crore**  
In a joint press conference held at Delhi Vidhan Sabha, BJP legislators led by Leader of the Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged that Mr. Kejriwal was bent upon spending ₹10 crores' taxpayers' money in building an almost new official residence.

### Set up emergency response team to resolve complaints: Chadha to officials

Senior engineers to make plans in consultation with area MLAs

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

Delhi Jal Board (DJB) Vice-Chairperson Raghav Chadha on Thursday instructed officials to set up emergency response teams to address and resolve complaints, said authorities.

He also laid special emphasis on the deployment of an emergency response team comprising Chief Engineers and Superintendent Engineers who will draft special task plans for critical areas under their jurisdiction in consultation with area MLAs and site visits.

"These plans will then be submitted to Member [Water] for verification and further necessary action. On execu-

# 24 containment zones out of 4,340 have active COVID-19 cases'

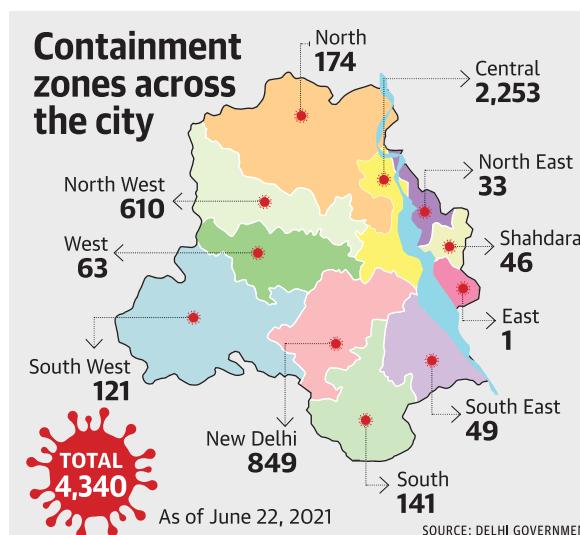
Such zones can be delisted only 28 days after the last positive case, says official

**NIKHIL M BABU  
NEW DELHI**

Delhi has 4,340 active containment zones but only 1,797 active COVID-19 cases, according to government data till June 22.

The number of such zones is higher as an area can be removed from the list of containment zones only after a 28-day period of no new COVID-19 cases being reported from the same place, as per officials.

"We can delist a containment zone only 28 days after the last positive case as per Central government rules. So, even if currently there are no active cases, we cannot delist that area. But we start de-escalation process after 14 days from the last positive case and people can start moving in and out of the containment zone after 14 days," an official said.



A district-wise breakup of data showed that there was a total of only 998 active cases.

The government did not explain why it is less than the official bulletin data of 1,797 active cases. Of these 998 ac-

tive cases, the Central district has the highest number of containment zones – 2,253 containment zones for just 37 active cases – while the east district has the lowest, just one containment

zone for 29 active cases, as per the data.

"Presently there are only 24 containment zones with active COVID-19 cases and the rest have zero active cases. But these can be delisted only 14 days after recovery of the last case in the respective containment zone [roughly 28 days from last case being reported]. That is why active containment zones are more than the active cases," a Delhi government official said.

The official said almost all containment zones are "micro containment zones" and in many cases one or two houses.

"In the beginning of the pandemic, we used to make very large containment zones, but for the past many months the focus is on micro containment zones and in many cases, it is just one house," the official said.

### Notices served to Google to remove certain apps

Most of them dupe people, say police

**SAURABH TRIVEDI  
NEW DELHI**

try through Cryptocurrency via Crypto Currency Exchang-

The apps identified in the scam have been found linked to Chinese servers and seven Chinese nationals – part of the scam – have been identified.

"The gang sued to contact and recruit random people over WhatsApp and Telegram. In a similar way, several other apps are operating and luring small investors. They used the Multilevel marketing (MLM) model for cheating and approaching people on various social media platforms. Several other virtual bank account addresses have been traced, which were linked with the crypto exchanges and money was transferred through those accounts as well. Details are being sought from Crypto Exchanges. We are tracing money trail to identify more accused involved in the fake investment apps."

"We had arrested the person responsible for sending pre-activated Indian SIM cards to China for the scam. More than 50 digital devices used in the offence have been seized," said the officer. He added that during probe, it was found that more than ₹13 crore have been moved out of the coun-

### Delhi reports 109 cases, 8 deaths

20 days of Covaxin, 9 days of Covishield stock available'

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

The city reported 109 fresh COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, taking the total cases to 14,33,475, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Thursday.

Also, eight deaths were reported and the total number of deaths stood at 24,948. A total of 77,382 tests were done in a day and that test positivity rate (TPR) was 0.14%. Of the total cases, 14,06,760 people have recovered and there are 1,767 ac-

**As of yesterday [Wednesday]. Delhi received more than 68,000 Covaxin doses and 80,000 Covishield doses, which totals to 10,24,000 vaccine doses available in the State**

ATISHI  
AAP MLA

People wait to get vaccinated at a government school in Vinod Nagar. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

tive cases.

AAP MLA Atishi, presenting a daily vaccination bulletin, said 25% youth in Delhi have received at least one dose of vaccine.

"As of yesterday [Wednesday]. Delhi received more than 68,000 Covaxin doses and 80,000 Covishield doses, which totals to 10,24,000 vaccine doses available in the State. Currently, Delhi has 20 days of Covaxin and 9 days of

### Govt. grants permission for cutting, transplantation of over 1,500 trees

Measure part of Netaji Nagar redevelopment project

**STAFF REPORTER**

**NEW DELHI**

The Delhi government gave permission for cutting or transplantation of 1,639 trees for redevelopment of General Pool Residential Accommodation (GPRA) at Netaji Nagar.

Of these trees, 325 trees will be felled and 1,314 will be transplanted, as per a notification issued by the Delhi government. The project is part of the redevelopment of seven government colonies in the city.



The transplantation of trees has to be done before felling of 325 trees, says the government. ■ FILE PHOTO

years over 21.45 ha. land of New Delhi and monitored till its successful establishment," the notification said.

The timber obtained from the removal of trees has to be auctioned and the money obtained from it has to be deposited as revenue to the government account by the NBCC.

"The lops and tops of the trees shall be sent/supplied

to the nearest crematorium free of cost and the same should be reported," the notification read.

Also, the transplantation of trees has to be done before felling of 325 trees. "The 325 trees shall be removed or felled after successful transplantation of 1,314 trees and submission of compliance certificate to DCF (South)," the document said.

### Man serving jail term in POCSO case allowed to attend brother's wedding

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

The Delhi High Court permitted a man, serving a 10-year rigorous jail term in a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) case, to attend a wedding ceremony.

Justice Anup Jairam Bhamhani directed that the applicant be taken in custody by jail or police officers in plain clothes to let him attend the marriage function of his elder brother from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Thursday.

Advocate Aishwarya Rao, representing the man, argued that though this application was moved earlier, it has been listed now since he has approached the court through the jail-visiting counsel of the Delhi High Court Legal Services Committee.

The Additional Public Prosecutor argued a pre-verification of the ground cited

for interim suspension of the sentence was made and it stands confirmed that the man's elder brother is scheduled to be married on June 24.

The Additional Public Prosecutor, however, submitted that verification from the to-be bride's family could not be completed as the man's father dissuaded the police officer from conducting verification from her family, saying if they find out that the applicant is in prison, they may not go ahead with the marriage.

With the Additional Public Prosecutor citing no objection to the arrangement, the court allowed the man to attend the wedding.

He is yet to serve 7 years and 8 months jail term. The court had earlier dismissed his interim bail application on the ground that he had furnished wrong information.

### Set up emergency response team to resolve complaints: Chadha to officials

Senior engineers to make plans in consultation with area MLAs

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

Delhi Jal Board (DJB) Vice-Chairperson Raghav Chadha on Thursday instructed officials to set up emergency response teams to address and resolve complaints, said authorities.

He also laid special emphasis on the deployment of an emergency response team comprising Chief Engineers and Superintendent Engineers who will draft special task plans for critical areas under their jurisdiction in consultation with area MLAs and site visits.

"These plans will then be submitted to Member [Water] for verification and further necessary action. On execu-



Raghav Chadha ■ THE HINDU

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NEW DELHI**

A Delhi court on Thursday denied bail to an accused in a gang-rape case, saying the allegations against him were grave and he may flee if allowed to come out of jail.

Accused Ajay Gupta allegedly lured a woman hailing from Rajasthan with a gold chain and earrings, took her to a hut of a co-accused where six people took turns to rape her, Delhi Police said.

Junking his bail plea, Additional Sessions Judge Ra-

jesh Malik observed, "Gravity of the offence is reflected from the fact that she was spotted by the accused and they took her to their jhuggi. They made her drink and took turns to rape her. The allegations are very grave."

The judge also said there was likelihood that the accused may influence prosecution witnesses or flee from justice considering the serious nature of allegations, and hence no case to release him on bail is made out."

Counsel for the accused

submitted that there are contradictions in woman's statement and that a false story has been cooked up to frame his client.

"Her husband contradicted her by stating that they had reached Delhi by bus, whereas, she mentioned in the FIR that she had reached Delhi by train," the counsel said.

He also said the woman had no injury mark at the time of her medical examination, whereas, she alleged that she was raped.

### Goel challenges CM to drink water supplied by DJB

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

Former Union Minister Vijay Goel and Ex-Mayor Jai Prakash on Thursday led a demonstration with dirty water bottles in their hands against bad quality water allegedly being supplied across the city by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB).

Mr. Goel challenged CM Arvind Kejriwal to drink the water supplied by the DJB. He said samples of dirty wa-

ter being supplied by the DJB had been collected from several locations in the city.

"People from 50 different places sent samples of the dirty water coming to their homes. In some areas people have been getting dirty, stinking water for the past 10 days. Several complaints made by residents, however, have not yielded any result," Mr. Goel said at the protest staged at Anand Parbat.

**NDMC hikes licence fee for 2021-22 by up to 7%**

**NEW DELHI**

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has increased by up to 7% the annual fees for grant and renewal of various trades licenses for 2021-22, including those for hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, lodges, sweet shops, officed said on Thursday. The maximum hike in the license fee is for the five-star hotels, which were earlier required to pay ₹61,200 per annum. They will now have to pay to ₹65,484 for the purpose, the civic body said.

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## Cong. leader's remarks against Shekhawat create flutter

BJP hits back,  
says it's 'a new  
low in politics in  
Rajasthan'

MOHAMMED IQBAL  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The remarks of Congress Chief Whip in Rajasthan Assembly Mahesh Joshi describing Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat as a 'fugitive' created a flutter in the political circles here on Thursday. In its sharp reaction, the Opposition BJP said the ruling party's leaders were touching a new low in politics in the State.

Mr. Joshi, who was summoned by the Delhi police crime branch to appear before it for questioning in a



Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

phone-tapping case registered on Mr. Shekhawat's complaint, said it was the Union Minister who was running away from giving voice samples to the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) for a probe into the audio clips of conversation about toppling the State government last year.

"If Mr. Shekhawat is clean, why is he running away? He is a fugitive on moral grounds.

He should appear before the ACB and give his voice samples," Mr. Joshi told reporters outside the PCC headquarters here. After his remarks, the Congress workers started raising slogans against Mr. Shekhawat, calling him a 'bhagoda' (fugitive). Mr. Shekhawat is the Lok Sabha MP elected from Jodhpur.

Mr. Joshi has refused to appear before the crime branch in Delhi, saying he was not named in the FIR registered in March this year, while the matter related to the jurisdiction of the case was pending before a court in the national capital. He said the notice of the crime branch was "legally untenable" because no person above 65 years of age could be called to a police station for recording of

statement.

The audio clips of alleged telephonic conversations between Mr. Shekhawat and Congress leaders had surfaced during the political crisis in July last year, when then Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot, along with 18 MLAs supporting him, staged a rebellion. Mr. Joshi had lodged the cases with the ACB and the Special Operations Group of the Rajasthan police on the basis of the audio clips.

### 'Indecent remarks'

State BJP president Satish Poonia said Mr. Joshi's "indecent remarks" had shown that the Congress leaders, who had stooped to a new low, were not interested any more in ideological fights in politics.

## No let-up in infighting within Punjab Cong.

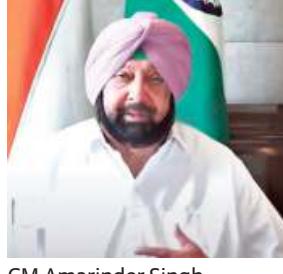
Party leaders trade charges over govt. positions for kin

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

There seems to be no let up in the infighting within the Punjab Congress as the controversy surrounding government jobs for children of two Congress legislators on 'compassionate grounds' by the State government refuses to die down.

Congress MLA Fatehjung Singh Bajwa on Thursday turned down the government job offer for his son Arjun Pratap Singh Bajwa, saying that the family decided to decline the job offer amid the 'petty politics' being played on the issue. He alleged that the opposition parties and some members of the Congress were playing cheap politics.

"Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa's (Minister) son is the Gurdaspur zila parishad chairman, Sukhbinder Sarkaria's (Minister) nephew is the chairman of the Amritsar zila



CM Amarinder Singh

parishad and Punjab Congress president Sunil Jakhar's nephew is the chairman of the Punjab State Farmers' Commission," he pointed out.

Last week, the Punjab Cabinet as a special case, gave approval to appoint Arjun Pratap Singh Bajwa as an Inspector in the Punjab police.

The Cabinet said the applicant is the grandson of ex-Punjab Minister Satnam Singh Bajwa, who laid down his life in 1987 for the sake of peace and harmony in the State. Mr. Arjun is son of Fa-

tehjung Singh Bajwa, the Congress MLA from Qadian.

The Cabinet also gave the nod to the appointment of Bhisham Pandey, the grandson of Joginder Pal Pandey who was gunned down by terrorists in 1987, as a Naib Tehsildar in Revenue Department. Mr. Bhisham is son of Rakesh Pandey, MLA from Ludhiana.

### 'Policy to continue'

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh had stated that children, grandchildren of such people would continue to be considered by his government for compensatory appointment on case-to-case basis.

Rubbishing questioning by the 'Bajwa family' on appointment of Ajay Vir Jakhar as chairman of Punjab State Farmers' Commission, Mr. Jakhar said that Ajay Vir did not draw any salary or other emoluments.

Punjab govt.  
reneging on  
poll promises'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

The opposition in Punjab – Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) – have accused the ruling Congress of renegeing on its election promises made in 2017.

Former Minister and senior SAD leader Daljeet Singh Cheema on Thursday challenged the claims of the Congress government of having fulfilling most of its promises. The AAP meanwhile said the government had failed to fulfil its promises, with the 'high command' now directing Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to deliver on his promises within the stipulated time.

Posting on Twitter, Mr. Cheema said, "What to talk about the people of the State, the worthy Punjab CM Captain Amarinder Singh has miserably failed to convince even his own high command that 84.6% of poll promises have been fulfilled."

## NHAI seeks Odisha govt.'s nod for coastal highway

It will connect Tangi with Bengal's Digha

STAFF REPORTER  
BHUBANESWAR

sectors fared badly, agriculture and allied sector sustained the economy. Farmers continued their work without giving up," said Mr. Patnaik in a statement.

Dairy farming plays an important role in the rural economy contributing to livelihoods of small and marginal farmers, he said.

"Since demand for milk has come down drastically, it had impacted the livelihood of dairy farmers in a big way. Keeping this in mind, it has been decided to provide financial assistance to dairy farmers," he said.

The Congress had earlier demanded monthly assistance of ₹6,000 to every milk farmer during the lockdown period.

Procurement, which was around 5.45 lakh litre per day, ranged between 3.75 lakh LPD and 2 lakh LPD at one point of time.

from the plan. The highway, which was initially planned from Gopalpur of Ganjam district, will now begin from Tangi in Khordha district.

### Greenfield project

"We have carried out a realignment to avoid disturbance to coastal biodiversity zones. The road is a greenfield project. Some portions of the existing roads near Purari will be part of the highway, otherwise we will have to acquire both private and government land for the project," said Ram Prasad Panda, Chief General Manager of NHAI, Bhubaneswar.

"Some portions of the highway project will require approval under coastal regulation zone guidelines," Mr. Panda said. Presentation on realignment of the proposed road was presented before the State government earlier this week.

## CM Patnaik announces aid for dairy farmers

They will get ₹6,000 each for fodder

STAFF REPORTER

BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday announced COVID-19 assistance for dairy farmers registered under the Odisha State Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation (OMFED).

According to the State government, 1,20,000 farmers would receive a maximum ₹6,000 each towards fodder costs resulting in ₹11 crore expenditure.

During the lockdown, the farmers suffered a lot as sweetmeat shops, restaurants and tea shops, which are major end users of milk, remained closed. Farmers were seen pouring milk on roads protesting against non-procurement.

"The pandemic has adversely impacted the economy of the world and Odisha is no exception. While all

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1	Name Of Work	Consultancy Services for Feasibility Study for execution of Widening of Existing Pavement to 4-Lane of Govindpur-Jamтар-Dumka-Sahibganj on PPP mode and Preparation of Detailed Project Report for Widening of the said project including Construction / Widening of existing Culverts, Bridges and other structures, Preparation of Land Acquisition Proposal, Forest Diversion Proposal, Shifting of Utility Services Proposal and Collection of relevant data which may deem necessary for Feasibility Study in the State of Jharkhand.
2	Tentative Length	310.00 KM
3	Period of Completion of Work	180 Days
4	Cost of Tender documents	Demand Draft/Banker Cheque of any Scheduled Bank (non-refundable fee) of Rs 10,000/- (Ten Thousand) only.
		EMD Rs. 500000.00 (Five Lakh) Only in the form of current issue of NSC, Fixed Deposits of a Scheduled Bank (all the above mentioned form of Security deposits money issued within the State of Jharkhand), and Bank Guarantee issued by any Scheduled bank anywhere in India Payable at Ranchi in favour of Executive Engineer, Planning & Investigation Division, Road Construction
5	Mode of Bid Submission	e-tender @ <a href="http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in">jharkhandtenders.gov.in</a>
6	Date/Time of Publication of Tender on Website	28.06.2021,10:30 AM
7	Date of Pre Bid Meeting	07.07.2021 (In the Chamber of SE, Adv. Planning Circle, RCD, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor, Nirupan Bhawan, Doranda, Ranchi-834002)
8	Date of PPT presentation on work Methodology	07.07.2021 (In the Chamber of SE, Adv. Planning Circle, RCD, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor, Nirupan Bhawan, Doranda, Ranchi-834002)

# Supreme Court pangs A.P. govt. over plan to hold Class 12 exams

Are you trying to prove you are different, it asks

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Andhra Pradesh government's insistence to have its Class 12 students brave the pandemic to attend exams saw the Supreme Court adopt a hard line on Thursday, saying the State will be held responsible and even be made to pay ₹1 crore as compensation in case of deaths.

A Bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari asked the Andhra Pradesh government what it was trying to prove by risking lives when other States across the country had opted to cancel their State Board exams.

"Are you trying to prove



A file photo of students of Class 10 writing exams in one of the centres in Rajamahendravaram.

you are different? Nobody should try to prove anything here... This is about lives," Justice Maheshwari addressed advocate Mahfooz A. Nazki, for Andhra Pradesh.

"Unless we are convinced that you will be able to conduct exams without any fatality, we will not allow this exam to be held. When other Boards have cancelled their

exam, you want to prove you can... are you trying to do anything here?" Justice Khanwilkar asked.

Justice Khanwilkar asked when the State would declare the results if it intended to conduct exams only by July-end. "Students in CBSE, ICSE and other Boards would get admissions, your students would be left out," Justice Khanwilkar said.

## A.P. cancels Intermediate, SSC exams

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has cancelled the SSC (10th Class) and Intermediate examinations.

Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh told a press conference that following the Supreme Court direction to complete the entire process of the examinations, including the declaration of results by July 31, the State was left with no choice but to cancel the exams. The decision was taken after reviewing the court's ruling with the officials of the School Education Department, he said.

## Ex-councillor hacked to death in Bengaluru

Rekha was attacked outside her office

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

Former Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) councillor Rekha Kadiresh was hacked to death by armed men outside her office near the flower garden in Cottontope on Thursday around 10.30 a.m. The two-time BJP councillor from Chalavadiplaya was supervising distribution of relief material and breakfast when the assailants struck.

"She was attacked by two persons with lethal weapons," said Additional Commissioner of Police (East) S. Murugan.

Neighbours claim to have

heard some noise. When they stepped out, they found the former councillor in a pool of blood. She was rushed to the Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences where she died.

"It was a planned murder. The assailants had turned away the CCTV cameras installed outside the office. We suspect that the assailants were known to her and were aware of her routine," said a senior police officer.

In February 2018, her husband Kadiresh S., a rowdyshooter, was hacked to death near the Muneshwara temple in Chalavadiplaya.

## HC grants relief to Twitter India chief

It says U.P. police can question him via virtual mode on Ghaziabad incident

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

In a temporary relief to Twitter India's Managing Director Manish Maheshwari, the Karnataka High Court on Thursday restrained the Uttar Pradesh police from taking any coercive action against him till June 29 on a criminal case related to the Ghaziabad incident of uploading a video related to assault on an elderly Muslim man.

However, the court said the Loni Border police could question Mr. Maheshwari, who is residing in Bengaluru, through virtual mode till it decided the legal question of whether the High Court of Karnataka had the jurisdiction to entertain challenge to the notice issued by the Uttar Pradesh police.

Justice G. Narendar passed the interim order on a petition filed by Mr. Maheshwari questioning the notice by the Loni Border police on June 18 asking him to join the investigation after he replied to their earlier notice indicating that he was prepared to cooperate with the investigation through video conference.

Earlier, Senior Advocate C.V. Nagesh had contended that Mr. Maheshwari was only an employee of Twitter Communications India Pvt Ltd., looking after marketing and sales and had nothing to do with the process of upload-

## SC refuses to intervene in Kerala students' plea

Top court asks them to approach HC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to intervene in a petition filed by students to cancel Class 11 exams in Kerala due to the pandemic and evaluate marks via an internal assessment scheme.

A Bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari gave the students liberty to approach the Kerala High Court with their plea.

Advocate G. Prakash, for Kerala, said Class 11 exams were scheduled in September.

The marks were not relevant for college admissions in 2021. They would only be considered in 2022, when they are combined with the Class 12 marks.

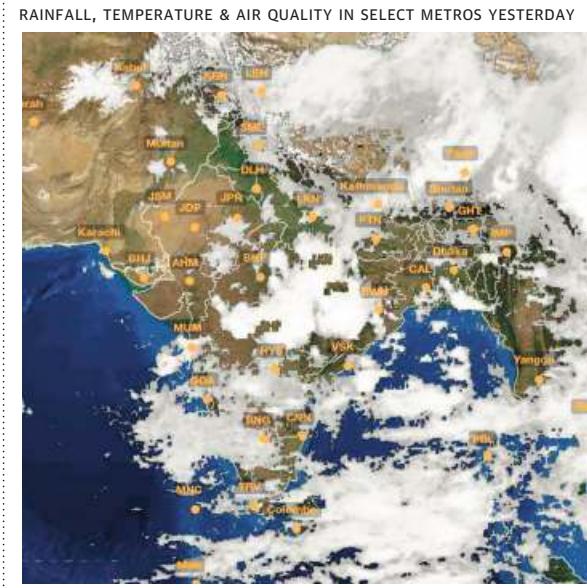
Mr. Prakash said Kerala had already conducted the Class 12 examinations in April.

Advocate Prashant Padmanabhan, appearing for the students, said holding Class 11 exams in September as planned or later depending on the COVID-19 situation would put students under unnecessary pressure. It would interfere with their studies and preparation for the Class 12 exams, which would start from March 22.

The court, at this point, asked Kerala whether they would give students time – 15 days to a month – to prepare for their Class 11 exams.

Mr. Prakash orally said the State would be willing to do so. However, Mr. Padmanabhan said students would need at least three months to prepare. But the court finally decided not to intervene, saying it had wanted to help but would not like to delve into the issue of Class 11 exams any further.

## WEATHER WATCH



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18:00 HRS)

**Forecast for Friday:** Heavy/heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Sikkim, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, east Madhya Pradesh and Konkan & Goa. Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Chandigarh, Delhi, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Andaman & Nicobar Islands

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...-34.2...	26.5	...	Kozhikode	...-31.4...	25.0	...
Ahmedabad	...-33.9...	27.3	...	Kurnool	...4...	34.2...	27.2
Aizawl	0.2...	20.0	...	Lucknow	...-33.2...	27.2	...
Altahabad	...-34.6...	26.6	...	Madurai	...-37.2...	24.5	...
Bengaluru	1...	29.4...	21.4	Mangaluru	2.3...	30.0...	24.0
Bhopal	...-34.0...	22.6	...	Mumbai	8.9...	31.7...	26.4
Bhubaneswar	...-33.2...	24.6	...	Mysuru	...-31.5...	21.6	...
Chandigarh	...-36.6...	25.1	...	New Delhi	14...	34.8...	28.3
Chennai	...-36.6...	25.1	...	Port Blair	17...	30.0...	22.6
Coimbatore	...-32.0...	22.6	...	Puducherry	...-33.8...	24.4	...
Dehradun	0.7...	23.1	...	Pune	...-28.0...	23.3	...
Gangtok	15...	24.1...	16.9	Raipur	11...	27.5...	24.2
Goa	0.8...	29.4...	24.6	Ranchi	0.9...	31.6...	23.5
Guwahati	...-34.2...	26.8	...	Shillong	15...	24.4...	18.0
Hubballi	...-28.0...	22.0	...	Shimla	5...	27.8...	20.6
Hyderabad	...-29.4...	23.6	...	Srinagar	...-29.0...	16.4	...
Imphal	10...	29.6...	21.4	Thiruvananthapuram	0.5...	32.6...	23.7
Jaipur	...-40.0...	29.5	...	Tiruchi	20...	33.5...	24.0
Kochi	54...	31.0...	23.0	Vijayawada	...-35.6...	25.2	...
Kohima	2...	26.4...	18.6	Visakhapatnam	0.2...	35.2...	23.6
Kolkata	0.2...	35.2...	26.6	Kolkata	0.2...	34.6...	23.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	76	45	25	54	164	...
Bengaluru	11	37	88	128	92	...
Chennai	8	5	40	66	71	...
Delhi	.7	37	77	213	193	...
Hyderabad	...	84	15	56	84	...
Kolkata	10	22	21	57	59	...
Lucknow	.8	24	65	102	108	...
Mumbai	4	15	9	170	100	...
Pune	...	7	50	66	41	...
Visakhapatnam	.9	49	33	54	83	...

Yesterday

In observation made at 4:00 p.m., Hisar, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 227 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Sagar, Madhya Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 25

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

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

**NO<sub>x</sub>:** Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

**PM2.5 & PM10:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

## WEST

## Maharashtra sees dip in recoveries

State reports spike of 9,844 COVID-19 cases; Mumbai records 773 fresh infections

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
PUNE

Maharashtra saw a dip in recoveries on Thursday, with just 9,371 patients being discharged, while 9,844 new COVID-19 cases pushed the active case tally to 1,21,767.

A total of 556 deaths were added to the State's progressive toll, of which 359 were part of the Health Department's ongoing 'reconciliation' process. While 149 deaths occurred during the last 48 hours, a further 48 occurred in the past week.

The total death toll has climbed to 1,19,859, with the case fatality rate rising to 2%. The total cases have reached 60,07,431, while cumulative recoveries have risen to 57,62,661, with the recovery rate standing at 95.93%.

State Surveillance Officer



Quick work: A woman gets inoculated at a drive-through vaccination centre at a shopping mall in Mumbai. ■ AFP

Dr. Pradeep Awate said, "Of 4,03,60,931 laboratory samples tested so far, 60,07,431 (with the average case positivity falling to 14.88%) have returned positive, with over 2.32 lakh samples being tested in the last 24 hours."

Pune reported 1,300 new cases, taking its tally to 10,48,407. As per the State Health Department, eight deaths were reported as the toll rose to 16,456. As per district authorities, the active case tally stands at 1,48,295, with the active cases at 9,753 while its death toll reached 3,909.

Neighbouring Satara reported 837 new cases and 26 deaths, taking its tally to 1,88,251, of whom 7,099 are active. Its toll has risen to 4,517. Sangli reported more than 850 new cases and 12 deaths. The total case tally stands at 1,48,295, with the active cases at 9,753 while its death toll reached 3,909.

Opposition. The two-and-a-half-hour meeting yielded nothing, despite being hosted by the media."

Earlier this week, Mr. Pawar hosted a meeting of the leaders of eight Opposition parties, including the Trinamool Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the Aam Aadmi Party, the Rashtriya Lok Dal, and the Left parties at his residence in Delhi, amid heightened speculation about the possibility of a 'third front' against the BJP.

The unlikely coalition of the Sena, the NCP and the Congress came into being in November 2019 following the Sena's acrimonious split with its partner of three decades, the BJP, owing to a bitter wrangling over the Chief Minister's post.

Pronouncements of fighting polls alone and the Sena's alleged frustration at being dominated by the NCP have led to speculation that the



## Stopping the surge

Govts should unlock using good evidence on how to avert another COVID-19 wave

After a debilitating second wave of COVID-19, cash-strapped State governments have responded to falling cases with a swift unlock programme in most districts. Some States have opted to open the floodgates, allowing dine-in restaurants, gyms, most shops and religious centres in areas with low test positivity rates for the coronavirus. Lockdown-weary citizens, on their part, have greeted the reopening with road trips to tourist centres, even travelling across inter-State borders. This is not surprising, considering that the country has gone through weeks of anguish, when death and misery touched the lives of millions. The *déjà vu* moment, worryingly similar to the misplaced optimism following the first wave, is a time for caution and to avoid the missteps that produced the deadly second wave. Already, Maharashtra has expressed worry that there is a noticeable rise in cases in just a week; the experience of other States will soon be known. There is a lot to be concerned about, since the highly transmissible delta variant of the virus that overran cities and rural areas in April-May continues to threaten unvaccinated populations, senior citizens and people with weak immunity in particular. The likely risk for children also causes apprehension. That it has morphed into a delta plus variant through a fresh mutation underscores the need for greater vigilance.

With the unprecedented knowledge base created in just over a year on COVID-19, governments have the resources to plan finely tuned reopening strategies. The current consensus on preventing spread, as WHO points out, is to avoid the three Cs – crowded places, close-contact settings and confined and enclosed spaces. The intersection of these is the most dangerous, and relaxations given by some States fall within this red zone: dine-in restaurants, cultural performances, shops, and social events in enclosed spaces. A significant number of people are unwilling to wear masks and adhere to distancing, making it difficult to stop transmission, including on trains and buses. Neither have State governments moved to provide certified masks to the public liberally, to be able to insist that they be worn. The insurance and banking sectors have made slow progress in enabling employees to work from home using real time platforms that can reduce crowding in offices. It is clear that until vaccines are freely available and cover every individual, the economy can reopen with a modicum of safety only with strong leadership. A record vaccination rate on a given day may encourage more people to come forward to be immunised, but there are not enough doses available, and data show rural areas are doing badly compared to cities even for the first dose. The Centre is cautious this time, warning of a third wave, but the imperative is to open windows of activity gradually without dropping the ball on safety.

## Deserving winners

New Zealand did well to win the Test Championship in spite of time lost to rain

The sun, after playing hide and seek with the clouds, finally shone in all its glory at Southampton and the inaugural ICC World Test Championship summit clash had its closure on the reserve sixth day. New Zealand emerged as deserving winners with skipper Kane Williamson leading from the front through knocks of 49 and an unbeaten 52, both outings buttressed by patience and a steely resolve to counter a strong Indian bowling unit. The Black Caps won by eight wickets and Virat Kohli's men had to draw solace from being second-best. They had to accept that the opposition was stronger in English conditions akin to New Zealand backyards unlike the tropical heat and abrasive pitches seen in India. Williamson also relished his luck at the toss and immediately elected to field with the damp weather and moist air further enhancing his pace-attack's potency. Even while the seniors Tim Southee and Trent Boult did their nagging lines, tall Kyle Jamieson, the man-of-the-final, extracted bounce and lateral movement and shackled the tentative Indian batsmen nibbling outside the off-stump. In a Test spiced by the elements, a low-scoring slugfest was in order and once New Zealand snatched a 32-run first-innings lead and reduced India's second dig to just 170, barring a miracle Kohli's men were down for the count and the meagre 139-run target hardly stretched the eventual champion.

India's cricketing nostalgia is infused with the glories of 'Indo-Pak' rivalry, the 1983 World Cup final against the mighty West Indies or the battles against Australia right from the miracle of Eden Gardens in 2001. But it has to be admitted that matches involving India and New Zealand have also acquired a mystique of their own. In recent ICC duels, New Zealand held the edge and it continued in Southampton. During the 2019 World Cup semifinal at Manchester, New Zealand prevailed and even that face-off spilled into the reserve day. The tale back then was one of swing and dark skies and the same backdrop was present at Southampton. New Zealand has often ended up as the bridesmaid in premier tournaments but a corner was turned over the last few days and it augurs well for cricket's health while new champions step up. India, which last won ICC silverware – the Champions Trophy – in 2013, did well in the run-up to the latest final and its rousing triumph in Australia earlier this year was the stuff of dreams. The squad has the right mix and after a break, it will be time to get back into the bio-bubble and then play the five-Test series against host England from August 4. A battle of attrition awaits India while New Zealand flies back with the champion's halo.

# The rural economy can jump-start a revival

The Government needs to reverse its neglect and policy missteps as key indicators show the sector has resilience



HIMANSHU

**T**he second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic could be slowly receding with a decline in the official estimates of daily infections and deaths. The economy is also very gradually getting back to normal, with many States beginning to ease some of the restrictions imposed in their lockdowns. However, the challenge of an economic recovery is far more serious than the health pandemic despite official claims of there being an economic recovery. Last month, the National Statistical Office (NSO) released the estimates of the Indian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for the fiscal year 2020-21. The decline in GDP, at 7.3%, was slightly better than expectation, even though this is a gross underestimate of the reality given the methodological issue of underestimation of the economic distress in the unorganised sector.

### Making things worse

But what makes economic recovery challenging is that this decline followed three years of sharp decline in GDP even before the novel coronavirus pandemic hit the country. Economic growth had already decelerated to 4% in 2019-20, less than half from the high of 8.3% in 2016-17. Since then, the slowdown in the economy has not only made things worse as far as economic recovery is concerned but also come at a huge cost for a majority of households which have lost jobs and incomes. The pandemic has only worsened an already fragile economic situation. The sharp decline in GDP was partly a result of the trend of a slowdown in economic activity since 2016-17. But a large part of

the economic outcome in the first year of the pandemic is also a result of a mishandling of the economic situation.

While a strict national lockdown certainly hit economic activity last year, what made matters worse was the less than adequate response from the Government in increasing fiscal support to revive demand in the economy. Many of the grand announcements remained largely on the monetary side without the enabling policy framework to help small and medium enterprises as well as the large unorganised sector which bore the brunt of the restrictions in economic activity.

### Agriculture, a key driver

Despite the lack of fiscal support, an important contributor to the better-than-expected economic performance was the resilience of the rural economy, particularly the agricultural sector. While rural areas were the first point of refuge for a majority of migrants who walked back thousands of kilometres from urban metropolitan areas, agriculture was the only major sector (other than electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services) which reported an increase in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2020-21. It not only provided jobs to returning migrants but also sustained the economy in the rural areas.

Agriculture has not only been the biggest saviour during the period of the pandemic but has consistently been an important driver of the economy throughout the last five years which has seen the economy slow down sharply. The average growth rate in agriculture GVA in the last five years, at 4.8%, is significantly higher than the GVA growth of the economy as a whole, at 3.6%, in the last five years.

But can the rural sector play saviour again? Unlikely, in the present context. And it will not be due to any natural calamity such as



B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

drought but a result of the neglect and policy missteps by the Government. Even though the lockdowns imposed by the State governments at the beginning of the second wave were less severe when compared to last year, they did impact the non-agricultural economy as is evident from the high frequency data for the last two months. The expectation of positive growth in this fiscal year may suggest recovery. However, given that the economy has already suffered last year, any recovery will largely be a statistical artefact driven by the low base of last year rather than a real recovery. The fact that a majority of households have already suffered job losses and income decline which are yet to regain their pre-pandemic levels suggests caution in making any inference on an economic recovery.

However, even the aggregate data are unlikely to capture the actual extent of devastation in the rural areas. While this is true for even the basic estimates of death and the health catastrophe caused by the pandemic, it is even more severe in its economic impact. Similar to the official statistics which have underestimated deaths due to the pandemic in most States – as has been brought out recently in several newspapers – the economic distress in rural areas is also largely unreported and underestimated.

The second wave affected rural areas disproportionately, in terms of health but also in terms of livelihoods. Many households have lost an earning member and an equal-

ly large number have spent a large sum on private health care expenditure in dealing with the infection. It will not be surprising if rural areas now witness a sharp rise in indebtedness from non-institutional sources.

However, the response from the Government has not been commensurate with the scale of the pandemic in rural areas. Unlike last year, the Government has not increased the allocation this year for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). For the country as a whole, despite an increase in employment demand in NREGS, the person-days generated in May 2021 was only 65% when compared to May 2020. While the free food-grain scheme has been extended this year as well, it does not include pulses as was provided last year. Similarly, there has not been any cash transfer to vulnerable groups, unlike last year.

### Decline in jobs, income

The impact of declining incomes and job losses on demand is now visible even in rural areas. While real wages have continued to decline with the latest estimates of April 2021 showing a decline in rural non-agricultural wages by 0.9% per annum in the last two years, agricultural wages continue to stagnate. One indicator of declining demand is the decline in wholesale prices of most of the agricultural commodities. Cereals and vegetables, which together account for more than half of crop output, have seen prices decline on a year-on-year basis for more than six months now. This is happening at a time when international agricultural prices are at an all-time high.

Some of this is reflected in the rise in inflation in pulses and oilseeds groups, both of which are largely imported. The net result is a peculiar situation where output prices for dominant agricultural commodities in the domestic mar-

ket are declining while consumer prices of essentials such as edible and pulses are contributing to rising inflation.

### Inflation threat

Rising inflation further threatens to reduce the purchasing power of the rural economy struggling with declining incomes and job losses. This is further compounded by the shift in terms of trade against agriculture which has put agricultural incomes under strain. The rise in input prices for diesel has already contributed to rising input costs but the recent increase in fertilizer prices for most of the complex fertilizers have also added to the misery of farmers. Rising inflation in international commodity prices also threatens the rural non-farm economy. A majority of the rural non-farm sector already struggling from low demand has now seen its profit margins getting impacted due to the increase in the cost of raw material.

Despite these setbacks, the rural economy including the agricultural economy continues to remain crucial for any strategy of economic revival. But for that, it will require proactive intervention from the Government to protect the rural population by speeding up vaccination. Unfortunately, so far, the rural areas have been lagging behind in the overall rate of vaccination. At the same time, rural areas will also need greater fiscal support, both in terms of direct income support to revive demand in the economy but also through various subsidies and protection from the rising inflation in input prices. This urgent intervention is not just necessary to support economic revival but also prevent another humanitarian crisis, this time as a result of economic mismanagement.

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## Staging a comeback, re-energising India's Africa policy

New Delhi needs to make new commitments, developing and deepening links in health, space and digital technologies



RAJIV BHATIA

**A**frica is considered a foreign policy priority by India. The Narendra Modi government designed a forward-looking strategy to deepen relations with African countries. Its implementation was managed quite well, with much political will invested in expanding the multi-faceted engagement. Even as the COVID-19 era began in March 2020, New Delhi took new initiatives to assist Africa through prompt despatch of medicines and later vaccines.

But now the policy implementation needs a critical review.

### The macro picture

The latest economic data confirms what was apprehended by experts: India-Africa trade is on a decline.

According to the Confederation of Indian Industry, in 2020-21, India's exports to and imports from Africa stood, respectively, at \$27.7 billion and \$28.2 billion, a reduction of 4.4% and 25% over the previous year. Thus, bilateral trade valued at \$55.9 billion in 2020-21, fell by \$10.8 billion compared to 2019-20, and \$15.5 billion compared to the peak year of 2014-15.

India's investments in Africa too saw a decrease from \$3.2 billion in 2019-20 to \$2.9 billion in 2020-21. Total investments over 25 years, from April 1996 to March 2021, are now just \$70.7 billion, which is about one-third of China's invest-

ment in Africa. COVID-19 has caused an adverse impact on the Indian and African economies.

India's top five markets today are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and Togo. The countries from which India imports the most are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Angola and Guinea. India's top three exports to Africa are mineral fuels and oils (processed petroleum products), pharmaceutical products and vehicles. Mineral fuels and oils, (essentially crude oil) and pearls, precious or semi-precious stones are the top two imports accounting for over 77% of our imports from Africa. The composition of the India-Africa trade has not changed much over the two decades.

### Global competition

These latest trends in bilateral economic relations should be assessed against two broad developments.

First, COVID-19 has brought misery to Africa. As on June 24, 2021, Africa registered 5.2 million infections and 1,37,855 deaths. Given Africa's population (1.3 billion) and what happened elsewhere (the United States, Europe and India), these figures may not have drawn international attention, but Africans have been deeply affected and remain ill-equipped. A recent World Health Organization survey revealed that 41 African countries had fewer than 2,000 working ventilators among them. Despite these shortcomings, Africa has not done so badly. Experts suggest that the strength of community networks and the continuing relevance of extended family play an important supportive role.

Second, as a recent Gateway House study, Engagement of External Powers in Africa; Takeaways for India (<https://bit.ly/3q0l4kv> and <https://bit.ly/3x0FFxE>), showed, Africa experienced a sharpened international competition, known as 'the third scramble', in the first two decades of the 21st century. A dozen nations from the Americas, Europe and Asia have striven to assist Africa in resolving the continent's political and social challenges and, in turn, to benefit from Africa's markets, minerals, hydrocarbons and oceanic resources, and thereby to expand their geopolitical influence. A mix of competition and contestation involving traditional and new players, especially the United States, the European Union (EU), China, Japan and India, has attracted much attention from governments, media and academia.



Besides, Africa has some of the protocols in place, having recently suffered from Ebola, and managed it reasonably well. Sadly though, with much of the world caught up in coping with the novel coronavirus pandemic's ill effects, flows of assistance and investment to Africa have decreased.

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While China has successfully used the pandemic to expand its footprint by increasing the outflow

of its vaccines, unfortunately India's 'vax diplomacy' has suffered a setback. This came in the wake of the debilitating second wave of COVID-19 in the country and the shortage of vaccine raw materials from the U.S. Geopolitical tensions in Asia and the imperative to consolidate its position in the Indo-Pacific region have compelled New Delhi to concentrate on its ties with the United Kingdom, the EU, and the Quad powers, particularly the U.S. Consequently, the attention normally paid to Africa lost out.

### India's role

This must now change. For mutual benefit, Africa and India should be consulted about their grievances and challenges in the COVID-19 era. It is essential "to impart a 21st century complexion to the partnership with Africa", as the above-mentioned study argues. This means developing and deepening collaborations in health, space and digital technologies.

Finally, to overcome the China challenge in Africa, increased cooperation between India and its international allies, rates priority. The recent India-EU Summit has identified Africa as a region where a partnership-based approach will be followed (<https://bit.ly/3wWjUV>). Similarly, when the first in-person summit of the Quad powers is held in Washington, a robust partnership plan for Africa should be announced. For it to be ready in time, work by Quad planners needs to begin now.

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House and a former High Commissioner to South Africa, Kenya and Lesotho

and economic engagement. The third India-Africa Forum Summit was held in 2015. The fourth summit, pending since last year, should be held as soon as possible, even if in a virtual format. Fresh financial resources for grants and concessional loans to Africa must be allocated, as previous allocations stand almost fully exhausted. Without new commitments, India's Africa policy would be like a car running on a near-empty fuel tank.

**Areas with promise**

The promotion of economic relations demands a higher priority. Industry representatives should be consulted about their grievances and challenges in the COVID-19 era. It is essential "to impart a 21st century complexion to the partnership with Africa", as the above-mentioned study argues. This means developing and deepening collaborations in health, space and digital technologies.

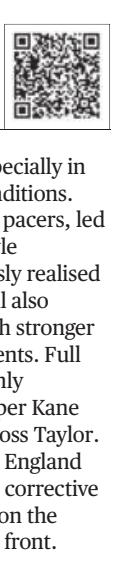
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**Attached and recovery**  
That there is some action now in trying to aid public sector banks in India for their huge losses as a result of the misdeeds of the three big fugitive Indian businessmen deserves some applause. But the mere attachment of properties is no good a solution unless they are sold at a reasonably fair price to avoid any 'distress sale'. The three big fish have to be severely punished by the courts if and when they are brought back to India by the Enforcement Directorate.  
**Create a haven**  
News about a 'YouTuber' and his abuse of women, the sexual harassment of schoolgirls by a school founder, and a 'Data Point' highlighting increasing domestic violence, only make one conclude that a girl in India is still not safe in her home, outside, or while in cyberspace. Many of us who are fortunate not to have experienced these, or have gone through these without many setbacks, need to be very vigilant. Our antennae must be sensitive to pick up any such issues in our extended families, neighbourhood and in our workplaces. If we know of such a breach of trust, sexual harassment and violence we must reach out for help. We must speak out and help such survivors. We should all pledge to leave our comfort zones and work towards making our own neighbourhood and our great country a safe place for our girls.  
**The Kiwi win**  
New Zealand's triumph ('Sport' page, "Kiwis bury the ghosts of 2019, crowned first World Test champion", June 24) comes as no surprise if their pre-match preparations and the homework they did were any indicator. The English weather no doubt favoured the Kiwis but does not in any way take away from the merit of their win. Can we say the men in blue gave away the match on a platter? Match practice with a couple of countries would have stood them in good stead. New Zealand bats deep – a marked difference with the Indians. The only solace is that everyone knows that the Indian team is capable of a much better performance.  
**A.V. NARAYANAN**, Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

pace bowling, especially in tough English conditions. The New Zealand pacers, led by the brilliant Kyle Jamieson, obviously realised this. The Kiwis tail also proved to be much stronger than their opponents. Full credit goes to highly experienced skipper Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor. As India is to tour England very soon, urgent corrective steps are needed on the batting technique front.  
**A. MOHAN**, Chennai



# Can the CBSE's plan objectively assess students of Class 12?

PARLEY

A school-leaving exam should be based on what a child has learnt right through two years at least

*The CBSE has prepared a tabulation scheme to determine the marks that students of Class 12 will be awarded in this pandemic year, upon completion of schooling. How reliable is such a scheme against the backdrop of the digital divide, and can it be improved? In a conversation moderated by G. Ananthakrishnan, Anita Rampal and Uday Gaonkar discuss the road ahead for assessing students. Edited excerpts:*

## Were the students adequately prepared for the assessment system proposed by CBSE?

**Anita Rampal:** I know in Delhi, for instance, students who could not even access online classes. So, for them, it's important that CBSE is looking at assessment over a longer period, not just this pandemic year, and what marks they got in Class 10 and 11. They have yet to see how their schools are going to be marking them for their internal assessment in Class 12. I have spoken to some who did not understand much of what happened in Class 12 because they barely had a shared phone between the siblings or not even that. This has been a very challenging year. I think this was the fairest that the CBSE could have worked out at the given moment, especially since it was done very late and under court orders.

**You would have a different experience in a rural setting, Mr. Gaonkar. What do you think?**

**Uday Gaonkar:** I'm working in a state-run school for Classes 8 to 10. Last year, only 80-85 days of physical classes were held. Normally, the academic year should have 200 working days. The syllabus was reduced by 30%. So, that is a mismatch: school days were reduced to 50% and the syllabus cut only by 30%. We were forced to teach hurriedly. Meaningful learning involves a lot of interaction between students, teachers and the community. In this scenario, we are just forced to complete the syllabus. The Government of Karnataka tried broadcasting classes: video classes were broadcast on Doordarshan and even on YouTube, but ours is a very remote location in a rural area. Only 30%

students have smartphones. Others have keypad phones. Students found it very difficult to get access to those YouTube videos.

## On TV and the Internet, what's their efficacy in terms of pedagogy?

**AR:** Very poor. For decades, we have struggled to move beyond just chalk and talk and staring at the blackboard. That itself is not pedagogy. We seem to be losing a lot of the work that we may have done in the last few decades. Learning happens through discussions with others, through engagement with activities or with the world around you.

Now, asking students to stare at a screen is worse than even staring at a blackboard. This is not learning; this is just a kind of coaching. You have learnt something, but you are told that you can have a person or a machine to help you revise it. Digital coaching has been pushed relentlessly by the industry of education technology. This time they really had it big. You can see the kinds of billionaires who have come out of this industry. For at least two decades, most educators in India have tried to resist the pressures of the computer industry which said that you must have smart boards and computers in the classroom. We have said that these can only be add-ons in places where there are essential resources for actual teaching and learning; they cannot be a substitute for activities and discussions among learners.

The pandemic has not only devastated the lives and livelihoods of a majority of our children, but has exacerbated divides. During a board exam, we know that children from disparate backgrounds take the exam and are marked for the same questions, irrespective of the kinds of resources, schools and teachers they've had. Now, this is an added layer to that divide. And this digital divide seems to be overwhelming, so much so that the government is bringing out guidelines on home learning and homeschooling, almost putting the responsibility on the learner and the family instead of the system.

That is going to be damaging. When the Right to Education (RTE) law was enacted, the Ministry had



appended to the Act a significant note, a justification for each of the clauses. One important justification was that if a child is not able to learn, it is not the failure of the child but of the system. Today, what is going to happen when the system is going to take responsibility for all these lapses, for the inability to connect with our students? We need to not just push the syllabus, but also emotionally support their agency, give them the confidence to continue despite all the odds, because many students are going to drop out after the pandemic is over. So, it's not just a matter of what marks we will give them for Class 12.

## What can feasibly be done this year?

**AR:** All the State Boards should make sure they've looked at assessments, at what students have done. I don't like the term 'learning loss' because again, it puts the responsibility on the student. I think the youngest children have learned a lot. They've learned the difficult lessons of life, so we shouldn't be calling it learning loss. Boards are very distant, remote entities. Schools should really make that intimate and compassionate connect. First, look at students and support them, relieve them of their traumas and anxieties, and then assess them over a longer period. Look at their Class 10, Class 11, look at all the work and projects that they may have done, or can do even now, and then assess them. Of course, if students have not had online classes at all, the school will need to take a call on that: how do they do an internal assessment? I think they will have to be empathetic, careful and fair. The RTE Act says that up to age 14, there

Most of the students have only basic keypad mobiles, no smartphones, and more than 20% of the students don't have a mobile phone.

UDAY GAONKAR

should be continuous and comprehensive assessment, but the system never heeded that. What it did, instead, was a poor substitute, what the CBSE called continuous assessment. We need a rethink on continuous assessment. It's not just a mark on a paper. It is the assessment of abilities – students' expression, writing, observation, ability to critically think and experiment.

## During the pandemic how can you provide instruction to students?

**UG:** Last year, the Bharat Gyan Vyan Samithi (BGVS), most of them teachers, started Vatar Sala, a neighbourhood school [in Karnataka]. Students here interact even during a lockdown period and because they know each other, they interact, they share one playground. We thought that one teacher or volunteer will help the students learn. One activity that we have developed is for children to collect electricity bills from their friends in their neighbourhood and transfer that data into another table for that information to get various inferences, for example, per capita electricity consumption in that area. We have developed worksheets and activity sheets this year also.

**The system is set around one school-leaving examination. Is**

**the situation conducive to having a standardised exam, besides entrance exams?**

**AR:** Exams meant as entrance exams are selective. You have a large number of people, you have fewer seats. But a school exam does not have to be selective. It should be a school-leaving exam based on what you have learnt right through the period or right through two years. That is much more healthy. It does not have to be standardised, which is never a good format for children because education is really rooted in a child's environment. The more decentralised the assessment, the more rigorous and better it is, the more it discerns what students have learned. You could have a common textbook, but the best way to assess is to be more decentralised. The RTE Act says don't take a centralised assessment for selecting/admitting students into school or for any other purpose. All our assessment theories tell us that better assessment is done in a trusting environment. We have statistical ways of seeing that these are not unfair, or can be moderated in ways that do not get skewed towards any particular State or district or school.

**CBSE has stipulated results committees in schools. Is that a sound approach, with 40% of the marking at Class 12 level?**

**AR:** It is okay to have some external component of the committee, some people who can understand assessment and who also look at fair distributions. For instance, in our university assessment for the four-year B.Ed teacher education programme run by many colleges under our faculty, there is a large component of internal assessment. We have a good system of moderation, where all colleges actually look at samples of work, of their highest and lowest marks, and then decide whether they fall within a fair marking distribution. If some college marking is skewed, those marks are moderated by consensus. This is a challenging process, it needs time and patience and careful rigour, which could be developed within the school system.

**Mr. Gaonkar, could you tell us about your report on education reform?**

**UG:** BGVS submitted a report last

year to the committee set up by the government on online classes. Our experience with Vatar Sala was very helpful. We gave some data collected by a national sample survey about Internet access and availability of devices. We said that it is injustice to have online classes for school students because it will not reach all the students, and recommended some paper-based activity sheets. Even learning kits were tried.

**What did you find from the survey and recommend as remedy?**

**UG:** Of the 70% of the students living in rural areas, only 6%-7% or even 2% have computers at home – laptops or computers – and only 10%-12% know how to handle the computer and Internet. Students who don't have a mobile phone have to share the phones of their friends. Most of the students have only basic keypad mobiles, no smartphones, and more than 20% of the students don't have a mobile phone. So, we said that is unjust. Even though Chandana television reaches more than 60%-70% students, these are PPTs (power point presentations) without any interaction. That is not learning.

**If conditions don't really improve for children to go back to physical classes, what would you do for 2022?**

**AR:** We should be prepared to run schools only when there are lean periods between COVID-19 waves when it is safe. And in that time, try and maximise the time to keep them engaged, not just give them memory-based information. More importantly, we need to keep in touch with them at home. Maybe give them some handouts, worksheets. Assessment should be closely tied to learning.

**UG:** This year is an opportunity to look into this matter differently. Board exams made the schools tuition centres. Now, we can make schools learning spaces again by providing real experiences rather than virtual experiences. Students gather knowledge in a fragmented way, whether it is language or the sciences or maths. Classes are fragmented age-wise. We can club them as far as possible and children can learn with their elders' help. It is time to rethink school education.



**Anita Rampal**  
is Professor and former Dean, Faculty of Education, Delhi University



**Uday Gaonkar**  
is a teacher in a rural school in Karnataka's public system who has worked in science teaching and learning



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

## Protecting prisoners' rights

Overcrowding in prisons has put several inmates at risk of COVID-19 infection and death

**AABID MUSHTAQ AND TAJAMUL ISLAM**

The catastrophic surge in COVID-19 cases across India in April and May led to a great number of deaths (still being counted) and put an enormous strain on the healthcare system and governments.

In the midst of the surge, prisoners were largely forgotten. The failure of the authorities to reduce severe overcrowding in prisons left thousands of prisoners at risk of infection and death. According to data, there are 12,715 inmates lodged in 11 sections of Tihar Jail alone as against the lodging capacity of 7,425. Out of them, 11,077 are undetained.

jailed under the Public Safety Act, a detention law that allows detention of any individual for up to two years without a trial or charge. He had tested positive for COVID-19 posthumously. His son said that Sehraf had complained of ill-health when the family had spoken to him 10 days earlier but there had been delay in his treatment till death became inevitable. Sehraf's death has exposed the condition of prisons in Jammu and Kashmir. It has also exposed the condition of political prisoners who often languish in jail for years and are rarely convicted.

### Political prisoners

Ever since the pandemic outbreak, human rights activists have demanded the immediate release of political prisoners on humanitarian grounds but this has fallen on deaf ears. There are several Kashmiris kept in preventive detention in jails in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and other parts of India. A number of them are undetained. According to Article 14(3)(c) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, an accused has the right to be tried without undue delay. The state is bound to provide legal assistance to prisoners, ensure their safe and timely release and safeguard their rights to a fair and speedy trial (*Hussainara Khatoon v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar*, 1979). But this is not the reality for a large number of prisoners.

Taking cognisance of this issue, the Supreme Court directed the States to examine releasing inmates, convicted or facing trial on non-serious charges, from jails either on regular bail or on parole. It also directed them to provide transport facility to the prisoners to reach home. It is hoped that States will comply. Some have said that they have begun reviewing prison occupancy. Given that States have started vaccinating prisoners too, the situation may improve soon. But India cannot ignore the problem of overcrowding, pandemic or no pandemic.

*Aabid Mushtaq and Tajamul Islam are students of law at the School of Law, University of Kashmir*



## NOTEBOOK

### Of Anand, simultaneous chess and the cheating controversy

One of the greatest minds of our time didn't deserve to be treated the way he was

**P.K. AJITH KUMAR**

Anticipation was in the air that bright October afternoon in 1987 at Pala, a bustling town in central Kerala known for its rubber plantations. Some 40 young chess players had come from across Kerala for the State junior championship.

For some of us, it was our first big tournament. So, the fact that we were playing at such an event was cause for excitement.

But there was another reason why we were so excited that afternoon: we were to meet Viswanathan Anand, who had recently been crowned the world junior champion in the Philippines. The State's chess association was felicitating him.

Anand had come along with his mother, who used to accompany him for tournaments those days. He also took part in an exhibition event called

simultaneous display, a term that has now become familiar because of a recent controversy following an online fundraiser.

In simultaneous chess, a strong player takes on several less talented opponents, ranging from 15 to 50 mostly, at the same time. There have been instances of Grandmasters playing against hundreds, too. In fact, Iran's Ehsan Ghaem Maghami set a world record in 2011 when he took on 604 players at Tehran (for the record, he won 580 of them, drew 16 and lost eight).

Usually the number is much lower. The player makes a move on one board and then goes to the next one. While the multiple participants get plenty of time, the strong player has to make his calculations quickly. But the statistics from Maghami's simultaneous display suggest, the Grandmaster

wins most of the games. Grandmasters can defeat a large number of opponents even while playing blindfolded.

At Pala, if I remember correctly, Anand won all games but two.

He did, in due course, go on to win games more important than that in a career that has had few parallels in world sport.

As a reporter of *The Hindu*, I have written on some of his finest moments over the years. I have also been privileged to interview him on several occasions, including a memorable one at his residence in Chennai three years ago. He greeted me with the same friendly smile which I first saw in Pala three decades ago.

It was a pleasure listening to him talk for well over two hours. Anand is one of the greatest minds of our time. The entire chess world – and those who have come across him anywhere

would agree that he is an incredibly nice, polite, humble gentleman, on whose head sit lightly five world championships and the credit for single-handedly revolutionising chess in India.

It is little wonder then everyone felt bad when news emerged earlier this month that some of Anand's celebrity opponents had cheated, using the computer, during the simultaneous display organised by chess.com to raise funds for COVID-19 relief.

It would count among Indian sport's great fiascos. Anand didn't deserve to be treated like that. The celebrity event featuring film stars, singers and businessmen was supposed to gain publicity for chess, which isn't as popular in India as other sports like cricket or football. It generated publicity alright, but of the negative kind.

**The Hindu**

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1971

### High cost of secrecy

From an editorial

The U.S. government has been fighting a losing battle with the press, which has published secret official documents about the origin and escalation of the war in Vietnam. As the Government took the *New York Times* to court and got the publication of the documents stopped, the task of publication was taken up in turn by the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Boston Globe*. The Government got a further jolt when some of the judges held that the newspapers did nothing seriously wrong in publishing the documents, since the consequences might be to preserve national security, rather than endanger it. Though the war in Vietnam continues and American troops are fighting there, it should be pointed that the Pentagon documents concern the decisions of past Presidents like Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson and their advisers. They do not refer to current operations, except in a historical context. Americans have recently begun to ask: "How did we get into this war? Why did we send half a million soldiers there?" The official papers have supplied the information which the public needs in order to evaluate the policies which led to deep American involvement.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1921

### Viceroy of Turkey

This morning the H.E. the Viceroy received and replied to an address by a deputation of 33 representatives of the Ahmadiyya Community among Mahomedans. The deputation emphasised that the Ahmadiyya Community founded by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, a Punjab Chief, 31 years ago, was started with the object of launching a campaign against the foolish Un-Islamic and unpeaceful doctrines about Jihad among the Moslem world. The community was enjoined by their Imam to remain perfectly loyal to the Government under which they lived and never to disturb the peace of the country. As a religious duty therefore, they had been loyal to Government in times of war and internal agitation and meant to remain unwavering in this loyalty to help H.E. the Viceroy in the arduous task of maintaining and promoting peace and order in the land.

## FROM PAGE ONE

## PM backs delimitation exercise in J&amp;K

He added that "delimitation has to happen at a quick pace so that polls can happen and J&K gets an elected government that gives strength to its development trajectory."

"The biggest strength of our democracy is the ability to sit across a table and exchange views," he said.

Government sources said Prime Minister Modi thanked all the participating leaders for making it to Delhi for the meeting and asked that they "express their views frankly."

National Conference leader Omar Abdullah, in a presser after the meeting said, "We told the Prime Minister that we don't stand with what was done on August 5, 2019. We are not ready to accept it. But we won't take law into our hands. We'll fight this in court. We also told the Prime Minister that there's been a breach of trust between the state and Centre. It is the Centre's duty to restore it."

Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad said "almost 80% of parties spoke on Article 370 but the matter is sub judice." Both Mr. Azad and Mr. Abdullah stressed on restoration of statehood and reversal of many executive and legal changes related to land rights protection and restoration of a Jammu and Kashmir cadre in bureaucracy.

Ms. Mufti's take was somewhat different, when she spoke after the meeting. "The people of Jammu and Kashmir are in a lot of difficulties after August 5, 2019. They are angry, upset and emotionally shattered. They feel humiliated. I told the Prime Minister that the people of J&K don't accept the manner in which Article 370 was abrogated unconstitutionally, illegally and immorally," she said.

## Hope this is the beginning of a process, says Omar

NC president and Gupkar alliance chief Dr. Abdullah said building the trust is very necessary and restoration of full statehood will be the first trust building exercise from New Delhi.

All the constituents of the Gupkar Alliance, including Dr. Abdullah and Peoples Democratic Party's Mehbooba Mufti reiterated their demand to restore the special status of J&K, as it existed on August 4, 2019.

Ms. Mufti said she complimented the PM for initiating dialogue with China and Pakistan and insisted that India should talk to Pakistan for peace in Kashmir. "We also sought security on land, jobs and minerals of J&K and an end to any kind of intimidation. We also demanded the release of political leaders," she added.

Kashmir-based Peoples Conference (PC) and J&K Apni Party also sought special provisions on the issue of land and jobs during the meeting, while describing the meeting as "cordial and dignified". However, these two parties did not discuss

## 'Notify Class 12 internal assessment scheme'

During the hearing, Justice Khanwilkar orally remarked that the University Grants Commission should announce a cut-off date for admissions to prompt school Boards to declare Class 12 results on time.

"There should not be any cause for uncertainty," Justice Maheshwari noted.

Most States have cancelled their Class 12 exams due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Assam informed the court on Thursday that it had cancelled its Class 12 exams and the assessment scheme was under formula-

tion.

BJP leader Kavinder Gupta said that any thought of restoring Article 370 should not even be considered. "Elections will be held after the delimitation process, and an Assembly constituted once again. The process will come into effect about which people are hoping that they'll get representation. Article 370 has been abrogated. It should not even be thought that it will ever come back," he said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who was present at the meeting, said the "delimitation exercise and peaceful elections are important milestones in restoring statehood as promised in Parliament", making it clear that Assembly polls had to be a precursor to any talk of restoring statehood. Some political parties however did stress that statehood should be restored before polls can be held.

Minister of State for the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Dr. Jitendra Singh, in an official statement after the meeting, said the next step in strengthening democracy in J&K would be swiftly completing the delimitation process so that the Assembly polls could be held, and that the Prime Minister stressed the need for "constructive engagement" of all political parties with the delimitation process. Among those who attended the meeting were four former Chief Ministers of Jammu and Kashmir – Farooq and Omar Abdullah of the National Conference, Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Congress, and Mehbooba Mufti of the PDP. People's Conference leaders Muzaffar Baig and Sajid Lone also attended as did Kavinder Gupta and Ravinder Raina of the BJP and Bheem Singh of the Panthers Party.

Ramesh Pokhrayan's take was somewhat different, when she spoke after the meeting. "The people of Jammu and Kashmir are in a lot of difficulties after August 5, 2019. They are angry, upset and emotionally shattered. They feel humiliated. I told the Prime Minister that the people of J&K don't accept the manner in which Article 370 was abrogated unconstitutionally, illegally and immorally," she said.

## Hope this is the beginning of a process, says Omar

Article 370, saying "it's sub judice".

"I did suggest to the PM to incorporate 35(A) (special provision to secure jobs and land for locals) under Article 371. There was a thrust on getting together in strengthening democracy in J&K and the majority of leaders demanded restoration of statehood. The PM did suggest elections after the delimitation process is completed and also promised on the restoration of statehood. After that other issues will be taken up," PC's Muzaffar Hussain Baig said.

J&K Apni Party chief Altaf Bukhari said the meeting is likely to herald a new dawn for J&K. "Our party's paramount demands have been restoration of Statehood, early Assembly elections, delimitation on merit and constitutional mechanism that protects the rights of residents of J&K on their land, jobs and natural resources besides expediting the hearing of the Supreme Court on Article 370 and 35-A," Mr. Bukhari said.

The case has been registered on a complaint lodged by the State Bank of India (SBI) on behalf of all the lenders, alleging fraud committed by the borrowers from 2015 to 2019.

In another tweet, he said,

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tion. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) also submitted that it had cancelled the exams for its students. The court has been, in every hearing, advising caution to States, saying children should not be exposed to the risk of contracting the infection.

We know how the second wave started and how quickly it panned out... Everything changed in a matter of 10 days... Now we don't know how the third wave will unfold," Justice Khanwilkar remarked on Thursday.

"The Ministry of Defence

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'A good start, but nothing beyond'

SOBHANA K. NAIR  
NEW DELHI

Neither Prime Minister Narendra Modi nor Union Home Minister Amit Shah proposed any action at the end of the three-hour-long meeting on Jammu and Kashmir, said Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader and spokesperson of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) M.Y. Tarigami.

Though there was no concrete outcome, Mr. Tarigami said the parties had agreed to come down to the capital for the meeting because it was the first such gathering hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"It was a good beginning but nothing beyond. Having a conversation is equally important, but I can not say that it was result-oriented," Mr. Tarigami told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Tarigami said the concerns of the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh were raised at the meeting. "We told him [the PM] that such a meeting should have been conducted prior to August 2019."

## Trinamool to back Roy for PAC chairperson post

BJP has demanded his disqualification

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress will support the candidature of Mukul Roy as the chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in the State Assembly, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Thursday.

Mr. Roy had joined the Trinamool Congress earlier this month after being associated with the BJP for over three years.

The development comes at a time when the BJP has written to the Assembly Speaker seeking Mr. Roy's disqualification as an MLA. Mr. Roy contested and won the recently concluded Assembly election from the Krishnanagar Uttar Assembly constituency.

"The Speaker's decision is final in such matters. If anyone has an issue, there

## Cong. raises 5 demands on J&K

But the party did not call for restoration of Article 370 in meeting with PM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI



**Crucial meeting:** Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, NC chief Farooq Abdullah and PDP's Mehbooba Mufti with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Thursday. ■ ANI

sulting elected representatives. But in the end, after saying all this, we have put up five big demands in front of the government. Statehood should be restored at the earliest was our first demand," Mr. Azad said.

"The Home Minister as well as the Prime Minister had assured on the floor of Parliament that Statehood would be restored [to J&K] at some point. There is peace now, ceasefire is also there and the borders are also quiet. There can't be a better

time to grant Statehood," he added.

"We had historic domicile rules and also rules regarding employment. The government should give a guarantee that they will bring Bills on land and employment [for J&K]," Mr. Azad said.

Though the Congress did not directly refer to the restoration of the special provisions under Article 370, party leaders claimed that its demand for special land rights and job guarantees for

locals would "have the same effect". Specifically asked about the party's position on Article 370, Mr. Azad said the matter was sub-judice.

"For now, we will not talk about this. The people of J&K are in distress since the August 5, 2019 decision ..." Mr. Mir added.

Recently, former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram talked about *status quo ante* by repealing the "offending laws" in the forthcoming monsoon session of Parliament.

Arguing in favour of stron-

## Calcutta HC reserves order on Mamata's recusal petition

She wants Nandigram plea to be referred to another Bench

SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
KOLKATA



The Calcutta High Court on Thursday reserved its order on a recusal application filed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urging that the election petition filed in the Nandigram results be assigned to another Bench.

Ms. Banerjee virtually participated in the hearing. Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, who appeared for the Chief Minister, sought recusal of Justice Kausik Chanda on grounds of his association with the BJP as a lawyer. Reading from the recusal application, Dr. Singhvi said posts on various social media platforms suggested that Justice Chanda had a "close, pecuniary, personal, professional and ideological relationship with the BJP" and "close relationship with pro-

minent leaders such as Dilip Ghosh and Tathagata Roy".

Justice Chanda asked why the recusal petition had not been presented on June 18, when the matter was brought before him for hearing. During the hearing, there had been cordial discussions between the parties, and Justice Chanda observed that when he had first appeared for the BJP as a lawyer, he had not known the full name of the party.

Dr. Singhvi remarked that since then, the BJP has made

large strides in West Bengal. He added that the judge would only be elevating his stature by recusing himself from hearing the petition. Dr. Singhvi pointed out that two judges of the Supreme Court had recused themselves from hearing matters related to West Bengal.

Justice Chanda said while Dr. Singhvi was associated with the Congress, other counsel having links to the BJP were appearing for the Trinamool in the case. He also asked if he would not be giving in to a media trial if he recused himself. He added that he would think it over and reserved the judgment.

Earlier this month, Ms. Banerjee had filed a petition alleging irregularities in the counting exercise of the Nandigram Assembly results.

## Kerala women's panel chief's remark draws flak

She expresses regret for her reply

STAFF REPORTER  
KOLLAM

Ms. Josephine, in her statement, said that her hard tone was due to the issues in audio quality and she had only taken a mother's freedom with the woman. "It was my self-indignation over girls failing to come forward bravely with complaints, but on second thoughts I felt I could have avoided that comment. If my words have hurt her, I express regret," she said.

**Totally clueless'**  
She further explained that she was totally clueless about the format of the programme. "I had tried to avoid that programme due to my busy schedule and health issues. I decided to go when they told me my response was necessary and the subject was downy-related. Only after reaching there, I came to know that it was a call-in programme," Ms. Josephine said.

The video clip of a seemingly annoyed Ms. Josephine snapping at a victim created much resentment, with many demanding her resignation. Her rude remark to a distressed woman, who seemed a little hesitant to open up, also generated a volley of trolls on social media.

When the woman said she was being abused by her husband and her mother-in-law, the chairperson asked if she had approached the police.

The Ernakulam resident revealed she had not shared it with anyone and Ms. Josephine retorted with a curt "then you suffer".

Many prominent persons, including politicians, pointed out her behaviour as arrogant and demanded a more humane person as her replacement.

## Maharashtra Congress chief called to Delhi

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

While on his trip to north Maharashtra to take stock of his party's growth in the region, Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole was abruptly called to Delhi, giving rise to yet another round of speculation upon the already shaky political ground being seen in Maharashtra. However, the Congress said Mr. Patole's visit to Delhi was for organisational reasons.

"It's likely that we will be electing an Assembly Speaker in the upcoming monsoon session of the State legislature. The leaders in Delhi needed to speak about this. At the same time, several BJP MLAs want to join the Congress party in the coming time. That issue also needs to be discussed," said Mr. Patole.

Two days ago, NCP chief Sharad Pawar held a meeting with non-Congress, non-BJP leaders. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has slammed the Congress for its stand on going solo in future polls.

## RLD chief urges PM to end impasse on farm laws

Govt. appears to have further withdrawn from engaging with farmers, says Jayant Chaudhary in letter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GHAZIABAD

In a fervent appeal to the Prime Minister to end the deadlock on the farm laws, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) president Jayant Chaudhary said on Thursday that "policy measures can be termed as reforms only if they satisfy the larger social good".

"It pains the nation that even after your statement, the government appears to have further withdrawn from engaging with the farmer organisations even as the



**A long struggle:** Farmers protesting at the Singhu border in Delhi on June 12. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

farmers are waiting at Delhi's borders," Mr. Chaudhary said in a letter to the Prime

against the farm laws.

Referring to the Agriculture Minister's statements suggesting that a rollback of laws was not possible, Mr. Chaudhary said he could understand that there was a fear in government circles that backtracking on these laws could become a precedent. "However, in the face of public sentiment, a sensitive government would not shy away from taking a step back in order to move forward."

"It is not clear to the farmers how these laws improve their market position or pricing power," he said.

He contended that the farmers' agitation had a negative economic impact, but the failure to resolve the key issues had also hurt the pride of the nation's agriculturists.

Meanwhile, Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait said on Thursday that "the farmers would find their remedy in Parliament and the government would be treated in villages".

## Rahul appears before court in Surat

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
AHMEDABAD

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi appeared before a magisterial court in Surat on Thursday in connection with a defamation case by a Gujarat BJP lawmaker Purnesh Modi.

"How come all the thieves have Modi as the common surname," he allegedly said at a rally in 2019, referring to diamond merchant Nirav Modi, former chief of IPL Lalit Modi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr. Gandhi said in court he never made such a statement. The case will be heard on July 12.

**KERALA STATE TRANSPORT PROJECT**  
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT OF KERALA  
INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB)/Tender Notice  
E-Procurement Notice (Item Rate Contract), following Two Envelope Bidding Process  
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING  
Dated: 25.06.2021

1. The Government of Kerala through the Government of India has received a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) towards the cost of Rebuilding climate Resilient infrastructures in Kerala and Government of Kerala (GoK) intends to apply a part of the funds to cover eligible payments under the contract for construction of works as detailed below.  
2. Bidding will be conducted through bidding procedures as per World Bank & GoK guidelines. Bidding is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the World Bank's Guidelines for the Procurement of Consulting Services, Works, Goods, and Non-Consulting Services under IBRD Loans & IDA Credits & Grants by World Bank Borrowers.  
3. The Project Director, Kerala State Transport Project, Public Works Department, Government of Kerala, now invites online bids through admeasurement (Item Rate) mode of execution for the construction of works detailed below:  
4. The bid documents can be viewed/downloaded from the e-procurement portal of Kerala Government <https://etenders.kerala.gov.in> from 25/06/2021 to 09/08/2021 upto 15.00 Hrs. IST. Bids received online shall be opened on 09/08/2021 at 15.30 Hrs. IST.  
5. Bids received through any other mode shall not be entertained. However, EMD, tender fee, Power of Attorney, joint bidding agreement, etc. need to be submitted physically by the Bidder. Please note that the Authority reserves the right to accept or reject all or any of the bids without assigning any reason whatsoever.  
6. A pre-bid meeting will be held on 19/07/2021 at 11.00 Hrs. at the office of Project Director, Kerala State Transport Project (KSTP) to clarify the issues and to answer questions on any matter that may be raised at that stage as stated in ITB Clause 7 of Instructions to Bidders' of the bidding document. Bidders are advised to download the bidding document prior to the pre-bid meeting in order for bidders to have a good understanding of the scope of work under this contract for discussion and clarification at the pre-bid meeting. Alternatively, pre-bid meeting may be held via video conference. In such a case, the bidders will be informed in timely manner by publishing the access link in the e-procurement portal.  
7. The address for communication is as under:  
Project Director, Kerala State Transport Project, Project Management Team, T.C.11/339, SreeBala Building, Keston Road, Nanthancode, Kowdai P.O., Thiruvananthapuram-695003, www.kstp.org.in, e-mail: pdkst@gmail.com, cepmtkst@gmail.com  
Sd/-, Project Director, KSTP

## In contact with stakeholders on Afghanistan, says India

MEA comment adds to reports of backchannel talks

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE  
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said it was in contact with "various stakeholders" in and around Afghanistan, confirming that South Block has adopted a broad-based approach to discuss the future of Afghanistan and the region around with various parties involved. The response came after National Security Adviser Ajit Doval addressed a meeting of his counterparts of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) held on Thursday in Dushanbe.

"India supports all peace initiatives and has a long-term commitment towards development of Afghanistan

 **India supports all peace initiatives and has a long-term commitment towards development of Afghanistan**  
ARINDAM BAGCHI  
MEA spokesperson

ger ties with Kabul, Mr. Bagchi said India has brought development to Afghanistan which was ravaged by violence inflicted by cross-border actors. "India has brought electricity, dams, schools, health clinics, roads and community projects to Afghanistan. The world knows what Pakistan has brought to Afghanistan."

The comments on dialogue with relevant stakeholders has also added to the officially unconfirmed reports of backchannel talks that India has been conducting with Pakistan through third parties. Mr. Doval attended the SCO NSAs meeting, which also saw the participation of his Pakistani counterpart Moeed Yusuf, who has

been in the news over reports of backchannel talks.

Sources said Mr. Doval argued for the "need to preserve gains made in the last two decades in Afghanistan and give top priority to the welfare of its people". He also proposed an action plan against Pakistan-based terror outfits Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) as part of the anti-terror framework of the SCO and sought adoption of international standards to counter terror financing, including an MoU between the SCO and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Cross-border attacks against India by LeT and JeM have been at the centre of recent tensions with Pakistan. The issue was being discussed at the FATF on Thursday and a decision on greylisting of Pakistan is expected as early as Friday. Mr. Doval also called for monitoring of new technologies used by terrorists, such as drones, dark web, Artificial Intelligence, blockchain and social media.

Arguing in favour of stron-

## Kerala women's panel chief's remark draws flak

She expresses regret for her reply

STAFF REPORTER  
KOLLAM

Ms. Josephine, in her statement, said that her hard tone was due to the issues in audio quality and she had only taken a mother's freedom with the woman. "It was my self-indignation over girls failing to come forward bravely with complaints, but on second thoughts I felt I could have avoided that comment. If my words have hurt her, I express regret," she said.

**Totally clueless'**  
She further explained that she was totally clueless about the format of the programme. "I had tried to avoid that programme due to my busy schedule and health issues. I decided to go when they told me my response was necessary and the subject was downy-related. Only after reaching there, I came to know that it was a call-in programme," Ms. Josephine said.

The video clip of a seemingly annoyed Ms. Josephine snapping at a victim created much resentment, with many demanding her resignation. Her rude remark to a distressed woman, who seemed a little hesitant to open up, also generated a volley of trolls on social media.

When the woman said she was being abused by her husband and her mother-in-law, the chairperson asked if she had approached the police.

The Ernakulam resident revealed she had not shared it with anyone and Ms. Josephine retorted with a curt "then you suffer".

Many prominent persons, including politicians, pointed out her behaviour as arrogant and demanded a more humane person as her replacement.

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"- PROCUREMENT NOTICE**  
WORKS DEPARTMENT  
E-mail : ceworlbankprojects@gmail.com

**1<sup>st</sup> Corrigendum to Bid Identification No.CE-W.B.P(O) - 22 / 2020-21**

The tender invited for the work :- Improvement to Nunhad-Turekela Road (ODR) from 0.0 Km to 8.00 Km in the District of Balangir under NABARD Assistance RIDF-XXV, tender ID No.2021\_EICCL\_65728\_1 is hereby cancelled.

All other terms and conditions remain unchanged.

**Chief Engineer, World Bank Project, Odisha**  
B-174:

**"STOP CORONA - WEAR MASK, FOLLOW PHYSICAL DISTANCING & MAINTAIN HYGIENE"**

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (PROJECT)W-II  
DELHI JAL BOARD : GOVT OF NCT DELHI  
501, VARUNALAYA PHASE-I, KAROL BAGH  
NEW DELHI-110005  
Telephone No. 9650299355 email id: mpsinghnew2@gmail.com

Press NIT NO.: 01/2021-22/(Re-invited)

**STOP CORONA - WEAR MASK, FOLLOW PHYSICAL DISTANCING & MAINTAIN HYGIENE"**

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Press NIT NO.: 01/2021-22/(Re-invited)

**(M.P. Singh)  
EE(Proj)-WII**

**Council of Scientific and Industrial Research  
NATIONAL AEROSPACE LABORATORIES**  
PB No. 1779, HAL Airport Road, Kodihalli, Bengaluru - 560017, India  
Phone: +91 80 25086040/ 6041 Fax: +91 80 25269611  
Email

Pandemic hikes narcotics sale over web'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The lockdown restrictions during COVID-19 may have accelerated drug trafficking using the Internet, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's World Drug Report 2021.

In Asia, China and India are the most frequently mentioned countries linked to shipment of drugs sold on the 19 major darknet markets analysed over 2011-2020.

"Access to drugs has also become simpler than ever with online sales, and major drug markets on the dark web are now worth some \$315 million annually. Contactless transactions, such as through the mail, are also on the rise, a trend possibly accelerated by the pandemic," it said.

Although this is a "tiny fraction" of overall drug sales, the trend of using dark web on the rise, with a fourfold increase in annual sales from the beginning of the 2010s to more recent years. While cannabis dominates darknet sales, marketing on the so-called clear web often involves new psychoactive substances.

## U.P. leads in number of shots given on Thursday

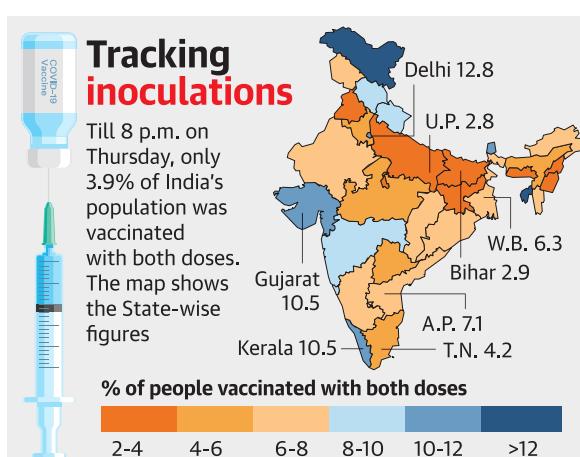
It is followed by Madhya Pradesh (7.3 lakh) & Gujarat (4.3 lakh)

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

India administered 59.1 lakh (5.91 million) doses of COVID-19 vaccines until 9 p.m. on Thursday. Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest number of vaccinations (8.2 lakh) followed by Madhya Pradesh (7.3 lakh) and Gujarat (4.3 lakh).

Between June 1 and 23, 37.2 lakh doses were administered daily in India on average. At the current rate, a total of 100.3 crore doses can be administered by December 31, 2021, which is around 87.7 crore doses fewer than those required to fully vaccinate all adults (188 crore doses). To fully inoculate all adults by the end of this year, 82.2 lakh doses need to be given daily on average in the country.

The seven-day rolling average of daily vaccinations in the country continues to increase. It stood at 51.6 lakh on June 23, which is more than the 32.6 lakh recorded a week ago (June 16). It was also significantly higher than the average daily doses recorded a month before (May 23) which was 18.8 lakh.



About 26.8% of adults in India, 46% of those aged above 45, and 48.8% of people aged above 60, have got at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. However, only 3.9% are fully vaccinated. The figures are based on the estimated population in 2021.

India recorded 47,755 new COVID-19 cases until 9.15 p.m. on Thursday, taking the cumulative caseload to 3,01,29,934. As many as 1,208 new deaths were also registered taking the tally to 3,93,294. Kerala reported 12,078

new infections, followed by Maharashtra (9,844) and Tamil Nadu (6,162). Maharashtra recorded 556 new fatalities, followed by Tamil Nadu (155) and Karnataka (138). Maharashtra's fatalities include backlog deaths which were missed in the previous reports.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Tripura, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Ladakh. The data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins.

## Outrage over felling of heritage pine trees for road in Meghalaya

NHIDCL told to halt chopping until govt. finds a solution

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The felling of several iconic pine trees for widening a road in Meghalaya capital Shillong has triggered outrage, forcing the State government to intervene.

Most of these coniferous trees, among the hill town's USPs, were more than 100 years old.

Green activists said the National Highway Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) took advantage of the COVID-19 lockdown to chop the pine trees locals were attached to. But the government swung into action on June 23 after photos and videos of the logs lying beside the road from the town's Rilbong Bridge to Upper Shillong went viral.

This stretch of the road is part of the 71 km Shillong-Dawki four-lane project estimated to cost ₹1,251 crore. Dawki is a trade point on the border with Bangladesh.

Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma asked the NHIDCL to immediately stop felling the trees until the government finds a better solution. His instruction coincided with an observation of the National Green Tribunal on a Goa bypass that construction of a



Chopped pine trees along the Shillong-Dawki road.  
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

road may be a necessity but should not result in the destruction of biodiversity.

**Cleared by Centre**  
A Meghalaya Forest Department official said it had received orders to cut down 4,447 trees for the road widening project after it was cleared by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The State's Forest Minister, James Sangma said the trees on one side of the road were felled as it was "totally unavoidable".

He also said the right of way for the project had been reduced from the standard 45-60 metres to 24 metres in

order to minimise the damage.

Forest officials said 10 trees would be planted in lieu of each tree felled. But locals said this would hardly make a difference as the site chosen for compensatory afforestation is in another district.

"We would like to know if the government followed Indian Forest Act, Biodiversity Act and Meghalaya Forest Regulation Act before the trees were hewn. Who gave the land for the project and who is funding for the destruction of the trees?" said activist Agnes Kharshiing, president of Civil Society Women Organisation.

Following a virtual meeting of the general secretaries and All India Congress Committee (AICC) members in charge of various States with Ms. Gandhi, the party has decided to step up its COVID-19 outreach programme by visiting over 3 crore households across 736 districts in a span of 30 days.

From July 1 to 17, the Congress will also hold protests against rising prices of petrol and diesel as well as food items by taking out protest marches, cycle yatra and signature campaign at petrol pumps, general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said.

Addressing the AICC office-bearers, Ms. Gandhi said experts had pointed to the possibility of a third wave in a few months and the vulnerability of the children in such a scenario.

"The second wave these past four months has been

devastating for lakhs and lakhs of families all over the country. We must learn from this traumatic experience so that we do not have to experience it yet again," Ms. Gandhi said.

The Congress chief urged party leaders to disseminate the party's white paper (released on June 22) that not only details the "failure" of the Narendra Modi government in handling the pandemic but also offers suggestions in aggressively vaccinating the majority of the adult population in the shortest possible time.

Ms. Gandhi also talked about the "intolerable" burden placed on the people because of the rising fuel prices and the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities like pulses and edible oils.

Besides, these are incentives such as free rice and cash offered by some local authorities to counter the reluctance or resistance to inoculation by people, many of whom believe that the vaccine induces infertility and genetic changes.

On June 23, the High Court of Meghalaya directed all shops, commercial establishments, taxi, auto-rickshaw and bus operators to display the vaccination status of their staff. This followed the hearing of a petition challenging the orders of the State's Deputy Commissioners asking shopkeepers, vendors, local cabbies and others to get vaccinated before they resume their business.

The Bench of Chief Justice Biswanath Somadher and Justice H.S. Thangkhiew observed that the orders of the district heads should be seen as a "persuasive advisory" and not coercion. The court, however, pointed out that forced vaccination violates the fundamental rights of the people concerned while advising all shops, commercial centres and public commercial vehicles should prominently display the words "vaccinated" or "not vaccinated" to let their customers or passengers know about their status.

"In the event, any shops/establishments/local taxis/auto-rickshaws/maxi cabs and buses flout the above directions, the authority concerned of the State shall immediately direct its closure/stoppages of plying," the court ordered.

The court, fixing June 30 as the next date of hearing, also said the authorities should immediately step in and proceed in accordance with the law if there was any

## Congress to combat vaccine hesitancy

Party plans outreach in 736 districts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday asked party colleagues to play an active role in ensuring vaccination coverage of 75% of India's population by the year end and also address the issue of hesitancy with regard to COVID-19 vaccines.

Following a virtual meeting of the general secretaries and All India Congress Committee (AICC) members in charge of various States with Ms. Gandhi, the party has decided to step up its COVID-19 outreach programme by visiting over 3 crore households across 736 districts in a span of 30 days.

From July 1 to 17, the Congress will also hold protests against rising prices of petrol and diesel as well as food items by taking out protest marches, cycle yatra and signature campaign at petrol pumps, general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said.

Addressing the AICC office-bearers, Ms. Gandhi said experts had pointed to the possibility of a third wave in a few months and the vulnerability of the children in such a scenario.

"The second wave these past four months has been

## Full licence for Covaxin may take time

Health officials have sought more data from studies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Bharat Biotech, the manufacturer of Covaxin, may not be given full licensure for its COVID vaccine just yet, said a senior health official, saying the vaccine will continue to be used under emergency authorisation.

While the company refused to comment on the latest development, Union Health Ministry officials said the authorities have sought more data from follow up studies.

The company earlier this week had submitted data from Phase 3 trials to the subject expert committee (SEC) of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO). The yet-to-be-published data submitted showed that Covaxin had demonstrated a 77.8% efficacy in its Phase 3 trial, which was conducted on 25,800 subjects. "The proposal seeking full licensure for Covaxin, was looked into and we have sought more details. Till then Covaxin will continue to be available to public under the earlier emergency authorisation," an official said.



Inoculation drive: A religious leader getting vaccinated at a mosque in Bhopal. ■ A.M. FARUQI

Mamata calls for early WHO approval

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention to ensure early approval of indigenously developed Covaxin from the World Health Organisation (WHO). Ms. Banerjee has for the past few days flagged concerns of students vaccinated with Covaxin, who are in a bind as their vaccination certificates are not valid abroad.

"Large number of students from all over the country travel abroad every year for higher studies. Many of these students have got themselves vaccinated with Covaxin and came to learn later on, that their vaccination certificate is not valid abroad. These students are now in a fix regarding their next course of action and their career is at stake," the Chief Minister wrote.

Ms. Banerjee said WHO's approval for Covaxin would also help those travelling abroad for jobs.

## Jab status linked to resuming of businesses in northeast

Assam to release pay to frontline staff only after vaccination

RAHUL KARMAKAR  
GUWAHATI

The COVID-19 vaccination status has been linked to the opening of shops and business establishments, operation of commercial passenger vehicles as well as the salaries of some government employees in the northeasten region.

Sonia Gandhi

Besides, these are incentives such as free rice and cash offered by some local authorities to counter the reluctance or resistance to inoculation by people, many of whom believe that the vaccine induces infertility and genetic changes.

The Congress chief urged party leaders to disseminate the party's white paper (released on June 22) that not only details the "failure" of the Narendra Modi government in handling the pandemic but also offers suggestions in aggressively vaccinating the majority of the adult population in the shortest possible time.

Ms. Gandhi also talked about the "intolerable" burden placed on the people because of the rising fuel prices and the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities like pulses and edible oils.



Meghalaya has asked all shopkeepers to take jabs.

attempt made by any person or organisation to spread misinformation regarding the efficacy of vaccines among the people of the State.

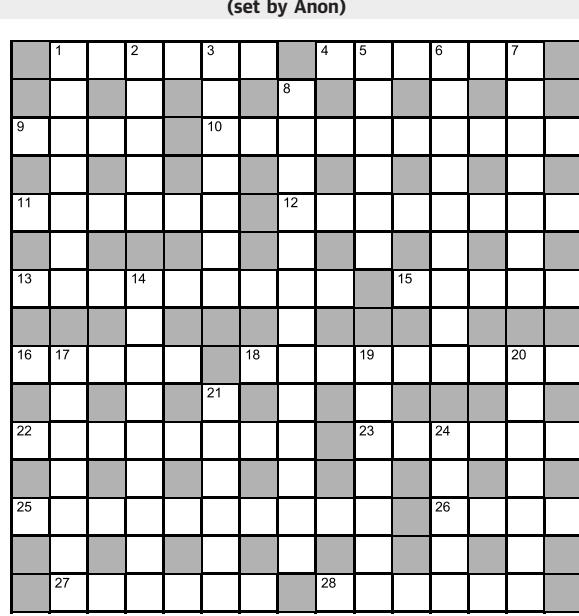
The Assam government has directed all the departmental heads to ascertain the vaccination status of their frontline employees before releasing their monthly salaries.

Chief Secretary Jishnu Barua, also the chairperson of the State Disaster Management Authority, Assam (ASDMA), issued the order after officials found out that many frontline government employees had not taken their COVID-19 vaccine shots. "Non-vaccination of such frontline government servants may give rise to the possibility of further spread of the virus, which in turn may endanger the lives of common citizens, especially the vulnerable groups like children, pregnant women, etc.," the order said.

"Direct all department heads to ascertain the vaccination status of such government servants before releasing the monthly salary/remuneration from the current month (June) onwards," it added.

## TH CROSSWORD + 13283

(set by Anon)



■ ACROSS  
1 Change Greek character at famous gallery (6)  
4 Unorthodox mandate missing a bicycle (6)  
9 Addict rues mistake (4)  
10 Salesman feels bitter about exhibits (10)  
11 Spirit, one in anger (6)  
12 Evocative elder not tipsy (8)  
13 Rash logic confused Russian rulers (9)

Never go off the grid.  
We are digital now. Come solve online.  
@ <https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn>

SCAN TO PLAY

15 Ire of heavenly messenger switching sides (5)  
16 Rise with first toe stuck in beach (5)  
18 Regularly sign report in reverse (9)  
22 Rarotonga district has argon air mixture (8)  
23 Sleep a smaller amount? Not quite in this city (6)  
25 Instrument for a University teacher oddly near nightshade (10)  
26 Prosecuted complicated dues (4)  
27 Designed enclosure with light emitting diode (6)  
28 Idiot, alien initially stumble upon valuables (6)

■ DOWN  
1 Winter wind removes one from invalid court case (7)  
2 Rotis made by trunks (5)  
3 Crucify, we hear, one who gives light (7)  
5 Alters ridiculous demands, removes source of doubt (6)  
6 Living quarters make ringing sounds around water source (9)  
7 Sea mammal overturned silvery metal at afternoon performance (7)  
8 Confused senior happens to have misgivings (13)  
14 As a rule, has army commander's regular ploy (9)  
17 Rodent returns, attains goals (7)  
19 In a riot, ensnared, let go of ringleader of groups of nine (7)  
20 They walk out to face the new ball (7)  
21 Irritable single heartless canine emotes initially (2,4)  
24 Spread ancient education at first (5)

## SUDOKU

9						7		5
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1		4	5		9	2	7	
			9		1	7		
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				8			5	6
6	7						2	

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13282

C	A	R	N	A	U	B	S	O	R	D	I	D

# Russia, U.K. spar over Black Sea incident

This comes after Moscow allegedly fired warning shots at a British destroyer off the coast of Crimea

REUTERS  
LONDON/MOSCOW

Russia accused Britain on Thursday of spreading lies over a warship confrontation in the Black Sea and warned London that it would respond resolutely to any further provocative actions by the British Navy off the coast of Russia-annexed Crimea.

Russia summoned the British Ambassador in Moscow for a formal diplomatic scolding after the warship breached what the Kremlin says are its territorial waters but which Britain and most of the world say belong to Ukraine.

Britain said Russia was sowing inaccuracies and disputed Russia's account, saying no warning shots had been fired and that no bombs had been dropped in the path of the Royal Navy destroyer Defender.

Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned Ambassador Deborah Bronnert to deliver a "tough demarche" – diplomati-



**Flashpoint:** British Royal Navy's HMS Defender arriving at the Black Sea port of Odessa, Ukraine, on June 18. • REUTERS

matic jargon for a telling off – and spokeswoman Maria Zakhrova accused London of "barefaced lies".

"We believe it was a deliberate and premeditated provocation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said of the incident, in which Moscow said it fired warning shots and dropped bombs in the path of the British destroyer.

Russia seized and annexed the Crimea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 and

considers areas around its coast to be Russian waters. Western countries deem the Crimea to be part of Ukraine and reject Russia's claim to the seas around it.

**Ukrainian waters: Boris**  
British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the warship was acting in accordance with the law and had been in international waters.

"The important point is that we don't recognise the Russian annexation of Crimea," he told reporters. "These are Ukrainian waters and it was entirely right to use them to go from A to B."

He also disagreed with the suggestion that relations with Russia were at an historic low. "I can remember times in my own lifetime when things have been far worse," he said.

Britain has also disputed the Russian version of events, with Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab saying: "No shots were fired at HMS

Defender." "The Royal Navy ship was conducting innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters," he told reporters on a visit to Singapore: "We were doing so in accordance with international law and the Russian characterisation is predictably inaccurate."

Under international law of the sea, innocent passage permits a vessel to pass through another state's territorial waters so long as this does not affect its security.

During its 2008 war with Georgia, Russia bristled at U.S. warships operating in the Black Sea, and in April the U.S. cancelled the deployment of two warships to the area.

BBC released footage from the ship showing a Russian coast guard warning that he would shoot if the British ship did not change course. "If you don't change the course, I'll fire," a Russian voice said in English to the British ship.

## Apple Daily sells out final edition

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
HONG KONG

The final edition of Hong Kong's last remaining pro-democracy paper sold out in hours on Thursday, as readers scooped up all 1 million copies of the *Apple Daily*, whose closure was yet another sign of China's tightening grip on the semi-autonomous city.

Across the densely populated metropolis, people lined up early in the morning to buy the paper, which in recent years had become an increasingly outspoken critic of Chinese and Hong Kong authorities' efforts to limit the freedoms found here but not in mainland China. The paper was gone from newsstands by 8.30 a.m.

The main Opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB, or United People's Front) has called for withdrawal of the presidential pardon to the former MP, calling it a "violation" of the independence of the judiciary.

Commenting on the development, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka asked on what basis the President took the decision to pardon Mr. Silva. While the President had the power and discretion to pardon, such discretion must always be "used judiciously", and such power "must not be exercised arbitrarily and selectively," the Association said in a statement.



Gotabaya Rajapaksa

In the last year alone, some 100 persons have been arrested under the PTA, including over "silly allegations" such as Facebook posts. Batticaloa MP Shanthyaran Rasamanickam recently told the Parliament. The year-long detention of lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah and poet Ahnaf Jazeem under the PTA have also drawn international condemnation, including from the UN, and more recently the European Parliament, that have called for the repeal of the PTA.

**Murderer's release**  
Although the release of the 16 persons on Thursday was welcome, "the positive ges-

ture has been marred by the President's pardon to Du-minda Silva, his close political ally who was convicted for murder," Mr. Sumanthiran said.

This is President Rajapaksa's second pardon to a murderer convict. In March 2020, he freed army man Sunil Ratnayake, who was on death row for killing eight Tamil civilians, including a five-year-old and two teenagers, during the civil war in the year 2000.

The main Opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB, or United People's Front) has called for withdrawal of the presidential pardon to the former MP, calling it a "violation" of the independence of the judiciary.

Commenting on the development, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka asked on what basis the President took the decision to pardon Mr. Silva. While the President had the power and discretion to pardon, such discretion must always be "used judiciously", and such power "must not be exercised arbitrarily and selectively," the Association said in a statement.

**Significant start: TNA**  
The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) welcomed the PTA detainees' release before completion of their full jail terms. "This is a small yet significant start which we hope will soon be completed with the release of all political prisoners, including those against whom cases are still pending. Some cases have dragged for more than

10 years, with no end in sight," TNA spokesman M.A. Sumanthiran said.

Intervening in Parliament recently, Youth and Sports Minister Namal Rajapaksa, son of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, said at least 35 prisoners, including terror suspects from the years of war, had been in prisons longer than their sentences had called for, and sought justice for them. "Some of them have been in there for longer than my age [35]. No charges have been filed against them till today," he said, highlighting what activists have, for long, cited while raising concern over arbitrary, prolonged detention enabled by the PTA.

Around 100 Tamils arrested under the controversial law have been in custody for at least over a decade. While the government accuses them of being former LTTE cadres or supporters, the TNA has insisted they are "political prisoners" on the basis they allegedly committed crimes for the political objective of a separate state, a cause that ceased to exist after the civil war ended in 2009.

**Amid vaccine shortage, Bhutan for mixing doses**

Over 90% of population got first shot

REUTERS  
KATHMANDU/MUMBAI

Bhutan's Prime Minister on Thursday said he "has no problem" in mixing-and-matching COVID-19 vaccine doses to immunise a population of about 7,00,000 people in the tiny Himalayan nation.

Bhutan, nestled between India and China, has one of the world's lowest COVID-19 fatality counts, with just one person dying from the infectious disease since the pandemic began.

Prime Minister Lotay Tshering – who is also a practicing urologist – said over 90% of the country's eligible population had re-

ceived a first dose of AstraZeneca's vaccine and that the deadline to administer the second dose after a gap of 12 weeks was scheduled to end this month.

"Knowing immunology, knowing how our body reacts to vaccines, I am comfortable to secure a second dose of any vaccine that is, of course, approved by the WHO."

Earlier this year, India provided 5,50,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to Bhutan. But New Delhi has no surplus to give to any nation as India exits the worst of a deadly wave of the coronavirus that doubled its death toll in two months.

**Thai activists march against government**

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BANGKOK

Pro-democracy protesters took to the streets of Thailand's capital on Thursday, marking the anniversary of the overthrow of the country's absolute monarchy by renewing their demands that the government step down, the Constitution be amended and the monarchy become more accountable.

The protesters defied a ban on large gatherings in

stitioned to fight a coronavirus surge that shows little sign of abating. It was their first large protest after a hiatus of about three months caused by the pandemic and the jailing of protest leaders, who have since been released on bail.

The government of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha is facing criticism that it botched pandemic recovery plans by failing to secure adequate vaccine supplies.

**Centre for Materials for Electronics Technology (C-MET)**  
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# The rise, fall and death of an antivirus software pioneer

John McAfee allegedly killed himself in a Spanish prison

SIRRAM SRINIVASAN

Seventy-five-year-old John McAfee, the creator of the McAfee antivirus software who allegedly killed himself in a Spanish prison on Wednesday, called himself an iconoclast. His run-ins with governments saw him do the life of fugitive many a time in the final years of his life. In between all the running away, he found his political expression in the Libertarian Party, though he was unsuccessful in his attempt to be its nominee for the presidential election of 2016. He wanted to give it another shot in 2020 but pulled out eventually.

Under international law of the sea, innocent passage permits a vessel to pass through another state's territorial waters so long as this does not affect its security.

During its 2008 war with Georgia, Russia bristled at U.S. warships operating in the Black Sea, and in April the U.S. cancelled the deployment of two warships to the area.

BBC released footage from the ship showing a Russian coast guard warning that he would shoot if the British ship did not change course.

"If you don't change the course, I'll fire," a Russian voice said in English to the British ship.



A file photo of John McAfee in Opelika, Alabama. • AP

sentence," he once tweeted.

He made his name and money in business. He was considered a pioneer in the field of security technology.

His McAfee Associates, which sold anti-virus software, was started in 1987. And by 1994, two years after taking it public, he exited the company. It wouldn't be until 2010 that Intel bought the then-avatar of this company, by which time, however, the McAfee name was starting to get controversial.

McAfee said, in his 30-second introduction at the party's presidential debate in 2016, "What we insert into our bodies or our minds is our own business," he would go on to say.

His death came hours after a court ordered his extradition back to the United States, where he is wanted for tax evasion. He was arrested last year at the Barcelona airport while he was reportedly about to board a flight to Istanbul.

"Decriminalise marijuana, bring our troops home, end the madness of our education system, reduce the size of government, hamstring the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration), and let all people out of prison (who are there) for non-violent crimes."

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"The words 'Arrested' and 'McAfee' are frequently found together in the same

## Ethiopian army confirms Tigray airstrike

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MONTREAL

"This is not a mass grave site. These are unmarked graves."

He said that the graves may at one time have been marked, but "Catholic Church representatives removed these headstones," adding that doing so is a crime in Canada and they were treating the gravesites as a crime scene".

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations chief Bobby Cameron described the finding as "a crime against humanity".

His cryptocurrency business interest only got him more troubles from the

authorities.

His problems with law spanned many countries. He once ran away from Belize where authorities considered him a "person of interest" in connection with the murder of a neighbour. He was then arrested for illegally entering Guatemala. In 2019, he refused a court order that directed him to pay \$25 million to the murdered neighbour's estate. He tweeted, "I have not responded to a single one of my 37 lawsuits in the past 11 years."

On Twitter, his tryst with controversies continued – in the form of his posts on everything from masks during the time of coronavirus to the Deep State. He had pondered about getting killed as also, more recently, about death. On September 18, 2020, his last birthday, he tweeted, "75 years of a roller coaster ride between Heaven and Hell... Constantly passing 'normal' as a speeding train might pass an intersection. I would have it no other way."

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## MARKET WATCH

	24-06-2021	% CHANGE
Sensex	52,699	-0.75
US Dollar	74.18	0.12
Gold	46283	-0.24
Brent oil	75.38	-0.40

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	709.90	-8.80
Asian Paints	3043.25	55.90
Axis Bank	739.15	6.80
Bajaj Auto	4226.90	28.30
Bajaj Finserv	12333.25	51.00
Bajaj Finance	6042.60	28.00
Bharti Airtel	528.75	-5.30
BPCL	466.10	-3.50
Britannia Ind	3689.10	29.80
Cipla	950.90	-6.85
Coal India	146.40	-2.05
Divis Lab	4250.35	25.75
Drd Reddys Lab	5277.65	-21.70
Eicher Motors	2706.75	-21.85
Grasim Ind	1498.90	9.15
HCL Tech	989.70	16.80
HDPC Bank	2487.40	-9.80
HDFC Bank	1506.25	20.75
HDFC Life	719.60	1.85
Hero MotoCorp	2906.95	-21.40
Hindalco	369.05	0.95
Hind Unilever	2490.15	9.65
ICICI Bank	634.05	9.35
Infosys	1559.20	56.05
Indian Oil Corp	111.45	-1.45
ITC	203.25	-0.70
JSW Steel	679.00	13.50
Kotak Bank	1737.90	1.20
L&T	1504.05	24.80
M&M	791.80	9.85
Maruti Suzuki	7527.45	94.75
Nestle India Ltd.	17619.75	204.95
NTPC	118.00	0.75
ONGC	122.00	-1.35
PowerGrid Corp	231.15	-1.10
Reliance Ind	2153.50	-51.85
SBI Life	1002.15	1.60
State Bank	417.20	-1.65
Shree Cement	28672.30	-194.90
Sun Pharma	664.80	-0.45
Tata Consumer Products Ltd.	575.45	-0.40
Tata Motors	334.65	-0.60
Tata Steel	1113.15	13.05
TCS	3373.60	112.20
Tech Mahindra	1080.00	23.55
Titan	1780.85	-1.70
UltraTech Cement	6961.95	58.60
UPL	813.45	9.45
Wipro	549.05	8.90

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	73.96	74.28
Euro	88.32	88.73
British Pound	103.27	103.75
Japanese Yen (100)	66.71	67.00
Chinese Yuan	11.43	11.49
Swiss Franc	80.48	80.87
Singapore Dollar	55.05	55.30
Canadian Dollar	60.16	60.42
Malaysian Ringgit	17.77	17.86

Source: Indian Bank

## IN BRIEF



'Govt. will rely on COVID data for an intervention'

KOLKATA  
The Centre will closely monitor COVID-19 data for six weeks to chart the path it needs to walk for economic intervention, rather than making announcements based on projections of the third wave, Principal Economic Advisor to the finance ministry, Sanjeev Sanyal said. PTI

## SAT stays SEBI penalties in Cairn buyback case

NEW DELHI  
The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) has stayed the penalties imposed by markets regulator SEBI on Cairn India and others for making a misleading announcement regarding buyback of shares in 2014. It also directed Cairn India, which was merged with Vedanta Ltd., and others, to deposit ₹2.5 crore with SEBI within three weeks. PTI

## SPORT

## Brazil edges Colombia amidst controversy

Peru rescues a draw against Ecuador, leaving both with a chance to progress

## COPA AMERICA

REUTERS  
RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazil trailed for the first time in eight games on Wednesday but responded with a controversial equaliser before netting a dramatic winner deep into stoppage time for a 2-1 victory over Colombia in the Copa America.

Brazil went behind in the 10th minute thanks to a wonder strike from Luis Diaz.

Juan Cuadrado swung in a cross from the right and Portu mid-fielder Diaz leapt acrobatically to volley an overhead kick past a helpless Weverton.

Brazil was forced to chase the game and it had most of the ball and almost all the chances, though Colombia did an excellent job of closing it down in the final third.

The hosts eventually got an equaliser with 12 minutes

## Reliance to invest ₹75,000 crore in 'new energy'

Company to set up four 'giga factories' for solar photovoltaic modules, batteries, electrolyzers and fuel cells in Jamnagar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) on Thursday announced plans to invest ₹75,000 crore in its 'new energy' business.

RIL aims to set up four large manufacturing units involving an investment of ₹60,000 crore in three years at Jamnagar, Gujarat.

"We have started work on developing the Dhirubhai Ambani Green Energy Giga Complex on 5,000 acres in Jamnagar," CMD Mukesh Ambani told shareholders at the company's 42nd annual general meeting. "It will be among the largest such integrated renewable energy manufacturing facilities in the world."



**Eyeing scale:** RIL will create a fully integrated, end-to-end renewable energy ecosystem, says Ambani. ■ REUTERS

nents of the new energy eco-system.

"We will build an integrated solar photovoltaic module factory. We will build an advanced energy storage

battery factory, an electrolyser factory, and for converting hydrogen into motive and stationary power, we will build a fuel cell factory," he said. "Reliance will thus

create a fully integrated, end-to-end renewables energy ecosystem," he added.

Mr. Ambani said the Jamnagar complex would offer infrastructure and utilities to make ancillary material and equipment so that all critical materials were available in time. "We will invest an additional ₹15,000 crore in value chain, partnerships and future technologies, including upstream and downstream industries."

Developed for the Indian market, the phone would be commercially available from September 10.

RIL also announced that Saudi Aramco's chairman Yasir Al-Rumayyan would join the board as an independent director, adding that the RIL-Aramco deal would be formalised in 2021. In 2019, RIL had said it would sell 20% in its oil-to-chemicals unit to Saudi Aramco for \$15 billion.

On the partnership with Facebook, Mr. Ambani said an initial set of integrations between WhatsApp and JioMart had been introduced on a trial basis.

"Our joint teams are developing the full new commerce solution linking merchants and consumers," the RIL CMD said. The firm planned to unveil these over

the next few quarters.

He added that RIL had tested Jio's 5G solutions in India and had demonstrated "speeds well in excess of 1 Gbps... we are confident of being the first to launch full-fledged 5G services."

## Threefold growth

The firm's subsidiary Reliance Retail would grow at least threefold in the next 3-5 years, he said. The unit, which aims to be among the top 10 global retailers, would create employment for more than 10 lakh people in three years, he added.

Reliance Retail would continue to acquire businesses to heighten its offering, sharpen omnichannel capabilities, and drive operating efficiencies, Mr. Ambani said.

(With PTI inputs)

## Fitch lifts RIL's rating a notch above India's

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings has upgraded Reliance Industries Ltd.'s rating to 'BBB', one notch above India's sovereign rating, as RIL benefits from cash flow generation across diversified business segments and the continuation of deleveraging.

In a statement, Fitch said it had upgraded RIL's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating (IDR) to 'BBB+' from 'BBB', with a negative outlook. At the same time, the agency affirmed RIL's long-term local-currency IDR at 'BBB+' with a stable outlook.

The company has cut its foreign-currency borrowings outside India by 36% following prepayment of \$7.8 billion in FY21.

## RBI sets rules for NBFCs to pay dividends

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued norms for NBFC dividend distribution to infuse greater transparency in the practice.

The norms will be effective for dividend declaration from the profit for the financial year ending March 31, 2022.

One of the criteria is the net NPA ratio must be lower than 6% in each of the last three years. No specific ceiling on payout has been set for NBFCs not taking public funds and not having customer interface.

The maximum payout ratio for core investment firms would be 60%, standalone primary dealers 60% and other NBFCs 50%.

## Ensure GST cuts reach users'

Plaints on COVID-essentials' prices must be prioritised: NAA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The National Anti-Profitereering Authority (NAA) has directed GST officials across the country to ensure that the tax rate cuts notified on some COVID-19-related essentials are passed on to consumers.

Complaints from end users about lack of price reductions commensurate with the tax cuts, are to be treated on a priority basis and forwarded to the State-level Screening Committees and Standing Committees on Anti-Profitereering, the NAA Secretary A.K. Goel said in a memo posted on its website on Thursday.

At its last meeting on June 12, the GST Council had waived the indirect tax le-

velied on two critical drugs, Tocilizumab and Amphotericin B, and reset the tax rate to 5% on 14 COVID-19 essentials. On June 14, the Finance Ministry had notified the revised rates, which are applicable till September 30.

"The suppliers are required to commensurately reduce the prices of each of the supplies of Goods and Services made by them so that the benefit of the reduction in tax rates and/or of input tax credits is passed on to the recipients/consumers," the NAA emphasised.

Tax experts said that producers of items ranging from

ambulances to pulse oximeters and oxygen concentrators would need to ensure retail price reductions were effected soon and paperwork filed to justify the extent of reductions, in order to avoid action under the anti-profitereering framework.

"Businesses dealing with medical supplies that have undergone a GST rate reduction need to ensure that they have adequate documentation to demonstrate that the rate cuts have been passed on to the consumers," said M.S. Mani, senior director at Deloitte India.

Suppliers or firms who had not got the benefit of input tax credits on account of cuts in the GST rate could also file complaints, with the anti-profitereering apparatus.

## NCLT reserves order on Siva Industries' bid

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

The National Company Law Tribunal, Chennai, has reserved its order on the one-time settlement (OTS) offer made by promoters of Siva Industries & Holdings Ltd. to lenders.

Last week, NCLT directed the lenders to explain the rationale behind accepting the OTS.

The agency lowered the growth outlook saying that a severe second COVID-19

outbreak in April and May led to lockdowns imposed by States and sharp contraction in economic activity.

"We forecast a growth of 9.5% this fiscal year from our March forecast of 11%," S&P said.

Stating that permanent damage to private and public sector balance sheets would constrain growth over

## S&amp;P cuts India's FY22 growth forecast to 9.5%

Further waves pose a risk to outlook

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

S&P Global Ratings on Thursday cut India's growth forecast for the current fiscal to 9.5%, from 11% earlier, and warned of risk to the outlook from further waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The agency lowered the growth outlook saying that a severe second COVID-19 outbreak in April and May led to lockdowns imposed by States and sharp contraction in economic activity.

"We forecast a growth of 9.5% this fiscal year from our March forecast of 11%," S&P said.

Stating that permanent damage to private and public sector balance sheets would constrain growth over

## 'U.S. group views India's e-com plan as worrying'

It limits operating environment: USIBC

REUTERS<br

# Williamson & Co. soak up the top-of-the-world feeling

Great to end up on the right side of a final for a change, says the New Zealand captain

## WTC

S. DIPAK RAGAV

After leading his side to its first ICC Trophy in 21 years, Kane Williamson said it was finally good to end up on the right side of a final after losing the last two 50-over World Cup finals in 2015 and 2019.

"2019 was a great occasion and a brilliant game of cricket, as well. But obviously, a slightly different feeling being on the right side of the result for us. Also, a part of a great game of cricket and a great occasion where it was the first, I suppose, official World Test Championship, and this is a really good feeling," said Williamson.

**Praise for Taylor**  
On his partnership with Ross Taylor, Williamson, who made an unbeaten half-cent-

tury, said, "... fantastic to be part of a contribution and a partnership like that. Obviously, with Ross, our most experienced player and leader in the group, it was nice that we were able to soak up some of the pressure and then sort of score a few together, although it was really difficult to come by. But having an experienced hitter like Ross out there was certainly helpful."

"You know, a really special feeling to be there at the end together and tick those runs off. Even though it was 130-odd on that surface, you never felt comfortable. It was nice to soak up some of that pressure and put together a partnership," he said.

During the post-match presentation, Williamson also credited his team for sticking to its beliefs and style of cricket.

"We know we don't always



**Reverie time:** Kane Williamson with the first WTC champion's mace at the site of Hambledon CC, known as the 'Cradle of Cricket'. ■ PTI

have the stars and we rely on a few other bits and pieces players to try and stay in games and be competitive.

And I think we saw that in this match, we saw a lot of heart, a lot of commitment, what's important to our

group and the commitment to the style of cricket we held strong, which was great," he said.

## Kohli expresses reservation on format

India skipper says it needs more than one Test to decide the champion

ASHWIN ACHAL

India captain Virat Kohli believes that the World Test Championship (WTC) final should ideally be contested over the course of a three or five-Test series.

Speaking after India lost to New Zealand in the one-off WTC final at Southampton on Wednesday, Kohli stated that the current format does not accurately reveal a true champion.

"I'm not in absolute agreement with deciding the best Test side in the world over the course of one game. It has to be a test of character over three Tests – which team has the ability to come back into the series, or totally blow away the other team."

### Hard grind

"It can't just be pressure applied over two days of good cricket. It has to be a hard grind. At the end of three matches, there's effort, ups and downs, situations changing throughout the course of the series, a chance to rectify



**Not true index:** Kohli, congratulating Williamson, says the final was not a measure of his team's ability. ■ AFP

### Captain Kohli in ICC tournaments

- 2017 Champions Trophy: Lost to Pakistan in the final
- 2019 World Cup (50-over): Lost to New Zealand in the semifinals
- 2021 WTC final: Lost to New Zealand in the final

**G** The one-off factor does bring a unique dynamic and makes it [final] exciting. On any given day, anything can happen

WILLIAMSON

things you've done wrong in the first game... Then you can really see who's the better side," Kohli said at the post-match media interaction.

"If you saw the way this game went, why wouldn't you want to see two more Tests of the teams battling it out to eventually win the WTC?"

"Historically, all the great Test series' are remembered for being three or five match-

es long. I think this definitely has to be brought in. I'm not saying this because we're not on the winning side. For this (WTC final) to be absolutely memorable, I think it has to happen over three games at a minimum," said the Indian skipper.

"We are not too bothered by this result because we understand what we've done over the last three-four years as a Test side. This (WTC fi-

nal) is not a measure of who we are as a team, and the ability and potential we have had for so many years," he said.

On the team's batting struggles in the summit clash, Kohli said, "We definitely need to work out better plans in terms of understanding how to score runs. We have to stay in sync with the momentum of the game, and not let the game drift away too much."

## A pace battery firing on all cylinders

S. DINAKAR  
CHENNAI

In his heyday, he earned the sobriquet Sultan of Swing. Now, in the evening of his life, his words carry immense wisdom.

The second Test of the 2019-20 India-New Zealand series was in progress at Christchurch, Sir Richard Hadlee's eyes scan the ground, his steely gaze picking up little things.

In the middle, the Indians were crumbling, and the man doing the damage was Kyle Jamieson, all of 6'8".

"We never had someone like him before. Perhaps in the '50s, but none after that. Nobody with his height and natural bounce," Hadlee was speaking to *The Hindu*. "He adds another dimension to the New Zealand bowling," said Hadlee.

The legendary bowler's

words were ringing in the ears when Jamieson pinned the batsmen on the back foot with his lift and, with their footwork disrupted, consumed them with fuller length and swing to scalp five in the Indian first innings of the ICC World Test Championship final at Southampton.

And then he opened up the Indian batting on the final day, setting Virat Kohli up with deliveries moving into him and taking him out with one that left the right-hander.

Soon, he had Cheteshwar Pujara snapped up in the slips.

New Zealand's pace was always probing, but Jamieson has lent it the cutting edge with his pace, lift, off-stump line, seam movement and swing. And, he changes his length so adeptly.

With the arrival of Jamie-



**The four musketeers!** The firepower generated by Jamieson, Southee, Boult and Wagner was too much for the Indians to handle. ■ INSTAGRAM/ICC

son, New Zealand's pace attack is complete. After all, you have the left-right combination of Trent Boult and Tim Southee, who between them, have over 600 Test wickets. They come from varying angles, pitch the ball up, allow it to swing and dare

the batsmen to go after them. So confident are they of defeating the batsmen with their movement.

The ever-evolving Southee has added the delivery that straightens and holds its line or comes in, to his trademark outswingers. Ask Rohit Sharma who was bamboozled by one such delivery in the second innings.

And, Boult is a bag of tricks. The left-arm bowler with equal control from over and round the wicket, can take the ball away from the left-hander from over the wicket and angle it across the right-hander and bring the odd one back.

The talented Boult can get the ball to deviate both ways from round the wicket. He is a serial scalpel-hunter.

Then there is the never-say-die Neil Wagner, all heart, effort and commitment, whose barrage of accurate short-pitched bowling is mixed cleverly with fuller length left-arm's swing whether angling it across or bringing it back. New Zealand, clearly, has the pace attack to be at the acme of Test-playing nations.

Once Williamson won the toss and the fickle English weather kept ushering in a damp curtain, Indian batsmen never felt at ease, even if in the first dig openers Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill strung a 62-run partnership. New Zealand maximised its advantage and with Kyle Jamieson bowling with seductive precision, edges were taken.

New Zealand played the percentages better and with Williamson being the batting glue in both outings, the eventual champion always stayed ahead of India. And when the chase commenced on the sixth and final day, the sun was out, the outfield dried up and shots carried to the fence unlike the previous days when the ball seemed arthritic.

## Ramkumar fights hard, but falls in the final qualifying round

### WIMBLEDON

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LONDON

A spot in the main draw of a Grand Slam eluded Ramkumar Ramanathan yet again, as he lost to Australia's Marc Polmans 3-6, 6-3, 6-7(2), 6-3, 9-11 in the final qualifying round at the Wimbledon championships, here on Thursday.

Showing nerves of steel, Ramkumar saved four match points but eventually fell at the end of a three-hour, 30-minute contest.

After the duo split the first two sets, Ramkumar had multiple opportunities to break at the start of the third but squandered all, before losing the set in a tie-break.

The 26-year-old, however,



Ramkumar... playing his heart out. ■ FILE PHOTO: R. RAGU

raced to a 3-0 lead in the fourth set and kept his level up to take it 6-3 and even the match.

In the decider, he was down a match point while serving at 4-5, but survived. Three more match points in game 12 were also saved as he stretched the contest. But the Australian broke his tenacious rival in the 20th game and punched his ticket for next week's main draw.

**Thiem pulls out**  
World No. 5 Dominic Thiem withdrew from Wimbledon on Thursday after suffering a wrist injury in Mallorca earlier this week.

"I'm sorry for pulling out of the upcoming three tournaments I had in my calendar – Wimbledon, Hamburg and Gstaad," the 27-year-old Austrian wrote on Twitter. "I am determined to come back stronger."

## How they finished

	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
<b>GROUP A</b>						
Italy (Q)	3	3	0	0	7	9
Wales (Q)	3	1	1	1	1	4
Switzerland (Q)	3	1	1	1	-1	4
Turkey	3	0	0	3	-7	0
<b>GROUP B</b>						
Belgium (Q)	3	3	0	0	6	9
Denmark (Q)	3	1	0	2	1	3
Finland	3	1	0	2	-2	3
Russia	3	1	0	2	-5	3
<b>GROUP C</b>						
The Netherlands (Q)	3	3	0	0	6	9
Austria (Q)	3	2	0	1	1	6
Ukraine (Q)	3	1	0	2	-1	3
North Macedonia	3	0	0	3	-6	0

Note: For teams tied on goal difference, head-to-head results decided the placings

	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
<b>GROUP D</b>						
England (Q)	3	2	1	0	2	7
Croatia (Q)	3	1	1	1	1	4
Czech Republic (Q)	3	1	1	1	1	4
Scotland	3	0	1	2	-4	1
<b>GROUP E</b>						
Sweden (Q)	3	2	1	0	2	7
Spain (Q)	3	1	2	0	5	5
Slovakia	3	1	0	2	-5	3
Poland	3	0	1	2	-2	1
<b>GROUP F</b>						
France (Q)	3	1	2	0	1	5
Germany (Q)	3	1	1	1	1	4
Portugal (Q)	3	1	1	1	1	4
Hungary	3	0	2	1	-3	2

JUNE 26: Wales vs Denmark, Italy vs Austria

JUNE 27: The Netherlands vs Czech Republic, Belgium vs Portugal

JUNE 28: Croatia vs Spain, France vs Switzerland

JUNE 29: England vs Germany, Sweden vs Ukraine

JUNE 26: Wales vs Denmark, Italy vs Austria

JUNE 27: The Netherlands vs Czech Republic, Belgium vs Portugal

JUNE 28: Croatia vs Spain, France vs Switzerland

JUNE 29: England vs Germany, Sweden vs Ukraine

## Hungary makes Germany work hard

France tops group; record-equalling Ronaldo keeps Portugal in the mix

### EURO 2020

REUTERS  
MUNICH

A late Leon Goretzka goal salvaged a 2-2 draw for Germany against Hungary on Wednesday night, in a seesaw Group F contest that sets the Germans up for a round of 16 match against England at Wembley on June 29.

Meanwhile, Cristiano Ronaldo kept Portugal alive with two penalties to cancel out a brace from France's Karim Benzema in an enthralling 2-2 draw that sent both sides into the last 16.

The Germans were teetering



**Rescue act:** Leon Goretzka, right, fired Germany into the last-16 with a late equaliser against Hungary. ■ AFP

Szalai's

## TV PICKS

**Golf:** Women's PGA championship: Eurosport (SD & HD), 9 p.m.  
**NBA:** SS Select 1 (SD & HD), 6 a.m. (Saturday)

## IN BRIEF



## Atlanta Hawks snatch a narrow win

Atlanta's Trae Young scored a career playoff high 48 points and the Hawks edged host Milwaukee Bucks 116-113 in Wednesday's opening game of the NBA Eastern Conference finals. **The result:** Eastern Conference finals: Milwaukee Bucks 113 lost to Atlanta Hawks 116 (Hawks lead series 1-0).

## Bopanna &amp; Divij lose in quarterfinals

## SPORTS BUREAU

Rohan Bopanna and Divij Sharan were beaten 6-3, 7-6 (3) by the top seeds Nikola Mektic and Mate Pavic of Croatia in the doubles quarterfinals of the €609,065 ATP tennis tournament here on Thursday.

Sania Mirza and Bethanie Mattek-Sands of the US were beaten 6-3, 6-4 by the American alternate entrants Christina McHale and Sabrina Santamaria in the first round of the WTA event in Eastbourne.

**The results:** €609,065 ATP, Eastbourne, Britain: Quarterfinals: Nikola Mektic & Mate Pavic (Cro) bt Rohan Bopanna and Divij Sharan 6-3, 7-6(3).

\$565,530 WTA: Eastbourne, Britain: First round: Christina McHale & Sabrina Santamaria (USA) & Sania Mirza 6-3, 6-4.

# Last chance to punch a ticket to Tokyo

Annu Rani will be aiming to qualify in javelin; spotlight on relay squads also

## ATHLETICS

UTHRA GANESAN  
PATIALA

The 60th National inter-State athletics championships starting here on Friday will be the last chance for Indian athletes to book a ticket to the Tokyo Olympics and quite a few would be hoping to either attain the elusive qualification standard or improve their ranking.

Among those aiming for automatic qualification at the five-day meet will be javelin thrower Annu Rani, who has been consistently improving over the last one year and is within sight of the 64m mark. Her personal best of 63.24m is not too far off and the reigning National champion will be hoping to go the distance this time around.

## Sprint showdown

On the track, the much-anticipated showdown between Dutee Chand and Hima Das



**Consistent:** Annu Rani has the wherewithal to make it to the Olympics. ■ FILE PHOTO

in the 100m and 200m sprints will be the highlight although the duo has managed to avoid it so far with either withdrawing from at least one event over the past one year.

While Dutee came agonisingly close to the 100m qual-

ifying time at the recent Grand Prix 4, she is comfortably placed in the rankings which is not the case with Hima, who has to clock 22.80s in the 200m to qualify.

The spotlight will also be on the women's 4x100m and the men's 4x400m relay

squads with the former hoping to better its National record and the latter aiming to consolidate its position in the rankings, placed precariously at 16th and final qualification spot.

Also hoping to improve his position on the Road to To-

kyo rankings will be high jumper Tejaswin Shankar, competing at home after almost two years and coming with a series of NCAA wins under his belt in USA.

Tejaswin has also entered in triple jump in keeping with his recent attempts at multiple events and it will be interesting to see how the youngster measures up here.

Shot-putter Tajinderpal Singh Toor and discus thrower Kamalpreet Kaur will be high on confidence after their impressive performances in IGP 4 couple of days ago but the pressure will be on veteran thrower Seema Antil who skipped the Grand Prix.

Javelin thrower Shivpal Singh, unable to fly abroad for training or competition, will also be in action for the first time since March but steeplechaser Avinash Sable and quartemiler Dharun Ayasamy have given the event a miss.

# Atanu, Deepika ensure mixed team medal

Abhishek Verma makes the semifinals in men's individual compound event

## ARCHERY

SPORTS BUREAU  
PARIS

The Indian recurve mixed team, consisting of the husband-wife pair of Atanu Das and Deepika Kumari, booked a berth in the final to ensure a medal in the Archery World Cup Stage-3 here on Thursday.

The Olympic-bound duo, who got a first round bye, defeated Great Britain's Bryony Pitman and James Woodgate 6-0 and Casey Kaufhold and Brady Ellison 6-0 to reach the semifinals.

In the last-four, Atanu and Deepika edged past Inse de Valesco and Daniel Castro of Spain 5-3.

India will meet the Netherlands in the final.

The compound mixed team, comprising Abhishek Verma and V. Jyothi Surek-

ha, lost to Elizaveta Knyazeva and Anton Bulaev of Russia 155-154 in the second round.

Verma was the lone Indian compound archer to make it to the semifinals in the men's individual event.

Verma beat Matthew Wong of Great Britain 147-134, Sergio Pagni of Italy 148-145, Jean Pizarro of Puerto Rico 148-143 and Martin Laursen of Denmark 146-146 (tie-breaker 10-9) to reach the last four.

Aman Saini and Rajat Chauhan exited in third and first rounds respectively.

Jyothi lost in the quarter-finals while Saanchi Dhalla, who beat Pragati in the first round, lost in the second round among women compound archers.

Akshita crashed out in the opening round.

## Saurabh bags bronze

## SHOOTING WC

KAMESH SRINIVASAN  
NEW DELHI

3. Saurabh Chaudhary 220.0 (581); 5. Abhishek Verma 179.3 (581).

**10m air rifle:** 1. William Shaner (US) 250.5 (628.3); 2. Vladimir Maslenikov (Rus) 249.2 (630.5); 3. Petar Gorsa (Cro) 227.7 (631.9); 7. Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar 143.9 (628.0); 14. Deepak Kumar 626.0; 25. Divyansh Singh Panwar 624.7.

**Women: 10m air pistol:** 1. Anoonaeta Kostadinova (Bul) 240.0 (579); 2. Carina Wimmer (Ger) 237.5 (574); 3. Yulia Korostylova (Ukr) 216.8 (575); 7. Manu Bhaker 137.3 (577).

8. Yashaswini Singh Deswal 117.1 (578); 13. Rahi Sarnobat 572.

**10m air rifle:** 1. Eszter Meszaros (Hun) 250.6 (628.3); 2. Zlata Dvorskak (Slo) 249.8 (628.4); 3. Sofia Ceccarello (Ita) 226.6 (629.2); 24. Apurvi Chandela 624.2.

42. Anjum Moudgil 622.3; 55. Elavenil Valarivan 621.2.

## Kshatriya wins under-12 title

## CHESS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Maharashtra's Kshatriya Vekhande won the National under-12 open online rapid chess title due to superior tie-break score, after being tied at 9.5 points with Assam's Mrinmoy Rajkhowa, on Thursday.

In the 11-round competition, Rajasthan's Yash Bhardwaj took the third spot after topping a 11-way tie at nine points.

These placings are subject to change after the Fairplay report is received from the online platform, Tornelo, and the decision of the five-man Fairplay committee.

## Uzbekistan Open results annulled

## SWIMMING

SPORTS BUREAU

best Indian performance, just 0.22s short of the mark for Tokyo.

His timing of 25.11s in the 50m backstroke was also a new high.

## Rich haul

Indians, in general, had come away with a rich haul of medals (18 gold, seven silver and four bronze), including two in the breaststroke events for Likhit.

The competition was an Olympic qualification event where two Uzbek swimmers were declared to have sealed their berths for Tokyo 2020.

India's Srihari Nataraj had clocked 54.07s in the 100m backstroke event, a

## Mane to join Lahiri in Tokyo

## GOLF

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI



Indian golfer Udayan Mane is all set to make the cut for the Tokyo Games as the withdrawal of Argentine Emiliano Grillo will push him inside the playing field.

The top-60 golfers as per rankings and the qualification criteria will compete in Tokyo and the vacant spot will now be grabbed by Mane, who was reserve player behind Grillo.

Grillo, world number 74 was the lone Argentine in the Olympic list. The next best Argentine is Fabian Gomez at 404 and Mane is 354th.

Mane was the leading Indian at one point but am still waiting for the official communication. I hope it comes soon," said Mane.

That means India will have two men and at least one woman like in 2016.

**MARUTI SUZUKI**

**NEXA**

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