

COIMBATORE | THURSDAY 17 | JUNE 2021

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VINEETA PANDEY |DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

PAWAN BALI |DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

**PARMOD KUMAR,
SANJAY KAW | DC**
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

alumni of the school made
against him.
The Baba had given the

Three cases have been registered against the self-styled godman under vari-

ous sections of the IPC, POCSO Act and Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Women Act at the Mahabalipuram All Women Police station following complaints of sexually harassment of students a few years ago when they were studying in the school. Meanwhile, an CB-CID team is conducting investigations at the school.

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

The zoo authorities said three lions that tested positive for Covid-19 were responding to the treatment very slowly. They are treated by a team of zoo veterinarians in coordination with the experts of TANUVAS.

T. SUDHEESH | DO
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Health minister Ma. Subramanian said on Wednesday that the government has decided to open special paediatric wards in all five government medical college hospitals in the city and all the districts across the state in an effort to protect children from the possible third wave of Covid-19.

New Delhi, June 16:
The Delhi government

will train 5,000 youths to assist doctors and nurses as part of preparations for the third wave of Covid-19, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Wednesday. The health assistants will be given two weeks' basic training in nursing and lifecare.

**G. BABU JAYAKUMAR,
D. SEKAR | DC**
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Leaving Chennai by a special flight at 7.30 am on Thursday, Mr Stalin would meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi at 5 pm, which alone is listed as the

Mr. Stalin had also reportedly sought 10 minutes for a personal one-to-one with the Prime Minister during the meeting that will see many party colleagues and top bureaucrats attending it. ■ P2

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

Twitter has lost its “safe harbor” protection in India over non-compliance with IT rules and failure to appoint key personnel mandated under the new guidelines, despite repeat-

ed reminders, and the platform will now be liable for action under the Indian Penal Code for third party unlawful content, sources said. Earlier this month, the government had given one last chance to Twitter to comply with the new IT rules. **P4**

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SHORT TAKES



G. S. Sameeran, IAS, takes charge as District Collector in Coimbatore on Wednesday.

200 beds donated to rural hospitals

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Government hospitals and public health centres in the districts of Dharmapuri, Ulundurpet, Villupuram and Mayiladuthurai have been donated 200 beds by Syngenta, an agricultural company.

Since the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic impacted rural areas more causing a strain on hospital beds, the company decided to donate the beds, a press release said, adding that sanitisers, masks and PPE units were also given away.

CM expected to meet Union ministers in Delhi

From PI

Stalin is also expected to meet several Union ministers Nirmala Sitharaman, Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Piyush Goel, Gajendra Singh Shekawat and Harshvardhan to discuss issues concerning their ministries and Vice-President M. Venkiah Naidu.

Another item in the tentative unofficial itinerary of Mr Stalin is a visit to the DMK office that is being constructed at the Deenadayal Upadhaya Marg area in New Delhi.

But more important is the series of meetings that have been lined up for the Chief Minister with leaders of the various national opposition parties.

Mr Stalin is expected to meet Congress president Sonia Gandhi and party leader Rahul Gandhi and Seetharam Yechury of CPM, besides a few other leaders on Friday before taking the flight back home.

Since the DMK is the third largest party in Parliament, the leaders want the visit of the Chief Minister to the capital to be a purposeful one and have plans to make it a gala affair.

Mr Stalin, through his meetings with the national party leaders, is also expected to start the discussions pertaining to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which would need the coming together of all national and regional parties to put up a viable fight against the BJP.

Mr Stalin would be staying at Tamil Nadu House in New Delhi, where the state's new special representative A.K.S. Vijayan, took charge on Wednesday in the presence of several members of Parliament.

Apart from those DMK MPs in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, several top leaders of the party including state ministers had already reached New Delhi to make arrangements for the Chief Minister's visit.

Health risk



The department of food safety and drug administration seized nearly seven tonnes of artificially ripened mangoes from the Koyambedu fruit market in the city on Wednesday. A team of six officials headed by the Chennai district designated officer Jagadish Chandrabose and P. Sundaramurthy, food safety officer, Koyambedu, conducted an early morning inspection in 150 shops. It was found that about 30 shops had stocked artificially ripened mangoes. About seven tonnes of such mangoes were destroyed at the bio-methanation plant located in the market.

—N. Sampath

2 more arrested for black marketing mucormycosis drugs

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

The police have arrested two persons for alleged black marketing of black fungus drugs.

A team of Tambaram police had launched a probe into the black marketing of mucormycosis in Tambaram.

The police arrested two persons involved in the online sales of mucormycosis drugs. The accused arrested have been identified as Chiranjeevi (38) and Prasanth (26), residents of Tambaram and contract workers at Omandur government hospital in the city.

A probe revealed that the suspects were selling vials at higher prices. The demand for black fungus drugs has significantly increased amid the second wave of Covid-19.

The police said the fraudsters posted online advertisements promising quick delivery of medicines of black fungus injections. The accused were remanded to judicial custody and lodged at a prison.

Recently, the St Thomas Mount police team arrested five persons for attempting to sell black fungus drugs online. The police have asked the people not to attempt to buy Covid-19 and black fungus related medicines from unknown sources in the black market.

TN braces for protecting children from third wave

T. SUDHEESH I DC
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Tamil Nadu, witnessing the downward trend of the second wave of Covid-19 for the last couple of weeks, has turned the focus on protecting children from a possible third wave.

Health minister Ma. Subramanian on Wednesday said the government will open special paediatric wards in all five government medical college hospitals in the city. "The health department will open such special wards in all districts across the state. We are hearing reports of a third wave that could spread among children. In order to avoid any crises, the government is taking all precautionary measures. There is nothing to worry about it," said the minister.

As part of this, the Tamil Nadu Directorate of

Medical Education has issued a set of guidelines for preparedness and management of a possible third wave of Covid-19 cases. According to the new guidelines, the nodal officers, preferably paediatricians, will make necessary preparations for the possible onset of Covid-19 wave in the future. Each institution should keep 100 beds ready with oxygen facilities and monitors for ICU care for children. No paediatrician or staff nurse of the paediatric ward can be posted out of regular duty rotation. Staff nurses at the hospitals should be trained in batches to attend to emergencies in the paediatric ward. The medical officers of general medicine and anaesthesia have also been asked to be trained to handle paediatric emergencies in batches, apart from paediatricians.

Meanwhile, the paediatricians suggest it's time to take utmost precautions to prevent the impact of a possible third wave as children have not yet been given the vaccine protection.

Dr Jayanthi Viswanathan, consultant paediatrician, Gleneagles Global Health City, said the parents and elders have to play a key role in keeping children safe. "We have seen many children being affected by the Covid-19 compared to the first wave. Though the mortality rate is less, the children, going by the past experience, are vulnerable to getting affected by the virus. So, family members should avoid attending closed-door meetings and functions along with children. If you want to go to beaches and parks for unwinding, you have to choose less crowded places. Since children are

being locked up in houses for a long time, it could develop psychological and other illnesses. In order to avoid this, children can be allowed for activities like cycling and playing in less crowded areas. Above all, children should be taught regular high hygiene etiquette at home," she said.

However, a recent report from the Lancet Covid-19 Commission India Task Force ruled out the greater risk of Covid-19 infection among children in the anticipated third wave.

As per the report, the mortality rate among hospitalised Covid-19 positive children below the age of 10 (excluding neonates) was 2.4 percent. About 40 per cent of the children who died had co-morbidities and 9 percent of all hospitalised Covid-19-positive children presented with severe illness are under 10 years of age.

Covid victim-doctor's wife gets reprieve

J. STALIN I DC
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

The wife of a deceased doctor, whose claim form to provide insurance coverage of ₹50 lakh under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kisan Package Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting Covid-19 for the death of her husband, who was undertaking private practice and was treating patients affected due to Covid-19 and who ultimately lost his life due to the same virus, has not been processed by authorities on the ground that the RT PCR test result was not submitted by her, got reprieve with the Madras high court directing the authorities to consider her claim without insisting for the test result and pay the amount under the scheme.

Justice N.Anand Venk-

atesh gave the directive while disposing of a petition filed by B.Varalakshmi.

The judge said the entire world and particularly India, was facing an unprecedented situation due to the untimely attack of the Covid-19. It was the doctors and the frontline workers who in spite of knowing about the risk involved through exposure to this virus were selflessly and tirelessly working to save the lives of millions of citizens of this country. If not for the selfless services rendered by the doctors, a major population of this country would have been wiped out due to the deadly Covid-19. Therefore, the least that should be done for a doctor, who has lost his life due to Covid-19, which had spread to him while he was on duty, was

to acknowledge the selfless service of the doctor and provide with the necessary compensation to his family under the laudable scheme that has been introduced by the government of India, the judge added.

The judge said it was very clear from the 'CT Chest Covid Screening Test' that the husband of the petitioner was affected with Covid-19. When such a clinching document was available, there was no requirement for insisting for the RTPCR test result. In cases of this nature, the authorities must not stick to technicalities and the claim must be considered with more humanness with the available documents which clearly substantiates the fact that the husband of the petitioner was suffering from Covid-19, the judge added.

HC dismisses bail plea of ex-minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Pointing out that the case on hand is one of the cases where due to the gravity of the offences and the personality involved, granting anticipatory bail at this stage when the investigation is in a preliminary stage will not arise, the Madras high court has dismissed the anticipatory bail petition filed by former AIADMK minister Dr.M.Manikandan, who apprehended arrest in connection with a sexual abuse case lodged by an actor, a Malaysian citizen.

Dismissing the petition, Justice Abdul Quddus said in the case on hand, where FIR has been registered against the petitioner under sections 376 (rape), 313 (causing miscarriage without woman's consent), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt, 417 (cheating) and 506 (i) (criminal intimidation) IPC read with section 67A (transmitting obscene material in electronic form) of the Information Technology Act and the petitioner being an influential person who was earlier holding the post of Minister and was also an

MLA, it is not desirable at this preliminary stage of investigation to grant anticipatory bail to him that too, when there are several other witnesses who may have to be interrogated and materials unearthed for the purpose of eliciting the truth. Further, the petitioner till date has also not come forward to cooperate with the investigation by giving his version to the police and that is also one of the major factors which has influenced the mind of the court to reject the petitioner's request for anticipatory bail at this preliminary stage of investigation, the judge added.

The judge said in the case on hand, the petitioner has been charged with a heinous crime. He was an ex-MLA and an ex-Minister. He held office as minister till August 2019 which was not long ago. The witnesses to the offence alleged to have been committed by the petitioner were his staff members, servants and his friends. Therefore, after giving due consideration to the gravity of the offences which were serious in nature and in view of the

nature of the witnesses who may have to be interrogated, there was reasonable apprehension that there was a possibility that the petitioner may tamper with the evidence/witnesses as the investigation was in a preliminary stage and some more witnesses and materials will have to be unearthed by the investigating team to find out the truth. There was also a possibility that the petitioner may flee from justice using his influence and money power, if anticipatory bail was granted at this stage, the judge added.

The judge said in view of the fact that the major offences alleged to have been committed by the petitioner were grave in nature and there was also prima facie satisfaction about the registration of FIR under the said sections, the custodial interrogation was required as only then elicitation from the petitioner was easier than when he was well settled with a favourable anticipatory bail order and there was every possibility, he may escape from the rigours of investigation by using his influence.



People placing stones and bags to reserve their place in the queue waiting for Covid relief fund and groceries at New Avadi Road ration shop. — DC

'Courts cannot interfere in administrative transfers'

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

The Madras high court has said the administrative transfers are the prerogative of the competent authorities and the court cannot interfere with such administrative transfers issued in the interest of administration and to maintain efficiency level in the public administration more specifically, in the uniformed services.

Justice S.M.Subramaniam made the above observation while dismissing a petition filed by C.Karthikeyan, serving as a sub-inspector of police in Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) in Chennai, challenging his transfer.

According to the petitioner, his 97-year-old father was taking treatment and therefore, his presence was required to assist his father to continue the medical treatment at Chennai. The impugned order of transfer has been issued transferring him from Chennai CISF unit to ASG, Hyderabad, and in the event of joining in the new station he cannot take care of the health of his father. Thus, he submitted a

representation to the authorities to defer the order of transfer for a period of one year. Since there was no response, he has filed the present petition, he added.

The judge said undoubtedly, every citizen of our great nation may have one or other grievances of his own and therefore, the nature of the grievances and the consideration to be shown was to be decided by the competent authorities and certainly not by the high court. The men and women in the uniformed services were bound to work in the interest of the public at large. An amount of sacrifice was imminent and courage in uniformed services was of paramount importance. An expected level of confidence and courage to be shown by the personnel of uniformed services was part of their service conditions and thus, cannot be compromised or neutralised by showing any misplaced sympathy by the high courts. Uniformed services were the pride of our great nation. Thus, any sort of compromise on discipline would cause serious injury to the maintenance of security, the judge added.

● The judge said undoubtedly, every citizen of our great nation may have one or other grievances of his own and therefore, the nature of the grievances and the consideration to be shown was to be decided by the competent authorities and certainly not by the high court. An expected level of confidence and courage to be shown by the personnel of uniformed services was part of their service conditions and thus, cannot be compromised or neutralised by showing any misplaced sympathy by the high courts. Thus, any sort of compromise on discipline would cause serious injury to the maintenance of security, the judge added.

The judge said the question may arise if certain officials were facing great difficulties due to family circumstances and personal grievances. Undoubtedly, those grievances were also to be looked into in order to keep the morale amongst the men and women in the Uniformed Services. In respect of those grievances, the Head of the Department or the Ministry has issued certain guidelines for redressal and the aggrieved personnel has to approach the appropriate authority for the purpose of redressing the grievance and thus authorities were empowered to consider those representations based on the guidelines and by conducting an enquiry by ascertaining the facts and genuineness of the griev-

ances put forth by the officials. Such considerations require deliberation and such an exercise cannot be one by the high court in writ proceedings under Article 226 of the Constitution. Thus, the competent authorities, on receipt of any such representation regarding personal grievances, were bound to consider the same in the light of the guidelines and rules in force and take appropriate decisions. In the case on hand, the authority competent was bound to look into the grievance put forth by the petitioner and take a decision by following the guidelines and rules in force. However, this court was not inclined to interfere with the order of administrative transfer, the judge added.

26 yr-old man killed in country bomb attack

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

A 26-year-old man killed in a country bomb attack on Tuesday night in Perumbakkam.

The incident happened at around 9: 30 pm on Tuesday right outside the victim's house in Anna Street in Perumbakkam, the police said.

Sarath (26), was talking over the phone outside his house on Tuesday night when assailants hurled country bombs at him. After hurling bombs, the six-member gang that had arrived on two motorcycles, attacked the victim with lethal weapons, despite he being already collapsed from the country bomb attack. He died on the spot. The gang allegedly threatened the eyewitnesses to clear the place and fled the spot.

Tension prevailed in the area until the Perumbakkam police got there. They had sent Sarath's body in an ambulance to the Chromepet Government Hospital. Perumbakkam police registered a murder case and the investigations are underway.

Banned manja thread leaves biker hurt

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Despite the city police having banned flying kites due to the continuous accidents involving Manja thread, the dangerous kites have once again taken over the sky over Chennai.

The latest victim to the abrasive manja thread being a 29-year-old man who suffered injuries due to illegal kite-flying in Pallavaram area.

Venkatesan, an employee of a private college in the city and his mother were riding on a motorbike on Tuesday evening on Thoraipakkam-Pallavaram radial road within Chitlapakkam police limits, when a stray manja thread slit Venkatesan's neck. He was taken to a private hospital in Pallavaram for treatment. On information, Chitlapakkam police registered a case

and a hunt has been launched for the kite flyers. The incident happened when the ban on flying kites and selling manja thread on in place in the Chennai city police jurisdiction.

An order under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 and sub-section (2) of section 20 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, was promulgated prohibiting use, sale, manufacture, store and dealing with manja thread for kite flying was put up by the City police.

The ban was imposed by the police in the city after the abandoned threads started turning into fatal tools as it slashed the necks of people on the road, mainly bikers. It may be noted that the police have also warned of detaining the kite flyers under the Goondas Act.

Gold worth ₹10L seized

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

The customs officers at the Chennai airport seized gold worth ₹10 lakh.

According to the information from the customs, Based on intelligence, Arulraj Subramanian (41), of Cuddalore who arrived from Dubai by Emirates flight EK-544 was intercepted at exit.

On examination of his baggage, a portable juicer was found inside among his personal belongings. The juicer appeared to be heavy and on opening one cylindrical gold piece was found concealed in the motor portion of the juicer.

Gold weighing 200 grams of 24 k purity valued at ₹10 lakh was recovered and seized under the Customs Act. Further investigation is in progress.



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SHORT TAKES

ODISHA EXTENDS
PARTIAL LOCKDOWN
TILL JULY 1

Bhubaneswar, June 16: The Odisha government on Wednesday extended the partial lockdown for two more weeks till July 1 and divided the state into two categories depending on the COVID-19 positivity rate, a senior official said.

The restrictions will be in force till 5 am of July 1, Chief Secretary S C Mohapatra said. The weekend shutdowns on Saturdays and Sundays will also continue across Odisha till the end of the month. He said that under Category A, there are 17 districts located in the southern and western parts of the state where the positivity rate is 5 per cent or less, while 13 districts in coastal regions feature in Category B, the official said. Mohapatra said the borders with Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand will now be opened keeping in view the decline in COVID-19 cases in these states, but restrictions will continue along the borders with West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

— PTI

INDIA TO
CORPORATISE DEF
ARMS-MAKER

FROM PG 1

The third entity, the 'weapons and equipment group, would be mainly engaged in the production of small arms, medium and large calibre guns and other weapon systems and is expected to increase its share in the domestic market through meeting domestic demand as well as product diversification. In addition, the 'troop comfort items' group, the 'ancillary group', 'opto-electronics' group and 'parachute' group constitute the entire structure.

"The structure would help in overcoming various shortcomings in the existing system of OFB by eliminating inefficient supply chains and provide these companies incentives to become competitive and exploring new opportunities in the market including exports," the source said.

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

In taking this decision, the government has ensured that the service conditions of the existing Central government employees of the OFB are protected. The government has decided all employees of OFB (Group A, B & C) belonging to the production units would be transferred to the corporate entities on deemed deputation initially for a period of two years without altering their service conditions as Central government employees.

TWITTER LOSES
'SAFE HARBOUR'
PROTECTION

FROM PG 1

That came into effect on May 26, and had issued a stern warning that failure to adhere to the norms will lead to the platform losing exemption from liability under the IT Act.

Sources in the government confirmed that Twitter has lost the safe harbour immunity, as it failed to comply with the IT rules, and appoint key executives under the new guidelines.

While the resident grievance officer and the nodal contact person nominated by the company, is not an employee of Twitter Inc in India, the ministry had also not received any concrete information on chief compliance officer, the name, or details, sources said.

IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said Twitter failed to comply with intermediary guidelines and has "deliberately" chosen the path of non-compliance despite being granted multiple opportunities. Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Police have booked Twitter, a news portal and six persons for in connection with the circulation of a video in which an elderly Muslim man narrates his ordeal after he was allegedly attacked by some people in Ghaziabad.

The FIR, which was lodged at the Loni Border police station in Ghaziabad around 11.30 pm on Tuesday on the basis of a complaint lodged by a local policeman, alleges that the video was shared with an intention to provoke communal unrest.

FURTHER
PROGRESS OF
MONSOON STOPS

New Delhi, Jun 16: Atmospheric conditions are still not favourable for further advance of monsoon into Rajasthan, remaining parts of Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Delhi, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday.

It said a cyclonic circulation lies over east Uttar Pradesh and neighbourhood and there is also a western disturbance. These conditions are not favourable for the advance of monsoon, IMD Director General M. Mohapatra said.

"Large-scale atmospheric conditions are not favourable for further advance of monsoon into Rajasthan, remaining parts of Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Delhi," the IMD said.

However, there could be a slow progress of monsoon into some more parts of Uttar Pradesh during the next five days in association with the existing cyclonic circulation over east Uttar Pradesh, the IMD added.



Tourists take a selfie at Hawa Mahal that reopened after authorities eased some restrictions in Covid-19 lockdown, in Jaipur, Wednesday.

— PTI

62,224 new Covid cases in India
Country's active caseload for the first time in 70 days comes down below nine lakh

FROM PG 1

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

Dr Arora said that the earlier decision of four

weeks was based upon the bridging trial data available then. He referred to studies by PGI Chandigarh and CMC Vellore which compared effectiveness of partial versus full immunization. "A PGI Chandigarh study very clearly shows that vaccine effectiveness was 75% for both partially immunized and fully immunized. So at least in the short run, effectiveness was similar whether you are partially or fully vaccinated. This was in relation to the Alpha variant which had swept Punjab, Northern India and came to Delhi. This also meant that even if you received only one dose, still you are protected." Results from the CMC Vellore study were similar.

On any fresh proposal to reduce Covishield dosage

gap, Dr Arora said the decision will be taken scientifically, giving paramount importance to the health and protection of the community. "Covid-19 and the vaccination are very dynamic. Tomorrow, if the vaccine platform tells us that a narrower interval is better for our people, even if the benefit is 5% - 10%, the Committee will take the decision on the basis of merit and its wisdom. On the other hand, if it turns out that the current decision is fine, we will continue with it," Dr Arora added.

Meanwhile, the Union Health ministry has contradicted claims on social media that Covaxin contains the newborn calf serum. The ministry said the newborn calf serum is used only for preparation or growth of vero cells

● **UNION HEALTH Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan on Wednesday clarified that the decision to increase the gap between the two doses was 'transparent and backed by scientific data'.**

● **CHAIRMAN of NTAGI Dr N K Arora explained that the decision to increase the gap between two Covishield doses from 4-6 weeks to 12-16 weeks lay in the fundamental scientific reason regarding behaviour of adenovector vaccines.**

and is later washed away. The Ministry said this technique has been used for decades in Polio, Rabies, and Influenza vaccines too.

"Different kinds of bovine and other animal

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

It added that the vero cells are completely destroyed in the process of viral growth. "Thereafter this grown virus is also killed (inactivated) and purified. This killed virus is then used

to make the final vaccine, and in the final vaccine formulation no calf serum is used. Hence, the final vaccine (Covaxin) does not contain newborn calf serum at all and the calf serum is not an ingredient of the final vaccine product," the ministry clarified.

India on Wednesday reported 62,224 new cases of Covid-19 and 2,542 deaths. Country's active caseload for the first time in 70 days came down below 9 lakh. The Recovery Rate has increased to 95.80 per cent while daily positivity rate stands at 3.22%.

The positivity rate has been less than 5% for nine consecutive days. With the pace of vaccination picking up, the Centre hopes to check the daily cases and blunt the possible third wave.

Eshwarappa says some within BJP
want CM Yediyurappa replaced

Bengaluru, June 16:

Karnataka BJP president Nalin Kumar Kateel on Wednesday once again ruled out the possibility of a leadership change in the State, even as senior Minister K.S. Eshwarappa acknowledged that a section within the party is of the view that Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa should be replaced.

The statements have come as the BJP national general secretary in-charge of Karnataka Arun Singh's three-day visit to the state begins on Wednesday amid speculations in some quarters about leadership change.

"There is no question of leadership change. Chief Minister Yediyurappa will remain in the post for the next two years," Kateel told reporters.

However, Rural Development Minister K.S. Eshwarappa con-

"What you are saying is right, some have proposed that the Chief Minister should be changed, while a few others are proposing that he (Yediyurappa) should continue as the Chief Minister; a few have even gone to Delhi and come back," Eshwarappa said in response to a question

ed that some within the party are proposing that the Chief Minister should be replaced.

"What you are saying is right, some have proposed that the Chief Minister should be changed, while a few others are proposing that he (Yediyurappa) should continue as the Chief Minister; a few have even gone to Delhi and come back," Eshwarappa said in response to a question.

Eshwarappa, however, hoped that all issues would be resolved, as Singh would meet Ministers, legislators and

Ministers who want to meet him, and finally on Friday he would take part in the State BJP core committee meeting, party sources said.

Speculations have been rife for some time now that a section of the ruling BJP is trying to push for unseating Yediyurappa.

However, Singh had recently ruled out replacing the Chief Minister and asserted that Yediyurappa would continue in the top post.

His visit comes amid growing disquiet among a section of BJP legislators like Hubli-Dharwad MLA Arvind Bellad and Tourism Minister C.P. Yogeshwar who have made visits to Delhi to meet national leaders and expressed the feeling of some legislators against Yediyurappa's style of functioning and requested them to rein in the Chief Minister.

Bharat (self-reliant India)," he added.

The estimated cost of the mission for a period of five years will be ₹4,077 crore and it will be implemented in a phase-wise manner, according to an official statement.

"The estimated cost for the first phase for the three years (2021-2024) would be ₹2,823.4 crore. The Deep Ocean Mission will be a mission-mode project to support the blue economy initiatives of the government. The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) will be the nodal ministry implementing this multi-institutional ambitious mission," the statement said.

The mission consists of six major components - development of technologies for deep-sea mining and manned submersible, development of ocean climate change advisory services, technological innovations for exploration and conservation of deep-sea biodiversity, a deep-ocean survey and exploration, energy and freshwater from the ocean and an advanced marine station for ocean biology.

"The technologies required for deep-sea mining have strategic implications and are not commercially available. Hence, attempts will be made to indigenise technologies by collaborating with leading

ASSAM EDU DEPT
TO TAKE CALL ON
HOLDING EXAMS

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, JUNE 16

The Assam cabinet on Wednesday observed that the Covid situation in the state has not improved to conduct class 10 and 12 board examinations but the final decision will be taken by the Education Department in consultation with the stakeholders.

Informing that in zero-18 years group about 25,000 children were infected by Covid in the state, Assam health minister Keshab Mahanta told reporters that state health department gave a detailed presentation before the state cabinet about the prevailing rate of positivity besides the possible congregation of people in case of holding the board examinations.

After seeing the presentation, the cabinet concluded that it would not be wise to hold the board examinations, he said adding that the decision on whether the exam will be conducted or not will be taken on June 18 by the education department.

Pointing out that Covid situation has not yet improved in districts like

Golaghat, Morigaon, Kamrup (M) etc, the minister said that the cabinet was of the view that all necessary steps should be taken to ensure that the spread of pandemic is brought under control.

"We have decided not to allow home isolation to persons who don't have separate isolation facilities at home," he said adding that home isolation was responsible for the spread of the pandemic in many cases.

The demand to cancel Assam board examinations has grown louder in the state with a group of class 10 and 12 students moving to the Supreme Court seeking scrapping of the board examinations.

In their plea, the students have said that they are being forced to appear in the exams amid a threat to their lives due to the ongoing pandemic.

The students approached the apex court after Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that they are considering holding the board examination in the middle of July if the positivity rate comes below two percent by July 1.

The students in their plea before the apex court said, "In the interest of the safety of lakhs of students and their parents, it is better to cancel the exams. The government's statement that Covid positivity rate below 2 per cent has no relevance."

According to reports and ongoing campaigns on social media, students are undergoing mental turmoil due to the suspense and the delay in the state board examination.

The HSLC and HS examinations were scheduled to begin on May 11 but were postponed due to the prevailing Covid situation in the state. Even after several states cancelled the board examinations following the pattern of the CBSE, Assam education department was insisting on holding the board examinations.

"This mission is also directed towards capacity development in marine biology, which will provide job opportunities in Indian industries. In addition, design, development and fabrication of specialised equipment, ships and setting up of the required infrastructure are expected to spur the growth of the Indian industry, especially the MSMEs and start-ups," it added.

— PTI

New Delhi, Jun 16: The Centre on Wednesday approved a proposal to roll out a "Deep Ocean Mission" to explore the deep ocean for resources and develop deep-sea technologies for sustainable use of marine resources.

The decision was taken by the Union Cabinet at its meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, minister Prakash Javadekar told a press conference.

"This will support the blue economy and take India into a new era," he said. The proposal for launching the "Deep Ocean mission" came from the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

Javadekar said under the mission, a mineral study will be conducted 6,000 metres deep in the ocean. The mission will also study the changes, if any, noticed due to climate change.

Under the mission, he said, a study will be conducted on more deep-sea biodiversity.

The minister said an advanced marine station will be set up for ocean biology under the mission. There will also be an off-shore thermal energy centre, which will help new emerging sectors.

After the US, Russia, France, Japan and China, India will be the sixth country to have this kind



For Representational Purposes

of technology, Javadekar said.

"There will be good opportunities for our

MSMEs and research. This will also help in our endeavour and vision towards an Aatmanirbhar

Nod for bid to explore deep ocean for resources

SHORT TAKES

EXTEND BREXIT
SAUSAGE WAR
DEADLINE: UK

London, June 16: Britain has asked the EU to extend a grace period for some post-Brexit trade rules in Northern Ireland, Brexit minister David Frost said Wednesday, as a sausage-centred dispute between London and Brussels sizzles on. Frost confirmed the UK has asked the bloc to delay an end-of-month deadline to implement a new trading regime around chilled meats in the British province, which could see Northern Irish imports of products like sausages banned. “We have asked and suggested to the EU that the right way forward would be to agree to extend the grace period, at least for a bit,” Frost told a British parliamentary scrutiny panel.

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

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

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

THINNER KIM
LEADS TO HEALTH
SPECULATION

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

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

2 CANDIDATES
PULL OUT OF
IRAN PREZ RACE

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

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

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

PIO NOMINATED
CONNECTICUT
FEDERAL JUDGE

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

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

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

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

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

AUSTRALIA COURT
REJECTS FOREIGN
INTERFERENCE
LAW CHALLENGE

Canberra, June 16: Australia’s highest court on Wednesday rejected a challenge to foreign interference laws in a case that involved a US conservative political organisation and free speech arguments. China has condemned the laws introduced in 2018 that are widely seen as a means of preventing covert Chinese interference in Australian politics, universities and other institutions.

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

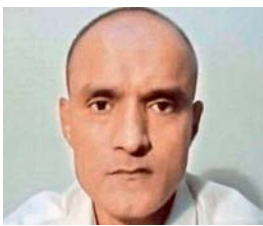
LibertyWorks argued the so-called Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act was not valid because it burdened the implied right to free speech in Australia.

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

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

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

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



Kulbhushan Jadhav

JADHAV’S CASE
ADJOURNED
TILL OCTOBER 5

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

Jadhav, the 50-year-old retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017.

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

The Hague-based ICJ ruled in July 2019 that Pakistan must undertake an “effective review and reconsideration” of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav and also to grant consular access to India without further delay. On Tuesday, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) adjourned the hearing of the government’s plea to appoint counsel for Jadhav till October 5 at the request of the Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Khalid Javed Khan. The Express Tribune reported.

— PTI

Putin says summit ‘constructive’

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

Authorities shove off journalists

Geneva, June 16: A first summit between US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart was “constructive”, Vladimir Putin said Wednesday after the talks in Geneva ended.

“The conversation was absolutely constructive”, Putin told reporters, adding that the sides had agreed for their ambassadors to return in a small gesture of healing in their strained relations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AP

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

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

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

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

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

was knocked to the ground.

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

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

— AP

Masks requirements vary
in Geneva, say authorities

Geneva, June 16: The acting chief of protocol for the Geneva region says staff members at the villa where United States President Joe Biden and Russian President

Vladimir Putin are meeting will keep masks on during the summit even if the two leaders don’t. Geneva authorities require the wearing of masks in public, though there are exceptions. The requirement holds particularly in places with a lot of pedestrian traffic, such as shopping areas.

Marion Bordier Bueschi, who is managing the

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

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

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

Sun, sea and sand



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

— AP

Russia orders mandatory
vaccinations over case surge

Two vax for kids show promise

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

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

Russia lifted most

restrictions last year, and the country has pressed ahead with large in-person events, like a recent

economic forum in Saint Petersburg and Euro 2020 hosting duties.

President Vladimir Putin

know children can transmit the virus to others, whether they get sick from SARS-CoV-2 infection or remain asymptomatic,” said Sallie Permar from New York-Presbyterian Komansky Children’s Hospital, US.

— PTI

in has repeatedly signalled Russia was moving beyond the Coronavirus.

— AFP

STATE INDUSTRIES PROMOTION CORPORATION OF TAMIL NADU LIMITED,
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Tender Notice Dt: 15.06.2021

Tender Notice NIT.No. 23/CD/T.No.23/2021-22

For and on behalf of State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited, sealed tenders are invited under “Single Cover System” for the following work from Class-4 State level Civil Contractors registered in State/Central or Government of Tamil Nadu undertakings having experience in similar nature of works. Tenders will be received upto 3.00 PM on 06.07.2021 and the same will be opened on the same day at 3.30 PM.

Name of Work	Approx. value of work	EMD
Raising of RCC kerb wall in the centre median at SIPCOT Industrial Park, Irungattukottai.	Rs. 187.20/- lakhs (Including GST)	Rs. 1,14,000/-

* In the form of Demand Draft drawn in favour of SIPCOT Ltd., payable at Chennai. (in the name of tenderer/firm only)

The tender Schedule can be Downloaded at free of cost from the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in

DIPR/1783/TENDER/2021 SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, SIPCOT, Chennai-8

Government of Tamil Nadu
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
BUILDINGS (C&M) CIRCLE, COIMBATORE - 1.
LUMPSUM CONTRACT (ITEM RATE TENDER SYSTEM)
RETENDER NOTICE No. NIT: 03/BC/C&M/CBE/2021-22, Dt: 10.06.2021

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamilnadu, sealed Tenders will be received upto 3.00 pm on 07.07.2021 from the PWD Registered Contractors by the Superintending Engineer, PWD, Buildings (Construction & Maintenance) Circle, Coimbatore - 641 001 for (1) Construction of KGBV Type II Residential School Building in GHS at Pallipalayam in Erode District (II CALL) and (2) Construction of Additional Class Room Building in GHS Devarmalai in Erode District (II CALL) at his office and Tender will be opened on the same day at 3.30 P.M.

All other details are available in the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in. If any changes / corrections etc., to the tender, it will be published on the above website only.

For Superintending Engineer, P.W.D., (IC) Buildings (C&M) Circle, Coimbatore.

DIPR/1758/Tender/2021

Israeli airstrikes
target Gaza sites

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

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

There were no immediate reports of casualties. On Tuesday, hundreds of Israeli ultranationalists,

some chanting “Death to Arabs,” paraded in east Jerusalem in a show of force that threatened to spark renewed violence. Palestinians in Gaza responded by launching incendiary balloons that caused at least 10 fires in southern Israel.

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

— AP

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL
ASSAM RIFLES, SHILLONG - 793 010

ASSAM RIFLES MERITORIOUS SPORTSPERSON RECRUITMENT RALLY 2021

- Online applications are invited from Indian Nationals Male & Female both as prescribed in detail advertisement to fill up 131 vacancies in Rifleman/Riflewomen General Duty posts in the Assam Rifles against Meritorious Sportspersons Recruitment Scheme.
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- Candidates to undergo Physical Standard Test (PST), Field Trials in respective sports and Medical Examination at own risk and expense. Injuries including fatal due to the test during recruitment rally and transit will not be compensated in any matter by the Govt or Assam Rifles.
- Vacancies are tentative & may increase or decrease. The Assam Rifles has right to make any change in the advertisement or cancel it without assigning any reasons.

DECCAN Chronicle

17 JUNE 2021

HC's ray of hope: To protest is a right, it's not like terror

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

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

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

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

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

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

BJP behind drama in LJP?

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

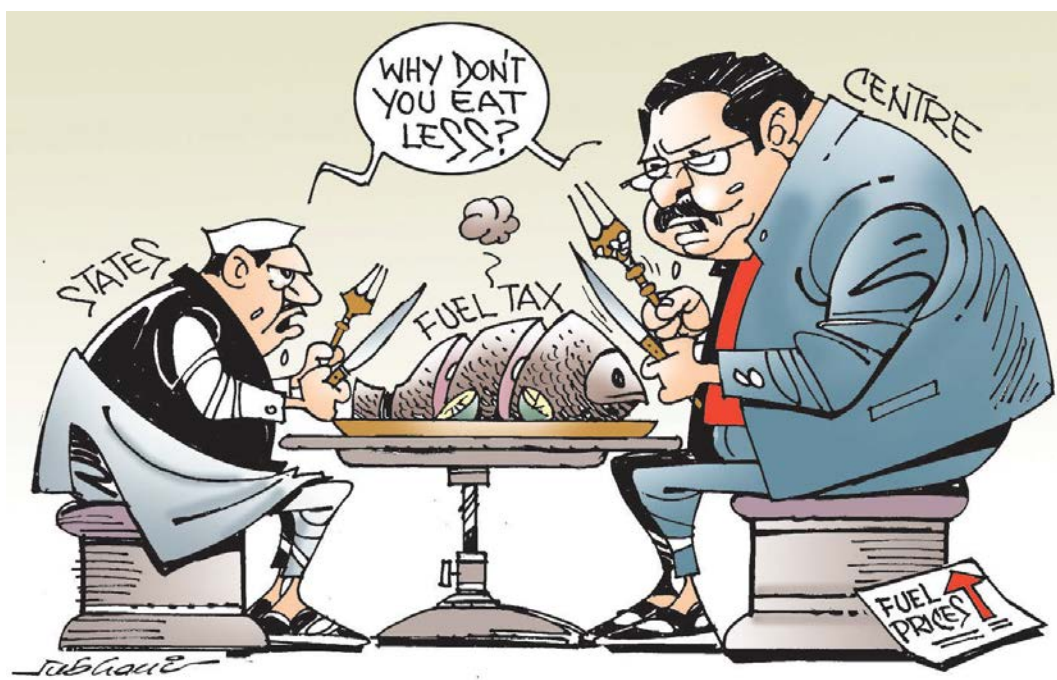
But Mr Paswan survived with clever footwork, joining alliances which he changed with frequency to retain a position in the Union cabinet in a range of governments. He had a personal standing and was a well-liked politician. After the demise of the nine-term parliamentarian last October, the LJP has clearly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

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

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

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Subhani



Covid-19 accountability: Making the dead count



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But better late than ever. Whatever be their motives, the states which are embracing greater data transparency deserve to be cheered even if by doing so, they push up India's official Covid-19 death count. As health economist Rijo M. John puts it: "Those brave states that are indeed doing this must be appreciated and I hope it motivates the rest to do so too."

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

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

Organisation.

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

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

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

Why is accurate Covid 19 data so important?

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

What should be done? Public health experts

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

RISING PRICES

Soaring prices of essential goods in the country reminds one of the sarcastic definitions of inflation, which reads as 'Confiscation without compensation.' It's clear that rising prices are due to cost-push and hence it is imperative that the government accelerates the production of essential goods in particular or reduce the indirect tax component of them to contain the prices.

Now, since the scenario is such that 'invisible hand' (self-interest of private entrepreneurs) is hard to come by due to the pandemic, the ball is purely in the court of the Indian state to focus on supply economics and enhance the real income (goods and services) of the common man.

S. Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

GOLD HALLMARKING

The Centre made hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts mandatory in a phased manner and will initially be implemented in 256 districts of the country. A decision in this regard was taken after a meeting chaired by Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal with industry stakeholders and the government had announced that hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts would be made mandatory. But the deadline was extended for four months till June 1 and later till June 15 after the jewellers sought more time in view of the pandemic. Gold hallmarking is a purify certification of the precious metal and has been voluntary in nature so far. Jewellers can continue to buy back old gold jewellery without a hallmark from consumers.

M.R. Jayanthi, Tiruchy

PLAY TO WIN

Cricket is a team game where performance is the name of the game. The Indian think tank is trying to make a match of the WTC final by picking a balanced and strong side to match the Kiwis. The players to miss out from the original 20-member squad that has toured England are: Axar Patel, KL Rahul, Shardul Thakur, Mayank Agarwal, Washington Sundar. Axar was too good at home against England and both Shardul Thakur and Washington Sundar earned a name as bowling all-rounders in the side in the famous win on Australian soil. But suddenly these three workhorses are totally ignored to accommodate the senior cricketers in the side. When we try to balance batting then we let down the bowling. Inconsistent in fielding can be a major let down for a team aspiring to win an ICC sponsored tournament after a long gap. Good luck Team India. The aim should be to play for a win in a do or die game.

C.K. Ramanathan, Chennai

Mahir Ali



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ran against the alternative regime that was taking shape.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,501.98	-0.51
Nifty 50	15,767.50	-0.64
S&P 500*	4,234.42	-0.29
Dollar (₹)	73.30	0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.48	-0.28
Euro (₹)	88.90	0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,814.48	0.10
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	74.32	0.45
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.045	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.485	-0.014

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Subsidies hiked for DAP, other fertilisers



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

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

NUPUR ACHARYA
JUNE 16

The slump in shares of companies controlled by Indian billionaire Gautam Adani deepened on Wednesday with three of them tumbling by the daily limit for a third straight day.

Adani Total Gas Ltd, Adani Power Ltd and Adani Transmission Ltd hit the lower circuit after dropping 5 per cent each even as the group denied a local report on Monday that said accounts of three Mauritius-based funds that own the group's stocks were frozen.

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone tumbled 7.17 per cent and flagship Adani Enterprises tanked 5.77 per cent on the BSE. Adani Green Energy declined 3.10 per cent. The dramatic rout marks a halt to the dizzying rally in shares of some of the Adani Group of Companies that had added almost \$40 billion to the billionaire's wealth this year through Friday that made him the second-richest person in Asia. His net worth, based on Tuesday's closing share prices, is \$71.5 billion.

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

INVESTORS FRET OVER LITTLE-KNOWN FUNDS

NUPUR ACHARYA & P. R. SANJAI
JUNE 16

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHYAM METALICS IPO SUBSCRIBED 121 TIMES, SONA 2.33 TIMES

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JUNE 16

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

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

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

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

The portion reserved for retail investors was subscribed 1.61 times.

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

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

Cooking oil prices start softening

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 16



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SIDDHARTHA SINGH
JUNE 16

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

The programme will allow companies to access funds for ramping up hospital capacity or medical

supplies with the government acting as a guarantor, said the people, who asked not to be identified citing rules.

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

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Avoid temptation in financial matters. Romance will seem appealing to you. Competitive environment at workplace will enable you to maintain a lead.



Taurus: A close associate will try to hide some important secrets from you. Your efforts to shine at the workplace are not likely to materialize.



Gemini: You will look for someone to share your feelings with. Working upto your full potential will enable you to achieve newer heights of professional excellence.



Cancer: Confronting your partner could lead to separation. Health is not likely to remain very sound today. It is time to make use of your hidden talents.



Leo: Listen to the voice of wisdom and avoid jumping to conclusions. Distrust and uncertainty will make it difficult for you to enjoy your partner's company.



Virgo: Businessmen are likely to suffer some setbacks on failing to meet deadlines. Today you will find it difficult to strike a balance between your income and expenditure. Spend time with family.

You share your b'day with

Amrita Rao is an Indian actress and model who primarily appears in Hindi-language films. She made her screen debut in Ab Ke Baras for which she was nominated for the Best Female Debut Award in 2003.



Libra: You are likely to be assigned the responsibility of leading the staff at work place. You need a clear vision to convey your goals to your team.



Scorpio: Today, your romantic partner will encourage you to be light-hearted. This will be exciting and liberating, so you'll want to do more of it in the near future.



Sagittarius: You have a high opinion of a person today. But you might be fooling yourself about what you mean to them. So try to keep your head out of the clouds.



Capricorn: Monetary health will require your attention. You could hear a secret today, so make sure you keep it to yourself. Try to get rid of the bad habits that are interfering with your well-being.

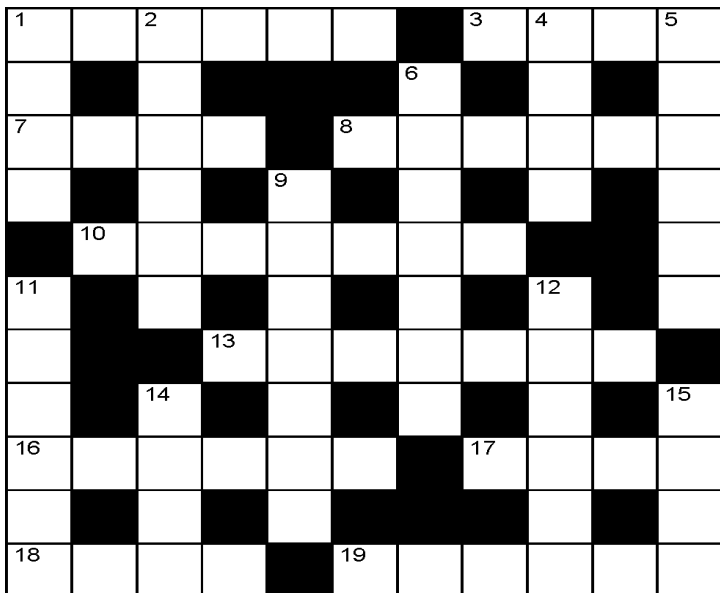


Aquarius: Someone will bring out the best in you today. There could also be a flirtatious encounter with a friend or a neighbor. It's a good time to tidy up any loose ends connected with your job.



Pisces: You will have a wonderful day at work. Try to get plenty of fresh air, otherwise you'll feel nervy which will make you slightly accident-prone. You might eat or drink too much today.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

- License (6)
- Common sense (4)
- Serendipity (4)
- Brief turbulent storm (6)
- Premeditated (7)
- Circling bird of prey (7)
- Detective (6)
- Penalty (4)
- Obligation (4)
- Sovereign's stand-in (6)

Down

- Canvass (4)
- Bring to mind (6)
- Elliptical (4)
- Puzzled out (6)
- Compress (7)
- Yearly allowance (7)
- Swore (6)
- Extol (6)
- Gusto (4)
- Retained (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Hierarchy, 6. Rusty, 7. China, 9. Seek, 10. Rebuff, 12. Reduce, 14. Stub, 17. Moist, 18. Aware, 19. Telegraph.

Down: 2. Issue, 3. Rays, 4. Racket, 5. Haiku, 6. Rostrum, 8. Affable, 11. Scythe, 13. Drive, 15. Trump, 16. Fair.

Word Mine

K
N N C
I A G P U

TODAY'S RATINGS: 11 AVERAGE; 13 GOOD; 15 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

jumble

TAHSS
CHNEE
GPDOAA
NPHOCO

Yesterday's Jumbles: AGAIN GECKO THORAX OUTBID
Answer: In "The Wizard of Oz," when Toto escaped from Miss Gulch, she thought — DOGGONE IT



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & Craig Boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



bridge
PHILLIP
ALDER
WAS IT
COURAGEOUS
OR
FOOLHARDY?

Mary Tyler Moore said, "Pain nourishes courage. You can't be brave if you've only had wonderful things happen to you."

This deal occurred during a French tournament some years ago. Jean-Pierre Carde

(West) missed a chance for a truly courageous play. The auction by Laurent Bouscarel (South) and Jean-Christophe Quantin was lengthy but reasonable. Following South's two-heart reverse, three diamonds was game-forcing. North would have rebid a conventional two no-trump with a weak hand.

Declarer won the first trick with his club ace, drew trumps and played a heart to dummy's nine. After it held

North	South
♠ A Q J 9	♠ 10 8 7 6 5 2
♥ 10 9 2	♥ 7 4 4
♦ 9 8 3	♦ 7 4
♣ 3 10 8 2	♣ 4
South	North
♠ Q 8 6 2 9	♠ A K 6 5
♥ A K 6 5	♥ 10 9 2
♦ A K 6 5	♦ 7 4
♣ 3 10 8 2	♣ 4
Dealer: North	Values: North-South
West	East
♠ Pass	♠ Pass
♥ Pass	♥ Pass
♦ Pass	♦ Pass
♣ NT	♣ Pass
♠ Pass	♠ Pass
♥ Pass	♥ Pass
♦ Pass	♦ Pass
♣ Pass	♣ Pass
Opening lead: ♠ Q	

the trick, Bouscarel continued with the spade ace (discarding a club) and the spade queen, preparing to throw a second club. When East covered with the king, South ruffed, played a heart to dummy's ace, threw his second club loser on the spade ace and run the heart 10 through East? If so, the contract would have failed, South having to lose a club trick as well.

Nicely done by declarer, but Carde realized he had missed a great chance. Suppose, on the first heart

lead, he had bravely played the king. Wouldn't South, placing the heart jack with East, have won with dummy's ace, thrown one club on the spade ace and run the heart 10 through East? If so, the contract would have failed, South having to lose a club trick as well.

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SHORT TAKES

Milkha is stable & out of Covid ICU

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

Japan to set 10k spectator-cap

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

Federer suffers defeat in Halle

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

Karun joins UK Board of Directors

Chennai: In a big honour for India's Karun Chandhok, the former Formula 1 driver was on Wednesday appointed to the Board of Directors of Motorsport UK, the governing body for four-wheel racing in the island nation. Chandhok is one of the only two Indian drivers to have made it to Formula 1 with the other being Narain Karthikeyan. “I feel very honoured to be invited onto the Board of Motorsport UK. I moved to England from India nearly twenty years ago because the belief at the time was that if you wanted to get to Formula 1, you had to come and race in the UK as it was the capital of world motorsport. “To now have the opportunity to work with the rest of the Board and the Motorsport UK organisation in shaping the future landscape of motorsport in the UK is very exciting,” said Chandhok, who has become the governing body's youngest ever board member.

Live on TV

EURO

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

COPA AMERICA

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

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Shot in the foot

Germany go down as Hummels kicks into own net

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POGBA PLAYS DOWN RUEDIGER 'BITE'

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

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

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

— AFP



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

Injury mars Russia win

St. Petersburg, June 16:

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

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

Russia	1
(Aleksei Miranchuk 45+2)	
Finland	0

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

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

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

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

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

EMOTIONAL DENMARK TO FACE BELGIUM

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

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

UKRAINE, MACEDONIA DESPERATE FOR WIN

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

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

DUTCH & AUSTRIA EYE MOMENTUM

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

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

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

Ronaldo breaks scoring record

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

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

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

SURPASSES LEGEND PLATINI

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

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

Hungary	0
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Milestone man

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

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

■ First player to appear in 5 Euro final tournaments.

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

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

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

— AFP



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

CR7 snub takes fizz out of Cola

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

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

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

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

The market valuation of Coca-Cola went from USD 242 billion to USD 238 billion, a fall of USD 4 billion. Reacting to the incident, Coca-Cola in a statement said “everyone is entitled to their drink preferences” with different “tastes and needs”.

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

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

POGBA REMOVES BEER BOTTLE

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

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

INDIA DISMISS BEAUMONT BUT ENGLAND CONSOLIDATE

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

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

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

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

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

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

ENVY OF WORLD

Gavaskar says India's batting depth is highly admirable

New Delhi, June 16:

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

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

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

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

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

TAYLOR SAYS KOHLI & CO. HAVE SET BAR REALLY HIGH

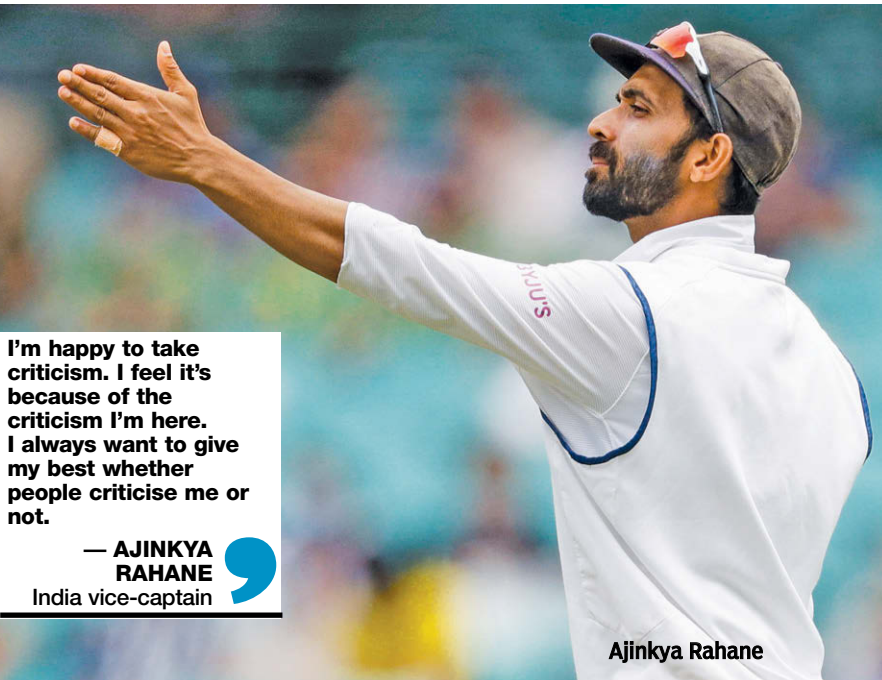
Southampton, June 16: Senior New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor has said India have set the bar really high and considering their bench strength, it will be an extremely tough battle for his team during the World Test Championship final beginning June 18. “You go through the Indian line-up, all world-class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

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

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

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

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



SOUTHEE BATS FOR CHANGE OF FORMAT

Southampton, June 16:

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

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

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

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

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

tion,” said Gavaskar.

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

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

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

“And will have the drive and energy since they haven't played competitive cricket for over a month.”

Gavaskar said India's “enormous self-belief” will drive them in England's changing weather conditions which pose a challenge to the batsmen. “India have a terrific new ball attack and spinners who can take advantage of any pitch.” — AFP