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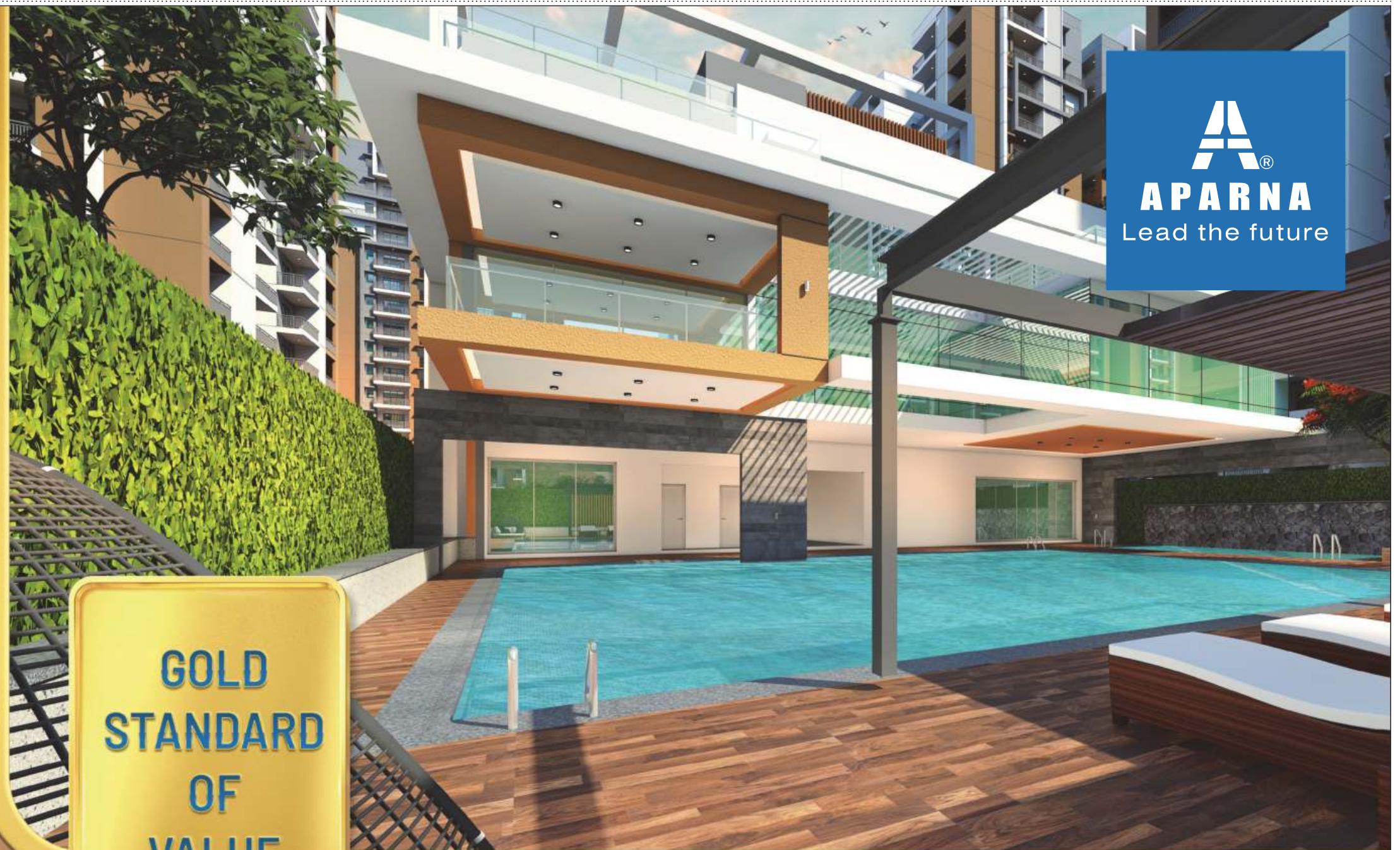
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NEARBY



COVID: Telangana records 1,556 new cases

HYDERABAD: Telangana recorded 1,556 new cases during the 24-hour period till 5.30 pm on Tuesday.

HYDERABAD ▶ PAGE 2

Revenue from registration on rise

HYDERABAD: Revenue from Registration and Stamps department continues to be on the upswing since the resumption of registration from May 31.

TELANGANA ▶ PAGE 4

OPORTUNITIES ▶ PAGE 5

Delhi riots: 3 student activists get bail

HC slams police for 'casually' invoking anti-terror law, says 'right to protest' not same as 'terrorist activity'

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday granted bail to Jawaharlal Nehru University students Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal and Jamia Millia Islamia student Asif Iqbal Tanha, arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in connection with the northeast Delhi riots in 2020.

In its order, the court rebuked the Delhi Police for "casually" invoking provisions of the anti-terror law against the three accused, who had protested against the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), noting that the line between the constitutionally guaranteed "right to protest" and "terrorist activity" had been blurred.

"We are constrained to say, that it appears, that in its

anxiety to suppress dissent and in the morbid fear that matters may get out of hand, the state has blurred the line between the constitutionally

guaranteed 'right to protest' and 'terrorist activity,'" a Bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Anup Jairam Bhambhani observed.

Chain of events | A brief timeline of the case

- Feb. 22-26, 2020: Violence and rioting take place in northeast Delhi
- March 6: Delhi Police register FIRs, slapping sections of UAPA, against various persons
- May 19: Police arrest Jamia Millia Islamia student Asif Iqbal Tanha in UAPA case
- May 23: Police arrest JNU students Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita
- May 29: Kalita and Narwal arrested in UAPA case
- May 24: Court grants bail to Narwal and Kalita, observing they were merely protesting against the passage of CAA. Both are arrested moments later in another case
- Jan. 28, 2021: Trial court rejects bail plea of Kalita and Narwal
- June 8: Delhi HC grants interim bail to Tanha so that he can appear for exams
- June 15: HC grants regular bail to Tanha, Narwal and Kalita



required in Hyderabad. One such centre is already operational in Singapore, the CJI, who was in Hyderabad on a three-day visit to the State, said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8
RELATED REPORT ▶ PAGE 4

CJI proposes global arbitration centre in Hyderabad

'Discussions held with Singapore Chief Justice on the subject'

MARRI RAMU
HYDERABAD

An International Arbitration Centre (IAC) in Hyderabad would be reality if the State government is ready to provide infrastructural facilities, said Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana on Tuesday.

The CJI in an informal discussion with Telangana High Court legal correspondents at Raj Bhavan here, said bringing the IAC to Hyderabad was his dream. Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao readily agreed to create all facilities

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8
RELATED REPORT ▶ PAGE 4

"If such blurring gains traction, democracy would be in peril," the Bench asserted.

The three activists, arrested in May last year, have been named in multiple FIRs in relation to the riots. They were granted bail by local courts in the other riots-related cases but denied bail in the FIR where the stringent UAPA provisions were invoked against them.

The High Court remarked that the chargesheet lacked "any specific, particularised, factual allegations" that would make out the ingredients of offences under the UAPA.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

AY.1 not a variant of concern yet: Centre

Found in Maharashtra, A.P., Telangana

Virus alert

A look at the new variant of the coronavirus

- 63 genomes of AY.1, or B.1.617.2.1, identified till June 7 on global repository GISAID, including 14 from the U.S., 13 from Japan and 6 from India
- The U.K. has identified 35 genomes of AY.1
- It is also called the Delta Plus variant
- It has a mutation called K417N, previously identified in the Beta variant and

A health worker collecting swabs from a child on the outskirts of Jammu, PTI

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday formally acknowledged occurrence of AY.1, a coronavirus variant that is closely related to the prevailing Delta variant.

AY.1, or B.1.617.2.1, has a mutation called K417N that is linked to high infectivity and has been associated with the Beta variant, first identified in South Africa.

"This [AY.1] was first identified in March in Europe but brought into the public domain only two days ago," said V.K. Paul, Chairman, National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration of COVID-19, at a press conference.

"Yes, a new variant has been found. It's not yet a variant of concern, or one which has adverse consequences to humanity. We don't know much about it yet and are studying it, including the prevalence in India."

As *The Hindu* reported on Monday, five Indian laboratories submitted data on this variant in May and June to GISAID, a global repository. Public Health England, a U.K. body, said of the 63 genomes in the GISAID repository as of June 7, six were from India.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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|----------------------|------------|-----------|
| WEDNESDAY, JUN. 16 | | |
| RISE 05:42 | SET 18:52 | |
| THURSDAY, JUN. 17 | | |
| RISE 05:42 | SET 18:52 | |
| FRIDAY, JUN. 18 | RISE 11:33 | SET 00:00 |
| RISE 05:42 | SET 18:52 | |
| SATURDAY, JUN. 19 | RISE 12:27 | SET 00:19 |

| Hyderabad Weather | max | min |
|-------------------|-----|-----|
| Sangareddy | 33 | 23 |
| Warangal | 33 | 22 |
| Hyderabad City | 33 | 23 |

Hyderabad City Today
32°C Day will be warm and humid. Night also will be humid. Chances of rain and thundershower.

Hyderabad City Tomorrow
33°C Weather will be warm and humid. Night will be comfortable. Spell of rain or thundershower to occur.

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Lockdown: MGNREGS sees drastic drop

Over 30% reduction in the work generated compared to first wave of COVID-19 pandemic

SWATHI VADLAMUDI
HYDERABAD

Workers registered for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) are a disappointed lot this year during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A study by the NGO Libtech India for the months of April and May this year has concluded that there was drastic drop in person-days generated by way of employment guarantee when compared with last year's first wave. There has been a drop of 30 per cent in the work generated, as visible from the person-days coming down from 8.27 crore of last year to 5.85 crore corresponding to the two months.



Telangana has about 1.2 crore registered workers from 54.2 lakh families. ■ FILE PHOTO

Only three out of the 31 districts, Medchal, Gadwal and Asifabad, clocked increase in the person-days during the two months, the study noted citing statistics from the government website. When viewed separately,

the month of April showed higher employment generation when compared to the corresponding month last year. Around 17 lakh households received employment during April this year, while 15 lakh households

were covered during the same month last year. A total of 3.2 crore person-days were generated in the month this year, as against 2.2 crore last year.

However, the figures dropped steeply for the month of May. Only 2.6 crore person-days have been generated in the month this year, as compared to six crore person-days last year for the corresponding period. Number of households employed came down from 10 lakh to mere 4.3 lakh. More than 85 per cent village panchayats have seen a decline in person-days generated when compared with last year, the study analysed, attributing it to the local governments unilaterally halt-

ing the works. As the government laid off field assistants two years ago, there was nobody to persuade and counsel them for the works to continue. Last year during initial days of the lockdown financial schemes by the State and Central government moderated the impact of the economic crisis. This year, no such schemes have been announced, which made the employment guarantee works the only fallback option for the poorest and most vulnerable rural population, the study noted.

Telangana has about 1.2 crore registered workers from 54.2 lakh families, most of whom migrate to neighbouring States for work.

Three arrested for murder of youth

STAFF REPORTER
HYDERABAD

Three persons were apprehended in connection with the murder of a 22-year-old man, Syed Zubair Ali alias Kachra Ali, a fruit vendor, on suspicion that he was a police informer. Hussaini Alam police, who are investigating the case, identified the accused as Salam Bin Abdulla Basloom (23), and Md Muzaffer Ali Khan (19), both residents of Qazipura. The third accused is Tariq Ali (19) of Chandrayangutta.

Murder accused held
Bahadarpura police on Tuesday apprehended Md Abdul Gaffar, one of the six accused in the alleged murder of a 24-year-old history sheeter Mohd Ajaz, a resi-

dent of Chiragalli Nagar. Police said that Ajaz attempted to kill Gaffar last year after which a case was booked, and pending trial. Holding a grudge against Ajaz, the accused attacked and killed him.

Man murdered
A 32-year-old man S Javeed, a daily wage earner, was murdered near his house in Dawood basti, Jagadgirigutta police said on Tuesday. Around 6.30 p.m. on Monday, Javeed and the accused, identified as Srihari alias Osman (25) had an argument. "It was a trivial issue over which Osman stabbed the victim 10 to 11 times. Neither the victim nor the accused are rowdy-sheeters," a police officer said.

IN BRIEF



IRCTC's North India pilgrimage special train

HYDERABAD

IRCTC South Central Zone has launched 'Pilgrim Special Tourist Train' originating from Renigunta via Vijayawada, Nalgonda, Secunderabad, Kazipet, Peddapalli and Ramagundam to Uttara Bharat Yatra, starting on August 27. Interested citizens can contact on phones - 040-27702407, 9701360701, 8287932228, 8287932229, 8287932231 - www.irctctourism.com.

THE HINDU
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Water Board clarifies about 20,000-litre free water scheme

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD



Even if there is a meter, if it is not functional, bills will be issued.

be given the supply. Even if there is a meter, if it is not functional, bills will be issued.

With regard to multi-storied buildings and complexes, unless all the flat owners establish Aadhaar linkage, the full rebate will not be applicable to the complexes.

The board has also informed about a mobile application 'HMWSSB 20KL Free Water Registration' for Aadhaar linkage online, which can be downloaded from the Google Play Store.

owners who have linked their Aadhaar. As the government has allowed opportunity to link the Aadhaar between December 1 and April 30, bills for five months have been issued without penal component since May 1 for all the connections without Aadhaar linkage.

Mobile app
After May 1 too, the consumers with functional meters may link their Aadhaar with CAN, but the scheme will be applicable from the day of the linkage, and not before that.

After May 1 too, the consumers with functional meters may link their Aadhaar with CAN, but the scheme will be applicable from the day of the linkage, and not before that.

Lorry driver murdered after tiff

HYDERABAD

A lorry driver working for a packing and moving company was murdered in Prem Nagar under Miyapur PS limits. Police said that the victim Shaik Farooq (39) was on his way home in New Hafizpet when one Mahboob got into an altercation with him, following which the latter smashed his head with a rock.

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IN BRIEF



KTR lays stone for a string of projects

NALGONDA
Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development K.T. Rama Rao laid the foundation for a 100-bed hospital at Nakrekal, among a string of projects, during a whirlwind tour on Tuesday. Apart from the proposed hospital and an integrated market, Mr. Rao along with local legislator C. Lingaiah and District Collector Prashant J Patil inaugurated the Rythu Vedika.

Oxygen concentrators donated

MEDAK
Haryana-based Sehgal foundation donated 15 oxygen concentrators to Medak district on Tuesday. They were handed over to Collector S. Harish by foundation representatives Shankar Naik, Aslam and Ramulu Naik. Thanking the foundation representatives for the kind gesture, Mr. Harish said that these concentrators would be shifted to Primary Health Centre (PHC) for use.

Police step up outreach to tribals

BHADRADRI-KOTHAGUDEM

Amid the COVID-19

pandemic, the district police have scaled up the outreach activities by distributing water filters and mosquito nets to Adivasis in remote tribal pockets. The district police have so far distributed more than 2500 water filters and hundreds of mosquito nets and over 65 television sets in several Gutti Koya tribal habitations.

Journalist Raghu out on bail

STAFF REPORTER

NALGONDA

Ganji Raghu, a reporter with an online news portal, who was picked by policemen in plainclothes earlier this month, was released from Nalgonda district jail on conditional bail on Tuesday.

A resident of Malkajgiri in Hyderabad, Raghu was seen on CCTV footage being forced into a car by unidentified men on June 3, and following the incident his whereabouts remained unknown.

The Suryapet police later said Mr. Raghu was picked up by its personnel for his alleged involvement in a riot situation and related violations at Gurrambodu Tanda under Mattampally police limits in February.

The 'arrest' caused an uproar and witnessed strong reaction from association of journalists, backward classes, political parties and voluntary organisations.

"I will respect the Court's directions, but I am not stepping back. As a journalist, people issues are my agenda and my 13-day experience in the jail has increased that responsibility," he said.

Revenue from registration on rise

Department reports ₹220 cr. revenue in 12 days

M. RAJEEV

HYDERABAD

Revenue from the Registration and Stamps department continues to be on the upswing since the resumption of the registration of non-agricultural properties from May 31.

The department had processed 27,837 documents since resumption till Monday reporting revenue of ₹220.09 crore in the 12 working days, at an average of over ₹16 crore a day. Registration of non-agricultural properties which started on a sedate note on May 31 with ₹74 lakh revenue through 578 documents grew subsequently reporting more than ₹20 crore revenue a day several days since the resumption of the process.

And, the number of registrations has been on the rise since the easing of restrictions allowing functioning of the offices of sub-registrars till 5 pm as in the past rather than the restricted timings during which they were allowed to function. The de-



Registration in progress at the Sub-Registrar's office at Vallabh Nagar in Hyderabad. ■ FILE PHOTO

partment reported revenue of more than ₹20 crore on seven of the 12 days during which it functioned with a high of ₹28.44 crore on June 5 through processing of 899 documents.

Though registrations picked up significantly since the resumption of the process, they could not be taken up on full scale as the offices of the sub-registrars and district registrars are allowed to open for four hours day from 9 am to 1 pm since May 31.

This limited the scope for number of transactions allowing only 24 a day in the offices where there is single sub-registrar and 48 in the offices where there are two sub-registrars.

Coupled with this were three public holidays on account of two Sundays and a second Saturday while transactions were disrupted for two more days on account of technical glitches. The central server of the department placed at the State Data

Centre faced technical problems for two days slowed down the registration process. Registrations were partly affected in some areas including key areas surrounding the GHMC area from where the bulk of the revenue is expected to be generated. Officials told *The Hindu* that the technical glitches resulted in reduction of the number of transactions and thereby, the revenue for two days. "The issue is technical and it is not related to the number of documents being processed. It has been resolved completely now," the official said.

It may be recalled that the government had set a stiff target of ₹12,000 crore revenue through Registrations and Stamps during the current financial year, averaging about ₹1,000 crore a month and the progress was impressive in April when it reported revenue in excess of ₹700 crore. The process however suffered setback after the lockdown imposed since May 12.

TRS continues its rant against Eatala

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) has alleged that former minister Eatala Rajender who joined Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday had prepared his script of switching loyalty six years ago itself and his oversight of issues concerning the State during his meeting with national leaders of BJP was an indication of it.

Government Chief Whip Mr. Vinay Bhaskar observed here on Tuesday that Mr. Rajender's fight was not for self-respect but for his existence and an attempt to safeguard his properties acquired illegally. Stating that people of Telangana were unable to digest Mr. Rajender's switch to BJP, he said the way he was admitted into party itself, in a luke-warm manner, was an indication of his stature there.

Speaking to news persons, Mr. Vinay Bhaskar sought to know why Mr. Rajender who joined BJP in the presence of Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan did not even raise the issue of skyrocketing price of petrol and diesel.

Summer holidays extended

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

The State government has extended the summer holidays for all schools and DIET colleges across the State by five days till June 20 in view of the pandemic. The Director of School Education said orders were issued earlier extending the summer holidays in schools and DIET colleges till June 15.

Saving a Mumbai heritage tree from Hyderabad



Vata Foundation is being called by others too

V. GEETANATH

HYDERABAD

Nearly a month after the giant 110-year-old Banyan tree was uprooted when Cyclone Tauktae hit Mumbai and the suburbs there are signs of fresh life with new leaves sprouting on the tree in the translocated spot in a Bandra reclaimed land.

The shoots have brought a smile on the face of Vata Foundation's founder-trustee P. Uday Krishna after a while, as he has been fighting

for a legal battle to save the trees marked for felling on the Gandipet road here.

"Sign of new leaves in the first translocated tree has been a source of happiness for all the volunteers. We have been able to save eight trees, all of them more than 50 years and some are up to 100-years-old, with the help of the local people and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). We have another 20 identified as 'heritage' trees for translocation. Work has been halted because of recent rains," he says. Citizens from Mumbai contacted him after they read about how he and his fellow volunteers successful-

ly saved a giant tree after it got uprooted in the Arambol beach in Goa last year.

"With COVID travel restrictions I was in a dilemma, but luckily I had two volunteer friends who have moved to Mumbai – Marc Francis and Jaryd – and with their active participation, we have been able to save the huge decades-old trees," explains Mr. Krishna.

The tricky issues where some roots got cut and another tree which got arched onto a dangerous angle were successfully tackled with help of video calls. Banyan, Peepal, and the likes were taken up for translocation but Gulmo-

hurs were left since roots were found to be brittle.

Donations were accepted from the citizens this time as the Foundation had to employ labour and contract machinery there though permissions from Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation were "quick and prompt".

"We have also been contacted by the Nagpur railway authorities to shift 4,000 trees to alternate site either of the railways or private lands as construction of a building is due. Most of the trees are 50 years or more, currently we are trying to enumerate them and our plan is to save a majority of them, if not all," adds Mr. Krishna.

Transformer explodes at sub-station

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BHADRADRI-KOTHAGUDEM

A major fire broke out after a transformer exploded at the Transmission Corporation of Telangana Limited (TSTRANSCO)'s 220 KV sub-station at Seetharamapatnam in Palvancha mandal and the remaining two from Mulakanapalli in Dummugudem mandal on Tuesday.

An old transformer at the sub-station suddenly exploded with a deafening sound around 6.30 am. Fire tenders from Palvancha, Manuguru and Bhadrachalam rushed to the spot and the fire brigade personnel doused the flames after a three-hour operation, sources said.

No one was injured in the incident the transformer and some other equipment at the sub-station were gutted, resulting in huge damage.

Officials launched an inquiry into the incident.

19 Maoists lay down arms

SP reiterates appeal to naxals

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BHADRADRI-KOTHAGUDEM

As many as 19 militia members and village committee members of the CPI (Maoist) Charla Area Committee surrendered before the police in Kothagudem on Tuesday, police said.

Presenting them before the media in Kothagudem on Tuesday evening, Mr. Sunil Dutt said regular community policing and the government's developmental activities in the Maoist affected areas coupled with a desire to lead a better life prompted the militia and village committee members of the banned outfit to surrender.

The Superintendent of Police reiterated his appeal to all Maoist leaders, cadre and militia members to join the mainstream.

Maoist militia and village committee members, 10 hail from interior Puligundala village and seven from Bakachinthalapadu in Charla mandal and the remaining two from Mulakanapalli in Dummugudem mandal.

Three women militia members were among those who gave themselves up before Superintendent of Police Sunil Dutt and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officials of the 141 Battalion in the district headquarters town.

This is the second biggest

surrender after 33 Maoist

militia and village committee members surrendered before the district police in November last year, police sources added.

Of these 19 surrendered

CJI offers prayers at Yadagirigutta temple

N.V. Ramana also visits work-in-progress on temple

STAFF REPORTER

YADAGIRIGUTTA

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana along with his wife offered prayers at the hill shrine of Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy here on Tuesday.



Chief Justice of India N. V. Ramana at the Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple at Yadagirigutta on Tuesday.

■ ARRANGEMENT

inside the temple. And he opined that the temple was ideally constructed to encourage devotion for generations to come, an official said.

The Chief Justice of India, who was on a three-day visit to the State, spent at least three hours on the hill shrine, admiring the temple work and also inspected the under-construction temple

city, presidential suites, pilgrim cottages and the landscape gardens, before leaving for Hyderabad at around 11.45 a.m.

hundi.

Yadadri Temple Development Authority vice chairman and CEO G. Kishan Rao and the temple's architect Ananda Sai later escorted the CJI and his family for a tour of the finished main temple which is now in the trial stage for electrical and lighting works, in the annex.

Justice Ramana, according to officials, was all praise for the sculptors and the project team, for the intricate carvings, the gopurams and the embellished themes

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH



Mr. K.S. Sankaranarayanan (Varadhan)

DOB: 25.08.1944 - DOD: 13.06.2021

Asst Manager - Cash (Retd),

Ashok Leyland

Passed away on June 13th, 2021

You lived an Exemplary Life!

Deeply Mourned by

Family, Relatives and Friends

PH : 044 - 2596 2536

DEATH



Shradhanjali

Expedited on 05.06.2021

"We miss you, our hearts still ache for you, your loving smile, your dear sweet face"

Inserted by:

HUSBAND: PANDEY NARAYANA PRASAD AND FAMILY

DEATH



Mr. Y.M. Elias

4th May 1934 - 15th June 2021

The Messenger of Allah (Sallallahu'alayhi wa salam) said,

"When a person dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things"

-Sadagh Jariyah (ceaseless charity)

-Knowledge beneficial to others

-Virtuous descendants

MAY ALLAH THE MOST MERCIFUL GRANT HIM JANNAH

SEASAGA GROUP

DEATH



IN LOVING MEMORY

GAJJALA PRASAD

Nataraja Iyer & Co, Chartered Accountants

A year has passed since you left us.

We miss you every day and cherish the memories.

You are always in our hearts and we know you are looking over us.

Gajjala Family

IN LOVING MEMORY

GAJJALA PRASAD

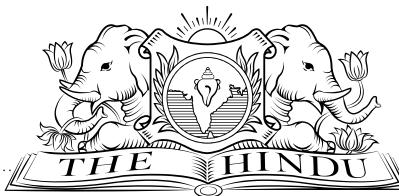
Nataraja Iyer & Co, Chartered Accountants

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Gajjala Family



The invisible tax

Emergent action is needed to rein in inflation as people face income losses, medical costs

The pandemic's second wave may have subsided but hopes of a smooth rebound in the economy in tandem with easing restrictions remain muddled, with the inflation numbers for May compounding the problem. The soaring pace of rising prices, both retail and wholesale, in the month that saw widespread lockdown-like restrictions, has come as a negative surprise. Inflation based on the Wholesale Price Index is reckoned to have hit a 25-year record of nearly 13%, while retail inflation touched a six-month high of 6.3%. While runaway fuel prices, that include high excise duties and taxes, were a key factor in driving up both the inflation indices, they were not the only ones at work. Retail inflation in food hit a six-month high of 5%, from barely 2% in April, with pulses and eggs as well as edible oils leading the surge. 'Fuel and light' inflation hit 11.6%, the highest in over nine years, and no respite is in sight on this front as pump prices for petrol raced past ₹100 a litre in even more parts of the country this month. Diesel has also crossed the century mark in Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar, where freight costs add up on top of State and central taxes. Even if one were to discount food and fuel prices, core inflation has crossed the 6% mark for the first time in 31 months and is estimated at 6.6%.

Reacting to the April retail inflation print of 4.3%, after averaging a steep 6.2% through 2020-21, the RBI Governor had remarked earlier this month that it brought some relief and 'elbow room' for sticking with growth-supportive policy. If anything, May's inflation prints leave no such room for manoeuvre. Though the bank's Monetary Policy Committee may not switch away from its dovish policy, no further easing of interest rates can be expected at these price levels. Most economists expect inflation to remain higher than the average 5.1% estimated by the central bank for this year. If the Government wants the RBI to persist with its accommodative approach to facilitate growth, it must take some actions of its own to curb price rise, including meaningful cuts in fuel taxes that the RBI Governor has been advocating since February. So far, it has only obfuscated the issue with arguments ranging from 'the States should cut taxes first' to 'let's bring petroleum products under GST', and the latest claim by the Petroleum Minister who admitted that the prices are problematic, but the Government is 'saving money to spend on welfare schemes' and buying vaccines. For a population already reeling from job and income losses and higher medical costs since the pandemic's onset, the persistently high inflation is untenable. No welfare scheme can offset its disproportionately adverse impact on the poor.

Bracing for a threat

India must be alive to the dangers of emerging variants of the coronavirus

An emerging form of the Delta variant called AY.1 is raising global concern. Five of India's leading laboratories, since May, have submitted data to the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) on its presence in India. Public Health England, a body in the United Kingdom, has said that of the 63 genomes in its repository as of June 7, six were from India. AY.1, or B.1.617.2.1, is a variant of Delta (B.1.617.2) and has all its characteristic mutations along with one called K417N. This particular one has previously been identified in the Beta variant (first detected in South Africa), which is an international variant of concern as it is highly infectious and known to reduce vaccine potency. The Delta variant is reportedly the most prevalent coronavirus variant in India and comprises close to a third of the genome samples, sourced from those with no international travel history, processed until late May. An additional concern with the K417N mutation is that some studies have found that it was associated with resistance to a newly developed monoclonal antibody treatment drug cocktail, Casirivimab and Imdevimab, for those assessed with a moderate to severe disease risk.

Scientists have said that AY.1 marks the continued evolution of the Delta variant. The Delta variant has become globally prominent in the same way as a mutation, D614G, increased the infectivity of coronavirus in March and April last year. Coronaviruses are marked by 'convergent evolution'; some defining mutations that emerge in different strains from around the world start to become more common in subsequent variants. These mutations are beneficial to the virus and, through a process of natural selection, help it infect human cells more efficiently as well as thwart defensive antibodies. Evolution is an incessant process, and it is impossible to forecast if SARS-CoV-2 will become a part of the human ecosystem – less contagious, and manifesting in sporadic outbreaks but ever present or buckling into oblivion under the force of counter-offensive measures such as vaccines, masks, lockdowns. As the virus and people continue to be engaged in a dialectical battle, humanity has a tool that has been absent in previous global pandemics – that of rapid genome sequencing. Several countries, including India, have the infrastructure and the resources to track threatening mutations. Unfortunately, the potency of a mutation to increase infectivity in a region can only be known retrospectively. However, this knowledge can help improve vaccines and enable researchers to perform quick tweaks, or in the parlance of software, develop upgraded patches that can blunt the threat from emergent variants. India has chosen to restrict genome sequencing studies to 10 government labs and not involve private labs, some of which have the capability and the expertise. Time and again, the country has suffered the consequences of a lack of preparedness. It is important not to downplay the seriousness of the threat.

America's mistakes in the 'forever war'

The U.S. misread the situation in Afghanistan, with the long war now leaving the Taliban at the height of their influence



STANLY JOHNY

President Joe Biden has set the September 11 deadline for all American troops to leave Afghanistan, winding up 20 years of the invasion by the United States. Military officials say the withdrawal would be complete about two months ahead of the schedule. The peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban that started in Doha last year have been frozen for months. The bid by the U.S. to hold a summit in Istanbul between the warring parties has been a non-starter. On the ground, the Taliban are making steady advances. Since May 1, the Taliban have seized eight districts in four different regions. At least six provisional capitals, including Kabul, Lashkar Gah (Helmand) and Kandahar, have the insurgents at their gates. As of now, about 22% of Afghanistan's 398 districts are in the Taliban's control and 24% with the government, while more than half of the country's territories are contested.

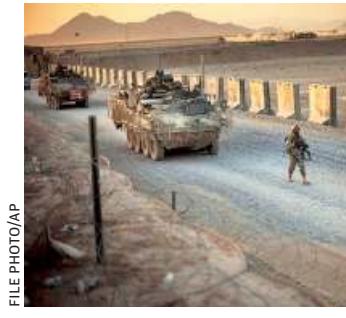
A neocon war

The longest war in America's history is also turning out to be one of its most disastrous. After 20 years of war, when the world's mightiest military is exiting Afghanistan, the Taliban, which it sought to perish, are at the height of their influence since they were driven out of power. Terrorist networks, which the U.S. vowed to destroy when it launched its global war on terror in Afghanistan, are now scattered across Asia and Africa, from eastern Afghanistan to the Sahel region. What went wrong for the U.S.?

The U.S. made three fundamental mistakes, which led to the superpower's humiliating exit from this clichéd 'graveyard of empires'.

First, the U.S. went into Afghanistan without learning anything from the country's history, or was blindsided by the unipolar hubris. Afghanistan was invaded by great powers in the 19th and 20th centuries as well. The British empire, which feared a Russian invasion to India via Afghanistan, sent troops to the country in 1839, ousted its ruler Dost Muhammad and established a client regime of its ally, Shah Shujah. But the British had to withdraw in the face of Afghan resistance, mostly by Pashtun warriors; while retreating in 1842, all of the British and Indian troops, except one doctor, were massacred by Afghans. In 1979, the Soviet Union sent troops to Afghanistan to salvage the country's nascent communist regime, orchestrated a coup and established a friendly regime. The Soviets, faced with a bloody Mujahideen resistance (which was bankrolled and trained by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), had to pull back in 1989 in ignominy. The U.S. might have thought that history would have been kinder to them when they launched the Afghan invasion in October 2001. It wasn't.

Once they invaded Afghanistan, the U.S., given the mistakes the British and the Soviets committed, could have had a strategically focused campaign, targeting its enemy, al-Qaeda, which was behind the September 11 attacks. It should have gone after the terrorists, destroyed their networks and then withdrawn. That is what a realist power would do. But the U.S., driven by the neoconservative globalism of the Bush administration, had set more ambitious goals for itself. It wanted to topple the Taliban and rebuild a centralised "de-



FILE PHOTO/AP

mocratic" state in Afghanistan. How did building democratic institutions in Afghanistan from top-down serve America's foreign policy interests? The neoconservatives in Washington might have found it fascinating, but the move made little strategic sense. And now, the U.S. is retreating, practically leaving Afghanistan to the mercy of the Taliban, in return for assurances from them that they would not assist the terrorists such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Strategic failure

After the Taliban regime was toppled and al-Qaeda driven back into the caves and mountains, the U.S. still had a chance to stabilise the country with help from its different factions and leave. In December 2001, Taliban spokesperson Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef had offered to surrender. The Taliban sought modest terms – Mullah Omar, their leader, should be allowed to return home. But the Americans rejected the offer and promised to destroy the Taliban in every corner of the country. The Taliban are an indigenous military with deep roots in Afghanistan's Pashtun majority. Toppling them from power was easy, but defeating them in their country was not. And after vowing to defeat them, the U.S. launched the Iraq invasion to topple Saddam Hussein and export democracy there. This was the second mistake.

The U.S. took Pakistan's tactical

support for its war on terror for granted, overlooking the fact that Pakistan had deep strategic ties with the Taliban. Pakistan played a double game by supporting the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan while at the same time offering refuge and support to the Taliban.

For Pakistan, the Taliban have been their wild card to check India's influence in Afghanistan. When the U.S. declared victory in Afghanistan prematurely and went on to invade Iraq in 2003, it became easier for Pakistan to assist the Taliban's regrouping, at a time when the Afghan government was grappling with corruption and infighting on ethnic lines. For the ordinary Afghans living outside the provincial capitals, life did not change much under the new government. When the U.S. got stuck in the morass of the Iraq war, the Taliban were steadily making a comeback in Afghanistan's hinterlands. By the time the U.S. shifted its focus back to Afghanistan, after defeating the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and amid growing calls at home to end the "endless wars", the Afghan war had already been lost.

Surrender to the Taliban

Granted, there is a realist case for the U.S. to leave Afghanistan. It seems to have reached the conclusion long ago that the war was one that could not be turned around. The war was also becoming increasingly unpopular at home, prompting Presidents, from Barack Obama to Donald Trump and Joe Biden, to promise to wind it up. The U.S. has also been shifting its focus to East Asia where China is rising. And given the foreign policy challenges the U.S. is facing now elsewhere, continuing troops and commitments in Afghanistan makes little sense. But the U.S. could have opted for a more orderly withdrawal. Instead, it surren-

dered to the Taliban's terms to pull back its troops. This was the third mistake.

The Taliban have not defeated the Afghan troops yet. The Afghan government has about 200,000 battle-hardened soldiers, including the U.S.-trained elite special forces. The government still controls most of the country's population centres. The Taliban's efforts to take over provincial capitals were successfully thwarted in the recent past, with air power help from the U.S. With the U.S. being present in Afghanistan, the conflict has been in a stalemate – the government not being able to defeat the insurgents and the Taliban unable to overrun the cities. The U.S. should have used this stalemate, coupled with mounting pressure on Pakistan, to extract concessions from the Taliban. Instead, the Trump administration went for talks with the Taliban on their terms. The Afghan government was kept out of the whole process because the Taliban do not recognise them as being legitimate. And the U.S. struck a direct deal with the Taliban, without addressing any of the Afghan concerns.

The American exit would now decisively shift the balance of power in favour of the Taliban. The insurgents have always known this. They have stepped up attacks and carried out targeted killings aimed at weakening the Afghan government and terrorising society immediately after signing the agreement with the U.S. in February 2020. And ever since the remaining U.S. troops started pulling back from Afghanistan on May 1, the Taliban have started capturing more territories. The war may be winding down for the Americans. But for Afghans, it will continue in one form or another.

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An acquittal with no good, but the bad and the ugly

The criminal justice system must observe the basics of a proper investigation, judicial fairness, and the survivor's rights



R.K. VIJ

The recent judgment of a trial court acquitting Tarun Tejpal, a former editor of a newsmagazine, who was charged, in 2013, of having sexually assaulted an employee, a young woman journalist, during an event the newsmagazine had organised in Goa, has created a furore and raised many questions about the law. The investigating officer has also been pulled up not only for the lapses in investigation but also for gaps in her knowledge of technology. The Goa government filed an appeal against Mr. Tejpal's acquittal in the Goa Bench of the Bombay High Court requesting an immediate hearing. The Solicitor General of India, Tushar Mehta, during the hearing, said that the lower court's judgment lacked sensitivity regarding crimes against women and awareness of the sections of criminal laws. "The law has evolved. The entire judgement proceeds as if the victim is on trial," he added.

Key changes

Back in 2002, based on the recommendations of the 172nd report of

the Law Commission of India, two major changes were made in the Evidence Act (<https://bit.ly/3xp0Elk>). First, the Act was amended to prohibit the defence counsel from asking questions to the prosecutrix in a rape case about her general character to impeach her credibility. Second, the defence was not permitted to put questions to a witness in the cross-examination about the general immoral character of the prosecutrix and adduce evidence. Even if it is hypothetically assumed that the survivor had had sexual relations with someone, it does not give any person the licence to sexually assault her. The Supreme Court of India has repeatedly said that the purpose of cross-examining a survivor of rape is not to humiliate her but to get to the truth of the case. Therefore, questions about the past sexual life of the survivor should not have been permitted to be asked by the defence counsel as they violated the survivor's right to a fair trial. The law does not permit the character assassination of a victim any more.

Stereotypical evaluation

Second, the conduct of a survivor of sexual assault cannot be cast in a straitjacket formula. Every individual behaves differently under the given circumstances. When in this case, the survivor had been entrusted with an important task/s by her boss during the event and

was afraid of losing her job by exposing her boss's crime, her dual behaviour (i.e., in the public gaze and with acquaintances) cannot be termed unnatural. It would be too stereotypical and patriarchal to expect a survivor to be seen traumatised all the time in front of everyone. The Supreme Court, in *Aparna Bhat and Ors. vs. State of Madhya Pradesh & Ors.* (2021) specifically said that courts should desist from expressing any stereotype opinion, in words spoken during proceedings, or in the course of a judicial order about women. Stereotyping excludes any individualised consideration of a person's actual circumstances and their abilities. It affects women's right to a fair trial. Therefore, the judiciary must be careful not to create inflexible standards based on preconceived notions.

Details and omissions

Third, every omission does not amount to a contradiction; omission which by necessary implica-

tion leads to conflicting versions between the statements made before the police and the court would amount to contradiction. It is trite law that the previous statements of the prosecutrix and witness can be used to shake their credibility. However, it is quite natural for a survivor to share the incident in different words and details to different individuals. She is not expected to share the same graphic details of the sexual assault on her to every individual she meets or wishes to reveal the details to. Therefore, if the statement given during the trial is substantially consistent with the statement given to the police and judicial magistrate during the investigation, the difference of details given to other individuals through email or otherwise in the form of written statements, cannot be rejected by terming them as untrustworthy. The High Court, therefore, must clarify on this vital question of the law keeping in view the nature of the offence.

Protection of identity

The Indian Penal Code was amended in 1983 and disclosure of identity of the survivor of rape by anyone was made punishable under a newly added Section 228-A. The publication of name or any matter which may make known the identity of the survivor since then is thus prohibited.

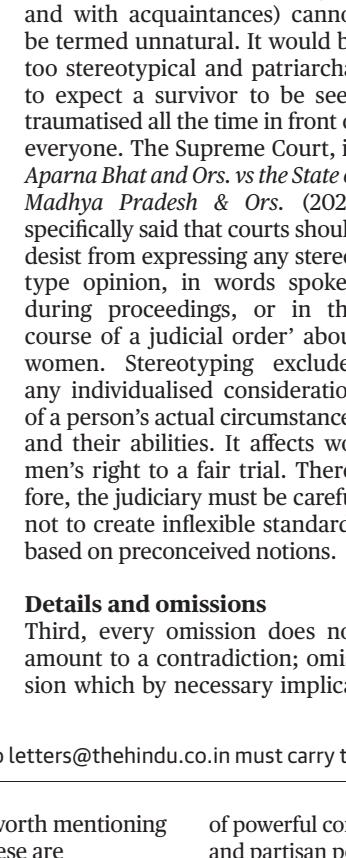
The Supreme Court in *State of*

Punjab vs. Ramdev Singh (2003) held that the name of the victim should not be mentioned in the judgments, it is of that Court, High Court or lower court, and she should be described as 'victim' in the judgment. It therefore implies that anything such as the survivor's husband's name, her email address, etc which could reveal her identity, should not have been mentioned in the judgment. It is against the spirit of the law.

Sensitisation is a must

It is true that the investigation must be unbiased, honest, just and in accordance with the law. The entire emphasis on a fair investigation has to be to bring out the truth of the case before the court. However, some lapses in investigation and ignorance about technical terms such as 'hash-value' with regard to electronic evidence, should not lead to a total rejection of the prosecution case. Many amendments have been made in the criminal laws since 1983 with regard to crimes against women. The police must pull up their socks to improve investigation skills, and the application of the law should not elude justice due to a lack of proper sensitisation among other stakeholders in the criminal justice system.

R.K. VIJ is a senior IPS officer in Chhattisgarh. The views expressed are personal



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Education in Kerala

The article, "Higher education in Kerala needs a new chapter" (Editorial page, June 14), has overlooked the fact that the linear expansion of arts and science colleges and even professional colleges' in Kerala was part of the strategy to enhance Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of the State. It is well known that Kerala could not transmit the success in its school education to its higher education sector. There are social, economic, political and historical reasons for the inter- and intra-regional inequalities in access to higher education in Kerala. According to baseline data of the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) State Higher Education Plan (I), the GER in Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode,

Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod was much lower than the State average of 21.9%, thus justifying the establishment of more higher education institutions in these districts. Setting up of more government colleges and government-regulated aided or self-financing colleges will increase the access to higher education with a very low, or reasonable and affordable fee structure. Twenty arts and science colleges from the State including four government colleges have found a place in the list of top 100 colleges in 2020 in the NIRF ranking for India by the HRD Ministry. Similarly, four aided colleges have been recently reaccredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council with a superlative grade of

A+. It is worth mentioning that all these are government-aided colleges. Concerted efforts are needed for more expenditure on higher education, both public and private. To increase the expenditure on higher education as a proportion of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) from the present 1% to the targeted 2%, Kerala needs a revamped model of public-private partnership (PPP) in higher education.

M. USMAN,
Pazhamallur, Malappuram, Kerala

of powerful communities and partisan politics. The introduction of a choice-based credit and semester system has not resulted in quality enhancement. The extreme parochialism in the affiliated colleges in terms of student diversity and the recruitment of teachers has diminished the dynamics of the teaching-learning processes. To overcome this issue, all-India exchange programmes and exposure to outside institutions are needed. The details of the knowledge society have not been worked out so we are talking about a knowledge-based economy as in the developed world?

CHANDRAN KOMATH,
Kottayam, Kerala

Bank turnaround
A close look at the numbers announced by the IOB ('Business' page, "IOB net

surges twofold to ₹350 cr. as income rises", June 15) reveals that the public sector bank has done excellently well in all key parameters.

The Government has time and again pumped in additional capital into most public banks and has also floated a new bad bank. After using tax-payer money to cleanse the balance sheets of public sector banks, how justified is the Government in planning to hand them over to private players?

THARCIUS S. FERNANDO,
Chennai

AIADMK developments
Ever since the passing of AIADMK leader Jayalalithaa, there has been much speculation about the future of the AIADMK, but Monday's developments (Page 1, "OPS is dy. leader of AIADMK legislature party", June 15) should prove that

the party's second rung leaders can pull through on contentious issues. If the party manages to stonewall any attempt by its former interim general secretary V.K. Sasikala to "capture the party" and also stay united, it has a chance of knocking on the door of power again.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

TASMAC sales

The report, "On day one, ₹164 cr. worth liquor sold" (Tamil Nadu, June 15), was stunning. The volume of sales points to a rush and crowding. The public must realise that the goal now is to flatten the pandemic curve and not wantonly try and break the rules under the pretext of freedom.

A.J. R

Needed: full disclosure on electoral bonds

The Supreme Court's suggestion to 'match the following' on political donations is impractical and incorrect



RAKESH DUBBUDU & INAYAT SABHIKHI

In 2014, the Delhi High Court held that both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were guilty of illegally accepting donations from two companies registered in India but whose controlling shareholder was Vedanta, a foreign company. The court held that this was in contravention of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 1976, as the donations accrued from "foreign sources" within the meaning of law.

Following this indictment, the two parties came together in the last memorable bipartisan move. In 2016 and 2018, the government amended the FCRA through the annual Finance Bills, to retrospectively legalise the violations. The amendments and subsequent changes brought in by the current government enabled new and regressive pathways that afford full anonymity to corporate and foreign political donors.

A new form of anonymity

While recently hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), the Supreme Court downplayed the concerns of the corrupting influence of anonymous corporate and foreign money. It offered us voters the suggestion of "match the following".

Earlier, only profit-making domestic companies could contribute to political parties; now loss-making companies can too. Earlier, foreign companies or companies where the controlling stake was held by a foreign company couldn't contribute; now they can. India's political parties could theoretically be fully funded by a foreign company operating in India or by a foreign entity through a shell company.

In 2017, the then Finance Minister said anonymous cash donations to political parties would be reduced from ₹20,000 to ₹2,000 to ensure greater transparency in political funding. However, the concurrent introduction of electoral bonds brought a new form of anonymity to



thousands of crores of donations. It drastically reduced public and legislative oversight. Only the ruling party via the State Bank of India (SBI) has a full account of all donations being made via electoral bonds, to itself and to Opposition parties. Parliament, the Election Commission and the Opposition parties do not have this information, nor do the public.

The ADR PIL challenges electoral bonds as unconstitutional. In March 2021, the Supreme Court refused to stay the sale of electoral bonds before the West Bengal elections. Instead, the judgment listed several documents which supposedly establish a paper trail on donations – "all that is required is a little more effort to cull out such information from both sides (purchaser of bond and political party) and do some 'match the following'".

This is impractical and plainly incorrect. The Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005 enables easier access to information held by public authorities. No ordinary person has the resources to navigate documents on obfuscating government websites or pore over income tax returns. The few civic and non-profit organisations that attempt to simplify information to enable accountability have been systematically delegitimised.

Suggesting a "match the following" is incorrect for three reasons. If we set aside individual donors and focus just on registered entities, we will find that the full scale of registered entities is unknown. Even if registered companies filed annual financial statements, many do not disclose political donations. Crucially, political parties do not need to disclose their electoral bond donors either.

According to back-of-the-envelope calculations, there are close to 25 lakh potential donors comprising just companies and firms. This includes about 12.6 lakh active private limited companies as of January 31, 2021. Unlike what is stated in the judgment, the annual reports of all these companies are not readily accessible on the website of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. More than 12 lakh firms filed income tax returns for the assessment year 2018-19. Firms, unlike companies, have no regulatory mandate to submit their annual reports except for filing their annual tax returns, since their functioning is regulated by Acts other than the Companies Act of 2013.

Even if these documents are indeed filed and available in the public domain, they will not specify donations to parties. Conveniently, the Finance Bill of 2017 amended Section 182 of the Companies Act of 2013 to remove the requirement for declaring disaggregated donations to political parties. At best, company statements might have a total aggregate amount of all donations, including philanthropic ones. If we are lucky, these might be sub-categorised as "political contributions through electoral bonds." Nowhere are donations to specific political parties required to be mentioned.

Even if one combs through these documents to find an actual political donation, there is nothing to match it with. Political parties do not need to disclose their electoral bond donors. Strictly speaking, political parties are not even supposed to know their electoral bond donors. The only requirement is the annual audit reports with a total of all donations received via electoral bonds. These

reports are submitted with great delays. For instance, the audit reports for 2019-20 of major national parties were made available on the Election Commission's website only a few days ago. The BJP's report is not yet available as the Election Commission extended the deadline for the submission of Annual Audit Reports for 2019-20 to June 30, 2021. Even if these reports are submitted on time, there is no way to match a donation of a company to that received by a political party as only aggregate amounts are available.

Hence, the "match the following" suggestion of the Supreme Court falls flat on its face. It is impossible for an average voter to pore over documents of lakhs of entities and track potential company and firm donors. Further, recipient-wise information is unavailable. Unlike the tall claims of electoral bonds enabling transparency, it is only RTI applications with the SBI that offer a glimpse into the crores of money funding political parties, and therefore influencing public policies. If they chose to, the Supreme Court or the legislature could order full and real-time disclosure, to the actual benefit of transparency and accountability. Instead, meagre civil society resources are expended in filing PILs and RTI applications, at significant personal risk.

Winners and losers

In effect, electoral bonds give political power to companies, wealthy individual donors, and foreign entities, thus diluting the universal franchise of one voter-one vote. Every vote is not equally valuable if companies can influence policies through hidden donations. The winner of this arrangement is the ruling party, whether at the Centre or in a State, and the loser is the average voter. Companies and political parties could exercise moral leadership and voluntarily disclose the identity of recipients and donors, as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha recently did. Till then, voters are stuck with a ruling party with war chests of resources, being subject to relentless election campaigns, while donors surreptitiously and directly influence policy.

Rakesh Dubbudu is the founder of @FactlyIndia; Inayat Sabhikhi is associated with the National Campaign for People's Right to Information

A paradigm shift in vaccination

The COVID-19 vaccination drive demonstrates that India has become Atmanirbhar in vaccination against infectious diseases



VIJAY CHAUTHAIWALE

In his address to the nation about the new vaccination policy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "If you look at the history of vaccinations in India... you will see that India would have to wait decades for procuring vaccines from abroad. When vaccination programmes ended in other countries, it wouldn't have even begun in our country." His remark reflected the harsh reality of the past. Further, indigenous manufacturing of vaccines not only started late but also fell short of the demand for long. This forced the government to continue relying on imports.

Delay in vaccination

Infectious diseases have been an enormous challenge for independent India. Innumerable lives were lost due to delayed response or government apathy. The best example for this is the case of polio. The Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV) and Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) were licensed abroad in 1955 and 1961, respectively. But it took two decades since international availability for India to initiate mass vaccination. The OPV was introduced through the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) in urban and rural populations in 1978 and 1981, respectively. Prior to the launch of mass vaccination, India was witnessing more than 10,000 officially recorded cases of polio annually, a severe underestimate due to poor official records. India could have saved lakhs of people from the disease if governments had been vigilant and started vaccination earlier.

Moreover, India had to rely on imports for both OPV and IPV. The OPV was produced by the Pasteur Institute of India, Tamil Nadu, but the Health Ministry closed down this unit in 1974. The IPV could not be manufactured as it was licensed only in 2006.

Similarly, India started mass vaccination for Hepatitis B two decades after commercial availability of the vaccine in the U.S. in 1982. The Hepatitis B vaccination was introduced in India's Universal Immunisation Programme in 2002. And even then, it was only introduced in merely 14 cities.

Earlier, the shortage of indigenously manufactured vaccines led to international dependence and delayed smallpox eradication in India. In 1962, almost a decade after North America and Europe had eradicated smallpox, India launched the National Smallpox

Eradication Programme. Most countries had shifted to the highly potent freeze-dried vaccine for better results. While India had adequate stock of domestically produced low-potency liquid vaccine, there was no production of the freeze-dried vaccine. The country depended almost entirely on the Soviet Union and the World Health Organization (WHO) for supply of the freeze-dried vaccine. Domestic production started in the early 1960s with assistance from the WHO and UNICEF. However, it took the country more than a decade to gradually expand domestic production. This might have been too late. States like Bihar and West Bengal witnessed a smallpox outbreak in 1974 which led to the death of close to 31,000 people. This could have been avoided if the Indira Gandhi government did not neglect smallpox eradication and augmented indigenous manufacturing of the freeze-dried vaccine. India also had to rely on the WHO for bifurcated needles required for the smallpox vaccine as these were not manufactured domestically. In sharp contrast now, Indian companies not only fulfill the domestic demand but are also supplying syringes for COVID-19 vaccination to countries.

A remarkable achievement

As Mr. Modi noted, the COVID-19 vaccination drive demonstrates that India has become Atmanirbhar in vaccination against infectious diseases. One must appreciate the scale of mass vaccination happening in the country; in a single day, up to 4.3 million beneficiaries received the COVID-19 vaccines. It is a remarkable achievement that India is conducting the world's largest vaccination drive ever and has already administered more than 25 crore doses. Moreover, rather than starting from selected areas, citizens across the country are simultaneously getting vaccinated. Indians did not have to wait longer than the developed world to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Covishield and Covaxin, manufactured in India, have been available to the people since January 16, 2021. India is one of the few countries across the globe with an indigenously developed vaccine. It is expected that a few more COVID-19 vaccines manufactured in India will be available in the second half of 2021.

The government's decision to make the vaccine available free of cost for the public shows a strong commitment to public health. There is little doubt that the COVID-19 vaccination drive marks a paradigmatic shift for the country.

Dr. Vijay Chauthaiwale is a Molecular Biologist and In-Charge of the Foreign Affairs Department of the BJP. Views are personal

Embracing cryptocurrency

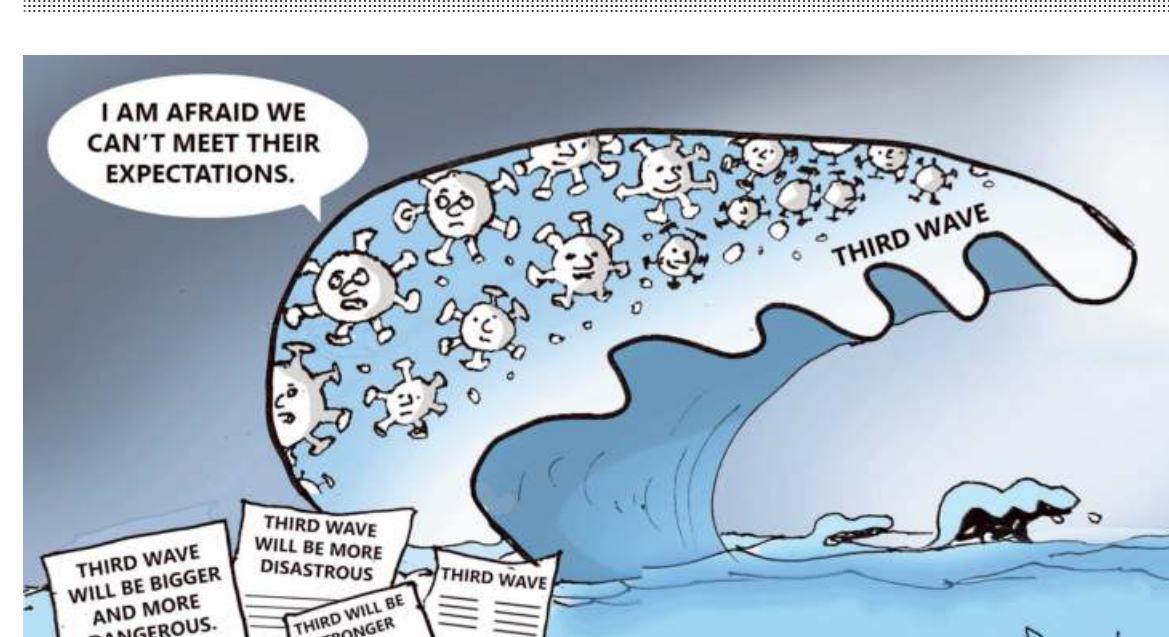
The fact that cryptocurrency has no legal classification should not be the impetus to prohibit its use in India

NAKUL DEWAN & ROHAN ANDREW NAIK

es to criminalise all private cryptocurrencies while also laying down the regulatory framework for an RBI-backed digital currency. The Minister of State for Finance, in response to a question in Parliament, stated that regulatory bodies do not have a legal framework to directly regulate private cryptocurrencies owing to their imprecise legal nature in India. As the draft Bill is yet to be tabled in Parliament, there is some hope that his concerns will be addressed in the form of a tailored regulatory approach rather than another ban.

Lessons from other countries
There are lessons in this regard from the U.K., Singapore and the U.S. The U.K. has classified cryptocurrency as property and this has paved the way for cryptocurrencies to be encompassed within a regulated legal framework in the country's economy. The U.K. has sought to regulate the functioning of crypto-businesses while still imposing some restrictions to protect the interests of investors. On the other hand, while there is no exact legal classification of cryptocurrency in Singapore, the amenability of cryptocurrency transactions to the contract law framework of the country has been firmly established and there is now a legal framework for cryptocurrency trading. In the U.S., the open approach taken by the authorities has resulted in the trade in cryptocurrency being both taxed and appropriately regulated. While the approaches are specific to the countries' economic realities and cannot be blindly implemented in India, the global regulatory attitude towards cryptocurrencies offers valuable insights into the alternative ways to achieve balanced regulation. In India, the absence of an existing legal classification of cryptocurrency should not be the impetus to prohibit its use. The government should use this as an opportunity to allow private individuals the freedom to harness a powerful new technology with appropriate regulatory standards.

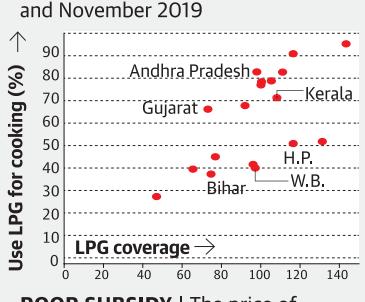
Nakul Dewan is Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India and was the lead counsel who argued against the RBI's cryptocurrency ban; Rohan Andrew Naik is Advocate, Supreme Court of India, who assisted in the case



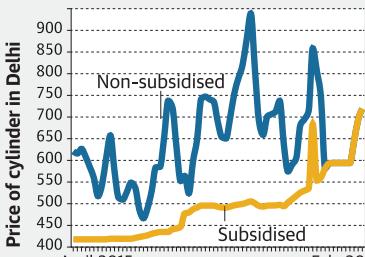
DATA POINT

Not cooking with gas Though most Indian households have an LPG connection, many don't use it for cooking, the NFHS-5 data show. For instance, in West Bengal, though 97% of the households had an LPG connection, only 40% used it for cooking. Such disparities existed in all the States surveyed. The difference between availability of LPG and usage was much higher in the rural parts. Low usage can be attributed to the cost of the subsidised cylinder, which has increased over the past two years. By Jasmin Nihalani, Suman Sen and Vignesh Radhakrishnan

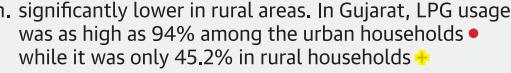
LOW USAGE | In Himachal Pradesh, LPG coverage stood at 116.6% as of Jan. 2020, while only 51% of households used it for cooking, according to the health survey conducted between July and November 2019



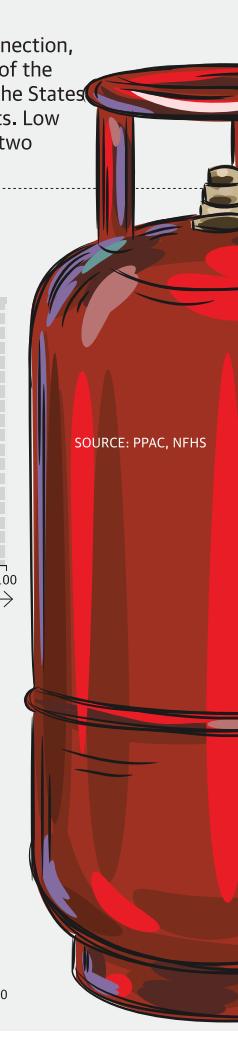
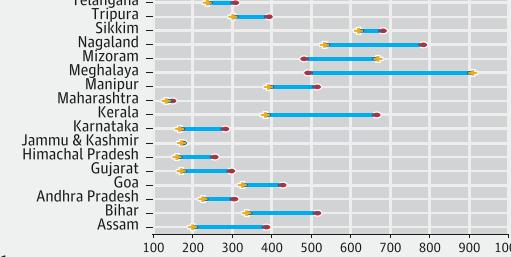
POOR SUBSIDY | The price of subsidised cylinders has steadily increased over the last two years, thereby reducing the subsidy amount, despite a drastic fall in international LPG cost after FY14



WIDE DISPARITY | The use of LPG for cooking was significantly lower in rural areas. In Gujarat, LPG usage was as high as 94% among the urban households while it was only 45.2% in rural households*



AT HIGHER RISK | According to NFHS-5, there was a higher prevalence of tuberculosis in households that were using solid fuels ● compared to those that were using clean cooking fuels ■ in most States



FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 16, 1971

Bangla Desh solution receding: PM

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, told the Rajya Sabha to-day [New Delhi, June 15] that with each passing day the possibility of a political settlement in Bangla Desh was becoming more remote. She dismissed fears that India would acquiesce in a political settlement at the cost of democracy and the rights of the people fighting there and said that any settlement "must be arrived at with those people who are to-day being suppressed." The Prime Minister who was replying to a four-hour debate on the situation caused by the influx of six million refugees, assured the House that this nation would make all the sacrifices and even "go through hell" to look after the refugees. Stressing the responsibility of the international community in a situation which not only resulted in a colossal refugee influx, but also involved the question of democracy and human rights, Mrs. Gandhi said India's Ministers and other emissaries who had gone abroad had some successes in bringing home the reality of the situation to those countries. "We are not going to allow the international community to get away with it. They have to realise it is their responsibility," she said.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 16, 1921

Ceylon and the Civil Service.

We understand that under the new rules made by the Ceylon Government to regulate the admission of Ceylonese to the Civil Service, the door has been shut against Indians. The Service in Ceylon will be recruited in future on a percentage basis, two-thirds being Britishers and one-third Ceylonese. The *Ceylon Daily News* comments thus on the change: "When the Government minute giving effect to this arrangement was published, we early warned the Government that this is bound to provoke India to retaliate. India, as soon as it becomes aware of the ban placed on her own, will effectively bar her doors against the admission of Ceylonese into the Indian Civil Service. Thus, under the plea of enlarging opportunities for Ceylonese in Ceylon, the Government is going about the best way of depriving the Ceylonese of the splendid and more profitable opportunities they

FROM PAGE ONE

Delhi riots: 3 student activists granted bail

Ruling that no offence under the anti-terror law is made out against any of the three student activists, the High Court said, "the phrase 'terrorist act' cannot be permitted to be applied in a cavalier manner to criminal acts or omissions that fall squarely within the definition of conventional offences as defined inter alia under the IPC (Indian Penal Code)".

The Delhi police had maintained that the accused engaged in "sloganeering and instigating the public against the government" and tried to create a "communally surcharged environment" with the intent to disrupt the unity and strike terror.

Responding to this, the High Court observed, "We find ourselves unpersuaded and unconvinced with this submission since we find it is not founded on any specific factual allegation and we are of the view that the mere use of alarming and hyperbolic verbiage in the subject charge-sheet will not convince us otherwise".

'Stronger foundations'
"The foundations of our nation stand on surer footing than is to be likely to be shaken by a protest, however vicious, organised by a tribe of college students or other persons, operating as a coordination committee from the confines of a University situated in the heart of Delhi," the High Court observed.

Noting that protests against governmental and parliamentary actions are legitimate, the High Court said though such protests are expected to be peaceful and non-violent, it is not uncommon for protesters to push the limits permissible in law.

AY.1 not a variant of concern yet: Centre

Evidence of AY.1 had been found in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana and Karnataka.

Dr. Paul said that while continued mutation was a biological fact, the steps to protect against exposure remained the same – "not giving opportunities to the virus to spread". On vaccination, Dr Paul said reserves of the Novavax vaccine had come into India on Monday, and are likely to be produced domestically in "very large" quantities. "What we know is that it is extremely safe and has a very high efficacy. There is a bridging trial of this vaccine underway in India. The pos-

itive results of this augur very well for our country," he added.

The US company that has partnered with the Pune-based Serum Institute of India tested its two dose 'NVX-CoV2373' vaccine on a population of around 30,000 adults in the U.S. and Mexico.

Novavax said it plans to apply for authorisations in the third quarter (July-September) and is on track to manufacture 100 million doses per month by the end of September and 150 million doses per month by the end of 2021 and most of these doses are expected to go to low and middle-income countries.

Twitter yet to appoint compliance officer

"Twitter continues to make every effort to comply with the new Guidelines. We are keeping the MeitY [Ministry of Electronics and IT] apprised of the progress at every step of the process," says an emailed response from the company.

In its latest communication to the MeitY on June 13, Twitter has only said that it has posted job descriptions to hire Chief Compliance Officer (CCO), Nodal Contact Person (NCP) and Resident Grievance Officer (RGO), and that it will endeavour to fill these roles as quickly as possible, the source said, adding that this is contrary to Twitter's own promise and assurance. "They have not appointed a CCO even on an interim basis."

Twitter has further conveyed a purposed advice of a purported consultant that establishing a India office of Twitter Inc. is necessary for hiring Chief Compliance Officer on a permanent basis. No one prevented Twitter from appointing a CCO as an

interim arrangement," the source added.

The source further added that in its email sent on June 2, Twitter told the government that they have appointed a lawyer working in a law firm – Dharmendra Chatur – as an interim Nodal Contact Person and Resident Grievance Officer. Mr Chatur was not an employee of Twitter as required by the Guidelines.

The Rule 7, the source said, clearly states that where an intermediary fails to observe these rules, the provisions of sub-section (1) of section 79 of the Act shall not be applicable and the intermediary shall be liable for punishment under any law for the time being in force including the provisions of the Act and the Indian Penal Code.

"Since, the Rules came into effect on May 26, and Twitter has not complied, the Rule 7 and the course suggested therein appears to have come into effect," the source said.

SC adjourns W.B. riots hearing

Centre makes the plea on petitions seeking a CBI or SIT investigation

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to a request by the Union government to adjourn the hearing on the petitions seeking a CBI or a SIT (special investigation team) investigation into incidents of post-poll violence in West Bengal.

Appearing before a Vacation Bench of Justices Indira Banerjee and M.R. Shah, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta asked the court to schedule the hearing on June 18.

The court was primarily hearing a joint petition filed by the family members of BJP activists Abhijit Sarkar and Haran Adhikari, who were killed allegedly in the violence following the Assembly polls in May.

Total inaction'
The families have alleged "total inaction" and even "subversion" of the investi-



Spot visit: A Union Home Ministry team conducting an investigation into the post-poll violence in Birbhum. • PTI

gation by the State administration and police.

The State government has replied that first information reports had been registered and several arrests made in connection with the murders.

In an affidavit filed on Monday on allegations of State complicity in the post poll violence, the Mamata Banerjee government maintained that these were "concocted stories" disseminated on social media by miscreants.

cial media by miscreants.

It said, "It is untenable to categorise each and every act of violence following the declaration of elections results as 'post-poll violence' while adopting a premise that such violence is ongoing in West Bengal to which the State machinery is turning a blind eye". False allegations of State complicity was drawn on the basis of hear-say reports disseminated on social media by miscreants.

The apex court was misled about the law and order situation. The petitions "reek of political motivation", it said.

The State said, "No person can be forced to stay away from his/her house, as it is their inherent right to live in their houses peacefully".

The petitions in the Supreme Court conveyed a "misleading narrative" while a five-judge Bench of the Calcutta High Court was already hearing a gamut of issues arising from the "alleged post-poll violence".

The State said a three-member committee of officers nominated by the National Human Rights Commission, the West Bengal Human Rights Commission and the Member Secretary of the West Bengal State Legal Service Authority had been formed to monitor the situation.

Research must follow protocol, says Ministry

'New mechanisms will be in place'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

will be taken to ensure that mechanisms are put in place to rectify the situation."

The Ministry is also concerned about the storage of the Nagaland bat samples. The Ministry wants the samples to be at the Biosafety Level-4 (BSL-4) standard facility at the National Institute of Virology laboratory in Pune rather than NCBS's Bengaluru facilities that are rated BSL-3. It said samples must be handled in a laboratory equipped for "biosafety and biosecurity conditions" as they can pose a "significant public health hazard". This when the Department of Atomic Energy noted that the samples were "non-infectious" and had been checked for the presence of filoviruses (Ebola and Marburg). Asked about the zoonotic pathogens and need to protect against any spill-over – the Nagaland bat study on filoviruses (Ebola and Marburg) is in no way related to the coronavirus (SARS) studies at Wuhan – Mr. Agarwal said laboratories had to be supported to ensure that pandemics are prevented.

Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Aggarwal on Tuesday said: "There are protocols for all research work undertaken and whenever there are lapses action

Comments sought on draft rules on compensation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

ed for 45 days from the date of notification. "The Code on Social Security, 2020 amends and consolidates the laws relating to social security to extend social security to employees and workers in the organised and the unorganised sectors. The draft rules include provisions for application for claim or settlement and interest for delay.

IUML gets two weeks to reply to affidavit

Party has said the May 28 order is a deliberate ploy to implement CAA's 'designs'

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday gave the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) two weeks to respond to an affidavit by the Union Home Ministry that its May 28 order, delegating power to the Collectors of 13 districts in five States to grant citizenship to non-Muslims from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, has "no relation whatsoever" with the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) of 2019.

Appearing before a Vacation Bench of Justices Hemant Gupta and V. Ramasubramanian, senior advocate



Kapil Sibal and advocate Harris Beeran, for the IUML, sought time to file its rejoinder to the government's reply to their petition challenging the legality of the May order.

Petitions, including that filed by the PFI (Popular

Front of India) and a private individual, have drawn parallels between the CAA and the May 28 notification, which facilitates non-Muslims from the three countries residing in 13 districts of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Punjab to apply for citizenship.

The IUML said the May 28 order was a deliberate ploy to implement the CAA's "mafia designs".

Delegation of power'
In its response, the Union Home Ministry said that the May order "merely delegates the power of [granting citizenship by registration and naturalisation] to the local

authorities in particular cases".

The Central Government used its authority under Section 16 of the Citizenship Act... It is merely a process of decentralisation of decision-making aimed at speedy disposal of the citizenship applications of such foreigners... It has no relation whatsoever to the CAA," the MHA affidavit said.

The government reasoned that the notification did not "provide for any relaxations to the foreigners and applied only to foreigners who had entered the country legally".

The applicants should possess valid documents such as passports and Indian visa.

Global arbitration centre proposed in Hyderabad

FROM PAGE 1

Justice Ramana explained that he held consultations with Singapore Chief Justice Sundareswaran Menon during the latter's recent visit to Delhi on setting up an IAC in Hyderabad.

It would require to constitute a panel of renowned international arbitrators. The reputation of international arbitrators would be an important factor in ensuring successful operation of the Centre, the CJI said. A Judge of the Supreme Court would be asked to coordinate with the international arbitrators, Singapore Chief Justice and Telangana government in establishing the IAC at Hyderabad.

Singapore CJ visit
In the next few weeks, the Chief Justice of Singapore is likely to visit Delhi for an international programme. After holding another round of discussions with him, efforts would be made to invite him and international arbitrators to Hyderabad

this August to assess the feasibility of creating such a centre, the CJI said.

Due to location of several pharmaceutical and IT companies in and around Hyderabad, litigations involving multinational entities was on the rise. These companies and litigants had no other option but to go to other international arbitration centres and were incurring huge expenditure due to that. Establishing an IAC in Hyderabad would be helpful to companies and the city was well connected internationally, the CJI observed.

"A well built structure to accommodate the centre with good library and other facilities would be the basic requirement," Justice N.V. Ramana said. The city has several hotels to accommodate international arbitrators, litigants and others coming to the proposed IAC. "International Arbitration Centre in Hyderabad is my dream... I hope it will be a reality," the CJI said.

He is one of 24 lawmakers of the country to have taken shelter in Mizoram.

Among the more than 9,000 refugees are Army and police personnel.

Myanmar province CM in Mizoram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Chief Minister of a province of Myanmar is the newest high-profile lawmaker to have taken refuge in Mizoram following a military coup in the country in February.

Officials in Mizoram said Salai Lian Luai, Chief Minister of Chin State, crossed over to Champhai town on Monday night. Champhai is the headquarters of Champhai district bordering Myanmar.

Mr. Luai is a leader of the National League of Democracy (NLD), the party headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been detained by the military rulers. He became the Chief Minister of the Chin State in 2016 when the NLD came to power.

He is one of 24 lawmakers of the country to have taken shelter in Mizoram.

Among the more than 9,000 refugees are Army and police personnel.

Sonia says no clarity yet on Galwan clashes

Jawans' sacrifice must not go in vain'



Sonia Gandhi

reassure the people that the sacrifice of our brave jawans was not in vain, the Congress Party reiterates its concern that no clarity is yet available and the Prime Minister's last word on the subject a year ago was that no transgression had occurred," she observed.

She urged the government to ensure its performance matched the commitment of the soldiers protecting the borders.

"Having patiently waited for the government to come clean and inform the nation about the circumstances in which the unprecedented incident happened and

reassure the people that the sacrifice of our brave jawans was not in vain, the Congress Party reiterates its concern that no clarity is yet available and the Prime Minister's last word on the subject a year ago was that no transgression had occurred," she observed.

"We have repeatedly sought details of the episode in light of the Prime Minister's statement, as well as details of what progress has been made towards restoring the status quo ante prior to April 2020," she stated.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) on Tuesday extended the deadline for mandatory seeding of Aadhaar numbers for filing of electronic challan-cum return by employers to September 1. In a circular, the EPFO modified its June 1 circular that said employers would only be able to file the ECR for those employees whose Aadhaar numbers are seeded and verified with effect from that date. However, on Tuesday, the EPFO modified the earlier circular to change the deadline to September 1.

West Bengal Governor flags Mamata's 'inaction'

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday wrote a letter to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee questioning her "continued silence and inaction" over post-poll violence and urged her to discuss it in the Assembly.

The Home Department responded saying the contents of the letter are "not consistent with real facts".

"The letter has been written to Hon'ble Chief Minister & released to public media simultaneously, which disrupts sanctity of such communications," the Home Department said in a tweet.

The Hindu scores in responsible suicide reporting

Sensitive reporting

The Hindu topped the list of newspapers in a scorecard that rates media reports on suicides

| Newspaper | Positive score | Negative score |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| The Hindu | 2.71 (0.92)* | 2.35 (1.15) |
| The Indian Express | 1.32 (0.68) | 3.32 (1.33) |
| Mirror | 1.32 (0.73) | 4.13 (1.35) |
| Hindustan Times | 1.31 (0.69) | 3.28 (1.22) |
| The Economic Times | 1.13 (0.83) | 3.25 (1.83) |
| The Times of India | 1.12 (0.66) | 3.37 (1.27) |
| The New Indian Express | 1.07 (0.91) | 3.42 (1.18) |
| The Telegraph | 1.03 (0.55) | 3.37 (1.31) |
| The Tribune | 1 (0.62) | 4.04 (0.98) |
| Total | 1.32 (0.87) | 3.31 (1.31) |

*Values are presented as Mean (SD)

ports on suicide from nine English newspapers with the highest readership in the country, between April 1 and June 20, 2020.

The average positive score across all newspapers was 1.32 and average negative score was 3.31.

The Hindu scored 2.71 in

positive parameters and 2.35 in negative parameters. In comparison with other newspapers, it had the highest score in positive parameters and lowest in negative parameters.

The positive parameters in the scorecard included presence of help-seeking information such as national or state-level support services, 24/7 crisis helplines, report establishes a link to poor mental health, link to drug/alcohol abuse, com-

Paras group had the blessings of BJP and JD(U)

The saffron party worked meticulously behind the scenes, but maintained that the events were 'internal matter' of LJP

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

The breaking away of the majority of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) parliamentary unit from Lok Sabha MP Chirag Paswan to form an independent group in the Lower House, had the full backing of the BJP as well as the Janata Dal (U), and will have far-reaching consequences for the NDA equations in Bihar.

According to those aware of the run-up to the dramatic developments on Monday, the seeds of this split were sown on the day the results of the Bihar elections were being announced last November. The BJP had almost immediately reached out to the LJP's lone MLA, Raj Kumar Singh to secure his support in a delicately balanced House and got his backing for the Speaker's election.

"We were still talking to

him when the Janata Dal (U) got him to join their party. We were of the opinion that if he had stayed as an independent he could have been made Minister," said a senior Bihar BJP office-bearer.

Personal equations

After that, both NDA partners were in constant touch with the five MPs of the LJP, in effect isolating Mr. Chirag Paswan.

Minister of State for Home Nitin Gadkari has excellent equations with Chandan Singh (MP from Nawada) who is also Suraj Bhan Singh's (a trusted lieutenant of late Ram Vilas Paswan) brother. Also, another MP, Veena Devi is actually from the BJP but fought from an LJP ticket as the seat she wanted to contest from (Vaishali), went to the LJP kitty in the alliance division,"



A house divided: Posters of rebel LJP leaders painted black by Chirag Paswan supporters in Patna on Tuesday. ■ PTI

said the source.

A week before the events of Monday, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda met with the party's Bihar unit president Sanjay Jaiswal, Mr. Rai, and BJP general secre-

tary in charge of Bihar, Bhupendra Yadav in New Delhi.

The BJP remained in the background of events, however, and continues to be tight-lipped. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Bhupendra Yadav's only comment was that

the events "were an internal matter of the LJP".

Within hours of the split in the LJP, Mr. Paras' uncle Pashupati Nath Paras was recognised as the parliamentary party leader of the LJP in the Lok Sabha. Significantly, there was no talk of merging the party into JD(U), with Mr. Paras insisting on maintaining a separate entity.

Significance of split

The fact that the breakaway LJP has been recognised as a separate party with five MPs, means that the split between the two NDA allies - the BJP and the JD(U) - remains at 17 and 16 seats respectively in the Lok Sabha, with Mr. Paras in a strong position to claim the single Ministerial berth in the Union Council of Ministers promised to the LJP, whenever the next reshuffle happens.

"If the LJP had merged with the JD(U) parliamentary party, they would have had 21 seats, four more than the BJP; their claim on multiple Ministerial berths would have been stronger, and the struggle with which we (BJP) have shrugged off the junior partner status to JD(U) in Bihar would have been for nought in future negotiations," said a source.

This intricate cut and thrust of alliance politics in a State which is considered to have the most political of electorates is far from over. Mr. Paras will have to do his best to emulate his canny elder brother, the late Ram Vilas Paswan, to stay afloat, while Mr. Chirag Paswan will have to go back to the starting point, albeit much diminished. The BJP and JD(U)'s complicated pas de deux in Bihar will continue.

After LJP split, eyes on Congress legislators

10 MLAs are in touch, say JD(U) leaders

AMARNATH TEWARI
PATNA

After the split in the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), now speculation is rife in Bihar for a possible break among 19 State Congress legislators. Congress leaders, though, have strongly denied it and said "such rumours are being spread by leaders of a party to create confusion".

If some ruling Janata Dal-United (JD-U) party leaders are to be believed, as many as 10 out of 19 Congress MLAs in the State are in constant touch with them and ready to break away from their party "at any time". "We now need the support of only three Congress

MLAs to make a split in the party by two-thirds to avoid action under the anti-defection laws," said a senior JD (U) leader, adding, "but, very soon these three too would come".

Party sources also told *The Hindu* that these 10 Congress MLAs include three legislators from the minority community, and two who have won elections in the 2020 Assembly elections from the Bhagalpur area.

With its dismal performance in the 2020 Assembly elections - winning only 19 out of 70 seats - the Congress in Bihar has been agog with internal bickering.

A notice released by the Paswan faction claimed that at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, a national executive meeting was called by the party, in which all the five MPs, Mr. Paras and Mr. Paswan's cousin Prince Raj were removed from the primary membership of the party. The notice is signed by the secretary general of the LJP, Abdul Khalil.

While the other faction claimed that they, too, had called a national executive meeting and decided to appoint Suraj Bhan, elder brother of party MP Chandan Singh and a close associate of the late Ram Vilas

Paswan as working president.

Both factions have also simultaneously shot off letters to the Election Commission of India.

"According to the party's constitution, only the president and the secretary general have the right to call for the party's national executive to meet. And the national executive not only has MPs and MLAs but also the secretary general, treasurer, 16 general secretaries, 16 national secretaries, and nearly 15 presidents of frontal organisations and presidents of State units," Mr. Khalil told *The Hindu*.

The Paswan faction has also written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to recant the appointment of Mr. Paras as the Parliamentary party leader of the LJP, claiming that only the chairperson of party's Parliamentary board had the right to nominate the leader according to its constitution.

Mr. Paras's faction, meanwhile, is confident that it will be able to win the legal battle. "Our letter to the Election Commission on the appointment of Mr. Suraj Bhan as working president precedes their notice on removing all of us," Khagaria MP Mehboob Ali Kaiser said.

The question of ownership of the party, though, will be settled only by the Election Commission.

Ownership war begins in LJP

Chirag Paswan says he made every attempt to keep the party together

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Chirag Paswan

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"According to the party's constitution, only the president and the secretary general have the right to call for the party's national executive to meet. And the national executive not only has MPs and MLAs but also the secretary general, treasurer, 16 general secretaries, 16 national secretaries, and nearly 15 presidents of frontal organisations and presidents of State units," Mr. Khalil told *The Hindu*.

The Paswan faction has also written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to recant the appointment of Mr. Paras as the Parliamentary party leader of the LJP, claiming that only the chairperson of party's Parliamentary board had the right to nominate the leader according to its constitution.

Mr. Paras's faction, meanwhile, is confident that it will be able to win the legal battle. "Our letter to the Election Commission on the appointment of Mr. Suraj Bhan as working president precedes their notice on removing all of us," Khagaria MP Mehboob Ali Kaiser said.

The question of ownership of the party, though, will be settled only by the Election Commission.

House Standing Committee on IT summons Twitter representatives

It will hear views on steps taken to prevent misuse of social media

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Shashi Tharoor

clarification, where he said that the committee decided to communicate with the MeitY through e-mail, because the standing committees have not been meeting and that the MeitY's response would be circulated to the members.

The agenda for Thursday's meeting is, "To hear the views of representatives of Twitter followed by evidence of representatives Electronics Technology 'Safeguarding citizens' rights and prevention of misuse of social/online news media platforms including special emphasis on women security in the digital space."

Other than the differences between the Congress and the BJP on the "manipulated media" tag, the MeitY's ultimatum to Twitter to comply with the amended IT rules is also expected to come up for discussion.

Mr. Tharoor had to issue a long

statement on Twitter's "manipulated media" tag drawing the ire of panel member and BJP leader Nishikant Dubey, who wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker, demanding the ouster of Mr. Tharoor claiming that he is using the standing committee as an "extension of the Congress".

In May, Mr. Tharoor wrote to the Ministry of Electronics and In-

formation Technology (MeitY) on Twitter's "manipulated media"

tag drawing the ire of panel member and BJP leader Nishikant Dubey, who wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker, demanding the ouster of Mr. Tharoor claiming that he is using the standing committee as an "extension of the Congress".

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States hit by unequal supply of vaccines

T.N., U.P. and Bihar get fewer doses from Centre despite high utilisation, show data from RTI query

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

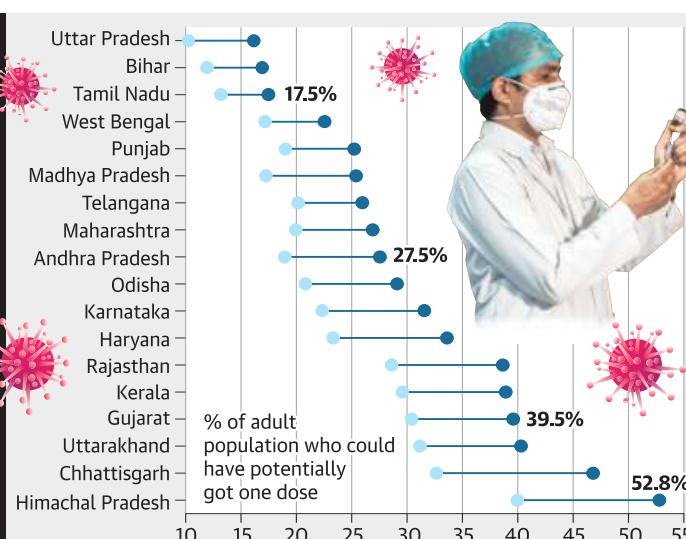
CHENNAI
The States such as Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continue to experience a crunch in their COVID-19 vaccine supply, while those such as Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat are enjoying a relatively better stock position, data from an RTI query reply reveal.

Till June 9, nearly 25 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been supplied to the States and the Union Territories by the Centre and through the direct State procurement channel, the RTI reply reveals. This was about seven crore doses more than what was supplied about a month back on May 11.

A state-wise analysis of the doses received on both these dates relative to the adult population shows that supply to some States continues

States of doses

The graph shows the % of adult population who could have potentially received one dose of COVID-19 vaccines on May 11 (●) and June 9 (○). Data for May 11 was sourced from the PIB while the figures for June 9 were ascertained through RTI



to increase at a higher rate than others. For instance, with the number of doses supplied till May 11, Tamil Nadu could have potentially given one dose of the vaccine

to 13.2% of its adult population. A month later, as on June 9, the share of such adults has barely improved to 17.5%. In West Bengal, the share has slightly improved

from 17.2% to 22.5% in the considered period.

On the other hand, in Himachal Pradesh, the share of adults who could have potentially got a dose in the consider-

IICT inks pact with pharma firm for 2-DG

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology Hyderabad (IICT) and Anthem Biosciences Pvt. Ltd., a Bengaluru-based integrated biopharmaceutical company, signed an agreement for technology transfer and manufacture of the anti-COVID drug 2-DG or 2-Deoxy-D-Glucose on Tuesday.

Studies have shown that the oral drug 2-DG has demonstrated quick recovery and reduction in oxygen dependence among moderately and severely affected patients. This drug in the form of powder formulation was earlier launched by Dr. Reddy's Laboratories.

Under the agreement, Anthem Biosciences Pvt. Ltd. gets non-exclusive license for the process know-how for synthesis of 2-DG. "The agreement is in-line with CSIR's efforts to help people access various therapeutic options to combat COVID-19. CSIR labs have undertaken clinical trials of various repurposed drugs for the treatment of COVID-19," said IICT Director S. Chandrasekhar.

Anthem Biosciences Pvt. Ltd. is in the process of filing the application for getting the approval from Drugs Controller General of India, New Delhi, and will manufacture and commercialise 2-DG from their facilities located at Bommasandra and Harohalli in Karnataka.

The firm has also developed domestic vendors for key raw materials for uninterrupted supplies to manufacture 2-DG.

Jabs help against hospitalisation'

2 doses of AstraZeneca or Pfizer vaccines effective against delta variant: study

R. PRASAD

CHENNAI



The AstraZeneca vaccine is known as Covishield in India.

as a preprint. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed.

Public Health England had earlier found that despite modest reductions, vaccines remain effective against the delta variant. It found that full vaccination offered good protection against symptomatic disease.

Vaccine effectiveness

against symptomatic disease was 67% in the case of AstraZeneca and 88% with Pfizer.

Single dose

Effectiveness against hospitalisation was high even with one dose of AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccine. In the case of delta variant, one dose of AstraZeneca vaccine offered 71% protection, while two doses offered 92% protection. In the case of Pfizer vaccine, the protection was 94% after one dose and 96% after two doses.

"This is reassuring data for India. In order to choose our way forward, I think we should use modelling approaches that lay out diffe-

rent implementation strategies and compare their impact at different stages of the pandemic," says Dr. Gagandeep Kang, Professor of Microbiology at CMC Vellore.

Another study posted as a preprint on May 24 found that protection against all symptomatic infections after a single dose of AstraZeneca was only 33.5% against the delta variant and 51.1% against the beta (B.1.1.7) variant. After the second dose, the protection against all symptomatic infections increased to 59.8% in the case of the delta variant and 87.9% against the beta variant.

Those getting their vaccination need to wait for 30 minutes at the inoculation centre after vaccination as most of the anaphylactic reactions occur during this period and prompt treatment prevents deaths."

Minuscule risk

Reacting to the report V.K. Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, said: "This incident should not create fear in the minds of people and there should be no apprehension about the safety of the vaccines approved for Indian population. Whenever decisions about public health are taken, we discuss the benefits and risks involved and in this case the risk involved is

always encouraged to report all deaths, hospitalisations and events resulting in disability as well as any minor and adverse events following immunisation at any point of time after vaccination," said the release.

Charu Goyal Sachdeva, HOD, Internal Medicine, HCMCT Manipil Hospitals, added that there should be no fear or apprehension about COVID vaccines. "Taking vaccines is advisable even for people who have had the COVID-19 infection. Vaccination should be done after the government prescribed window period following COVID," she said.

Centre probing charges of fake COVID tests during Kumbh Mela

Detailed report is expected within a week: Health Ministry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Health Ministry on Tuesday said an investigation is under way into the allegations that over a lakh fake COVID-19 tests were

done in Uttarakhand during the Kumbh Mela.

To a question at the Ministry press conference, Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said: "We got to know about an incident when a Punjab resident received a message that his COVID test had been conducted in Haridwar, while he was in Punjab. The information was passed onto the State government, which in a pro-active manner conducted an inquiry and about

a week ago and directed senior officials in Haridwar to prepare a detailed report."

He said while the exact number of the alleged fake tests is not known, a detailed report is expected within a week or so.

Action will follow

"Whatever necessary action, including for criminal offence, will be taken against those involved in recording tests without actually conducting them."

The Ministry said some reports had indicated that a large number of test results were issued by private labs to a senior officer in Uttarakhand. He alleged that his Aadhaar and mobile number had been misused.

meet the daily quota of 50,000 tests set by the Uttarakhand High Court.

A detailed probe was ordered by the Haridwar administration after preliminary investigations revealed that many private labs roped in by the district health department had issued fake reports in the name of random people on the basis of their identity cards and phone numbers.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) was alerted when the Punjab resident reported the matter to a senior officer in Uttarakhand. He alleged that his Aadhaar and mobile number had been misused.

total death toll. Backlog deaths are those that occurred more than a week before the day they were recorded but were not counted in the earlier bulletins.

Maharashtra adds big backlog of deaths

12,909 fatalities updated in June's fatality figures

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

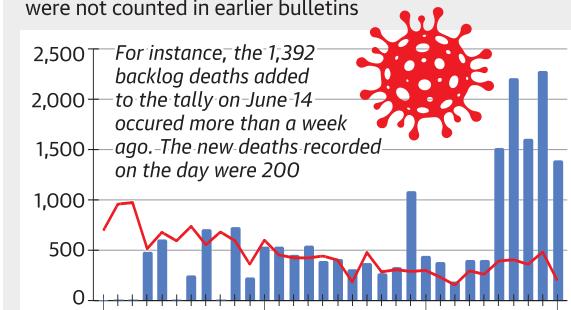
India recorded 62,265 new COVID-19 cases and 2,520 new deaths till 9.30 p.m. on Tuesday. The country has so far reported a total of 2,96,32,350 cases and 3,76,849 deaths.

Kerala reported 12,246 new infections, followed by Tamil Nadu (11,805) and Maharashtra (9,350). Maharashtra recorded 1,458 new fatalities, followed by Tamil Nadu (267) and Kerala (166). Maharashtra's fatalities include backlog deaths which were missed in the previous reports.

The figures do not include cases and deaths from Arun-

Adding to the count

The chart shows the number of new fatalities (red line) and the number of backlog COVID-19 deaths (blue bars) added to the tally in Maharashtra between May 14 and June 14. Backlog deaths are those that occurred more than a week ago but were not counted in earlier bulletins.



nachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Tripura, and Ladakh. The data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins.

Between June 1 and June 14, Maharashtra has added 12,909 backlog deaths to its

total death toll. Backlog deaths are those that occurred more than a week before the day they were recorded but were not counted in the earlier bulletins.

The State had recorded a total of 1,12,696 fatalities due

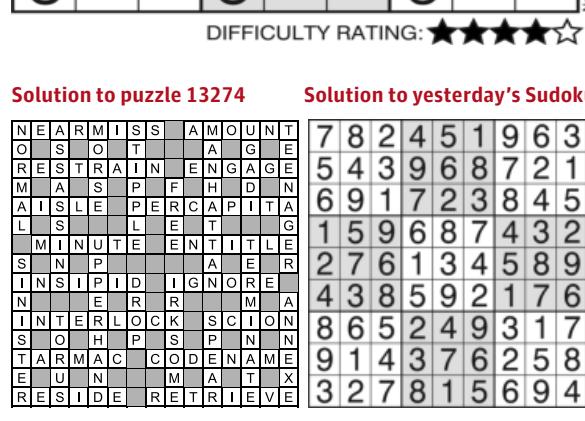
to the virus until June 14.

Around 17.51 lakh samples were tested in the country on Monday (the results for which were made available on Tuesday).

Vaccine doses

As many as 39.27 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the country in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Tuesday. The seven-day rolling average of daily vaccinations in the country continues to increase. It stood at 31.11 lakh on June 14, which is more than the 27.8 lakh recorded a week before (June 7). About 22.4% of adults in India, 42.8% of those aged above 45, and 46.4% of people aged above 60, have been administered with at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, until 8 p.m. on Tuesday. Only 3.5% of India's total population is fully vaccinated.

SUDOKU



MARKET WATCH

| | PRICE | CHANGE |
|-----------|--------|--------|
| Sensex | 52,773 | 0.42 |
| US Dollar | 73.31 | 0.00 |
| Gold | 47,853 | 0.31 |
| Brent oil | 73.67 | 0.38 |

NIFTY 50

| | PRICE | CHANGE |
|-----------------------------|----------|---------|
| Adani Ports | 761.85 | -6.60 |
| Asian Paints | 3042.20 | 9.20 |
| Axist Bank | 750.90 | 14.65 |
| Bajaj Auto | 4138.10 | -8.40 |
| Bajaj FinServ | 11798.70 | -127.45 |
| Bajaj Finance | 6161.15 | -32.00 |
| Bharti Airtel | 542.50 | 3.15 |
| BPCL | 481.90 | -1.80 |
| Britannia Ind | 3631.85 | 40.60 |
| Cipla | 969.70 | -6.45 |
| Coal India | 157.15 | -2.20 |
| Divis Lab | 4313.05 | -75.00 |
| Dr Reddys Lab | 5410.85 | -50.50 |
| Eicher Motors | 2763.50 | 18.55 |
| Grasim Ind | 1495.25 | 2.25 |
| HCL Tech | 985.45 | 1.25 |
| HDFC | 2545.10 | 5.90 |
| HDFC Bank | 1490.25 | 10.80 |
| HDFC Life | 692.55 | 10.85 |
| Hero MotoCorp | 3007.05 | 21.40 |
| Hindustan | 390.85 | -3.95 |
| Hind Unilever | 2391.95 | 27.35 |
| ICICI Bank | 645.30 | 10.15 |
| IndusInd Bank | 1034.45 | 10.15 |
| Infosys | 1473.90 | 12.10 |
| Indian Oil Corp | 115.75 | 1.00 |
| ITC | 207.05 | -0.25 |
| JSW Steel | 725.10 | -4.05 |
| Kotak Bank | 1770.90 | 2.85 |
| L&T | 1510.80 | -4.95 |
| M&M | 808.60 | 1.15 |
| Maruti Suzuki | 7166.25 | -11.60 |
| Nestle India Ltd. | 17684.80 | 107.30 |
| NTPC | 117.80 | -0.40 |
| ONGC | 125.35 | 0.55 |
| PowerGrid Corp | 247.60 | -1.10 |
| Reliance Ind | 2250.00 | 5.10 |
| SBI Life | 995.85 | 9.70 |
| State Bank | 429.50 | -0.85 |
| Shree Cement | 28485.90 | 151.85 |
| Sun Pharma | 673.20 | -3.90 |
| Tata Consumer Products Ltd. | 719.50 | 4.75 |
| Tata Motors | 352.70 | -3.25 |
| Tata Steel | 1174.30 | 9.50 |
| TCS | 3262.75 | -13.60 |
| Tech Mahindra | 1066.85 | -2.40 |
| Titan | 1723.40 | -11.40 |
| UltraTech Cement | 6668.30 | -10.20 |
| UPL | 841.80 | 7.20 |
| Wipro | 557.90 | -3.70 |

EXCHANGE RATES

| CURRENCY | TT BUY | TT SELL |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| US Dollar | 73.11 | 73.43 |
| Euro | 88.66 | 89.05 |
| British Pound | 102.95 | 103.41 |
| Japanese Yen (100) | 66.45 | 66.74 |
| Chinese Yuan | 11.42 | 11.47 |
| Swiss Franc | 81.39 | 81.75 |
| Singapore Dollar | 55.10 | 55.35 |
| Canadian Dollar | 60.01 | 60.28 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 17.74 | 17.83 |

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



TVS cuts price of iQube e-scooter by ₹11,250

CHENNAI TVS Motor Company has reduced the prices of its electric scooter TVS iQube Electric by ₹11,250. The new pricing is in line with the revision in subsidy under FAME II scheme. The incentive would increase the reach of electric two-wheelers in the country, the company said. The revised price of iQube Electric in New Delhi will be ₹1,00,777 and Bengaluru ₹1,10,506.

Ashok Leyland arm buys out EV-maker SMAL

CHENNAI Ashok Leyland's subsidiary Switch Mobility Ltd. of U.K. has acquired the entire shareholding in EV maker Switch Mobility Automotive Ltd. India (SMAL) on Monday, resulting in the latter becoming a step-down subsidiary of the company. SMAL was incorporated in December last year with a paid up capital of ₹1 crore to manufacture and sell electric vehicles (EVs).

AIRA to aid development of debt market

MUMBAI Two credit rating agencies (CRAs) have established 'Association of Indian Rating Agencies' (AIRA). AIRA is expected to work closely with the regulator and government for debt-market development, the agencies said. While Care Ratings Ltd. and Acuité Ratings & Research Ltd. are the founding members, two more CRAs may join soon. Care and Acuité officials said.

NBFC Authum set to buy Reliance Home Finance

NEW DELHI Authum Investment and Infrastructure Ltd. has emerged as the highest bidder for Reliance Home Finance, a group company of the debt-ridden Anil Ambani-promoted Reliance Group, with ₹2,887 crore offer. Sources said lenders led by Bank of Baroda would receive ₹2,887 crore of which ₹2,587 crore, or 90%, would be paid upfront and ₹300 crore within a year. PTI

Inflation spurs spike in bond yield; rupee hits 1-month low

Latest data would make RBI wary of continuing to boost liquidity, says economist

REUTERS

MUMBAI

India's benchmark 10-year bond yield closed at its highest level in more than six weeks while the rupee ended at a one-month low on the back of a larger-than-expected surge in retail inflation.

The benchmark 10-year bond yield ended at 6.04%, after touching 6.05%, its highest since April 30 and up 4 basis points on the day.

Retail inflation rate rose 6.3% year-on-year in May, from 4.29% in April and sharply above analysts' estimate of 5.3%. The wholesale price inflation rate rose 12.9%, its highest in at least two decades.

Traders are worried the



Tight spot: Traders are worried the spike in inflation beyond RBI's target band could force it to act sooner. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

spike in inflation beyond the RBI's mandated target band of 2%-6% could force it to act sooner on inflation, but two senior sources said the growth focus will continue for the time being.

"The latest data would make RBI wary of continuing to boost liquidity in a big way, and whether RBI stops unwinding its forwards book, or limits bond market intervention to announced

G-SAP will be closely eyed," Abhishek Upadhyay, economist at ICICI Securities Primar

ity Dealership said in a note.

The G-SAP or government securities acquisition programme of the RBI has been crucial in ensuring the government's massive ₹2.06 trillion borrowing programme goes smoothly, and more measures may be needed to support markets.

The rupee closed at 73.3125 per dollar after touching 73.32, its weakest since May 14.

Traders said inflation and demand for dollars by importers weighed on the local unit and they would keenly watch out for the outcome of the upcoming Fed meeting.

Canara Bank to buy 12% stake in bad bank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Canara Bank said it will be the lead sponsor of National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd. (NARCL), or bad bank, with a 12% stake in the entity.

Bad bank refers to a financial institution that takes over bad assets of lenders and undertakes resolution.

"The board of Canara Bank has given in-principle approval for taking stake in NARCL," Canara Bank said in a regulatory filing.

Following the board nod, the bank has sought the approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for participating in NARCL as a sponsor contributing 12% stake.

Move precedes nod for Piramal buyout

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has revoked the deposit-taking status of Dewan Housing Finance (DHFL), the first financial services firm to go for bankruptcy proceedings.

The central bank had reclassified DHFL as a non-deposit taking housing finance company, before approving the Piramal Group's bid to take over it towards the end of the resolution process.

This was revealed in the June 7 order of the NCLT Mumbai approving the ₹35,250-crore bid by Piramal Capital & Housing Finance, forcing a more than 65% haircut on creditors and just ₹1 to NCD holders to

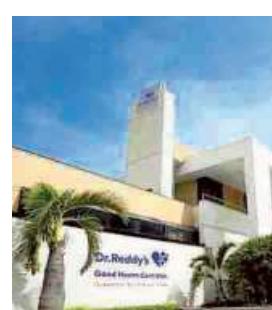


whom the firm owes more than ₹45,000 crore.

The changes were made in February 2021, after the banking regulator gave a no objection to the January 25, 2021 application by R. Subramaniam, the DHFL administrator, citing Rule 5 of its FSP (financial services providers) Rules.

U.S. arbitrator tells DRL unit to pay \$46.25 mn

Ruling backs Australia's Hatchtech Pty



Govt., Infosys to discuss I-T portal glitches

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Top Finance Ministry officials, while acknowledging that the new income tax filing portal has been 'fraught with several technical glitches/issues leading to taxpayer inconvenience,' said they will hold an interaction on June 22 with the service provider Infosys, along with chartered accountants, auditors and taxpayers.

"Written representations on the problems, difficulties faced in the portal have also been invited from the stakeholders," the Revenue Department said in a statement. "Representatives from Infosys team will be present to answer queries, clarify issues and receive inputs on the working of the portal, to remove glitches and sort out issues faced by the taxpayers."

Also, the sum had been already accounted for and charged off in the company's financial statements for 2020-21, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories said in the filing to the stock exchanges.

Covaxin at ₹150 to Centre not sustainable: Bharat Biotech

Higher price in private markets needed to offset costs



penditure for setting up manufacturing facilities, sales and distribution expenses, procurement volumes and commitments, the firm said. It added that it had so far invested over ₹500 crore 'at risk' for product development, clinical trials and setting up of manufacturing facilities for Covaxin.

Observing that less than 10% of the Covaxin output had been supplied to private hospitals, the company said the weighted average price of Covaxin for all supplies realised by it was less than ₹250 per dose.

Unlike most medicines, vaccines were provided free of cost by the Centre to all eligible citizens. Hence, procurement of vaccines by private hospitals was optional and not mandatory, the company contended.

"In our view, the question of product pricing is only of extraneous interest to all concerned, especially when the same vaccine is made available free of cost," Bharat Biotech said.

Exports surge 69%, trade deficit widens

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

India's exports rose by 69% to \$32.3 billion in May, driven by healthy growth in sectors such as engineering, petroleum products and gems and jewellery, even as the trade deficit widened to \$6.3 billion, according to government data released on Tuesday.

Imports grew by almost 74% to \$38.6 billion – leaving a trade deficit for the month at \$6.3 billion.

Exports during April-May this year jumped to \$62.9 billion, from \$29.4 billion in the year-earlier period. Imports were recorded at \$84.3 billion, an increase from \$39.3 billion in the same two months of 2020. The trade deficit came in at \$21.4 billion, as against \$9.9 billion.

Adani Group shares close on a mixed note

Flagship Adani Enterprises gains 2.45%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Max Life Insurance on Tuesday reported a 33% jump in death claim settlements to more than ₹885 crore for FY21.

The private sector insurer said its claim settlement ratio also touched an all-time high at 99.35% during the year. It represents the ratio of the number of claims paid against the number of claims filed during a particular time-frame.

Max Life Insurance has paid 19,922 death claims worth ₹885.57 crore during the financial year 2020-21. With this, the company said it had achieved an all-time high individual death claims paid ratio of 99.35.

On Tuesday, Adani Enterprises gained 2.45% to ₹1,441.40 while Adani Total Gas tanked 5% to ₹1,467.35. Shares of Adani Power slumped 4.97% to ₹133.90 and that of Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone declined 0.94% to ₹761.45.

The comments come as major U.S. technology firms including Twitter and Facebook are at loggerheads with the government over issues such as data privacy bills and policies some industry executives have called protectionist.

The CCI initiated a probe last year on a complaint alleging Amazon and Flipkart promoted select sellers on their platforms.

Retail sales decline 79%

Indian women return to the Test arena today

Mithali & Co. short on practice but high on confidence as they meet England

INDIA IN ENG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BRISTOL

A favourable record in England and a "positive mindset" despite inadequate time for preparation will spur the Indian women's team when it takes on England in its first Test engagement in nearly seven years here from Wednesday.

After multiple quarantines in India and the UK, the Mithali Raj-led squad got little over a week, that too only in the nets, to prepare for its first red-ball game since November 2014.

Mithali is among the seven players who were part of that victorious XI against South Africa in Mysuru.

Seventeen-year-old Shafali Verma is expected to make her debut and open the innings with Smriti Mandhana. The experienced trio of Mithali, Harmanpreet and Punam Raut follow.



What a finish! The Indian players are on cloud nine after the Test victory against England at Wormsley in 2014. ■ FILE PHOTO

On the bowling front, veteran pacers Jhulan Goswami and Shikha Pandey will have to shake off the rust of the long hiatus.

The spinners, who had a forgettable time at home in the limited-overs series

against South Africa, will be itching to make amends. In England, India has not lost in eight Tests and won two.

The squads: India: Mithali Raj (Capt.), Smriti Mandhana, Harmanpreet Kaur (Vice-Capt.), Punam Raut, Priya Punia, Deep-

ti Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Sneh Rana, Tanya Bhattrai (wk), Indrani Roy, Jhulan Goswami, Shikha Pandey, Pooja Vastrakar, Arundhati Reddy, Poonam Yadav, Ekta Bisht and Radha Yadav.

England: Heather Knight (Capt.), Nat Sciver (Vice-Capt.),

India has played 36 Tests, won five, lost six, drawn 25

■ India's last Test was against South Africa in 2014 at Mysuru. The host won by an innings and 34 runs

■ The victory helped India equal Australia's record of most successive Test wins (three)

■ India's final Test against England was played at Wormsley in 2014, where it won by six wickets

■ In bilateral Tests between India and England, Mithali tops the charts with 505 runs (avg. 63.12). Jhulan is the leading bowler with 29 wickets (avg. 14.93).

Emily Arlott, Tammy Beaumont, Katherine Brunt, Kate Cross, Freya Davies, Sophia Dunkley, Sophie Ecclestone, Georgia Elwiss, Tash Farrant, Sarah Glenn, Amy Jones, Anya Shrubsole, and Mady Villiers, Fran Wilson and Lauren Winfield-Hill.

Match starts at 3.30 p.m.

Players want to figure in longer format'

Mithali says priority is to take the field in right frame of mind

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

When Mithali Raj made her international debut, the third millennium hadn't dawned yet. She was only 16 when she made an unbeaten 114 against England in an ODI at Milton Keynes to announce her arrival, in 1999.

More than two decades later, she is still the mainstay of the Indian women's team, that takes on England in the one-off Test at Bristol from Wednesday. The captain sounded confident on the eve of the match.

She, however, isn't thinking of the record that beckons India – most successive Test wins. India has won its last three Tests and no country has won four in a row.

"I am not looking at the record," Mithali, who became the second woman to score 10,000 international runs three months ago, said at a virtual conference on Tuesday.



Mithali. ■ FILE PHOTO

"For us, the first thing is to get out there in a confident frame of mind. Let us see how it goes from there," she said.

Debutants

Since India's last Test was played seven years ago, a few youngsters are bound to make their debut at Bristol. With hardly any red-ball cricket on India's women's domestic circuit, they could find the long format particu-

larly challenging.

"You don't want to burden them with expectations and responsibilities," said Mithali. "As a team we would support them on the field and they should just enjoy playing this format."

She hopes the current tour could be a new beginning as far as women's Test cricket is concerned. "This – and the pink-ball Test in Australia later on – opens the channel to have a three-format bilateral series," the skipper said.

"Cricketers still want to play the longer format. Because... that is the format that tests the skills of the players. Maybe in the coming years, it might also lead to a World Test championship."

After making her Test debut in 2002, she has played only nine more. None of those Tests had attracted as much attention as the one that is about to get underway as it will be telecast live.

Lack of match practice a disadvantage, but we are ready: Pujara

Maybe a few extra days of preparation would have helped, but we can't complain, says India's batting mainstay

WTC FINAL

AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

Cheteshwar Pujara, the senior batsman, has admitted that lack of a warm-up fixture ahead of India's inaugural World Test Championship (WTC) final versus New Zealand is a bit of a disadvantage.

"It is (a disadvantage), but this is something we can't control. These are challenging times in the world because of the pandemic, and you can't have the luxury of extra preparation time. But the most important part is the game is still going on and that we're playing a final," Pujara said from Southampton in a virtual media interaction on Tuesday.

"Yes, preparation time is a bit of a disadvantage maybe, but if you are ready for the

challenge, even if circumstances aren't favourable, you would do well. We are confident as a team. Maybe a few extra days of preparation would have helped, but we can't complain. We are ready."

India will face New Zealand at The Ageas Bowl from Friday. While New Zealand will enter the game having defeated England in a two-Test series, India has had to make do with intra-squad match besides net sessions after serving mandatory quarantine in Southampton.

Pujara insisted that India had made the most of the "centre-wicket simulation", with batsmen trying to "spend time in the middle" and bowlers "getting used to workload".

The veteran batsman, who is one of the leading Test-match specialists for India, stressed the WTC final is as



Historic moment: Pujara says the WTC final is like a World Cup final for him.

big as a World Cup final for him.

"Personally, it means a lot to me. This is the first time we are in a WTC final. We have worked hard over a pe-

riod of time. It's just like playing in a 50-over or T20 World Cup final," he said.

"Test cricket needs to survive, and a WTC format helps where every Test, every se-

ries is important. If we win, then many youngsters would want to play the Test format and be part of the final when the next cycle comes around."

It was an ideal preparation to play two Test matches with guys getting match preparation. I couldn't think of anything better.

ROSS TAYLOR

Meanwhile, India has omitted Shardul Thakur from the 15-member squad for the WTC final. The pruned squad was announced on Tuesday as per the ICC regulations.

The team management has preferred the experience of Umesh Yadav ahead of the Mumbai pacer.

The squad:

Virat Kohli (Capt.), Ajinkya Rahane (Vice-capt.), Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Hanuma Vihari, Umesh Yadav, Ravichandran Ashwin, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Wriddhiman Saha (wk).

Williamson cleared to play, will lead the Kiwis

REUTERS



New Zealand has cleared captain Kane Williamson and wicketkeeper BJ Watling to play in the inaugural World Test Championship final against India, while retaining Ajaz Patel as a specialist spinner in the 15-man squad.

Doug Bracewell, Jacob Duffy, Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra and Mitchell Santner will miss out after being part of the original 20-player touring squad.

"Kane and BJ have certainly benefited from their week of rest and rehabilitation and we expect them to be fit and available for the final," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said on Tuesday.

"We've gone with Ajaz as our specialist spinner after an impressive outing at Edgbaston (against England) and we believe he could be a

Dravid confirmed as coach



Rahul Dravid. ■ FILE PHOTO

INDIA IN SL

ANI

NEW DELHI

Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah has confirmed that former India skipper Rahul Dravid will coach the team for the limited-overs series against Sri Lanka.

The Shikhar Dhawan-led team will play three ODIs and three T20Is at the R. Premadasa International Cricket Stadium in Colombo.

"Rahul will be coaching the team for the Sri Lanka series," Shah said.

The team assembled on Monday and is undergoing seven days of hard quarantine.

Medvedev ousted

HALLE OPEN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BERLIN

World No. 2 Daniil Medvedev, the top seed here, was a first-round casualty at the ATP grass court tournament in Halle on Tuesday as he suffered a shock 7-6 (6), 6-3 defeat to Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff.

Fourth seed Andrey Rublev beat his doubles partner Karen Khachanov 6-3, 7-6(5) in the first round.

Consistent India starts favourite, says Laxman

ASHWIN ACHAL

BENGALURU

V.S. Laxman backed India to overcome a lack of match practice and win the ICC World Test Championship final against New Zealand.

Former India batsman Laxman, Ian Bishop and Shane Bond spoke in a virtual press conference organised by official broadcaster Star Sports.

"India starts as favourite. India has been the most consistent team, both home and away, in this two-year Test cycle. There is so much depth and experience in this Indian line-up. New Zealand may have an advantage having just played a Test series in England, but this Indian team is capable of overcoming any challenge," Laxman said.

The Hyderabad stylist stated that the Indian openers, Rohit Sharma in particular, should avoid fishing outside off.

"It is very important for every opener to know where his off-stump is. Leaving balls outside off, in the channel of uncertainty, is something which Rohit should focus on. Rohit has another challenge in the form of Trent Boult, who brings the ball in. He also knows that against Boult, he cannot take his left leg across. Rohit has to play with the full face of the bat.

These are two things that Rohit needs to address at the start of his innings," Laxman said.

Former West Indies pacer Bishop stated that India's ideal bowling attack should consist of three pacers – Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma – and two spinners, R. Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja. Umesh Yadav and Mohammed Siraj are the two other bowling options available for India.



Shubman Gill. ■ FILE PHOTO

It would've been nice to represent the country in WTC'

However, for the spectators it would be difficult to follow multiple series in between: Tendulkar

AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

Sachin Tendulkar, former India captain, is excited ahead of the inaugural WTC final. He shared his views ahead of the contest in a brief conversation. Excerpts:

What would your preferred bowling combination be for India?

It depends on the surface and I am sure the groundsmen will be watering it till the 17th. I haven't had a look at the wicket but I know there are three options. One

is to play with seven batters, three seamers and one spinner. The second option is to play with four seamers and one spinner. And the last is to play three seamers and two spinners. It's too early to figure out the combination. The advantage with India is both the spinners can bat.

What do you make of the contrasting preparation for both the sides?

It is actually a coincidence that New Zealand and England have played a series just before the WTC final.

But they obviously have that advantage of having played two practice matches in the form of Tests. We haven't had that advantage but I would much rather focus on having done whatever best we could, given the circumstances. It is important to think of the next step rather than the last one. The next step matters and that's where the focus should be.

Would you have liked to be a part of a concept like WTC?

It would have obviously been nice to be representing the

country in the Test Championship final. As a player, yes. But am not too sure as a spectator. It's too spaced out, I feel.

There were multiple series happening in between, so it was difficult to follow. But as a player, it would have been exciting. The gaps in series make it difficult to follow.

For instance, we played New Zealand early in 2020 and now after 16 months, we'll be playing them in the final. It's a long time.



Sachin Tendulkar. ■ FILE PHOTO

Ronaldo's brace powers Portugal past Hungary

Defending champion begins with 3-0 win; misfiring Spain held 0-0 by Sweden

EURO 2020

REUTERS

BUDAPEST

Portugal began the defence of its title at Euro 2020 with a 3-0 victory over Hungary on Tuesday as Cristiano Ronaldo struck twice to become the all-time leading scorer in European Championship history.

Raphael Guerreiro's deflected shot broke Hungary's resistance on 84 minutes and Ronaldo smashed home a penalty before he added a third in stoppage time.

Ronaldo, the first player to appear at five different Euros, has now scored 11 goals in the tournament, surpassing the record of nine set by France's Michel Platini.

Poor finishing

Spain tried to pass Sweden into oblivion in its 2020 opener on Monday but had to settle for a 0-0 draw as it was let down by poor finishing and might have even lost had it not been for a glaring miss by opposing striker



On a high: Ronaldo over

