





## SHORT TAKES

LOCAL  
TRANSPORT CAN  
ADD TO FINAL COST

From page 1

Before Friday's 28 paise hike, the previous increase of 27 paise per litre was on June 1.

While local transportation costs can contribute to the final price at the pump in some places, this cost is very negligible and the real cost that people pay comes from the taxes that are levied by both the state and Central governments on petrol. The Telangana government levies a value added tax of 35.2 per cent on every litre on petrol, that as on Friday works out to ₹25.62, and the VAT on diesel in the state stands at 27 per cent which works out to ₹19.84 per litre.

Diesel cost ₹93.38 per litre in Hyderabad on Friday. The Centre, on its part, collects ₹32.90 per litre on petrol and ₹31.80 per litre as tax on diesel.

PLANS FOR  
MUSI REMAIN  
ON PAPER

From Page 1

In July 2020, amid the Covid-19 lockdown, MRDCL authorities identified a few patches on the banks of the river where there was scope for development: 3.5 km from Nagole to Kothapet, 3 km in Uppal Bhagat, 2 km from Chaderghat to Purnanul and about 2 km near Muslim Jung Bridge. The authorities decided to construct walking and cycling tracks of about six-metre width at a few locations and of three metres at other places. Officials said that they have spent ₹9 crore for the development.

However, these plans remained on paper. Neither has the Water Board constructed sewerage treatment plants (STPs) to arrest the sewage flowing into the river and preventing the stench emanating from the river, nor has the GHMC strengthened any bund of the bunds which were washed away during the flash floods of October last year.

Instead, the water board has been leaving over 1000 MLD (million litres a day) directly into the river. Apart from minor beautification works near Shilparamam at Nagole, the revenue department neither removed encroachments nor initiated action against HMRL for dumping debris into the river during the construction of MGBS bus station.

Asked about these issues, MRDCL chairman D. Sudheer Reddy said, "I took charge in February last year, and the lockdown followed in March. Amid multiple challenges we hardly had five months for development and the Musi project has made decent progress. However, I can assure that in three years the Musi project will see radical changes."

MRDCL managing director Vishwajit Kampati was unavailable for clarifications.

● **INSTEAD, THE water board has been leaving over 1000 MLD (million litres a day) directly into the river. Apart from minor beautification works near Shilparamam at Nagole, the revenue department neither removed encroachments nor initiated action against HMRL for dumping debris into the river during the construction of MGBS bus station.**

## Risky zone



Women crowd at the Nampally area hospital for a regular check-up. They visit the hospital on Mondays and Fridays and risk catching Covid-19 as the authorities have not enforced norms.

— P. SURENDRA

Kids at receiving end  
as Covid-19 spreads

Around 2-3% children might need to be hospitalised, say experts

KANIZA GARARI | DC  
HYDERABAD JUNE 4

With 2,86,326 new cases of Covid-19 reported from March 15 in Telangana, a fear now is that children will fall prey to the pandemic and they might be faced with multisystem inflammatory syndrome in the coming weeks.

The worst-case scenario is of a five per cent share for children in the arrivals in hospitals for admission and treatment in the peak-term possibility of 1 lakh cases.

With more than two lakh Covid cases currently under treatment in the state, it will require gearing up for the paediatric challenge if more children are affected and required hospitalisation.

With the eruption of more Covid-19 cases in rural areas, the central ministry of health and family welfare have prepared models of a 'worst case scenario' and asked pediatricians across the country to gear up for the challenge in the coming months.

They are expecting MISC (multisystem inflammato-

ry syndrome in children) cases from this month in large numbers and want the healthcare set-up to be ready to face this challenge. Paediatric care requires specialists for intensive unit care and the existing facilities must be ramped up for the same.

An expert group under the chairmanship of Dr A.K. Deorari has gone through national and international data indicating that some two to three per cent children will require hospitalisation in the second wave. In the worst case scenario, it can increase to five per cent.

For this reason, hospitals must improve capacity in their treatment to meet the demand as it arises from this month.

With a large number of families suffering from Covid in the second wave, children are likely to show symptoms three weeks later. The symptoms to watch out for are continuous fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, pain in the stomach, rashes in the skin, heavy breathing, redness or swelling of lips and tongue, redness or swelling of hands and feet,

headache and dizziness.

With more people from rural areas falling prey to the Covid-spread in the second wave, the fear is that only some 40 per cent of the affected will go to the private sector facilities and as high as 60 per cent will opt for treatment at government hospitals.

For this reason the district hospitals must have at least 10 per cent beds reserved for sick children. They must also have paediatricians and other specialists in hand.

Dr Faisal Nadhi, paediatrician at Rainbow Hospitals, explained: "There are set protocols in place to treat MIS-C. We have treated children in the first wave too. Awareness about these symptoms helps parents come to hospitals early. The first wave has created this awareness and in the second wave too, we are hoping for the same. It can be easily treated if they come in early."

In the first wave, MISC was noted in children from September 2020 onwards. In the second wave, experts say June and July will see these cases.

Dr Ravi Kumar, professor and paediatrician at Niloufer Hospital, said: "Healthy children will not require hospitalisation and they recover with medicines. The worry is for children who are suffering from co-morbid conditions like problems of kidney stones, congenital heart disease, cerebral palsy, tuberculosis and obesity."

"If there is an unrecognised ailment, it can get aggravated during these times. These can be complications. For healthy children, these problems are not noted. We have seen less than 1 per cent of cases in the first wave."

Paediatricians said challenges were noted in asymptomatic cases where both parents were infected with Covid but were not aware of it. It is only when the child is brought to hospital with MISC that they know that they have suffered from Covid-19. These asymptomatic cases pose a problem as the child is not brought in early and it would require aggressive treatment for cure. Experts say awareness and alertness will help.

Geetha Reddy seeks  
action against RamdevDC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JUNE 4

Senior Congress leader Dr J. Geetha Reddy demanded that the Centre prosecute Baba Ramdev and Balakrishna of Patanjali Group for their utterances against the medical fraternity and for claiming that allopathy was a 'stupid science', at a time when doctors were fighting relentlessly against Covid-19.

She demanded stringent action against both of them for misleading people on allopathy and for inciting communal discord.

In a letter written to Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan and law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, on behalf of the

AICC All India Professionals' Congress (AIPC), Dr Geetha Reddy said "Baba Ramdev's remarks were not only ill-conceived and dangerous but also contributed to vaccine hesitancy in an already fearful climate. He also claimed that people succumbed to the illness because of allopathic medicines rather than oxygen shortage".

"To make matters worse, Ramdev's close aide Acharya Balakrishna, chairman of Patanjali Group, added a communal twist with his tweet that it was all a conspiracy to convert the entire country to Christianity and to malign both yoga and ayurveda by targeting Baba Ramdev. He further instigated communal

fears by urging the countrymen to wake up before it is too late. Adding fuel, Ramdev asserted that he would convert at least 1,000 allopathic doctors to ayurveda," Geetha Reddy, who is also regional coordinator, south zone, AIPC, stated. The actions of Ramdev and Balakrishna are in clear violation of Article 51A of the Constitution, Indian Penal Code 1860 and the Disaster Management Act 2005 and attracted legal action, she noted.

"Such statements are dangerous and harmful to the public and detrimental to public health. They ought to be prosecuted as their comments are discrediting people from getting vaccinated," she added.

ADVOCATE-COUPLE MURDER: HC  
CLOSES SUO MOTU PETITION

**Hyderabad:** The Telangana High Court on Friday closed the suo motu petition taken on its own over the brutal killing of advocate-couple Gattu Vaman Rao and P.V. Nagalakshmi in Kalvacherla village of Peddapalli district.

As the chargesheet by the investigation team was filed before the trial court and it was to commence before the special sessions court in Karimnagar on June 10, the High Court disposed of the suo motu petition, through which it had monitored the investigation.

The court was given status reports every fortnight by the investigation authorities.

The court gave several directions to the investigation team and asked for evidence from passengers, drivers and conductors of

● **THE COURT gave several directions to the investigation team and asked for evidence from passengers, drivers and conductors of RTC buses, on the incidents that led to the couple being hacked to death on February 17.**

RTC buses, on the incidents that led to the couple being hacked to death on February 17.

Police submitted a fresh status report before the High Court on Friday.

Although, pleas were filed before it seeking a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the daylight murder, the High Court made it clear that it would only monitor investigation done by the local police, in order to avoid unnecessary delay.

NAMES OF HOSPS  
STILL IN ENGLISH

From Page 1

The url (uniform resource locator), primarily the address for the website on the internet - [cowin.gov.in](http://cowin.gov.in) - remains in English.

Once the website is accessed, a user needs to click on a small icon at the extreme right with the alphabet 'A' in a small box, right at the top of the website.

Once the icon is clicked, the user can choose the language of his or her choice, which translates

the registration/sign-in link into the chosen language. Also, the link for booking a slot then becomes available in the language of choice.

However, there are still some limitations on the website when it comes to accessibility in regional languages as not all information, once the link for booking a slot is clicked, is available in the language of choice.

The names of hospitals, or even the names of states, districts in the search fields remain in English.

Etala alleges KCR humiliated him  
Development projects  
for Huzurabad laid out

From Page 1

Former health minister Etala Rajendar slammed the Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao for sacking him without even seeking his explanation to the allegations against him and his family. Stating that the gap between him and Chandrashekar Rao developed five years ago, he asked the Chief Minister whether a minister could be removed from office based on an anonymous petition.

Rajendar alleged that the Chief Minister had humiliated him by denying him an appointment on many occasions and was sent back along with ministers and MLAs from the gates of Pragathi Bhavan and the farmhouse.

He alleged that the TRS chief who used to believe in righteousness and the people during the Telangana movement was now relying on money, conspiracies and was crushing opponents.

"Many leaders were sent out of the party through conspiracies. Is there any minister in the state Cabinet or any officer in the government who is working independently? Even Harish Rao faced several humiliations. All my previous colleagues in the TRS may now condemn my comments but they all know what the truth is," the former minister said.

Rajendar said he won the election whenever the party fielded him as its candidate.

From Page 1

It was also decided to launch a slew of development activities and address long-pending issues in Huzurabad until the election code comes into force. Chandrashekar Rao will campaign in Huzurabad as he did in Nagarjunasagar, where he addressed two public meetings, the first time he campaigned in a bye-election.

The party leadership reportedly attaches much significance to the Huzurabad bypoll than the ones at Dubbak and Nagarjunasagar as it feels

that earlier bypolls were necessitated due to untimely demises of respective sitting MLAs but the Huzurabad bypoll is coming as per the wishes of the party following sacking of Rajendar from the Cabinet and his subsequent resignation from the Assembly.

The party leadership views this bypoll as a 'do-or-die battle' as any upset in this election would have huge political implications on the TRS as well as the state government and may become a rallying point for anti-TRS and anti-Chandrashekar Rao forces

to realign and unite before crucial 2023 December Assembly elections.

A victory with a decent majority in Huzurabad will make voices of dissent in the party, if any, completely silent and dash plans of party leaders to quit the party to join other parties.

By defeating former minister Rajendar, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti leadership wants to send a loud and clear message that the TRS remains unbeatable in Telangana political landscape and for the party, individuals, however big they are, do not matter much.

## JAB | REQUEST

## Min. says exporting vaccine was a wrong decision

## KTR asks Centre to import vax

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JUNE 4

Telangana state has urged the Centre to import Covid-19 vaccines from countries that have them in surplus. This, IT minister K.T. Rama Rao said, will help states vaccinate their people.

"Universal Covid-19 vaccination is the only permanent solution for dealing with the present crisis," said the minister while inaugurating a 150-bed intensive care unit (ICU) for Covid-19 patients at the Telangana Institute of Medical Sciences (TIMS) in Gachibowli here.

Rama Rao pointed out that 50 crore vaccines manufactured by AstraZeneca are lying unutilised in countries like Norway, Denmark, Canada and the USA. "What is preventing the centre from

opening dialogue with these countries and procuring the vaccines. This will allow for vaccination of half of the Indian population," he stated.

The minister regretted that the Central government has depended only on two companies - Bharat Biotech and Serum Institute of India — for supply of vaccines, though it would not be possible for them to meet the huge demand of the country. "Central government policy on procurement and administration of vaccines is faulty. Exporting vaccines to other countries when we have a large population was a wrong decision. We now need vaccines but there are no sufficient stocks. Opening up vaccination process for 18-44 years group without sufficient stocks

has further complicated issues at the ground level," he underlined.

Rama Rao was critical of the manner in which the Centre was going about procuring and distribution Covid vaccines, making the states answerable to their people. There is a hue and cry for vaccines and long queues at public health centres. But the private sector has been slow in meeting the challenge due to lack of a robust vaccination process, he said.

The minister underlined that with cases of Coronavirus reducing in the state, state government is upgrading its health infrastructure to ensure that there is availability of oxygen, ventilators and other medical devices at government hospitals.

Incidentally, the Telangana state government and

Hyderabad Software Enterprises Association (HYSEA) member companies are coordinating in providing ventilators, oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators, beds, masks, flow meters and other equipment to TIMS, Kondapur District Hospital, Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital, Niloufer Hospital, Gandhi Hospital, King Koti and Fever Hospital.

Rama Rao, along with principal secretary Jayesh Ranjan, Cyberabad police commissioner V.C. Sajjanar, Ranga Reddy district collector Amoy Kumar, and health and medical education director Dr K. Ramesh Reddy went around the TIMS hospital and met patients. The minister spoke to patients and inquired from them about the treatment being given to them.



## SHORT TAKES

WARANGAL JAIL  
INMATES SHIFTED  
TO NIZAMABADDC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD, JUNE 4:

Around 50 prisoners shifted from Warangal central jail to Nizamabad district jail. In view of the demolition of Warangal jail, the inmates shifted here. Currently, 300 prisoners were kept in Nizamabad jail and after the joining of Warangal prisoners, the number reached 350 on Friday. The Nizamabad district jail capacity is 460. The officials are planning to shift a few more prisoners from Warangal to Nizamabad.

GANDHIAN SOCIETY  
DONATES OXYGEN  
CONCENTRATORSDC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD, JUNE 4

Gandhian society of New Jersey-USA donated four oxygen concentrators worth ₹2.50 lakh to the Rotary club of Nizamabad and Rotary club of Gems in Nizamabad. On behalf of the Gandhian society, TPCC former secretary Narala Ratnakar initiated a donation and commissioner of police, Kartikeya handed over the oxygen concentrators to the Rotary club members. He appreciated the donors for the initiative during Covid pandemic. The donors are also planning to send more oxygen concentrators to Nizamabad soon, he said.

Covid second wave badly  
affects transport sector

Many families dependent on transport sector are facing difficulties

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD, JUNE 4

Covid-19 pandemic has affected the transport sector in the erstwhile Nizamabad district. Taxi drivers, autos and other travel agencies are unable to get regular business from the customers. Hundreds of families dependent on the transport sector have been facing difficulty for livelihood during the lockdown.

Problems in the transport sector began after the first wave of Covid-19 in March 2020. government restrictions on travelling adversely affected autos, taxis and other travel mini vans. However, people are also unwilling for community travel. They preferred their own vehicles even for emergency works.

Srinivas Goud, auto driver said that he regularly gets Rs 1000 to Rs 1500 per day carrying the passengers from Nizamabad to Sirikonda route. Currently, I am unable to get at least Rs 200 per day, he lamented.

"I am defaulted for bank EMIs for auto loan and unable to meet daily expenses of the

342 discom staff test  
Covid +ve, four dead

**Khammam:** Nearly one-fourth of the 1,656 employees working with the Northern Power Distribution Corporation Ltd in united Khammam district has been tested Covid-positive. The employees are worried and tensed.

The fast spreading of Covid-19 in the second wave showed more effect on the employees working in the meter-reading department. About 342 employees were hit by the pandemic and 4 persons died of it so far.

There are 1,002 employees in the district electricity department. Of them, 192 tested positive and two persons died. In Bhadradi district, about 150 persons out of the 650 employees were hit by the virus

and two of them passed away.

About 75 per cent of the meter-reading workforce is drawn from outsourcing agencies and 25 per cent from among the electricity department staff. The outsourcing employees are not coming to do meter reading due to the intense spread of virus in the second wave.

Faced with this situation, the electricity department introduced a self-billing App and asked customers to download the App. The customers can read the meter through the App and pay the bills online. But, the App did not give the expected results.

On the other hand, the unseasonal gales in various areas in Khammam

district forced the field staff like artisans, lineman, sub-station operators, assistant engineers and deputy engineers to go to the villages to restore the power lines and burnt transformers.

Lineman Srinivasa Rao said these personnel have to meet the casual labourers while restoring the transformers and there is every possibility of contracting the virus.

United electricity employees union secretary Prasad said more employees in the meter-reading department fell victim to the virus. The government is urged to recognize them as frontline warriors and give vaccination to the employees on priority basis, he said.

## Helping hand



American Vasahi California members hand over an oxygen concentrator to District Collector K. Shashanka in Karimnagar on Friday

Complaints pour in  
against pvt hosps  
for overchargingDC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD, JUNE 4

Complaints are pouring in against Covid-19 private hospitals in Nizamabad district for overcharging patients. A few patients and their kin lodged complaints with district medical and health department officials against some hospital managements following which officials issued notices.

The district administration accorded permission for 56 private hospitals to treat Covid patients. During the severe second wave of the pandemic, the patients preferred joining private hospitals. There was a shortage of beds in private hospitals during April, when the pandemic was severe. Taking advantage, few private hospital managements overcharged the patients.

As per Government GO 248 dated 15.06.2020, private hospitals can charge ₹4,000 per day for general ward/isolation facility, ₹7,500 for ICU without ventilator and isolation facility and ₹9,000 for ICU with ventilator and isolation facility.

Against this, some hospitals charged patients ₹25,000 to ₹35,000 per day even for general ward admission. Covid patients were forced to shell out ₹2.5 lakh for five days in private hospitals.

District medical and health officer Bala Narendra said

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that they issued notices to private hospital managements and after getting their explanation, further action will be initiated.

Meanwhile, Syed Qamruddin of Nizamabad lodged a complaint with the DMHO stating that Rudrasai Hospital in Nizamabad collected ₹1.38 lakh for five days of Covid treatment. The hospital bill was ₹70,000, pharmacy bill ₹62,452 and lab charges ₹6,000. "We are unable to bear the exorbitant charges," he said.

Nayimuuddin complained that Pratibha Hospital was collecting ₹3.36 lakh for Covid treatment. It had collected ₹25,000 for patients without oxygen, ₹35,000 with oxygen and average pharmacy charges of ₹5,000 per day.

HUSBAND FORCES  
COVID-19 PATIENT  
TO ISOLATE IN  
BATHROOM

**Adilabad:** Medi Peddiah asked his wife, who had tested Covid-19 positive, to stay for a few days in the bathroom so that other family members do not contract the virus. The family resides in Ramnagar colony in Luxettipet in Mancherial district. It is learnt that the victim is struggling to stay in a small bathroom. She spent one day in the bathroom and before that under a shed.

The incident came to light late on Friday. The Covid victim works as a servant in the Luxettipet municipal chairperson's house and recently he and his family members had tested positive.

Medical and health, police and revenue officials visited the victim's house and counselled the husband and other family members against taking such an extreme measure. As there were children in the house, the husband wanted to ensure their safety in the small house. The officials took the victim inside the house and kept her in home isolation by taking all precautions. They also gave medicines, essential commodities and fruits to her. The issue came to light when the neighbours saw the plight of the woman and informed authorities.

## Farmers blame rice millers for their losses

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD, JUNE 4

Farmers here have alleged that a section of rice millers are indulging in irregularities in paddy procurement. Citing reasons like "inferior quality" of paddy, these rice millers are reducing an average seven kg from the actual weight of a quintal of paddy.

This is causing heavy loss to the farmers. There were frequent complaints against rice millers, but officials are not taking note and also not taking any action against errant millers, the farmers complain.

With a view to ensuring minimum support price, the state has roped in government agencies like primary agriculture cooperative societies, MEPMA and women self-help groups to start procuring paddy from farmers.

The paddy is being shifted to rice mills for milling of rice. In this transaction, at paddy purchasing centre level and in rice mills, the under weighing happens.

There is variation in measurement details of paddy procurement at purchasing centres and rice mill, resulting in huge loss to the farmers. Citing reasons like moisture content and "foreign elements" in the produce, the millers deduct five to

1.2K tonnes of paddy  
damaged due to rainDC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, JUNE 4

Delay that was caused in the process of lifting of paddy from Indira Kranthi Patham centres to the rice mills has resulted in heavy loss to paddy farmers following the onset of the rainy season.

In some places, farmers were kept in wait mode by procurement officials for over a month, and now this damage has occurred.

About 1,200 tonnes of paddy placed in 75 centres at various mandals was hit by the rain.

The government had opened 285 procurement centres in 22 mandals of this district and the paddy lifting was going on in Kallur, Penuballi, Julurpad, Vemsoor, Sattupalli and Tallada mandals. Yet, the scarcity of lorries due to the lockdown turned out to be a curse to the farmers in ten mandals.

10 kg of paddy during the weighing of a quintal of paddy. Some transport operators have also joined

The affected mandals are Kusumanchi, Mudigonda, Chintakani, Wyra, Tirumalayapalem, Raghunathapalem and Nelakondapalli. These mandals witnessed rainfall on June 3 and 4.

In Kusumanchi, there existed 20 lifting centres. Some 50 tonnes of paddy was damaged in the rain. The situation in Nelakondapalli mandal with 12 lifting centres was also the same. At least 80 tonnes of the produce has been damaged in these centres.

About 100 tonnes of paddy placed in Wyra Farm Market has been damaged by the rain.

Bharatiya Kisan Morcha state president K. Sridhar Reddy, who visited the market, said, "The negligence of the government turned out to be a curse to the farmers. He urged the government to lift the paddy from the farmers and make full payment to them.

hands with the millers and caused heavy loss to the farmers.

Nadpi Gangaram, a

● Citing reasons like moisture content and "foreign elements" in the produce, the millers deduct five to 10 kg of paddy during the weighing a quintal of paddy.

farmer of Nandipet, said their woes during paddy procurement are not being addressed by officials. "We hoped to get the minimum support price for paddy with the help of government agencies, but in vain," he lamented. Compared with self-help groups, there is no fair business through primary agriculture cooperative societies, he opined.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, Nizamabad district rice millers association general secretary V Mohan Reddy said around 150 rice mills took part in the paddy procurement process. The price is decided based on the quality of paddy, he said.

Problem is that some farmers failed to clean the paddy stocks properly to get a better price, he said.

Another problem is that there is not enough space for rice millers to stock the paddy. Untimely rainfall also damaged the paddy on open ground. Rice millers are taking up paddy procurement based on the policies of the state and central governments, he said.

## DC IMPACT

RIMS GETS COOL  
DRINKING WATER  
DISPENSERDC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, JUNE 4

The women and Child welfare department officials of Adilabad have provided a cool drinking water dispenser at the Radiology department for the benefit of pregnant women and other patients who come to get scanning at Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Science (RIMS), Adilabad.

Women and Child Welfare department commissioner, Divya Devarajan has responded positively to the news item published in the DC highlighting the plights of the pregnant women for drinking water at the Radiology department in particular and patients in general at the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Science (RIMS), Adilabad on May 29. Commissioner instructed the district welfare officer Milka to provide a cool drinking water dispenser at the Radiology department officials set up the cool drinkingwater dispenser at the radiology department of the RIMS on June 3.

KISHAN REDDY OPENS  
THREE-DAY BHAGYANAGAR  
LITERARY FESTIVALDC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, JUNE 4

The three-day online Bhagyanagar Literary Festival organised by Think India began on Friday with Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy lamenting that children these days are not able to experience the joys of listening to stories from their grandparents.

"With the increasing adoption of Western culture by us, children are missing out on stories from the Panchatantra and the joy of learning from listening to stories," he said.

The minister said that, by adopting Western culture, people are increasingly forgetting our own culture, and recalled the value of reading classical Indian works such as Kalidasa's Abhigyan Shakuntalam.

He also spoke about the importance of the Vedas, the Quran, and the Upanishads.

Among those who were expected to speak during the online literary festival included Sunil Ambekar, Makarand Paranjape, Sushil Pandit, Shantanu Gupta, Shefali Vaidya, Pallavi Joshi, Tuhin Sinha, Swati Goel Sharma, Sanjeev Newar, Jayant Sinha, Abhijeet Iyer-Mitra, Adhikari, Abhinav Prakash, Amish Tripathi, Manoshi Sinha, and Sahana Vijayakumar.

Police keep tabs on RMPs  
to track Covid-hit MaoistsDC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, JUNE 4

Mancherial and Komaram Bheem Asifabad district police have intensified surveillance on the state borders and villages located on the banks of river Pranahitha and Godavari rivers with Warangal police arresting a senior Maoist leader Gaddam Madhukar who had come to Mulugu from Chattisgarh for Covid treatment on June 2. It is learnt that police are providing the treatment.

Police are also keeping a close watch on activities and movement of RMPs and PMPs following information that Covid-positive Maoists may take treatment from them.

Intelligence personnel are interacting with family members of Maoists for a health update on them. They are also enquiring about arrivals of new

## MAOIST SURRENDERS BEFORE SP

**Warangal:** Madakam Nandal alias Nandu who has been working as a guard to the commander, CPI Maoist SGS (special guerilla squad), Lachanna, surrendered himself in front of the superintendent of police, Mulugu, Sangramsingh G. Patil on Friday.

Nandu has been suffering from ill-health and since there was no opportunity to avail proper treatment, he decided to leave the forest and lead a normal life. Patil said that the 20-year-old Nandu is a native of Kourugutta, Pameda mandal, Bijapur District of Chhattisgarh state. In the year 2018 he joined as Dalam member in Cherla Arunakka

persons in villages and where they were being housed.

Madhukar (38) operat-

Dalam with the help of Somudu UG cadre and worked there for one year as Dalam member. latre he moved to Manuguru and worked as guard to Lachanna, special guerilla squad commander. Working as guard to Lachanna, he participated in the firing exchange at Tekulagudem of Chhattisgarh state, where 24 CRPF jawans died. Further, he also disclosed that so many Maoist UG cadre are infected with Covid-19 and some of them died due to no proper treatment, the SP said. Suggesting the Maoists to lead a normal life, SP said all the benefits from the government will be provided to the surrendered Maoists.

ing in Chattisgarh region is a native of Kondapalli village of Penchikalpet mandal in

Komaram Bheem Asifabad district. It is learnt that Madhukar from the washerman community and a school dropout had joined the Sirpur (T) Dalam of Naxalites in 1999.

News is that police are trying to ascertain the whereabouts of Mylarapu Adellu alias Bhaskar, who is a Telangana state committee member of Maoists and other members of the Asifabad-Mancherial division committee members and their health condition. Adellu is a native of Pochera village in Boath mandal of Adilabad district.

Old Adilabad district police are trying to find out if any Maoists from the area are affected by Covid. They are assuring the family members that the state government is ready to provide treatment to the Covid-affected if they seek police help.

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## SHORT TAKES

## GUJARAT ALLOWS OFFICES TO RUN WITH 100% STAFF

**Ahmedabad, June 4:** In the wake of a significant decline in Covid-19 cases, the Gujarat government on Friday announced that private as well as government offices in the state can now function with 100 per cent staff from June 7.

The decision was taken by Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, an official release issued on Friday said. All government offices will remain open on Saturday (June 5), it added.

Private as well as government offices in Gujarat have been functioning with 50 per cent staff since the beginning of May, when the state witnessed a substantial rise in infection cases. The state government had allowed only half the work force in offices in a bid to curb the spread of the virus.

However, the number of daily infections has come down drastically in the last couple of weeks. On Thursday, Gujarat recorded 1,207 new cases and 17 deaths.

## ASSAM HALTS 1ST DOSE OF COVAXIN DUE TO SHORTAGE

**Guwahati, June 4:** The Assam government has stopped administering the first dose of Covaxin due to its shortage, and will accord priority to 1.50 lakh people who are due for the second dose of the jab, a state minister said on Friday.

The current stock of Covaxin in the state is 20,000 but “we will get 50,000 more doses within the next few days”, minister for health and family welfare Keshab Mahanta said.

He also urged those who are slated for the second dose to not panic as the gap between the two doses has been increased from 28 to 42 days, and said they will be inoculated within the stipulated time.

The state has received 15,000 doses of vaccine on Friday, he added. Assam has 3.20 doses of Covishield and the vaccination process with it will continue as per schedule, the minister said.

## ALL MP DISTRICTS OUT OF RED ZONE, SAYS SHIVRAJ

**DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, JUNE 4**

All the 52 districts in Madhya Pradesh have emerged out of the red zone, bringing the Coronavirus pandemic in the state under control, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Friday.

Reviewing the pandemic situation in the state, Chouhan said no district is in the red zone now and all the districts in the state have been reporting a positivity rate below five per cent for the past one week.

The review meeting has indicated that 30 out of 52 districts in the state have been reporting positivity rate below one per cent since last one week, while the other 22 have been maintaining 1-5 per cent positivity rate since the last seven days.

Three districts, Alirajpur, Jabua and Katni have reported no fresh case on Friday, while four districts, Bhind, Mandla, Singrauli and Tikamgarh, recorded only one case each on the day.

## AMBUBACHI MELA CANCELLED FOR SECOND YEAR

**Guwahati, June 4:** The Ambubachi Mela at Assam's famed Kamakhya Temple here has been cancelled for the second consecutive year due to the Covid situation but rituals associated with the four-day annual fair will be performed by the priests from June 22.

The event, during which temple doors are closed for four days due to the belief of the annual menstrual cycle of Goddess Kamakhya, attracts over 25 lakh devotees from across the globe who seek blessings of the presiding deity when the doors are opened on the fifth day.

The Shakti Peeth atop the Nilachal Hill shall remain closed for visitors till June 30 and a decision regarding its reopening will be taken in consultation with the Kamrup Metropolitan district administration, a statement issued by the Maa Kamakhya Devalaya said on Friday.

No devotee shall be allowed to enter or stay on the temple premises and no arrangement for their food and lodging shall be made, it said.

## Kerala announces ₹20K-cr relief

₹5 cr set aside for children orphaned due to Covid; ₹1,000 cr to be used for free vaccination

**GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JUNE 4**

Pinarayi Vijayan government which came to power for the second time in Kerala after the recent polls, has presented it's maiden budget on Friday which comprised a ₹20,000 crore special package to deal with the huge crisis triggered by Covid 19 second wave.

While presenting the budget in state Assembly, Kerala's finance minister K.N. Balagopal announced that as part of the package ₹2,800 crore would be spent on facing health emergency situation.

The minister said ₹8,900 crore would be pumped into the market through various social welfare measures including social welfare pensions.

This would in turn help people who have been plunged into grave crisis

due to loss of livelihood. Besides, ₹8,300 crore has been set aside for interest subsidy on loans granted for reviving the economy.

The minister said all community health centres, taluk and district hospitals will have 10 isolation beds each. Each medical college to have separate blocks for dealing with epidemics. Oxygen plant with a capacity of 150 metric tonne would be set up.

Balagopal said ₹1,000 cr would be utilised for providing free Covid vaccination for all above 18 years of age.

The minister announced that ₹500 crore would be spent on providing infrastructure facilities including equipment for mass vaccination drive. The government has set aside ₹5 crore for children who lost their parents due to Covid. Each orphaned

child would be given ₹3 lakh.

Balagopal said the emphasis of the new budget was on ensuring health and food for all especially during the pandemic period. With the state still fighting the second wave, the current challenges posed by the pandemic are also adversely impacting the state's development, he added.

He said the government was also gearing up to face the challenges that third wave might pose.

People spared of tax hike as Pinarayi government focuses on reviving Covid hit economy.

While sparing the people of additional tax burden, the minister said this was not the right time to impose taxes. However, he said that considering the 18.7 per cent dip in state's revenue due to Covid crisis, it would be difficult to move forward without an

increase in tax and non tax revenues.

Balagopal said the government hoped to shore up more revenues when the economy comes back on track.

## Special package for coastal areas

The minister announced a special package for the state's coastal areas which witnessed widespread destruction due to recent cyclones and rains. The government would spend ₹5,300 crore as part of coastal package for coastal conservation activities including construction of integrating tetrapods and diaphragm walls.

A special loan package of ₹2,500 crore had been announced for farmers and ₹1,000 crore loans through Kudumbasree.

Opposition slams the government and said the budget is packed with

deceit. Opposition leader V.D. Satheeshan said the government had deceived the people by making false claims. The government had earlier claimed that ₹8,900 crore would be transferred directly into the hands of people. However, now it has retracted from the announcement which clearly indicates their trickery.

Satheeshan said the former finance minister Thomas Isaac before demitting office had claimed that he was leaving behind ₹5,000 crore in state's exchequer. Where is the money? asked Satheeshan.

## State reports 16,229 new cases; 25,860 recover

Kerala reported 16,229 new cases of Covid on Friday even as 25,860 people recovered from infection.



Naveen Patnaik

## ODISHA CANCELS CLASS XII EXAMS, SAYS PATNAIK

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 4**

After the Central Board of Education (CBSE), Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE), Odisha also on Friday cancelled the Class 12 (Plus II) examinations this year. The decision was taken in view of the uncertain conditions due to Covid-19 pandemic and feedback received from various stakeholders.

Announcing the decision, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said, “Education and livelihood have been the worst affected during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. However, keeping everyone safe in this pandemic is most important. Keeping in this view, the Plus II examinations conducted by CHSE have been cancelled this year. Ample opportunities will come in future and the civilisation will grow, only if we survive now,” he stated.

The Chief Minister also directed the CHSE to consult experts for recommendations and take steps to compile results of Plus II students as per a well-defined objective criteria in a time-bound manner.

## K'TAKA TO HOLD CLASS X EXAMS IN JULY: MIN.

**Bengaluru, June 4:** The Karnataka government on Friday announced that the SSLC or 10th standard examinations will be held in July third week while cancelling the second year pre-university course (PUC) exams this year in view of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The PUC second year students will be promoted to the next level and the grading will be based on their performance in the first PUC exam.

“The SSLC exam will have one multi-choice question paper for mathematics, science and social science and one more question paper for languages,” Karnataka primary and secondary education minister S. Suresh Kumar told reporters.

The multi-choice question paper bearing 40 marks will be easy and straight and there will not be any indirect questions, he said. Kumar said there will be a supplementary examination for those students who are affected by the Covid-19. The exam results will be out by August.

The exams will be conducted in 6,000 centres, which is double last year, the minister said, adding, each room will have 10 to 12 students. — PTI



A health worker collects swab samples for Coronavirus tests in Nagercoil of Tamil Nadu on Friday.

— PTI

## TN likely to extend curbs with relaxations

**G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, JUNE 4**

The total lockdown now in force in the state is expected to continue for one more week with a few minor relaxations like letting shops selling essential items open for a few hours in a day even as officials and experts deliberated on the merits and demerits on Friday.

The meeting presided over by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin was attended by most top officials of the state like chief secretary V. Irai Anbu, health secretary J. Radhakrishnan and DGP J.K. Tripathi besides medical experts and various health department officers.

Since the two week total lockdown had led to the number of cases coming down in most parts of the state, many were in favour of continuing it for at least another week with a view to enable the rate of infection to come under control.

## Decision on class XII exams only by Monday, says minister

**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JUNE 4**

The question on holding public examinations for Plus Two students of the state board hung on fire on Friday as educationalists, experts and officials were divided on the issue and a final decision was expected only by Monday.

In the deliberations the state minister for school education Anbil Mahesh Poyamozhi had with dis-

trict education officers, government officials and experts, some wanted the conduct of the examinations after the Covid-19 crisis was over while others favoured its cancellation.

The minister would hold a meeting with leaders of the Legislative parties in the state assembly on Saturday before finalising the issue, which has gained significance after the Centre cancelled examinations for the

CBSE and ICSE boards.

Queries came up on the granting of marks to the students in the event of calling off the examinations and concerns were also raised on fixing the eligibility for admission to colleges without granting marks, particularly when the government was mulling over not taking into consideration the scores obtained in NEET or any other qualifying examination.

ticularly those in the western part of the state.

Suggestions were made on opening big markets with restrictions and allowing businesses and commercial activities to resume in a small manner, though it was pointed out that such moves could turn risky and lead to spike in cases.

The government has also been receiving informal representations from various traders' bodies requesting the relaxation of the lockdown to enable them open their businesses, the closure of which had led to loss of livelihood for many people.

But the lack of discipline among the general people in following Covid-19 prevention norms has been a matter of concern for officials and also health experts, who feel that only a lockdown would ensure that people do not move around and spread the virus.

## Movement against plastic hit hard due to single-use items

**COVID | DETRITUS**

## PPE, masks, shields adds to waste crisis

**New Delhi, June 4:** The crisis of plastic and biomedical waste is deepening with each Covid case as millions of people use and throw face shields, surgical masks, gloves and PPE suits, once used primarily in hospitals and now an indispensable part of everyday life.

The movement against plastic has taken a battering in the pandemic with dependency on single-use plastic surging and households contributing to the tonnes of biomedical waste being generated, worried experts said ahead of World Environment Day on Saturday.

The detritus of the pandemic can be seen everywhere PPE suits lying discarded behind hospitals and crematoriums, surgical masks and shields

being thrown as part of household waste and, of course, sanitiser bottles, gloves and the like found in street corner garbage dumps.

With waste disposal mechanisms less than perfect in India and the plastic footprint becoming larger by the day, concerns on plastic waste choking the planet and worries about safety are mounting.

There has been a general increase and since it is a crisis situation, we are not thinking of plastic but general prevention. The focus is no longer plastic, so that is a problem, Ravi Agarwal, founder director of the environmental NGO Toxics Link, said.

A lot of biomedical waste like masks and PPE kits are also being generated in general homes

● India produced 45,308 tonnes of Covid-19 biomedical waste between June 2020 and May 10, 2021, an average daily generation of 132 tonnes of Covid-19 related waste.

now. So that is becoming a big problem. These things are finding their way across ecosystems. A lot of these things like masks can be seen on beaches, in coral reefs etc, he added.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), India produced 45,308 tonnes of Covid-19 biomedical waste between June 2020 and May 10, 2021, an average daily generation of 132 tonnes of Covid-19 related waste.

This is in addition to the 615 tonnes of biomedical waste a day being produced before Covid-19,

amounting to a 17 per cent increase in biomedical waste generation solely because of the pandemic.

Besides Covid-related waste from hospitals and homes with positive patients, there is pandemic promoted waste from non-Covid homes, including not just protective gear but also plastic packaging with more and more people using home deliveries for essential and non-essential shopping.

Under the existing waste disposal rules, biomedical waste is segregated into four categories Yellow (highly infectious waste such as human, animal, anatomical, soiled), Red (contaminated recyclable waste generated from disposable items like tubing, bottles tubes, syringes), White (waste sharps,

needles, syringes with fixed needles), and Blue (broken or discarded and contaminated glassware, including medicine vials).

Considered potentially infectious, all Covid waste, irrespective of content, is tagged Yellow and incinerated.

On the face of it, India seems well equipped to handle this extra load of biomedical waste with a national incineration capacity of 800 tonnes a day. But experts said there are other factors that needed to be taken into account.

Like the fact that due to the health crisis, non-Covid biomedical waste generation has also gone up. Secondly, these incinerators are meant for waste that has been segregated.

## TN: Lioness dies of suspected Covid-19

**P.A. JEBARAJ | DC CHENNAI, JUNE 4**

A nine-year-old lioness housed at the Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Vandalar has died of suspected Coronavirus infection on Thursday evening. Eight other lions have also been tested positive for SARS CoV-2.

The deceased lioness named Neela had been asymptomatic and showed some nasal discharge only the day before her death and had been treated immediately.

According to the statement from the zoological park, five lions housed in animal house 1 of the Safari Park Area of Arignar Anna Zoological Park showed anorexia (loss of appetite) and occasional coughing on May 26.

The zoo veterinary team investigated the case and started treatment as per protocol. A team of experts from Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University also joined the team later. Later, 9 of the 11 lions tested positive in the examination conducted at Bhopal-based National Institute of High Security Diseases (NIHSAD). One of them died on Thursday evening.

Samples of the swabs have now been sent to the Indian Veterinary Research institute Bareilly and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad on Friday to ascertain whether the reported findings are in the nature of false positives or the animal could have died of comorbidities.



## SHORT TAKES

## FIRE AT JUVENILE DETENTION KILLS 6 KIDS IN EGYPT

Cairo: A fire broke out on Thursday at a juvenile detention center in Egypt's capital of Cairo, killing at least six children, officials said.

The officials said the fire followed a fist-fight between two children in one ward at the facility, located in the city's Marj district. More than two dozen other children were injured, they said.

Police are holding those running the facility as prosecutors investigate the cause of the fire, the officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief media.

It was not immediately clear what caused the fire. Initial investigation blamed an electric short-circuit for the blaze, according to state-run media.

The state-run newspaper *Akhbar el-Yom* reported that the children were not able to flee the fire because the ward was locked.

## JAILED SAMSUNG LEADER FINED FOR PROPOFOL SHOTS

Seoul: South Korean prosecutors fined the jailed de facto leader of the giant Samsung group 50 million won (\$45,000) on Friday for illegally taking shots of the anaesthetic propofol. Lee Jae-yong — the 168th richest person in the world according to Forbes — is currently serving a two-and-a-half year prison sentence for bribery, embezzlement and other offences in connection with the corruption scandal that brought down ex-South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

He is also standing a separate trial over alleged stock manipulation that effectively eased the path for him to take control of the family conglomerate. Propofol is normally a medical anaesthetic but is also sometimes used recreationally. An overdose of the drug was given as the cause of pop star Michael Jackson's death in 2009.

Lee was accused of having repeatedly taken it at a plastic surgery clinic in Seoul in 2017 and 2018.

## GERMAN CLERIC TO QUIT OVER CHURCH ABUSE

Berlin: A leading German cardinal and confidant of Pope Francis, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, offered to resign Friday over the Catholic Church's "catastrophic" mishandling of clergy sexual abuse cases, declaring in an extraordinary gesture that the scandals had brought the church to "a dead end." The archdiocese of Munich and Freising, where Marx has served as archbishop since 2007, published his resignation letter to the pope online, in multiple languages, and the cardinal said Francis had given him permission to make it public.

"It is important to me to share the responsibility for the catastrophe of the sexual abuse by Church officials over the past decades," the 67-year-old Marx wrote in the letter. But he also issued a challenge of sorts for his fellow bishops to use the opportunity of the scandal to save the church and reform it. There was no immediate comment from the Vatican, where Marx sits on powerful financial and political committees.

## 12 OZ FIRMS FINED FOR BREAKING PELL ORDER

Canberra: A judge on Friday ordered a dozen Australian media companies to pay fines from 1,000 Australian dollars (\$766) to AU\$450,000 (\$345,000) for breaching a gag order by publishing references to Cardinal George Pell's since-overturned convictions in 2018 for child sexual abuse.

Dozens of companies, reporters and editors were initially charged with contempt and breaching a suppression order over their coverage of the convictions, which were banned from publication in Australia until February 2019.

Such suppression orders are common in the Australian and British judicial systems. But the enormous international interest in an Australian criminal trial with global ramifications highlighted the difficulty in enforcing such orders in the digital age. The media companies pleaded guilty in February to 21 charges of contempt in a plea deal in the Victoria state Supreme Court.



People hold up their phones with the light on in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong on Friday, after police closed the venue where Hong Kong people traditionally gather annually to mourn the victims of China's Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 which the authorities have banned citing the Coronavirus pandemic and vowed to stamp out any protests on the anniversary.

— AFP

## HK park empty for 1st time in 32 years on Tiananmen anniv.

Cops enforce ban public commemorations but protests flicker at distance

Hong Kong, June 4: A Hong Kong park that traditionally hosts huge vigils on the anniversary of China's deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown lay empty for the first time late Friday as police blocked access, but flashes of defiance still flickered across the city.

Huge crowds have routinely gathered in Hong Kong's Victoria Park to mark the anniversary of Chinese troops crushing peaceful democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.

Hundreds were killed in the crackdown, by some estimates more than 1,000.

Public commemorations are forbidden on the mainland and, until recently, semi-autonomous Hong Kong was the one place in China where large scale

remembrance was still tolerated.

This year's vigil was banned at a time when authorities are carrying out a sweeping clampdown on dissent following huge and often violent democracy protests two years ago.

Police threw cordons around the Victoria Park, keeping crowds out and leaving the venue free of candle carrying mourners for the first time in 32 years.

Activists who approached the park were stopped and searched, while officers used loud hailer and signs to call for people to disperse from nearby streets.

Some officers displayed signs warning chanting crowds that they were in breach of a sweeping new national security law Beijing imposed on the

**● POLICE THREW cordons around the Victoria Park, keeping crowds out and leaving the venue free of candle carrying mourners for the first time in 32 years.**

city last year to stamp out dissent.

Unable to muster en masse, many Hong Kong residents still found other ways to mourn the dead.

As the clock struck 8pm in Hong Kong's shopping district of Mong Kok, dozens of people simultaneously turned their mobile phone lights on, a small gesture of defiance in a city where mass remembrance of Beijing's Tiananmen crackdown has been banned.

It was a scene repeated

in multiple districts across the city.

For the last 32 years, crowds of Hong Kongers, often tens of thousands strong, have come together each June 4 in the city's Victoria Park to hold a candlelight vigil for those killed in 1989 when tanks and troops crushed pro-democracy protesters in China's capital.

Police arrested an organiser of Hong Kong's annual candlelight vigil remembering the deadly crackdown in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, warned people not to attend the banned event and cordoned off parts of the venue on Friday as authorities mute China's last pro-democracy voices.

In past years, tens of thousands of people gathered in Hong Kong's Victoria Park to honour those who

died when China's military put down student-led pro-democracy protests on June 4, 1989.

Hundreds, if not thousands, were killed. China's ruling Communist Party has never allowed public events on the mainland to mark the anniversary and security was increased at the Beijing square, with police checking pedestrians' IDs as tour buses shuttled Chinese tourists in and out.

Chinese officials say the country's rapid economic development in the years since what they call the "political turmoil" of 1989 proves that decisions made at the time were correct.

Efforts to suppress public memory of the Tiananmen events have lately turned to Hong Kong.

— AFP/AP

## China urges closer Afghan ties as US pullout looms

Beijing, June 4: China is urging closer security and economic cooperation with Afghanistan in an apparent effort to bolster its influence in the region as the US and its allies prepare to withdraw their forces from the country.

The official *Xinhua* News Agency reported that foreign ministers from China, Afghanistan and Pakistan met via video conference on Thursday and agreed that the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan should be carried out in a responsible and orderly manner to prevent the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan and the return of "terrorist forces."

It quoted Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi as saying the three countries "needed to strengthen communication and cooperation" for the sake

of Afghanistan's interests and those of neighbouring countries.

"The security and stability of Afghanistan and the region are facing new challenges, with foreign troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan accelerated, the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan impacted, and armed conflicts and terrorist activities becoming more frequent," Wang was quoted as saying. China has long resented the presence of US and allied forces in Afghanistan, but is equally wary of the country becoming a haven for insurgents that could threaten security in its Xinjiang region that shares a narrow border with Afghanistan.

Xinhua said Wang, Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar and Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi "stressed the need to ...

forbid any terrorist organisations or individuals from using their territories to engage in criminal activities against other countries."

China has sought to invest in Afghan resources, particularly copper, but constant fighting between the government, the Taliban and other groups has largely held back such projects. China has also sought to boost already close ties with Pakistan through its Belt and Road initiative, but the country's economic weakness and security problems have blunted the success of that drive.

The United States is preparing to wrap up its longest war by withdrawing the last of its 2,500, 3,500 troops along with 7,000 allied Nato forces by September 11 at the latest, generating fears of increased chaos in a country already deeply insecure.

— AP

## Corporate tax 'in sight' as G7 meets

London, June 4: Group of Seven finance ministers kicked off talks Friday, with optimism growing that the world's wealthiest countries will support US-backed plans for a minimum global level of corporate tax.

British finance minister Rishi Sunak was hosting the meet — held in person after an easing of Covid restrictions and attended by counterparts from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.

The talks were preparing the ground for a broader summit of G7 leaders in Cornwall, southwest England starting on June 11, which will include US President Joe Biden on his first foreign tour since taking office in January.

Momentum is building for a minimum level of corporate tax to prevent multinationals like tech giants from playing the system to boost profits.

Corporate tax is one of two pillars in efforts for global fiscal reforms, the other being a "digital tax"



Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak speaks to Canada's finance minister Chrystia Freeland (right) on the first day of the G7 Finance Ministers Meeting at Lancaster House in London on Friday.

— AFP

to allow countries to tax the profits of multinationals headquartered overseas. "It is increasingly clear that in a complex, global, digital economy, we cannot continue to rely on a tax system that was largely designed as in the 1920s," Sunak said in opening remarks.

"And I would just say this: The world has noticed. And I believe they

have high expectations for what we all can agree over the coming days.

"Opportunities to make truly lasting reforms like this do not come very often, and I sincerely hope that we seize the moment." The finance chiefs and central bankers of the world's seven richest nations will express "strong support" and a "high level of ambition"

over a minimum global minimum corporate tax rate.

They then hope to reach broader agreement at a G20 finance meeting scheduled for July.

Ministers also plan to commit to "sustain policy support", or stimulus, for "as long as necessary" to nurture economic recovery, while addressing climate change and inequalities in society, according to the document.

Furthermore, they will urge "equitable, safe and affordable access to Covid-19 vaccines" everywhere.

The thorny topic of the regulation of digital currencies such as bitcoin will also be on the agenda.

Biden has called for a unified minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent in negotiations with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and G20. His proposal has so far won broad support from countries such as France and Germany, as well as the International Monetary Fund.

— AFP

EXCITEMENT | APPREHENSION 11-day long annual celebration of cinema, will be held in person from July 6 to 17th

## Cannes film festival all set to showcase 61 films

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

Jodie Foster, vaccination certificates, regular RT-PCR tests, celebrities in designer dresses negotiating the 24 red-carpet steps and a touch of the supernatural are all set to mark the opening of the 11-day long annual celebration of cinema at the 74th Cannes Film Festival that will be held in person from July 6 to 17th.

Whatever may be the apprehension of cinephiles and the film fraternity around the world about hosting an in-person

event at the grand Palais des Festivals theatre on the shore of the Mediterranean, festival president Pierre Lescure and general delegate Thierry Frémaux betrayed none as they unveiled the list of 61 films on Thursday morning that will premiere at Cannes 2021.

The Cannes website claims that 18,000 professionals and journalists have already applied for accreditation and from the looks of it, Pierre and Thierry are all set to welcome them all.

Last year, the 73rd

Cannes festival was cancelled owing to the raging Corona pandemic. But this year, with caution and preparation, it will go ahead.

Of the 61 films announced, 24 are in the festival's most prestigious Competition section. They will be vying for the Palme d'Or trophy — a delicate, golden sprig of leaf resting on a crystal cushion — that will be picked by a jury headed by American director Spike Lee.

Though opening films at Cannes have rarely ever lived up to the hype and expectation, there is buzz



Jodie Foster

around this year's opening film — French director Leos Carax's *Annette*, starring Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard.

Handsome in that very

French shabby-chic, chain smoking style, Carax is known for his "poetic, enigmatic" films that often tell tales of "tortured love". Carax's last film to premiere at Cannes was *Holy Motors* in 2012. It has been ranked as the 16th greatest film of the 21st century in a BBC critics' poll. Annette is a musical about "a provocative stand-up comedian and his wife, a world-famous soprano, and the unexpected turn their life takes when their daughter Annette is born, a girl with a unique gift".

Also in the Competition

section this year is *Flag Day*, a thriller directed by and starring Sean Penn, as well as Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch*. The comedy-drama's ensemble cast includes the starlights of American cinema, from Benicio delToro, Tilda Swinton and Frances McDormand to Willem Dafoe, Bill Murray and Owen Wilson.

Forty-five years after she was part of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* entourage, actress-director Jodie Foster will receive an honorary Palme d'Or at the Cannes' opening ceremony on July 6.

Then just 13 years old, Ms Foster has since starred in more than 50 films, directed four feature films, and received two Oscars (for *The Accused* in 1989 and *The Silence of the Lambs* in 1992).

That year, 1976, when Ms Foster climbed the stairs at the Palais Croisette, in Competition alongside *Taxi Driver* was Shyam Benegal's *Hindi Film*, Nishant, starring Shabana Azmi, Smriti Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, Girish Karnad and Amrish Puri.

This year there is no Indian film in Cannes' official section.5



DECCAN  
Chronicle

5 JUNE 2021

## Change in pension rules a bid to stifle critical voices

Earlier this week, the government amended Rule 8 of the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules 1972. It aims to prevent retired officials from writing books or newspaper articles or give interviews without taking prior approval from the current heads of those organisations. In practice, this is likely to amount to a blanket ban unless, in a specific case, the government wants to promote a viewpoint through a retired officer.

It is evident that changing the pension rules amounts to dangling the threat of withholding or even withdrawing the pension earned through decades of dedicated service. This seems an intimidation tactic. In a recent interview, former Army chief Gen. V.P. Malik (Retd) said the amendment “requires a review” and that it was “overarching”. The military leader, who led the Army with distinction in the Kargil war, chose to speak his mind although the military is not covered under the change made. He rightly noted the Official Secrets Act was adequate deter those who seek to compromise national security.

A retired chief of both the Intelligence Bureau and Research and Analysis Wing. A.S. Dulat, who was an adviser in Atal Behari Vajpayee's PMO, is an author of many books and newspaper articles and is often interviewed in the media, has said he wouldn't be seeking permission. He also said the amendment “isn't right”. He

wondered aloud in an interview if the changed rule would apply even if he chose to write literature or poetry. And there is a reason for this.

The threatened backdoor ban would apply to writing that is related to the “domain of the organisation, including references or information about any personnel and his/her designation, and expertise of knowledge gained by virtue of working in that organisation”. If the government turned nasty, this could easily apply to a short story, poem or novel where insights or

experiences of a period are referred to.

Why link pension, widely seen as an inalienable part of government service, to drummed-up fears on national security? It is necessary to raise the question as it is amply clear that through their writings and interviews, and through their contribution to think tanks whose discussions are frequently reflected in public forums, retired senior officials enrich the national conversation by raising the level of debate and discussion. They help us better grasp matters relating to national security, on which millions of rupees from the exchequer are spent. The process makes for an aware citizenry, an unquantifiable attribute that aids society and the State by preparing people for times of crisis. The experience of retired senior officials, when made public, also enhances the scope of knowledge production.

There are 18 departments in the Second Schedule of the RTI Act that are covered under the amended order covering pensions. These include the IB and RAW, the paramilitary forces like BSF, CRPF, ITBP, CISF, Assam Rifles, SSB, SFF, the special branch and CID in select locations like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra, Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep. The Enforcement Directorate, Narcotics Control Bureau and the Central Economic Intelligence Bureau, outfits which are suspected to be used to harass political opponents, are also covered.

The list of departments suggests that the government is sensitive to any criticism or implied criticism in the future to policies related to Kashmir and the Northeast or distant maritime regions where the intelligence and security services are salient, and is keen that suppressing dissidents and political opponents is cost-free.

## SDG: Gaps flagged, bridge them

A look at the dashboard of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index of Niti Aayog showing data that was released on Thursday throws up little surprise — some Indian states are seen making steady progress while some fail to catch up in improving the lot of their people. And the pattern continues to be similar to what we have seen over all these decades — the South and West are doing relatively well compared with the northern and eastern states. Kerala retains its top position with 75 points while Tamil Nadu has shared the second spot with Himachal Pradesh, each scoring 74 points. Bihar is at the bottom of the list with 52 points. India as a nation has improved its own position by scoring 66 points against last year's 60 on the back of better performance in areas such as clean energy, urban development and sanitation. The 2021 index covers 17 goals, 70 targets and 115 indicators compared with last year's 17 goals, 54 targets and 100 indicators.

As per Niti Aayog, the SDG India Index is intended to provide a holistic view on the social, economic and environmental status of the country as a whole as well as those of the individual states and the Union territories and to provide decisionmakers with critical data for action. It is designed with the help of the United Nations and is expected to help states “understand reasons for differential performance and devise better strategies to achieve the SDGs by 2030”. It should also throw light on the areas where more investment is needed. It's now over to the states to understand the gaps and focus their priorities.

Data are dead numbers unless the people who are entrusted with the job make proper use of it. It calls for a political will and sagacity.

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Subhani



## The business of gagging retired spooks isn't easy



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

A recent amendment to the pension rules of Central government employees provides that those who worked with the intelligence and security agencies, and certain other organisations dealing with India's scientific, strategic and economic interests, will stand to lose their pensions if they write or talk publicly about the outfits they were once associated with and the work they do. It's a clear warning for former spies and spooks, and others who know a little too much about the secrets of the State, that they will lose their pension and other benefits if they were to spill the beans. Given the fact that all of us live in a nation state framework and that we are obliged to protect the interests of the State, it seems but natural that those who were part of officialdom and who worked in the inner circles of the Secret State — which is quite distinct from the Deep State — are honour-bound to keep the secrets till the very end.

It is one of the paradoxes of the modern State that though it operates within a democratic framework and the assumption is that the State is there to protect the interests of all citizens living within its boundaries, it turns out at many times citizens are asked to pay obedience to the State, and even surrender their democratic rights for the survival of the State. And this obligation becomes a draconian demand on those who had worked for the State, and that too in its deepest recesses. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is understandably even more paranoid about the secrets — often dirty and dark — of the State as

befits a political party with the ideology of idol-worshipping the State. The tweak in the pension rules then does not come as much of a surprise.

But it's a matter of some curiosity and much speculation about why the BJP-led NDA government felt compelled to bring in these punitive changes at this juncture. Is there a fear in the class of political masters that they had tried to use spy rings and the security experts to promote their own agenda on the pretext of serving the State's interests? The case of Mehul Choksi, the fugitive diamond merchant, in Antigua-Dominica does point to some dirty plan that may have gone wrong, or the sedition cases foisted on critics of this government as well as against students and ailing social activists do point to the possibility that the Modi government may have a lot more to hide on issues that involve so-called national interests.

But the government's real irritation lies elsewhere. The retired bureaucrats who have been constantly needling the government are mostly from the IAS and IFS, not many from the intelligence and security services. There are many “grey areas” in this order. If anyone were to write on developments after they left the service, will they attract the punitive action implied in the amendment? The scope of vagueness is much too large.

It is fairly unlikely that in India any government will have to face a book like *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man: The Shocking Story of How America Took over the World*, the 2006 best-seller by John Perkins, a former Central Intelligence Agency operative, which showed the repul-

sive underbelly of America's secret operations in other countries. If ever there is a book like that of Perkins, it might have more stories of failures rather than successful subversions, in the small countries of South Asia and in the Indian Ocean region.

The issue, however, throws up fundamental issues of morality as well as realpolitik. At the moral level, the citizens of a democratic state have a right to know whether the money they pay in taxes is used for diabolical acts like murder and mayhem, and whether innocent people are being trapped and framed. These goings-on can only be told by those who have worked within the intelligence and security agencies. If the State commits criminal acts in the name of State interests, people have a right to know and to call out the leaders who allowed these things to happen.

It's necessary to know the truth from the realpolitik viewpoint, even if we choose to junk morality. The people have a right to know if ostensibly immoral operations have helped the State's cause or not. It may be that the State would have suffered a lot of harm through ill-thought plans of subversion at home and abroad. Many of America's overseas operations have been utter failures, and the costs in terms of money and men was quite high. The examples of the wars that America has waged in Afghanistan, Iraq and

Syria in the past 20 years in a case in point. No government would, however, allow any of its former employees to spill the beans, and it is natural to hold out the threat of penalties. In India's case, the government's amendment of the pension rules only holds out financial penalties. The former spy or security establishment insider who writes on things he is prohibited from writing, except when permission is granted by a higher officer, will stand to lose his/her pension and other handouts.

Of course, all this is another way of validating the Official Secrets Act. But we know that at least in democratic countries, secret documents are declassified, and the time bar in India is 30 years. Unlike in many other countries, especially those in the West, many of the State's crimes are committed and no record is left about it. It is very unlikely that any of the Indian intelligence agencies, like the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) or the Intelligence Bureau (IB), is ever likely to keep scrupulous records of all the right and wrong things that they have done, and which at least after a lifetime come to light. During the Shah Commission hearings after the Emergency, P.N. Haksar, Indira Gandhi's onetime confidant, told the commission that not all orders were put in writing. It is often left to the eyewitness or the victim to speak the truth. It is in situations like these that a former spy or security insider has to speak out for the sake of the truth and morality. Of course, he or she does not have to do so. But if there is a call of the conscience, it may become a compelling need. Then the threat of losing his/her pension or other post-retirement financial benefits may not deter the person from speaking out.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

**During the Shah Commission hearings after the Emergency, P.N. Haksar, Indira Gandhi's onetime confidant, told the commission that not all orders were put in writing. It is often left to the eyewitness or the victim to speak the truth.**

## LETTERS

## RARE GESTURE

Thirty specially designed buses that will serve as mobile intensive care units for Covid patients across the state is a boon (30 buses equipped to provide intensive care, DC, June 4). Such selfless acts are praiseworthy.

Dr Nousheen Khanum  
Hyderabad

## WELCOME ORDER

Democracy lovers welcome the Supreme Court order in the Vinod Dua case (*Sedition charge against Vinod Dua quashed, DC, June 4*). It's even more pleasing that the court defended the fundamental right of a journalist to criticise the ruling dispensation. It's a timely shot in the arm to the fourth estate.

Phani Marur  
Hyderabad

## REDUCE PRICES

The skyrocketing price of fuel, edible oil and food items are adding to hardships of people reeling under the pandemic with job loss and reduced salaries. I request the TS government and the Centre to take steps to control the prices.

Shaikh Khader  
Secunderabad

## THIRD WAVE ENROUTE

While appreciating the TS government for steps taken to contain Covid-19, it must not become complacent as reports of a third wave are coming in. If government and people do not prepare to fight, they will have to pay the price.

Dr G.V. Kumar  
Hyderabad

## 50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN  
Chronicle

## Orders reserved on bail petition

HYDERABAD, June. 4

The Sixth City Magistrate, Mr. Y. Venkateswara Rao, today reserved orders on the bail petition of Thakur V. Hari Prasad, Honorary Secretary of A.P. Welfare Fund, and posted the case for tomorrow.

The Magistrate remanded Diwakar Shetty, joint secretary of Kannada Natya Ranga, to judicial custody for 15 days. The State Crime Branch CID officials arrested Diwakar Shetty last evening on charge of cheating and misappropriation.

Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings

“How does a seed turn mud into trees?  
 God won't say!  
 Numbers of leaves defy infinities  
 Nature at play!  
 Odours the animals, pollen the bees  
 The eternal way.  
 The sun sets; birds dance on the breeze  
 The sky is grey...”

— From **Wobhi Theek** by Bachchoo

BBC's Di interview, Harry & Meghan...  
Why do the Brits 'love' their Queen?

The most famous remark of the late Princess Diana in her BBC interview with journalist Martin Bashir was: “Well, there were three of us in this marriage, so it was a bit crowded.”

It was not a revelation. Prince Charles had weeks before admitted in a publicised interview his relationship with Camilla Parker Bowles.

The remark was perceived by the media and the public as an insight into Diana's suffering and seen as an assault on the morals and integrity of the royal family. It precipitated the Queen's agreement that Charles file for a divorce.

At the time there was a lot of speculation about how Martin Bashir had persuaded Diana to give him

that interview and launch the royal scandal. Last week, 25 years after the broadcast, the report of an inquiry into that question has been published. The report, compiled by Lord Dyson (not the muck-suction tycoon) was an exposure of Martin Bashir's perfidious and possibly criminal means of obtaining the interview. Lord Dyson severely criticised the coverup of his actions by the BBC.

The report reveals that Bashir, a junior BBC journalist, got a colleague in the BBC to forge bank statements which “proved” that the press were paying Princess Diana's staff to spy on her and give them details of her relationship with an Army officer called James Hewitt. Bashir took these forged bank statements to Earl Spencer, Diana's brother, and persuaded him that Diana should tell all in an interview before the media went on to characterise her as the villain in the triangle — or quadrilateral?

In the interview, Diana admitted her relationship with Hewitt before it got exposed as scandalous. Perhaps she could have, quite justifiably, said: “Well, since there were three of us in this marriage, I assumed there could be a fourth!”

The BBC apparently knew about the forged documents and Martin Bashir's devious means of obtaining the interview and covered it up. Bashir was not reprimanded or disciplined and was, years later, hired as the BBC's head of religion.

Bashir protests that Diana was quite willing to give him an interview in any case and that his forged documents weren't instrumental in helping persuade her to speak to him.

The 25-year-old episode has been brought to light again and became the focus of media attention displacing, however briefly, the reports from the world and especially India on the Covid devastation, the Israel-Hamas conflict and terrorist activity in Mozambique. Prince William gave an interview attacking the BBC and claiming the interview had led directly to his mother's death.

The newspapers were in the main very happy to use the Dyson report to attack the BBC without making the connection between Diana's death two years later in a speeding car which crashed in a Parisian tunnel as it was being relentlessly pursued by — no, not gremlins — the same newspaper paparazzi.

That the public is interested in the shenanigans and quarrels of the royal

family is not surprising. There's always something to report. The last three focuses on the royals were in themselves, even to a republican like myself, gentle reader, momentarily entertaining.

A year ago, Prince Andrew, the Queen's favourite son, was interviewed on the BBC's *Newsnight* programme about his involvement or friendship with the late Jacob Epstein, the paedophile billionaire who procured young girls for him.

And then there was the Prince Harry and Meghan Markle interview with Oprah Winfrey in the United States. It was seen as an assault on the prejudices and repressive controls within the royal family and caused an estrangement between Harry, his father and brother William.

The death and funeral of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, brought Prince Harry back briefly to England but the focus shifted from Philip's deeds and gaffes to the froideur between Harry and William.

The Windsor Castle funeral, with the restrictions on gatherings imposed by the Covid lockdown, prevented any mass congregation of citizens, but still they came in their hundreds to profess their love for a man they had never met.

I completely understand, gentle reader, the admiration one may feel for, say, Muhammad Ali, Nelson Mandela or even one of the cricketers or Bollywood actors, male and female — though I suspect the last three have some affinity to the worship of deities. But love?

I, just like you, have various experiences covered by the word. Parental, both ways, romantic and even loving a favourite flower, food or wine... but for members of a privileged, parasitical and patronage-lending, mostly idle family?

It's not that I feel Cromwellian in my republicanism. And I certainly don't feel that a Parliament dominated by the likes of Boris Johnson and the freeport and deport Indian variants, Priti Clueless and Wishi Sunak, or the mendacious health secretary Matt Halfcock are doing a better job than if it were all left to Liz II. My faith in parliamentary democracy has been deeply shaken through assessing the actions of elected leaders and parties of several nations in this our sad vale of oppressions. But the hope is that Prime Ministers are not permanent and that even in those countries the populace doesn't love them like the tribal Brits just “love” their Queen.



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,100.05	-0.25
Nifty 50	15,670.30	-0.13
S&P 500*	4,225.86	0.79
Dollar (₹)	73.0	-0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.91	0.51
Euro (₹)	88.44	0.497
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,917.388	0.80
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	71.95	0.90
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.028	0.52
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.564	-0.063

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Govt caps trade margin on O2 machine at 70%

The government has capped the trade margin on oxygen concentrators at 70 per cent at the distributor level. The chemicals and fertilisers ministry said the decision has been taken in view of volatility in the MRP of oxygen concentrators. As per information collected by the government, margin on the oxygen concentrators at the distributor level currently ranges up to 198 per cent, the ministry added.

## SBI lends ₹3,725 cr to Jewar Intl airport near Delhi



The Yamuna International Airport Pvt Ltd (YIAPL) has secured a loan of Rs 3,725 crore from the SBI for developing the Noida international airport at Jewar in UP. YIAPL is a Zurich Airport International subsidiary. The entire loan has been underwritten by SBI on a door-to-door loan tenor of 20 years," Christoph Schnellmann, CEO, YIAPL, said. Door-to-door loan means the principal and interest have to be paid within 20 years.

## TCPL launches 'Sonnets By Tata Coffee' brand

Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) has made a foray into the premium roast and ground coffee segment with the launch of brand 'Sonnets By Tata Coffee'. Through this brand, TCPL is eyeing customers seeking a special coffee experience. These are microlot coffees that are limited edition offerings and are processed on the estates in a distinctive manner, it said. The aim is "to make it the go-to choice for the well-travelled."

## Bayer opens consumer health division in India

Bayer said it has launched its Consumer Health division in India comprising 10 brands across the categories of allergy, dermatology, nutrition and analgesics. These brands include Saridon, Supradyn, Becozym C Forte, Benadon, Alaspan, Canesten and Bayer's Tonic. The brands Saridon and Supradyn licensed to Piramal Consumer Products division in the past, have been transitioned back to Bayer, it said.



## Economy to grow at 9.5%; inflation seen at 5.1% RBI cuts growth forecast, leaves rates untouched

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, JUNE 4

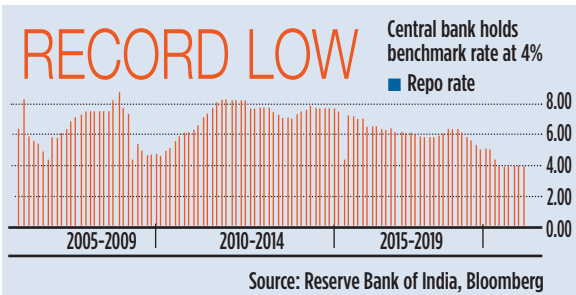
Caught between slowing growth amid the second wave of the Covid pandemic and inflationary pressures, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy committee (MPC) stayed put on policy rates on Friday. The MPC also continued with its accommodative stance "as long as necessary" to support growth.

A status quo in the policy repo rate means that there is unlikely to be any change in your equated monthly instalments (EMIs) on your home loans or car loans as of now. On the flip side, your fixed deposits too would continue to fetch the same low returns.

This was the committee's second bi-monthly monetary policy meeting of the current fiscal and it was widely expected that the rates would remain steady. The MPC, which is the rate setting panel, has kept the repo rate unchanged in the last five bi-monthly policy meets, too.

The six-member monetary policy committee headed by governor Shaktikanta Das voted unanimously for keeping repo rate - RBI's key lending rate - unchanged at 4 per cent, and the reverse repo rate - the borrowing rate - at 3.35 per cent.

"The MPC was of the view that at this juncture, policy support from all sides is required to regain the momentum of growth that was evident in



## REITERATES CONCERNS OVER CRYPTO TRADING

SUVASHREE GHOSH  
JUNE 4

The RBI reiterated its concerns over cryptocurrencies, clarifying its stance on digital assets just days after the regulator told banks to set aside a 2018 ban on trading.

"There is no change in RBI's position," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das told reporters. "We have major concerns around cryptocurrency, which

we have conveyed to the government."

Das' comments come less than a week after the central bank told banks, which are needed to help facilitate crypto trades, not to cite a 2018 RBI circular as a reason to prevent such transactions. The order, which has since been struck down by the Supreme Court, can't be cited or quoted from, it said.

— Bloomberg

H2:2020-21 and to nurture the recovery after it has taken root. Accordingly, the MPC decided to keep the policy rate at its current level of 4 per cent and to continue with the accommodative stance as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis and continue to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, while ensuring that inflation remains within the target going forward," said the RBI governor.

Anticipating some impact on the economy of the second Covid-19 wave, the RBI also trimmed the growth forecast by 100 basis points at 9.5 per cent from 10.5 per cent. Inflation for FY22 was revised upwards by 10 basis points with risks broadly balanced.

One basis point is one hundredth of a percentage point.

The RBI has projected CPI inflation at 5.1 per cent for FY22 with 5.2 per cent in Q1; 5.4 per cent in

## Liquidity window opened for transport, hotels and tourism

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, JUNE 4

To address the adverse impact of the second wave of the Covid 19 pandemic, Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday announced an on-tap additional liquidity window for Rs 15,000 crore for contact-intensive sectors, including hotels and restaurants, transport, tourism, event management companies and beauty salons.

Besides it also raised the aggregate debt eligibility threshold to struggling businesses to Rs 50 crore from Rs 25 crore. Under the on-tap liquidity window, banks can provide loans of three-year tenures to "certain contact-intensive sec-



Shaktikanta Das

tors i.e., hotels and restaurants; tourism-travel agents, tour operators and adventure/heritage facilities; aviation ancillary services - ground handling and supply chain; and other services that include private bus operators, car repair services, rent-a-car service providers, event/conference organisers, spa clinics, and beauty parlours/salons.

Banks are expected to create a separate Covid

loan book under the scheme," the RBI said. Banks are to be incentivised by being permitted to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of their loan book under the scheme, with the reverse repo window at a rate 40 basis points higher than the reverse repo rate.

Heading to the industry demand, the RBI also expanded the scope of borrowers by raising the maximum aggregate exposure threshold from Rs 25 crore to Rs 50 crore for smaller businesses and loans to individuals for business purposes.

For liquidity, another GSAP operation under GSAP 1.0 will be conducted in June and GSAP 2.0 in Q2.

## Central bank expands QE as growth seen faltering

ANIRBAN NAG  
JUNE 4

The central bank expanded its version of quantitative easing (QE) to keep borrowing costs anchored, as economic growth is seen faltering because of a resurgent Covid-19 wave.

The Reserve Bank of India will buy an additional Rs 1.2 lakh crore (\$16.4 billion) of bonds under the Government Securities Acquisition Program 2.0, governor Shaktikanta Das said in an online broadcast on Friday. The programme is aimed at keeping government borrowing costs anchored to ensure it can aid an economic recovery.

The monetary policy committee, which has been in a rate pause mode for more than a year, said it was retaining its accommodative policy for as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis, signalling there's still room to cut rates further.



"At this juncture, policy support from all sides is required to gain the momentum of growth," Das said.

The RBI's bond-buying programme aims to support the administration's borrowing plan, with the central bank buying sovereign debt to cap yields. It's already on course to acquire Rs 1 lakh crore of bonds in the current quarter.

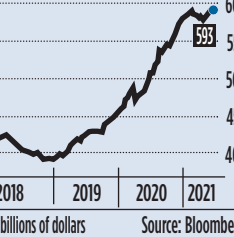
A recovery in Asia's third-largest economy is in peril from a resurgent pandemic, which forced states to impose lockdowns. The movement and activity curbs are seen fanning inflation and hitting GDP.

— Bloomberg

## FX reserves to help manage global spillovers: Das

### Forex buffers

Forex pile will help fight spillovers  
■ India foreign exchange reserves  
USD-Last Price



ANIRBAN NAG  
JUNE 4

The country's foreign exchange reserves have by all indications crossed \$600 billion, central bank chief Shaktikanta Das said, a huge buffer that will help insulate Asia's third-largest economy from global spillovers and volatile external flows.

Earlier this year, the country's forex reserves briefly surpassed Russia's to become the world's fourth-largest, as the Reserve Bank of India continued to hoard dollars to cushion the economy against any sudden outflows. The reserves are enough to cover around 15 months of imports and have been bolstered by rising inflows into the booming stock market and FDI.

"While these flows ease external financing constraints, they also impart volatility to financial markets and asset prices, while producing undesirable and unintended fluctuations in liquidity, Das said.

— Bloomberg

## FM pushes ministries, PSUs to step up capex

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

Focusing on the capital expenditure targets to revive the pandemic-hit economy, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday asked key ministries to aim to achieve more than their capex targets. She also emphasised that an enhanced capital expenditure will play a crucial role in the country's economic revival.

According to finance ministry sources, the minister discussed capital expenditure road map of key ministries and the central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) under them, the status of the implementation of budget announcements, and vari-



Nirmala Sitharaman

ous measures to expedite infrastructure investment were discussed.

"Besides, Sitharaman will also hold a meeting with heads of public and private sector insurers on Saturday for faster settlement of claims under the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) during the pan-

demic," the sources said.

All the discussions happened while reviewing the capital expenditure performance of the key ministries and their CPSEs on Friday. She met with senior government officials and encouraged the ministries to front-load their capex and ensure the clearance of MSME dues.

According to a statement released by the Ministry of Finance on Friday, Sitharaman said that the budget for the financial year 2021-22 provided a capital outlay of Rs.5.54 lakh crore. This is a sharp 34.5 per cent over the budget estimate of the previous fiscal 2020-21.

This was the fourth review meeting by the finance minister.

for that particular fiscal.

Investment will include expenditure incurred on new plant, machinery, equipment and associated utilities, research and development (R&D), and transfer of technology relating to the facilities setup for the products.

Investment in R&D should not exceed 15 per cent of the total committed investment, the guidelines added.

The application window for the scheme will be open from June 15 to September 15 this year and no applications will be accepted after that.

The guidelines also said an applicant will have to submit a claim for disbursement of incentive on an annual basis for the sales made in a financial year along with audited financial statements.

The scheme will be implemented through a project management agency (PMA) which will be responsible for providing secretarial, managerial and implementation support.

— PTI

## EU, UK open antitrust probe against Facebook over classified ads

KELVIN CHANAP  
LONDON, JUNE 4



European Union and British regulators opened dual antitrust investigations on Friday into whether Facebook distorts competition in the classified advertising market by using data to compete unfairly against rival services.

The coordinated effort represents an escalation by European regulators in their battle to rein in the dominance of big tech companies. The focus of the investigations highlights a long-standing concern that the data they collect from people or businesses using their platforms is used to get an advantage over competitors, which could include those same businesses.

Facebook collects vast troves of data on the activities of users of its social network and beyond, enabling it to target specific customer groups, said Margrethe Vestager, the European Commission's executive vice president in charge of competition policy.

We will look in detail at whether this data gives Facebook an undue competitive advantage, in particular on the online classified ads sector, where people buy and sell goods every day, and where Facebook also competes with companies from which it collects data, Vestager said.

The UK's Competition and Markets Authority said in a simultaneous

announcement that it launched its own probe to examine whether Facebook's collection and use of data gave it an unfair advantage over competitors providing classified data and online dating services.

Facebook said it will continue to cooperate fully with the investigations to demonstrate that these are without merit.

Marketplace, Facebook's classified ad service, and Facebook Dating offer people more choices and both products operate in a highly competitive environment with many large incumbents, the company said in a statement.

The EU's executive commission, the bloc's top antitrust enforcer, is looking at the possibility that Facebook collects data on what users are interested in based on how rival classified ad providers are advertising their sites to Facebook users. The commission is worried Facebook then uses that data to tailor Marketplace to outcompete the rival sites.

It's also looking at whether the way Facebook embeds its Marketplace into the social network gives it an advantage.

— AP

## Restaurant stock leaps over panda pregnancy



SHOKO ODA  
JUNE 4

Shares of a Tokyo-based Chinese restaurant operator surged after local media reported that a panda at a nearby zoo may be pregnant, stoking investor speculation of increased foot traffic in the area.

Totenko Company stock jumped as much as 29 per cent, the most in almost four years, after local broadcaster FNN reported that Shin Shin, a giant panda at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo, may be expecting. The zoo had announced earlier in March Shin Shin and Ri Ri had mated twice. Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike confirmed the reports, local broadcaster NTV reported. Seiyoken, another nearby eatery, rose as much as 11 per cent, with trading more than five times the three-month average.

The restaurant stock has served as a gauge for panda-related news in the past. In February 2017, Totenko shares also jumped after Ueno Zoo announced that the same pair of pandas had mated. Shares surged again when Shin Shin gave birth to a cub the same year in June.

The news coincides with the reopening of the popular Ueno Zoo on Friday, which had been closed since December amid the Covid-19 outbreak in Tokyo. Visits require a reservation and the zoo is limiting visitors to 2,000 a day under infection prevention protocols. The pandas are one of the main draws to the zoo.

— Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Milkha stable in ICU, wife unwell

**Chandigarh:** Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is "better and more stable" as he battles Covid-19 in the ICU of the PGIMER hospital here even as his wife and former volleyball captain Nirmal Kaur's condition deteriorated because of the same ailment.

Milkha also received a phone call from Prime Minister Narendra Modi enquiring about his health on Friday. In a statement, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) said that Milkha is better than Thursday when he was brought to the hospital with dipping levels of oxygen.

"On the basis of his medical parameters today, his condition has been observed better and more stable than yesterday," PGIMER's official spokesperson, Prof Ashok Kumar, said. — PTI

## Ex-hockey player Usman no more

**New Delhi:** Former India hockey player Usman Khan has died after a prolonged battle with cancer, the sport's governing body in the country said on Friday while condoling his death. Khan was 76 and survived by three sons and a daughter. He breathed his last in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh after a long battle with cancer.

Khan, a retired assistant commissioner of Customs, Chennai, was a stylish left winger. He played hockey at the Madras Azam Ground before shifting to Kolkata, where joined the Customs. In Kolkata, Khan played for the Calcutta Customs and also represented Bengal in the national championships for several years. Hockey India president Gyanendra Ningombam expressed his condolences to Khan's family. — PTI

## Tech Mahindra, Fide in big league

**Chennai:** The FIDE on Friday announced a new partnership with Tech Mahindra Ltd for the Global Chess League (GCL), which will also have former world champion Viswanathan Anand as its official mentor and partner to shape the league. The memorandum of understanding signed by FIDE with Tech Mahindra, a leading provider of digital transformation, consulting and business re-engineering services and solutions, focuses on creating the Global Chess League, a project first proposed by the latter earlier this year. "Now, with the support of FIDE, the Global Chess League will be provided with an accredited and exclusive status as the only world league officially recognised by the governing body of the sport of chess," a press release here said. — PTI

## IOA seeks relief from shut down

**New Delhi:** Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President Narinder Batra has requested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to allow them to operate from their office premises for completing administrative work linked to the upcoming Tokyo Olympics. Due to the Covid-19 surge in the national capital, the Delhi government had ordered shutting down of all premises that don't fall under the essential category. However, the number of cases has reduced in recent days and the capital is inching towards easing of restrictions. "We request and appeal to You Sir to allow the office of Indian Olympic Association to function from Monday 7th June 2021 to enable IOA to upload the mandatory required data," Batra wrote in the letter. — PTI

## Moin's son Azam in Pak T20 team

**Karachi:** Pakistan on Thursday named uncapped Azam Khan, son of former captain Moin Khan, in the T20 squad for the tours of England and West Indies. The selectors also recalled Imad Wasim for the three T20 matches in England and five in the West Indies besides Haris Sohail for the three ODIs in England. Muhammad Abbas and Naseem Shah have also won back spots in the Test squad. — PTI

## Swiatek shimmers

Nadal celebrates birthday with victory; Zverev too wins

**Paris, June 4:** Rafael Nadal celebrated his 35th birthday in style with a straight sets win over Richard Gasquet on Thursday to reach the French Open third round. Nadal, the 13-time champion in Paris and chasing a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, won 6-0, 7-5, 6-2 to register his 17th career victory in 17 meetings with France's 53rd-ranked Gasquet.

Next up for the world number three is Britain's Cameron Norrie who he has beaten twice already this season, at the Australian Open and on clay in Barcelona.

German sixth seed Alexander Zverev eased into the French Open last 16 for the fourth successive year on Friday with a straight-sets win over Serbia's Laslo Djere.

The 24-year-old, last year's US Open runner-up, saw off the 55th-ranked Djere 6-2, 7-5, 6-2 on Court Philippe Chatrier.

He will next face former world number four Kei Nishikori, whose third-round opponent Henri Laaksonen retired injured following the opening set, for a quarterfinal spot.

Meanwhile, Serena Williams continued her quest for a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam title by reaching the French Open second week for the first time since 2018, after third seed Aryna Sabalenka's surprise loss left the veteran American as the highest-ranked player in her half of the draw.

Three-time Roland Garros champion Williams came through a potentially tricky third-round tie with compatriot Danielle Collins, winning 6-4, 6-4. She will next face



Poland's Iga Swiatek returns the ball to Sweden's Rebecca Peterson during their women's singles match of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros in Paris on Thursday. Swiatek won 6-1, 6-1. — AFP

Kazakh 21st seed Elena Rybakina, with a possible quarterfinal against old rival Victoria Azarenka up for grabs.

Also, former world number one Azarenka, who stunned Williams in their 23rd meeting in last year's US Open semi-finals, cruised past Madison Keys 6-2, 6-2 to reach the Roland Garros fourth round for the first time since making the last four in 2013.

Earlier, defending champion Iga Swiatek breezed

through to the third round, however, beating Rebecca Peterson 6-1, 6-1 on Court Simonne-Mathieu. The No. 8-seeded Pole next faces No. 30 Anett Kontaveit. — AFP

## OTHER RESULTS

**Men's third round:** Kei Nishikori (Japan) bt Henri Laaksonen (Switzerland) 7-5, 0-0 — RET; Federico Delbonis (Argentina) bt Fabio Fognini (Italy) 6-4, 6-1, 6-3; Alexander Zverev (Germany) bt Laslo Djere (Serbia) 6-2, 7-5, 6-2;

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (Spain) bt Casper Ruud (Norway) 7-6 (3), 2-6, 7-6 (6), 0-6, 7-5; Daniil Medvedev (Russia) bt Reilly Opelka (USA) 6-4, 6-2, 6-4. **Women's third round:** Elena Rybakina (Kazakhstan) bt Elena Vesnina (Russia) 6-1, 6-4; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Russia) bt Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus) 6-4, 2-6, 6-0; Victoria Azarenka (Belarus) bt Madison Keys (USA) 6-2, 6-2; Serena Williams (USA) bt Danielle Collins (USA) 6-4, 6-4. — AP

## Messi scores but Argies held

**Santiago Del Estero (Argentina), June 4:** Lionel Messi scored a penalty but Argentina missed out on the chance to take over top spot of South American World Cup qualifying from rivals Brazil after a 1-1 draw with Chile on Thursday.

Messi also clipped the woodwork and forced three impressive saves out of Chile goalkeeper Claudio Bravo but Alexis Sanchez earned the dogged visitors a point in Santiago del Estero.

The draw leaves Argentina a point behind Brazil, the only remaining side with a perfect qualifying record, who host Ecuador on Friday.

Chile are down in sixth, still two points off the qualification places having won only one of their five matches so far.

Argentina captain Messi said he was happy with the result, despite failing to win.

"The team had a good dynamic, it wasn't easy playing again after so much time," he said.

Elsewhere, Iran bounced back from two straight defeats to put their 2022 World Cup qualification campaign back on track with a 3-1 win over Hong Kong while Bahrain hammered Cambodia 8-0 to go top of Group 'C'.

Five-time finalists Iran struck twice in the second half of their Group 'C' game to take their tally to nine points from five matches, three behind leaders Bahrain, who are hoping to qualify for the tournament proper for the first time in their history.

Midfielder Ali Gholizadeh put Iran ahead from an acute angle after dribbling his way into the box in the 23rd minute before Vahid Amiri and Karim Ansarifard scored in the second half to give them a 3-0 cushion.

Meanwhile, it took less than a minute for Mathew Leckie to head in the opening goal as Australia romped Kuwait 3-0 in Kuwait City.

Jackson Irvine extended Australia's lead midway through the first half and Eintracht Frankfurt's Edin Hrustic netted the third with a free kick in the 66th minute. — Agencies



Argentina's Lionel Messi (right) and Eugenio Mena of Chile battle for the ball during their qualifying match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 in Santiago del Estero, Argentina, on Thursday. The match ended in a 1-1 draw. — AP

## Greece, Belgium in a friendly draw

**Paris, June 4:** A Belgium side missing many of the stars that have helped them rise to the top of FIFA's world rankings were held 1-1 by Greece in a Euro 2020 warm-up on Thursday.

For his first friendly ahead of the delayed tournament starting on June 11 coach Roberto Martinez was without injured trio Kevin De Bruyne (facial fractures), Eden Hazard (thigh), and Axel Witsel (Achilles).

The former Everton boss also chose to give the night off to Thibaut Courtois (with Simon Mignolet in goal), and Jan Vertonghen and Thomas Vermaelen in defence.

Those that were in Brussels had the chance to press their case for a place in Martinez's line-up for their June 12 opener against Russia.

Like Hazard's younger brother Thorgan, who started and supplied the finishing touch to the move that put Belgium into a 20th minute lead after Romelu Lukaku was denied at point blank

range by Greek goalkeeper Odysseas Vlachodimos. Georgios Tzavellas levelled for the unscripted winners of Euro 2004 midway through the second half, tapping in Kyriakos Papadopoulos' diving header which hit the woodwork.

Martinez will be looking for a sharper performance in the Red Devil's second friendly against Croatia on Sunday.

Belgium romped through to the finals as group winners with a 40-goal haul. After their Group 'B' opener in Saint Petersburg they go on to face Denmark and Finland.

In other warm-ups involving finalists for the delayed tournament Switzerland dished out a 7-0 drubbing to Lichtenstein, with Mario Gavranovic grabbing a hat-trick. The Swiss are in Group 'A' with Italy, Wales and Turkey who were also in action, seeing off Moldova 2-0. Ukraine, drawn in Group C, edged Northern Ireland 1-0. — AFP

## TENNIS PLAYER ARRESTED FOR MATCH-FIXING

**Paris, June 4:** A tennis player suspected of match-fixing last year has been arrested in Paris during the French Open, the Paris prosecutor's office said Friday.

According to French newspaper *Le Parisien*, which first reported the story, the player is 765th-ranked Yana Sizikova of Russia. The prosecutor's office confirmed to The Associated Press that a "women's international player" was in custody, but it did not identify her.

An investigation was opened last October by a French police unit specializing in betting fraud and match-fixing. It has previously worked with Belgian authorities investigating suspected fixed matches at the lower levels of professional tennis.

The prosecutor's office said the probe centered on suspicions about one match at Roland Garros last year. It did not specify the match. German newspaper *Die Welt* and French sports daily *L'Equipe* said at the time there were suspicious betting patterns in the first round of a women's doubles match on Sept. 30.

On that day, Sizikova and partner Madison Brengle of the United States played on Court No. 10 against Romanian players Andreea Mitu and Patricia Maria Tig. Sizikova was broken to love serving in game five of the second set, during which she double faulted twice. — AP

## Sumit fails dope test, suspended

**New Delhi, June 4:** Olympic-bound Indian wrestler Sumit Malik has been provisionally suspended after failing a dope test during the recent Qualifiers in Bulgaria, a major embarrassment for the country with just weeks left for the Games in Tokyo.

It marks the second consecutive instance of a wrestler being caught in dope net before the Olympics — the previous being ahead of the 2016 Rio Olympics when Narsingh Pancham Yadav had failed one and was slapped with a four-year ban.

Malik, the 2018 Commonwealth Games gold-medallist, had qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in the 125kg category at the World Olympic Qualifier event in Sofia, Bulgaria which was the last chance for wrestlers to earn quotas.

The 28-year-old's participation at the main event starting July 23 seems uncertain now.

"We got a mail from the UWW (United World Wrestling) on Thursday that Sumit has failed the dope test and he has been suspended provisionally. The substance found in his sample is said to be 5-methylhexan-2-amine (1,4-dimethylpentylamine)," Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) secretary Vinod Tomar said.

A Delhi-based sports lawyer Parth Goswami contends that since this substance is a specified one, Malik cannot be suspended provisionally. — PTI



Sumit Malik and Brianna McNeal

## HURDLES CHAMP BRIANNA BANNED FOR FIVE YEARS

**Paris, June 4:** Olympic 100m hurdles champion Brianna McNeal has been banned for five years for tampering with the anti-doping testing process, the Athletics Integrity Unit announced on Friday.

McNeal, 29, can still take part in the US trials for the Tokyo Olympics later this month while she appeals the ban, which is backdated to August 15, 2020, the AIU said in a statement.

Her appeal will be heard before the Olympics begin on July 23.

AIU said she had been banned for "tampering within the results management process".

It was her second doping violation after she missed the 2017 World Championships while serving a one-year ban for missing three drug tests.

"The system is pretty messed up if you ask me but that's another topic for another day," she said in an Instagram post. — AFP

## JAPAN CORNERED ON GAMES, SAYS COMMITTEE MEMBER

**Tokyo, June 4:** Japan has been backed into a corner over the Tokyo Games, a member of the country's Olympic committee said Friday, arguing the virus-postponed event has "lost meaning" but it is too late to cancel. Public opposition to holding the Olympics this summer remains high, but organisers insist they will go ahead safely under strict Covid-19 countermeasures and with most athletes and officials vaccinated.

In an opinion article for *Kyodo News*, Japan Olympic Committee member Kaori Yamaguchi, who won judo bronze in Seoul in 1988, described "anxiety and distrust" between the public and the government over the Games.

"What will these Olympics be for and for whom? The Games have already lost meaning and are being held just for the sake of them," she wrote.

"We have been cornered into a situation where we cannot even stop now. We are damned if we do, and damned if we do not," added Yamaguchi, who has previously voiced unease over the Games and called for their postponement last year. — AFP

## Rain ruins play in Eng-NZ Test

**London, June 4:** Persistent rain meant there was no play before lunch on the third day of the first Test between England and New Zealand at Lord's on Friday.

The match was intriguingly poised, with England 111-2 in reply to New Zealand's first-innings 378 that featured debutant Devon Conway's 200 — the highest score by a batsman making their Test bow in England.

England, now 267 runs behind, slumped to 18-2 before ending the second day with Rory Burns 59 not out and England captain Joe Root 42 not out following an unbroken stand of 93.

New Zealand looked like batting England out of the game while South African-born opener Conway and fellow left-hander Henry Nicholls (61) were sharing

a fourth-wicket partnership of 174.

But they lost four wickets for just six runs as they slumped from 288-3 to 294-7, with Mark Wood, the fastest member of England's pace quartet, instigating a collapse.

Meanwhile Test debutant paceman Ollie Robinson led England's attack with 4-75 in the first of this two-Test series.

This match marks the return of spectators to international cricket in England after last season's fixtures were all played behind closed doors because of coronavirus restrictions. The second Test is due to take place at Birmingham's Edgbaston from June 10-14. — AFP

## BRIEF SCORES

New Zealand 378 vs England 111/2 in 43 overs (Rory Burns 59 batting, Joe Root 42 batting; Tim Southee 1/17).

## INDIAN PLAYERS UNDER HARD QUARANTINE IN SOUTHAMPTON

**Southampton, June 4:** India spinner Axar Patel has revealed that the team will serve a three-day hard quarantine before it is allowed to train at the Aegaeas Bowl here ahead of the WTC final against New Zealand. The final begins on June 18 and India have limited time to prepare having arrived here on Wednesday.

On the other hand, New Zealand are already involved in a two-match series against England.

The India squad was in quarantine for 14 days in Mumbai prior to its departure and is in the middle of another yet shorter quarantine.

"I had a good sleep...the plan is to quarantine. We have been told that we can't meet each other for three days so we will be quarantining for that much time," said Axar. The men's and women's squads were in the same flight. After landing in London, the contingent took a two-hour bus journey to Southampton. — PTI