

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SATURDAY 12 | JUNE 2021

WEATHER



Max: 37°C
Min: 23°C
Rainfall: 6%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Vaikashi 29
Tithi: Thuvithiyai
Star: Tiruvathirai
Rahukalam: 9.00 am to 10.30 am
Yamagandam: 1.30 pm to 3.00 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.34 am
Luhar: 12.11 pm
Asar: 3.16 pm
Maghrib: 6.24 pm
Isha: 7.38 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.35 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.42 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 7.01 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 8.19 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+3,30,217)	(+6,239)
2,93,29,574	3,64,317

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+33,658)
TN: 23,24,597 28,906

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

17,57,59,104

DEATHS

37,91,640

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

Former IL&FS chairman Ravi Parthasarathy held

Chennai: Former chairman of the bankrupt Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) Ravi Parthasarathy has been arrested by the Economic Offences Wing-II, here, following a complaint given by 63 Moons Technologies. "The kingpin and the mastermind of the several crore IL&FS and ITNL (IL&FS Transportation Networks Ltd) financial scam Ravi Parthasarathy has been arrested by the economic offences wing (EOW-II) Chennai," a press release said on Friday. The IL&FS Group consists of more than 300 group companies that were used as a vehicle to perpetrate one of the country's largest financial frauds by the then management of IL&FS group headed by Parthasarathy, the release said.

■ FULL REPORT ON P2

COUNTER POINT



Bumper offer! You will get a party ticket and a ministry if you defect with a few more leaders!

Pak passes bill; Kulbhushan can move ICJ

Islamabad, June 11: Pakistan's National Assembly has passed a government-backed bill that will provide the right of appeal to Indian death-row prisoner Kulbhushan Jadhav, according to a media report.

The National Assembly passed the ICJ (Review and Re-consideration) Bill, 2020 on Thursday aimed at allowing alleged Indian spy Jadhav to have consular access in line with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict. *Dawn* newspaper reported.

Jadhav, the 51-year-old retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017.

India approached the ICJ against Pakistan for denial of consular access to Mr Jadhav and challenging the death sentence.

The Hague-based ICJ ruled in July 2019 that Pakistan must undertake an "effective review and reconsideration" of the conviction and sentence of Mr Jadhav and also to grant consular access to India



without further delay.

The ICJ, in its 2019 verdict, had asked Pakistan to provide a proper forum for appeal against the sentence given to Mr Jadhav.

Speaking after the passage of the bill, law minister Farogh Nasim said had they

not passed the bill, India would have gone to the UN Security Council and could have moved contempt proceedings against Pakistan in the ICJ.

Mr Nasim said the bill was being passed in light of the verdict of the ICJ.

He said by passing the law, they had proved to the world that Pakistan was a "responsible state".

The National Assembly also passed 20 other bills, including the Elections (Amendment) Bill.

The opposition members staged a walkout and point-

ed out the lack of quorum three times, but each time the chair declared the house in order and continued the business, forcing the Opposition to resort to noisy protest.

The Opposition members gathered in front of the Speaker's dais and raised slogans. Criticising the government's move, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) lawmaker Ahsan Iqbal pointed out that it had included the bill in the heavy legislative agenda to provide relief to Mr Jadhav. —PTI



CITY | 2 TN Congress protests against petrol price hike



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CITY | 2

TN Congress protests against petrol price hike

STATE | 3

AIADMK picks on DMK govt

SPORT | 8

Tsitsipas enters French Open final



Vol. 17 No.77 Established 1938 | 8 PAGES | 3.00

Lockdown to stay but most curbs go

■ Govt announces extension of lockdown till June 21 ■ Life to be near normal in 27 districts

Made-in-India Covaxin to aim at full FDA approval

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, JUNE 11

In yet another instance of the West denying due recognition to Indian technological prowess, the United States' food and drug regulator, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has refused to allow Indian vaccine maker Bharat Biotech to bypass cumbersome processes to sell its India-made Covid vaccine in America.

The grant of an "emergency approval use" (EAU), would have allowed the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech to sell its Covid vaccine Covaxin in the United States immediately.

The FDA, however, recommended Bharat Biotech's American partner,

● THE US FDA has refused to allow Indian vaccine maker Bharat Biotech to bypass cumbersome processes to sell its India-made Covid vaccine in the United States

Ocugen, to submit a Biologics Licence Application (BLA) or the full approval route with additional data. Ocugen in an official release said on Friday that this may delay the launch of Covaxin in the US.

Explaining the process of granting a EUA on its website, FDA claims that it "may allow use of unapproved medical products, or unapproved uses of approved medical products in an emergency to diagnose, treat, or prevent serious or life-threatening diseases

or conditions when certain statutory criteria have been met, including that there are no adequate, approved, and available alternatives." Under this process, the FDA has already granted emergency authorisation to vaccines of Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Janssen. However, none of these has proven its efficacy for the highly transmissible Delta variant that was initially found in India and spread to many other countries.

Though the FDA cites the unavailability of alternatives as one of the criteria for granting emergency approval, it appears to have turned a blind eye to the fact that Covaxin was proved effective against the Delta variant.

Centre to launch sero survey

DC CORRESPONDENT

WITH AGENCY INPUTS

NEW DELHI, JUNE 11

The Union government will soon start a national level sero survey to understand the spread of Covid-19 in the population during the second wave.

"The Indian Council of Medical Research will conduct national sero surveys to assess the Covid spread and states/UTs should also

conduct them to get all geographies' information," the Union health ministry said on Friday.

Meanwhile, health experts have suggested to the Union health ministry that mass, indiscriminate and incomplete vaccination can trigger emergence of mutant strains. They said there is no need to vaccinate those who have been infected by Covid and instead focus should be on

those at higher risk of infection.

NITI Aayog member Dr V.K. Paul said a team of experts is examining suggestions to reduce the present gap between two doses of Covishield. The gap was increased from six-eight weeks to 12-14 weeks after some other countries did the same.

India on Friday recorded 91,702 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 3,403 deaths.

MUKUL ROY, SON RETURN HOME TO DIDI'S WELCOME

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC

KOLKATA, JUNE 11

Dealing a severe blow to his party a month after its washout in the West Bengal assembly elections, BJP national vice-president Mukul Roy along with his son Shubhbrangshu Roy quit the party and returned to his Trinamul Congress roots in a grand welcome by its supreme and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The Krishnanagar North MLA's defection to the state's ruling TMC, which has reduced the BJP to 74 MLAs in the House, came after he did not get the leader of the opposition post which went to Nandigram MLA Suvendu Adhikari. Even a recent call from Prime Minister Narendra Modi inquiring about his ailing wife Krishna failed to stop Mr Roy from maintaining his distance from the BJP. Mr Roy had switched to the BJP from the TMC in November 2017.



Thanjavur district collector M. Govinda Rao briefs Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on the renovation works at Grand Anicut at Thanjavur on Friday.

CM inspects Grand Anicut ahead of water release

G. SRINIVASAN | DC

THANJAVUR, JUNE 11

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Friday inspected the renovation works at Grand anicut and desilting going on in canals and rivers in Thanjavur district, a day ahead of the release of water from Mettur dam for kuruvai cultivation on Saturday.

Water will be released into Cauvery, Vennar, grand anicut canal and kolidam systems. Public works department has taken up 647 desilting works in 4061 kms at a cost of Rs 65.10 crore in Cauvery delta districts.

The Chief Minister who flew in a special aircraft to Tiruchy arrived at Grand anicut by road. PWD additional secretary Sandeep Saxena and Thanjavur dis-

STALIN WRITES TO CENTRE ON WATER

DC CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI, JUNE 11

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has written to the Union water resources minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat to ensure that adequate quantity of water, as mandated by the Supreme Court, was released in river Cauvery every month. The Chief Minister wrote the letter after visiting the Cauvery delta overseeing the work related to the desilting of canals. ■P3

trict collector M.Govinda Rao explained about the works to the chief minister.

G-7 LEADERS TO COMMIT 1 BILLION DOSES OF COVID VAX FOR WORLD

Carbis Bay (England), June 11: World leaders from the Group of Seven industrialised nations are set to commit at their summit to share at least 1 billion coronavirus shots with struggling countries around the world — half the doses coming from the US and 100 million from the UK.

Vaccine sharing commitments from President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson set the stage for the G-7 leaders' meeting in southwest England, where leaders will pivot Friday from opening greetings and a "family photo" directly into a session on "Building Back Better From COVID-19."

"We're going to help lead the world out of this pandemic working alongside our global partners," Mr Biden said, adding that the G-7 nations would join the US in outlining their vaccine donation commitments at the three-day summit. The G-7 also includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan.

The leaders meeting in the resort of Carbis Bay hope to energise the global economy as well. On Friday they are set to formally embrace a global minimum tax of at least 15 per cent on corporations, seconding an agreement reached a week ago at a meeting of their finance ministers. The minimum is meant to stop companies from using tax havens. —AP

SHORT TAKES

Boy rescued from bonded labour

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC
NAGAPATTINAM, JUNE 11

The Nagapattinam Childline authorities rescued a 14-year-old boy who was working as bonded labour at Thirumarugal in Nagapattinam district on Friday.

Police said the childline authorities along with village administrative officer Mariappan inspected the location and found the boy working as a goatsherd with Mathavan of Thirumarugal. They rescued the boy and handed him over to Manivelan, the Nagapattinam RDO.

According to preliminary inquiries, the boy Manimaran hailed from Ammanurperiya-hikkolai in Tiruvarur district and his parents are Devaraj and Lakshmi. Following the demise of Devarajan, Lakshmi sent her son to Nagaraj of Karaikudi to work as a bonded labour and from there the boy was sent to Mathavan, sources added.

The boy was handed over to the child protection committee.

Class IX boy commits suicide

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, JUNE 11

A ninth standard student committed suicide after he was ticked off by his college-going elder brother for engaging in online games often at Varakuppai village near Tiruchy on Thursday.

Police said the deceased Dayanidhiman took his elder brother Manikandan's android phone and always engaged in playing the online game for which Manikandan warned his brother. Following this, the deceased consumed pesticides and informed his parents. They rushed him to a nearby hospital but doctors declared him brought dead.

The Lalgudi police registered a case and are investigating.

Greens hail making land in Kallar jumbo corridor private forests

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 11

The environmentalists have hailed the decision of the Coimbatore district administration to make 50.79 hectares along the Kallar elephant corridor as private forests under the Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forests Act, 1949. District Collector S Nagarajan took the decision for the first time since the enactment of the Act in the state. The move will help immensely in protecting the Kallar elephant corridor.

The collector announced the said land between the forests in Odanthurai in Mettupalayam as a private forest area. The area includes the Jackanarai slope-Hulical Durgam elephant corridor. It is the first corridor area to be brought under the Act in the state. The decision will reduce the animal-human conflicts and preserve the Kallar elephant corridor, the activists said.

Securing the corridor of The Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve (NBR) will protect the giant mammals and facilitate free movement of elephants between Coimbatore, The Nilgiris and Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve as it would prevent any development works in the corridor. Land sales will become difficult along the corridor. Since the place has been made a private forest area, conservation of the land for other purposes like sale, cutting trees or erecting fences will not happen without obtaining the permission from the committee headed by the district collector.

The activists have been requesting the government to prevent development works along the key Kallar corridor for conservation of elephants. The activists also demand the government to build a flyover on the national highways through the Kallar corridor as the road has been a stumbling block for the elephants and wildlife.

EOW arrests kingpin of ₹1 lakh cr IL&FS scam

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 11

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Chennai police said on Friday that it has arrested the kingpin and the mastermind of the ₹1 lakh crore IL&FS financial scam, Ravi Parthasarathy. The scam triggered liquidity crises in the financial services market in 2018.

He was arrested in Mumbai on Wednesday, June 9, and then brought to Chennai on Friday, sources said. The accused has been taken into police custody for 14 days.

According to the Chennai police, the prime accused Ravi Parthasarathy was the former chairman and managing director of the entire IL&FS group. The IL&FS group which con-

sists of more than 300 group companies was used as a vehicle to perpetrate one of independent India's largest financial fraud by then management of IL&FS group which was headed by the then chairman and MD CEO Ravi Parthasarathy.

The EOW in a statement stated that an FIR has been registered under section 409, 420 r/w 120B of Indian Penal Code, 1860 and Section 5 of the TNPID Act in connection with the complaint given by 63 Moons Technologies Ltd who has lost a sum of ₹200 crore.

Complaints from various other depositors have also been received by the EOW. The anticipatory bail petition filed by the accused Ravi Parthasarathy in CrI OP No.2007 of 2021 was also

dismissed by the Madras high court.

Earlier, the Chennai EOW-II in connection with the same criminal case had arrested and remanded other co-accused in the scam namely Hari Sankaran and Ramachandra Karunakaran who were former Directors and Managing Directors of the financial establishment and who were close aides of the mastermind Ravi Parthasarathy and their bail petitions were also dismissed by the Madras high court.

The prime accused Ravi Parthasarathy was produced before a Chennai court after following due procedure and the court has recorded the arrest and remanded him for judicial custody till June 24.

Rescued and saved



Man impregnates 14-year-old, held under Pocso Act

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 11

The police have arrested a man for allegedly raping a 14-year-old girl after she was found to be 2 months pregnant.

The incident came to light after the child welfare committee received an alert about the pregnant minor from the Egmore children hospital in the city. The 14-year-old girl allegedly came with her parents to terminate the pregnancy.

The officials interacted with the child and her parents and a case was registered against the accused who had been raped the minor under the pretext of marrying her.

According to the police, the accused identified as Rahim (24) a resident of Nagalkeni near Pallavaram works for a private company. Rahim befriended the victim a few months back and allegedly raped her on multiple occasions. When she got pregnant, she shared her ordeal with her parents.

Based on the complaint from the family, Tambaram All Women police registered a case and arrested the accused Rahim on Thursday.

He was booked under the Pocso Act (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) and lodged at Puzhal prison.

Fire service personnel rescue cow from well

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 11

A cow that had fallen into a 30 feet deep well on a farm land in Madambakkam near Tambaram was rescued by personnel of fire and rescue services on Friday.

According to sources, a few cows were grazing at farmland on Sudarshan road in Madambakkam on Friday morning. The farmland had a 30 feet deep abandoned well. While grazing, one of the cows slipped into the well.

The locals heard some strange noise from the unused well. When they looked into the well, they found a cow struggling in the water. Seeing the plight of the cow, they soon informed the Fire Service and a squad from Tambaram fire station arrived on the scene.

Two firemen climbed down the well and tied ropes around the cow. After a few minutes of struggle, the firemen rescued the cow with no injuries. The cow was fine and it walked away soon after being lifted.

Fuelling misery



Congress men protest against the BJP government condemning the hike in petrol prices at Velachery on Friday.

—DC

Cases go up in south Tamil Nadu after a drop

M. ARULOLI | DC
TIRUNELVELI, JUNE 11

The daily caseload of Covid-19, which registered a decline in the southern districts of Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Kanyakumari and Tenkasi during the first two days since the full lockdown was relaxed on June 7, however, took an upward trend on June 9 and 10.

The Tirunelveli district showed a sudden decline in daily cases from 263 on June 6 to 202 on June 7 and 185 the next day. But it increased to 258 on June 9 and 267 on June 10.

The trend in Thoothukudi district too is not different with new cases registering an upward trend since June 8, when the number was 281 and gradually increased to 297 and 345 on June 9 and 10. Tenkasi, the district with the least number of cases in the extreme south, registered 13 cases higher than its caseload on June 6.

Compared to the number of daily cases of 447 on June 9, Kanyakumari district on June 10 recorded 469 cases.

Increase in passenger traffic at Chennai airport

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 11

With the decrease in the number of Covid-19 cases in the state, the number of travellers and flights services at the Chennai airport has seen a slight increase.

Officials at the Airports Authority of India (AAI) said on Friday the number of passengers was around 5,000, as against less than 3,000 earlier. The number of aircraft movements had also seen a slight up in recent days.

According to an official, since the beginning of the Covid-19 second wave in the state, the passenger traffic and flight operations at the Chennai airport came down slowly. The airport saw the lowest passenger traffic (less than 3,500) in over a year on May 11. People in the state got more cautious and avoided travelling.

Two weeks after that, when the state's covid-19 cases begun to dip, the air

● Officials at the Airports Authority of India (AAI) said on Friday the number of passengers was around 5,000, as against less than 3,000 earlier. The number of aircraft movements had also seen a slight up in recent days. 104 flights operated in and out of Chennai ferrying 5,000 passengers.

Meanwhile, on Friday 104 flights operated in and out of Chennai ferrying 5,000 passengers.

The number of fresh Covid-19 cases fell to 15,759 on Friday, bringing down the total number of active cases in Tamil Nadu to 1,74,802. Chennai reported 1094 fresh cases and 2377 were discharged, according to the daily bulletin from the Directorate of Public Health.



Health minister Ma. Subramanian along with health secretary Dr J. Radhakrishnan inspects Government Siddha, Yoga Naturopathy hospital in Arumbakkam on Friday. The health minister demonstrates some yoga postures during the inspection.

—N.Sampath



Stalin to meet Modi on Thursday

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 11

Chief Minister M. K. Stalin will be meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi at New Delhi on Thursday, June 17, apparently to seek more help from the Union government in tackling the coronavirus crisis.

The meeting, which assumes importance as Stalin will be calling on Modi as the Chief Minister for the first time, has been organised ahead of the next session of the state Assembly, which meets on June 21.

Since the state budget would have to be presented after the Governor's address and the discus-

sion on it was over, Stalin is speculated to seek financial support from the Union Government to overcome the pandemic.

Also, the supply of vaccines to the state has been a big issue with Delhi reportedly not responding properly to the needs of the state. Stalin might also sort out the matter with the

Prime Minister in his meeting scheduled for 10.30 am on Thursday.

The Chief Minister will leave Chennai on June 16 night by a special aircraft and return the next evening. During the day's stay in Delhi, he will also inspect the work on the construction of the DMK office in the national capital.

TN Congress protests against petrol price hike

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 11

Protests to express anger over the hike in prices of petroleum products were held outside 4,800 petrol stations in over 3,000 places on Friday by the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.

Responding to a call by the Congress high command to hold agitations against the increase in price of petroleum products across the country, the series of protests were held by maintaining social distancing, a press release from TNCC vice president A. Gopanna said.

TNCC president K. S. Alagiri took part in the protest at a petrol station opposite to Nehru Park and that Congress MP Vijay Vasanth, MLA S. Rajesh Kumar and many others took part in it.

Chimpanzee delivers baby at Vandalur zoo

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 11

A chimpanzee at Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Vandalur has given birth to a baby chimpanzee.

A release from the office of AAZP Deputy Director here on Friday said the chimpanzee Gowri (Susie) gave birth to a baby chimpanzee on June 9. The mother and the baby chimpanzee are healthy and are under continuous monitoring of the veterinary team. The AAZP received a pair of chimpanzees from the Singapore Zoo on October one, 2005. The two chimpanzees Gombe aged 28 and Gowri (Susie) aged 23 are one of the most attractive precious wild animals of Vandalur zoo. Chimpanzees are endangered species that is endemic to the African continent, the release



said. Due to Covid-19, the Vandalur zoo has

remained closed since April this year.

Only 10 staff allowed in IT related firms

From P1

Other companies can engage 33 per cent of their workers, who would be allowed to travel by two-wheelers with e-registration. But IT related firms will have to restrict their employees in the premises to 20 per cent or 10 persons at a time.

Housing finance companies, non-banking finance companies and all insurance compa-

nies can function with 33 per cent employees in the 27 districts with more relaxations.

In the 11 districts with more restrictions, self-employed persons like electricians, plumbers, computer engineers, motor technicians can visit the homes of those seeking their services between 9 am and 5 pm but will not be allowed to open their shops.

Cycle and two-wheeler mechanics, those who repair

agricultural appliances and pump sets and opticians fixing spectacles can work from 9 am to 2 pm and taxis and auto rickshaws will be allowed with e-registration to ferry three and two passengers respectively.

Potters and artisans of handicrafts making and selling will be permitted from 6 am to 5 pm and export companies and those making raw material for them can function with 25 per cent workers.

Students raise funds for food, stay of 'external examiners'

Chennai, June 11: Students of a government medical college here have alleged that they were asked to collect money to arrange for the accommodation and food of 'external examiners', prompting the government to direct the authorities to hold a detailed probe.

Students pursuing the final year MBBS course at

Stanley Medical College levelled the charge in April, following which the Tamil Nadu Dr M G R Medical University filed a report with the government on the matter.

"I received a WhatsApp message just before the final examinations in April, asking us to pay a huge amount for their accommodation and food. Most of us

STATE GOVERNMENT ORDERS PROBE

paid", a final year student told PTI on condition of anonymity.

Asked about the issue, health department principal secretary J Radhakrishnan said the government has ordered a detailed probe into the matter.

"I have asked the Director of Medical Education to

inquire into it. Appropriate action will be taken if it is found to be true", he told PTI.

The government, however, has not received any formal complaint in this regard so far, he said adding it was also not clear if "anyone else collected money from the students. This too needs

to be ascertained," he said. Radhakrishnan said the probe would also ascertain whether there were any other financial irregularities.

In this regard, he said he had recently received a complaint from the father of a student that his ward had failed the practical exam, despite money being paid to the college.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

MAOIST GUNNED DOWN IN ODISHA

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 11

A Maoist was on Friday gunned down during a joint combing operation by Special Operation Group (SOG) jawans and Odisha police at Padampur in Odisha's Bargarh district.

The security personnel also seized a cache of arms and ammunition, including an AK-47 rifle, from Jhanj Reserve Forest near Bhanjagunda area, informed state Director General of Police Shri Abhay.

However, the identity of the slain rebel was yet to be ascertained, the DGP said.

According to reports, a group of Left Wing Extremism cadres opened fire on the security personnel when the latter were carrying out a combing operation in Jhanj Reserve Forest. The security personnel retaliated with full force and in the process a cadre in uniform was killed. However, the remaining Maoists managed to escape.

According to police, an AK-47 rifle, three AK-47 magazines, sophisticated ammunition and other explosives were recovered from the spot. The combing operation was in progress till the report last came in.

"Normally, senior Maoist cadres are given AK-47 rifles to operate. We assume that the encountered rebel could be a senior cadre. Effort is on to establish his identity," said the DGP.

"I once again urge all the Maoists to shun violence and return to the mainstream. I appeal to them to join various rehabilitation schemes of the state government," he added.

SACHIN PILOT TRASHES JOSHI CLAIM ON BJP TILT

Jaipur, June 11: Former Rajasthan deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot on Friday refuted claims made by BJP leader Rita Bahuguna Joshi that she had spoken to him about joining the saffron camp.

"Rita Bahuguna Joshi claimed that she had spoken to Sachin. She might have spoken to Sachin Tendulkar. She does not have the courage to speak to me," Pilot told reporters during a protest organised by the Congress in Jaipur against fuel price hike.

Ms Joshi told a TV channel that she had spoken to Mr Pilot about joining the BJP.

Mr Pilot's statement came amid reports of his discontentment with the Congress leadership.

The Congress leader had openly revolted against the leadership of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot in July last year, and after a month-long political crisis, the party high command assured him of resolving the issues raised by him and formed a committee.

The Pilot camp, however, says that the issues are unresolved and nothing was done by the committee.

In the protest outside a petrol pump in the Sanganer area, Pilot targeted the central government over inflation and hike in fuel prices.

"Economic slowdown, inflation and unemployment have hit the country hard during the coronavirus pandemic. People have lost jobs and labourers are not getting wages," he said.

Covid chaos



People throng a market that opened after two months as restrictions of Covid-19 lockdown eased in Bhopal on Friday.

— PTI

BJP leaders call Mukul Roy 'Mir Jafar, opportunist'

WB BJP chief says anyone can go anywhere, it is their personal choice

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JUNE 11

The Bharatiya Janata Party, shattered by its national vice president Mukul Roy's exit and his return to the Trinamul Congress, has become a divided house in West Bengal with a blame game between two camps amid a fierce internal revolt since its poll debacle in the state.

While one section slammed the party leadership for inducting Mir Jafar's like Roy without any judgment ahead of elections, senior leaders alleged their rivals of having "no contribution" while downplaying the newly elected Krishnanagar North MLA's defection as a "personal choice."

Bishnupur BJP MP Saumitra Khan alleged, "We saw Mir Jafar in Bengal before independence. But now we are seeing them in politics. This type of people are never accepted. Had he been Chanakya in politics, he could have succeeded in ensuring the victory for his son Shubhrangshu from Bijpur Assembly seat this time. But he failed. Mir Jafar can not do anything good. They



BJP leader Mukul Roy hugs TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee during his re-joining of the party, as West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee looks on in Kolkata on Friday.

— PTI

only can harm." Another party MP Arjun Singh claimed that Roy was an "opportunist" who belongs to no organisation.

His party colleague Anupam Hazra posted on Facebook, "A pathetic outcome of extra jubilation over one or two leaders during election and sidelining and insulting the efficient through lobbying!! Now the Royal Passengers of Chartered flights are also missing!!! Still time is there, the

Bengal BJP should stop lobbying and engage the efficient leaders who are sidelined!!!"

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh, however, said, "Those who have no contribution in the rise of our party here are feeling sad. If someone fails to sing in the party's tune, it is his personal problem, not of the party. Anyone can go anywhere. It is his personal wish. I do not know if there was hardly any gain for us

when he was there. Our party remains intact."

Darjeeling BJP MP Raju Bista said, "Mukul Roy is a senior and a seasoned politician, and his joining TMC is a reflection of his personal choice. The beauty of democracy is that people are free to choose. But sadly, today this freedom to choose does not exist in West Bengal. BJP is making space for democracy to foster again in Bengal and as the 2021

elections showed, BJP has grown stronger in the grassroots level in West Bengal and this momentum will continue unabated."

Former MLA Shilbhadra Dutta, who defected to the BJP before the polls, said, "This is a personal choice. He did whatever he thought was best. I have nothing to say. But people develop a hatred towards politics when they see repeated switches by someone."

SC raps Param Bir for having no faith in cops

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 11

The Supreme Court on Friday described as "shocking" the former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh saying that he had no confidence in the Maharashtra police with which he has been associated for over three decades as IPS officer, as it declined to entertain his plea for the transfer of all the criminal cases

registered against him in Maharashtra to CBI or an independent agency.

Apparently intrigued over Param Bir Singh showing lack of faith in Maharashtra police in which he grew up to become the top cop of Mumbai police, the court observed that those living in glass houses should not throw stones on others.

Describing as "shocking" Param Bir Singh's plea that he was seeking



the transfer of all the criminal cases to CBI or an independent agency because of his lack of trust in the Maharashtra police, a bench comprising Justice Hemant Gupta and Justice V. Ramasubramanian said,

"It is very surprising. You were part of Maharashtra IPS cadre for 30 years and served it. Now you are saying you do not have faith in that system. It is a shocking... shocking allegation."

Reminding Param Bir Singh that he was alleging lack of trust in a police force of which he was part for 30 years, the court observed, "It is said persons living in glass houses shouldn't throw stones at other."

"Your Lordships are assuming I am living in glass houses," senior counsel Mahesh Jethmalani appearing for Param Bir Singh said responding to the observation from the bench.

At the outset of the hearing, the court told Singh that it can't pass a blanket order in respect of all the FIRs registered against him and asked him to approach Bombay High Court or any other appropriate forum.

Prashant Kishor's meeting with Pawar sets off speculations

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, JUNE 11

Well-known political strategist Prashant Kishor on Friday met Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar at the latter's residence Silver Oak in South Mumbai. Though the NCP maintained that the meeting was a thanksgiving trip related to the Bengal and Tamil Nadu election, there are speculations that non-Congress opposition parties are trying to put up a joint fight against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and credible leader against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Shiv Sena has been openly proposing Pawar as the opposition leader.

Kishor held talks with the NCP chief and party leaders for three and half hours. The meeting between Pawar and Kishor assumes 'political significance' as it is believed the NCP chief wants a united forum of Opposition parties to take on the ruling BJP in the next Lok Sabha election, which is scheduled in 2024.

A senior NCP leader, requesting anonymity, said that Kishor had apprised the NCP chief about the current political situation with the facts and figures.

He also gave a suggestion on how to unite the opposition parties in the country. Apart from the NCP chief, the meeting was also attended by Baramati MP Supriya Sule, Maharashtra NCP president Jayant Patil and MLA Rohit Pawar.

Speaking with this newspaper on Friday, Maharashtra Cabinet minister and NCP national spokesperson Nawab Malik said that the current political situation in the country was discussed in the meet-

● **KISHOR HELD** talks with the NCP chief and party leaders for three and half hours.

● **THE MEETING** between Pawar and Kishor assumes 'political significance' as it is believed the NCP chief wants a united forum of Opposition parties to take on the ruling BJP in the next Lok Sabha election, which is scheduled in 2024.

● **THE SHIV** Sena has been openly proposing Pawar as the opposition leader.

ing. "A discussion was held over the political situation in the country and how to unite the opposition parties against the BJP in the country," Malik added.

Senior NCP leader and Cabinet minister Chhagan Bhujbal said that Prashant Kishor, who is a successful election strategist, has helped various parties win the elections at the centre and states with his suggestion and strategies.

"But I don't know the exact reason behind the meeting but if he comes with a suggestion, Pawar will certainly consider it," he added.

Shiv Sena spokesperson Arvind Sawant welcomed the meeting and said, "At present, polarisation is needed in the country. If democracy needs to be preserved, a strong opposition is needed."

In March 2021, the Sena had said that there is a need to restructure the UPA, and the new alliance should be led by a senior leader like Sharad Pawar as many regional parties are not ready to work under the leadership of the Congress. According to the Sena, if UPA is restructured, more parties will join the alliance.

Will provide security to Poonawalla if he asks: Maha to HC

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JUNE 11

The Maharashtra government on Friday told the Bombay High Court that it would provide security to Adar Poonawalla if he asks.

Following the statement by the state that it would provide more security to Poonawalla if he asks so, a division bench of Justice S.S. Shinde and Justice N.J. Jamadar disposed of the petition filed by city based lawyer Datta Mane seeking Z+ security for Poonawalla. The petitioner had also sought registration of FIR against those who had threatened him in relation to supply of vaccine used in fight against Covid-19. The petitioner had termed the 'Y' category security provided to Poonawalla by the Centre as an eye wash.

On Friday, Chief Public Prosecutor Deepak Thakare made a statement before the court that whenever Poonawalla returns from London, and if he seeks protection, then adequate or additional protection will be

● **THE PETITIONER** had also sought registration of FIR against those who had threatened him in relation to supply of vaccine used in fight against Covid-19. The petitioner had termed the 'Y' category security provided to Poonawalla by the Centre as an eye wash.

given to him immediately.

Advocate Pradeep Havnur, appearing for the petitioner, requested the Court to keep the petition pending to consider the prayer for registration of FIR.

The bench, however, said that the petitioner is seeking protection for someone else, but what if he says he doesn't want it? "How can we incorporate all of this into your petition?" asked the bench. The bench said that the court will not entertain the petition beyond a point now.

When Havnur submitted he did not have instructions to withdraw, the court proceeded to dispose of the petition after recording advocate Thakare's statement.

CROSS FIRE

Congress says data indicates no population explosion in state

'Assam CM misleading on demography'

Guwahati, June 11: The opposition Congress and AIUDF along with a minority student body on Friday termed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's statement asking the minority community to adopt a decent family planning policy as "unfortunate, frivolous and misleading".

Referring to recent evictions of a number of families from "encroached land" in three districts of the state, the Chief Minister on Thursday had urged the minority community to adopt the policy saying that increased population leads to poverty, shrinking of living space and consequent land encroachment.

The Congress claimed that Mr Sarma's remarks on "population explosion" in Assam are "certainly

misinformed and misleading", while the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) claimed that the rate of increase in population among some other communities is higher than that of the minorities.

The All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) said that the population problem can be resolved by ensuring proper education and health facilities for the people.

According to the 2011 Census, Muslims comprise 34.22 per cent of Assam's total population of 3.12 crore and they are in majority in several districts. While Christians form 3.74 per cent of the total number of people in the state, the percentage of Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains is much less than one per cent.

The Assam Pradesh

Congress Committee (APCC) said that this is highly unbecoming of a chief minister who is expected to be well versed in the demographic facts of his state.

As per the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) undertaken by the Union ministry of health and family welfare and released in December 2020, the total fertility rate (TFR) across most Indian states have declined in the last five years, APCC spokesperson Bobbeeta Sarma said. According to the NFHS, the fertility rate of women in Assam has declined from 2.2 in 2015-16 to 1.9 in 2020-21, which means the future population of the state will be less than what it is now and there is no question of its increase, she said.

"If, however, the chief

minister is referring to the population explosion that may happen in future due to immigration of people from Bangladesh and Pakistan because of implementation of CAA, then perhaps his concern is valid," Ms Sharma said.

The Congress, however, would like to assure Mr Sarma that the party will take definite steps in that case and do its best to prevent such encroachments, she added.

The AIUDF, an alliance partner of the Congress, also termed the chief minister's statement targeting only the minorities responsible for population explosion as "unfortunate and not proper for a person holding that post".

Population increase in Assam is lower than the national growth and it is also less compared to some

other states, AIUDF spokesperson and MLA Aminul Islam said.

Studies have shown that the rate of growth of many scheduled castes and tribes is higher than that of the minority community, he claimed.

Besides, social scientists have pointed out that poverty, illiteracy, lack of awareness were mainly responsible for population increase and the state government should focus on these issues instead of targeting a particular community, he said.

"The people of the community have already supported the government in the case of the two-child norm for election to panchayats and in government jobs," he pointed out.

The chief minister must take all communities into confidence, he said. — PTI

Will continue as CM for next two years: Yediyurappa

Hassan (K'taka), June 11: BJP national general secretary Arun Singh's statement ruling out his replacement has given him "more strength", Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said on Friday and asserted that he will work for the development of the state during the remaining two years of the term.

The 78-year-old Lingayat strongman also said his responsibility has increased because of the trust shown in him by the BJP high command. "Arun Singh who is Karnataka in-charge has said that there is no question (of leadership change).. it doesn't arise and that Yediyurappa will remain (CM) for the next two years and complete the term — where does that question arise," Yediyurappa said in response to a question.

Speaking to reporters after a review meeting with officials and public representatives from the district, he said, "it has been clarified that Yediyurappa will continue for the remaining two years and with the cooperation of everyone I will focus on development and tour across the state, and will make honest efforts to do a good job."

Amid speculation about leadership change in Karnataka, Singh, who is BJP's national general secretary in-charge of the state, on Thursday had ruled out replacing the Chief Minister and asserted that Yediyurappa will continue in the top post.

Yediyurappa in response to a question said that Singh's statement has given him "more strength". "Hundred per cent, when

our Karnataka in-charge has said there is no change for the remaining two years and good work is happening under my leadership, my responsibility has increased. I will put more effort and honestly work for the next two years, and try to live up to the trust shown in me by PM Narendra Modi and Amit Shah (Union home minister)," he added.

Speculation has been rife for some time now that efforts were on, by a section of the ruling BJP to exert pressure for unseating Yediyurappa. Some BJP legislators are said to be pushing for convening a legislature party meeting, citing some decisions taken by the government, its functioning, handling of the Covid crisis and alleged instances of corruption, among others. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

18 KILLED IN
BUS CRASH
IN PAKISTAN

Karachi: At least 18 persons were killed and 30 others injured on Friday when an over-speeding passenger bus overturned in Pakistan's Balochistan province, a media report said.

The bus was travelling from Wadh to Dadu when it met with an accident at Khorl in Khuzdar district of the province, Geo News reported. Fifteen people were killed on the spot. As soon as the accident was reported, rescue personnel rushed to the spot and started rescue operations, the report said.

The injured and deceased were shifted to Teaching Hospital Khuzdar, where three more people died and the death toll rose to 18, it said. The condition of some of the injured is said to be critical. Sources told the channel that the passenger coach lost control and overturned as it was over-speeding.

THREE DEAD
AT FLORIDA
SUPERMARKET

Royal Palm Beach, Fla.: A man fatally shot a grandmother and her 1-year-old grandson inside a Florida supermarket before killing himself, authorities said, causing dozens to flee the store in panic.

The shooting happened shortly after 11:30 am on Thursday at a Publix located in a strip mall that also houses small shops and restaurants.

Authorities initially said the shooter and the victims may have known each other. A later update from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office said there was no known motive or relationship between the suspect and the victims, but detectives were still investigating.

The sheriff's office identified the suspect as Timothy J. Wall, 55, of Royal Palm Beach.

The names of the grandmother and her grandson won't be released. Their family invoked Marsy's Law, the sheriff's office said, which allows victims of crimes to block information that could be used to locate or harass them or their families from being made public.

INDONESIA
DENGUE STUDY
OFFERS HOPE

Jakarta: Dengue fever infections dropped dramatically in an Indonesian study where a bacteria was introduced into disease-carrying mosquitoes, offering hope in the battle against an illness that sickens millions annually around the world.

Results of the three-year study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine this week, found that infecting dengue-carrying mosquitoes with a harmless bacteria called Wolbachia led to a 77 percent drop in human cases.

Infections requiring hospitalisation also fell by 86 percent in Wolbachia-treated areas of Yogyakarta, a city on Java island where the experiment was conducted, researchers said. The study was conducted by the World Mosquito Program at Monash University in Australia and Indonesia's Gadjah Mada university.

"The 77 percent figure is honestly quite fantastic for a transmissible disease and we're very grateful with the result," said Adi Utarini, a public-health researcher.

INDIA-KUWAIT
SIGN MOU ON
RECRUITMENT

Kuwait City: India and Kuwait have signed an MoU that brings Indian domestic workers in the Gulf nation within the ambit of a legal framework that streamlines their recruitment and provides them with the protection of the law.

The MoU was signed on Thursday by Indian Ambassador Sibi George and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait Majdi Ahmad Al-Dhafiri in the presence of visiting External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

Jaishankar arrived here on his first bilateral visit to the oil-rich Gulf nation early on Thursday, according to a press release issued by the Indian Embassy here. The MoU brings the Indian domestic workers in Kuwait within the ambit of a legal framework that streamlines their recruitment and provides them with the protection of the law.

G7 to donate 1 billion jabs

Leading economies feel joint approach is best to recover from Covid-19

Carbis Bay, June 11: G7 leaders gathered on Friday for their first in-person talks in nearly two years, with an expected pledge to donate one billion Covid vaccine doses to poor countries on the agenda in a show of Western democratic cohesion.

The club of leading economies — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and United States — say a joint approach is the world's best chance for recovering from the global health crisis, and tackling climate change.

President Joe Biden has set the tone, ditching Donald Trump's isolationist stance to ram home a message of resolve by the G7 and NATO against both Beijing and Moscow, as he heads into his first sit-down with Russian President Vladimir Putin next week in Geneva.

"The driving animating purpose of this G7 summit is to show that democracy can deliver against the biggest challenges we're facing in the world," a senior US administration official said.

Campaigners say the G7's vaccine donations pledge for this year and next — including 500 million US doses — is far too little, too late to end a pandemic that has claimed over 3.7 million lives worldwide.

"If the best G7 leaders can manage is to donate one billion vaccine doses then this summit will have been a failure," Oxfam said, insisting the world needs 11 billion doses. But the G7 has recognised it needs to rise to competing "vaccine diplomacy" efforts launched by China and Russia, with the Biden administration stressing it expects nothing in return for its donated jabs.

G7 leaders meeting at the seaside resort of Carbis Bay in Cornwall, southwest England, are also expected to outline more help for developing nations to build up infrastructure, as a counterpoint to the debt-fuelled spending by China in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The initiative "will embrace a high standards, transparent, climate friendly, non-corrupt mechanism" for infrastructure investment in the developing world, the US official said. "It will be an alternative to that which other countries, including China, are offering." Underpinning the US-led

CHINA PASSES
LAW AGAINST
DEFAMING
ARMED FORCES

Beijing, June 11: China has passed a new legislation that bans "defamation" of military personnel, adding an array of legal tools to its 2018 law under which a Chinese popular blogger was punished recently for "defaming" PLA soldiers killed in last year's clash with the Indian Army at the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh.

The legislation, which was adopted by the standing committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) on Thursday, states that no organisation or individual may in any way slander or derogate the honour of servicemen, nor may they insult or slander the reputation of members of the armed forces, state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported.

It also bans the desecration of plaques in honour of military personnel.

Prosecutors can file public interest litigation in cases of defamation of military personnel and the infringement on their legitimate rights and interests that have seriously affected their performance of duties and missions and damaged the public interests of society, according to the new law. The new law adds to an array of legal tools that already ban defamation of revolutionary martyrs. — *AP*



(Left to Right) President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, France's President Emmanuel Macron, President of the European Council Charles Michel, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel and Italy's Prime minister Mario Draghi, take part in an EU coordination meeting in advance of the start of the G7 summit in Carbis Bay, Cornwall on Friday.

— *AFP*CDC LOOKS INTO
HEARTBURN
AFTER PFIZER VAX

Washington, June 11: US health officials are investigating what appear to be higher than expected reports of heart inflammation in male teens and young adults after they get a second dose of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

It's not clear if the heart inflammation is caused by the shots and the reports still are rare, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It urges everyone 12 and older to get vaccinated.

As of May 31, the agency had 275 preliminary reports of such inflammation in 16- to 24-year-olds, CDC's Dr Tom Shimabukuro told a government vaccine meeting on Thursday. — *AP*

diplomatic revival, Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Thursday adopted a new "Atlantic Charter", modelled on the pact signed by their World War II predecessors to help build a new world order. — *AFP*

H1-B visa: USCIS
undoes Trump plan

Washington, June 11: The US' immigration agency has said that it would rescind a 2018 trump-era policy that allowed immigration officers to reject visa applications, including the H-1B, instead of first issuing a notice of intent to deny to the applicants, a decision which will reduce barriers to "legal immigration".

The H-1B visa, popular among Indian IT companies and professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens

UK says Delta variant
60% more transmissible

London, June 11: The British government said Friday that the new Delta coronavirus variant is 60 percent more transmissible in households than the variant that forced the country to lock down in January.

The Delta variant, which first emerged in India, has caused a rise in cases in the UK, prompting questions about whether social distancing restrictions will be lifted as planned from June 21.

New research from Public Health England "suggests that the Delta variant is associated with an approximately 60 percent increased risk of household transmission" compared to the Alpha variant identified in Kent, southeast England.

The Kent variant caused a surge of Covid cases in January leading to a three-month lockdown as hospitals were stretched to near-capacity.

The government ramped up its public vaccination drive in response, and has now given two doses of vaccine to nearly 29 mil-



People dine out in Melbourne's Lygon Street cafe and restaurant strip on Friday as the city eases restrictions after a two-week lockdown.

— *AFP*

lion adults and one dose to nearly 41 million.

Daily cases rose to 7,393 on Thursday, a level not seen since February. More than 90 percent of new cases were of the Delta variant, ministers said.

However the number of patients in hospital remains low, at just over 1,000 on Thursday, and Health Secretary Matt Hancock has said most inpatients have not had any vaccine.

The government said this suggested the vaccination programme is mitigating the impact of the

Delta variant, urging the public to get both jabs.

Jenny Harries, chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency, said that "two doses provide significantly more protection" against the Delta variant than one.

The UK has reported 127,867 deaths from the virus, the worst toll in Europe.

Under the government roadmap, England plans to drop rules on numbers at social gatherings and allow large weddings and reopening of nightclubs from June 21. — *AFP*

US nod to 1st Muslim federal judge

Washington, June 11: The US Senate has approved the historic nomination of Pakistani-American Zahid Quraishi to the District Court in New Jersey, making him the first Muslim federal judge in the country's history.

The Senate voted 81-16 on Thursday to confirm Quraishi, 46. As many as 34 Republicans joined the Democrats in confirming the first-ever Muslim-American as a federal judge.

Currently a magistrate judge for the District of New Jersey, Quraishi would now make history when he will be sworn in as the Judge of the US District Court of New Jersey. "Judge Quraishi has devoted his career to serving our country,

and his story embodies both the rich diversity of New Jersey and the promise of America as a place where anything is possible," said Senator Robert Menendez during a speech on the Senate floor before the confirmation vote.

PUBLIC NOTICE

We would like to inform the general public that our Bill of Lading No KMTCAA0195457 & KMTCAA0199500 (ORIGINALS 3 sets, COPY 3 SETS EACH) pertains to KALLAM TEXTILES LIMITED issued by the KMTCL liner have been LOST at North Chennai, Minjur area. If any person/s who finds it requested to return the same to us, Contact No 6380195819 / 9500067161

SOUTH EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE

Tender Notice No. CDMS-GSD-R-PLT-2021-006 Name of Work: Hiring of 03 nos. Crane Mounted battery operated platform Truck, (Crane capacity 1.5 & loading capacity 2.0 T) each for GSD/R.RWSS/R & DSD/BSP for a period of 02 years. Tender Value: Rs.20,69,280.00 EMD: Exempted Submission of Tender: Upto 15.00 Hrs. on 16.07.2021. For further details/purchase of tender document, eligibility criteria & the complete details for the above work, please contact office of the CMMI/GSD/SECR Raipur or refer/download tender document which is available on our website: www.ireps.gov.in. CMMI/GSD PRIR/GSD/RAIPUR S.E.C. Railway, Raipur If South East Central Railway & @seccrail

UK digs in over
North Ireland in
Brexit trade row

Enniskillen, United Kingdom, June 11: Britain on Friday hit back at French President Emmanuel Macron's uncompromising stance on Brexit, in a simmering row over new trading arrangements for Northern Ireland.

Macron on Thursday warned London that it was "not serious" to review agreements signed last December, just weeks before the UK left the European single market and customs union.

"Nothing is renegotiable," he said before heading to the G7 leaders summit in Cornwall, southwest England.

But Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab insisted that Brussels should be more flexible in its approach to Northern Ireland, which shares the UK's only land border with the EU.

Under the so-called Northern Ireland protocol, checks are required on some goods heading to the British province from mainland Britain — England, Scotland and Wales. But that has angered unionist communities who say it has driven a wedge between them and the rest of the UK, and blamed it for a resurgence of violence.

Controls have been sus-

pending, and London has extended a grace period for checks on deliveries of chilled meat products to the province.

"The change must come from the European Commission side," said Raab. "We are not negotiating or haggling the integrity of the United Kingdom," he told *Sky News*.

Talks to try to resolve the issue broke up in London without agreement on Wednesday, with Brussels threatening punitive action if London fails to implement the agreement.

The arrangement — to prevent unchecked goods heading into the EU through member state Ireland — effectively means Northern Ireland is still part of the European single market.

The row threatened to overshadow the G7 summit, with reports that US President Joe Biden was angered at the potential harm to the 1998 peace deal that brought an end to three decades of violence over British rule in Northern Ireland.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson played down reports of a rift on Thursday, after the pair met for 90 minutes of talks on the eve of the G7 leaders meeting. — *AFP*

US: China can spark
'crisis' in Indo-Pacific

Washington, June 11: Describing China as a "pacing challenge" to the US, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin has told American lawmakers that Beijing's "aggressive behaviour" in the Indo-Pacific could spark a "crisis" in the strategically vital region.

Responding to questions from members of the Senate Armed Services Committee during a Congressional hearing on the annual budget of the Pentagon, he stressed on having a direct line of communication between the militaries and also between government officials of the two countries.

"As we look at some of the aggressive behaviour that we have witnessed from China in the Indo-Pacific, I'm concerned about something that could happen that could spark a crisis," Austin

● Austin described the US' relationship with China currently as one of competition.

told the lawmakers on Thursday. "We need the ability to be able to talk with our allies and partners and also with our adversaries or potential adversaries. So, I think there needs to be a direct line of communication between the military and also between government officials as well," the defence secretary said.

Austin described the US' relationship with China currently as one of competition. "They desire to be the preeminent country on the planet. Their mid to long-term goal is to do that. They look to compete with us, not only militarily but across a spectrum of activity," he said. — *PTI*

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sl. No.	Tender No	Description	Due date
1	212223 000440	Office Up-keeping and operation of company vehicles at TNPL Unit II, Trichy.	25.06.2021
2	212223 000439	Providing Drivers for TNPL Unit II, Trichy.	25.06.2021

Detailed terms and conditions, Tender fee, EMD, etc., are available in the tender Document which can be downloaded from websites : www.tnpl.com / www.tenders.tn.gov.in.
DIPR/1730/Tender/2021

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NORTHERN RAILWAY
INVITATION OF TENDERS THROUGH E-PROCUREMENT SYSTEM

Tender Notice No. 09/2021-2022 Date: 11.06.2021

Dy. Chief Materials Manager, NRly. Store Depot Mech. Workshop, AMRITSAR for and on behalf of President of India, invited tenders through e-procurement system for the supply of the following items:-

S.N	Tender No.	Description	Qty.	Due Date
1.	62215111	CRF SPECIFICATION ITEMS FOR BRN 22.9M1 WITH DETAILED DESCRIPTION AND QUANTITY OF ITEMS AS PER ATTACHED ANNEXURE-A CONSISTING OF 21 ITEMS.	200 SET	08.07.2021
2.	62215112	FABRICATED CENTRAL GIRDER ASSEMBLY FOR BRN 22.9M1 WAGON CONSISTING OF 02 NOS/SET AS PER RDSO DRG NO. WD-09053-S-05 ALT-B, ITEM NO. 11 MATERIAL SPECIFICATION IRS-M-44	200 SET	08.07.2021

NOTE: Above tenders with detailed description are uploaded on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in. The firm who desires to participate against e-tenders, are advised to electronically register themselves on the above website for which they would require to have a class III digital certificate form certifying Agencies authorized under IT Act 2000. By Govt. of India. Manual offers against e-tenders will not be accepted. 1277/21

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e-ReTender Notice (4th call)
e-Tenders are invited for the following work in Two Cover System as per details furnished below.

Rehabilitation and Retrofitting for the existing bridge across Captain Cotton Canal in Meenambal Road at M.K.B. Nagar in Dn-37, Zone-IV.
Bid document will be available in website <http://tntenders.gov.in> till 3.00 PM on 15.07.2021 for online bidding. The bidders must possess Digital Signature Certificate for submission of bids through online in the above website.

Work Value : Rs. 1.85 Cr	EMD Amount : Rs. 1,85,000/-
Pre-bid meeting date and time: 01.07.2021 at 3.00 P.M.	

Last date and Time of Tender Submission : 15.07.2021 up to 3.00 P.M.
Tender opening date and Time: 16.07.2021 at 3.30 P.M.

DIPR/1743/Tender/2021 Superintending Engineer / Bridges

DECCAN Chronicle

12 JUNE 2021

To stay relevant, Congress must hold inner-party polls

After repeated electoral setbacks the party has endured in recent years, is there any relevance left for the Congress? Many may think the question redundant, considering how little the party's impact has been on the ground in most parts of the country. And yet, there is another question: "Does India need a viable Opposition?"

This question has not become pressing on account of the government's conspicuous failures to deal with the corona crisis last year and this year, which is pretty much an open and shut case, no matter how much the BJP may try to put a spin on it. Even before the virus struck, the economy stood shaken on account of questionable policies, and the unemployment rate was the highest in 45 years. Shortly thereafter, the Chinese Army marched into territories on India's side of the Line of Actual Control and remains there by and large. The humiliation is stark.

If none of this has quite registered with the public, there has to be a question about the effectiveness of the Opposition. For want of a viable choice, the voter may find themselves stuck in a rut. This hypothesis may be too structured. After

The present-day Congress inspires too little confidence. There is a leadership vacuum. Party units do not function on the ground in most states. And where they do, they are riven in factions, and cannot hold a coherent line.

all, the electorate is capable of springing a dramatic surprise, as in the election after the Emergency. But for that to happen, there have to be on the scene political actors with antecedents, and some reliability.

On that count the present-day Congress inspires too little confidence. There is a leadership vacuum. Party units do not function on the ground in most states. And where they do, they are riven in factions, and cannot hold a coherent line. In any case, the party is lacking a message. Defections are frequent, Jitin Prasada being the most recent. As for even the most swashbuckling of regional parties, these are not of a mould that can fit the pattern

nationwide. As if to attest to this, the ruling BJP's highest political priority appears to be to decimate a Congress whose trace is slowly disappearing. If this is an irony of sorts, it also tells us something about the meaning of brand value.

There has been some G-23 messaging after Mr Prasada quit last Wednesday, but most in the G-23 are not even paper tigers. What the Congress needs is a stiff dose of the sanjeevani of even a haphazard CWC election based on old AICC roles, which in turn would lead on to an immediate election for the party president.

The Gandhi family has meant well and has hewed to the line of Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. The tallest of them is too unwell to carry on even in an interim capacity. The most vital of them, and the most honorable, will not return as party chief. He resigned taking responsibility for a major poll defeat and announced none in his family would fill the slot after him. Which means he has paved the way for a fresh election for party president.

If this can happen well before the upcoming election in UP, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Goa in early 2022, the Congress can be in the hunt for the laurels, and the political scene can be electrified. Let the Congress disregard the corona restrictions (as it would need to anyway when elections are announced), and go for inner-party polls.

No room for complacency

The second wave of the pandemic Covid-19 has started showing signs of a decline, given that every indicator, from daily case load to number of deaths to test positivity rate, shows a definite pattern. This, however, offers little reason to be complacent what with experts predicting the arrival of a third wave which could be more dangerous and lethal. It is important that the government pull up the socks to take on it, and a truthful and scientific assessment of the first and second waves is key to the successful resistance to the pandemic.

It is in this context that the reports of an upward revision of the death toll in Bihar must be viewed. As per the latest government figures, Bihar has lost 9,375 people to the pandemic against the earlier figure of 5,424. This indicates that the government's figures have gone up by more than 72 per cent after the correction. The government's justification is that it has taken time to collect data from private hospitals, other facilities, in home isolation and of those who died of post-Covid complications. In a way, the government was admitting that it was formulating its policies and strategies on a wrong database.

The Bihar episode should be an eye-opener for all state governments and the Union government. The Union health ministry must ensure that every state follows uniform guidelines, formed by the Indian Council of Medical Research in the collecting data on infection and deaths. It must also ensure that the data from the rural and remote areas are also collected, collated and analysed scientifically so that it gives valuable inputs while preparing for the next wave. The right inputs based on reliable data should help the government plan the ways to augment healthcare infrastructure at places that would seem the next target of the virus.

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Subhani



‘Bombshell Barbara’ vs the ‘Robed Yogi’ of UP



Shobhaa's Take

I love it that we're a chilled-out country so accepting of dramatic contrasts. I mean that! For centuries, we have absorbed absurdities and carried on like it's no big deal. Last week's headline grabbers couldn't have been more startlingly different! One, a mysterious femme fatale in Antigua, the other a saffron-robed chief minister of our country's most populous state. In both cases, their newsworthiness was hinged around perfect timing! "Bombshell Barbara" is getting her cues so on point (wonder who's tutoring this one!). So is Yogi Adityanath (err... we can guess who his tutor is!). Both protagonists are armed with enough lethal ammo to blow up a few very important reputations. There is a third high-profile player: Harish Salve, who'll attract almost as much attention in the weeks to come as these two.

Let's start with "Bombshell Barbara", who's living up to the old chestnut... "*Cherchez la femme*"... in the ongoing extradition saga featuring a disreputable and disgraced diamantaire from India — the infamous Mehul Choksi, maternal uncle of an equally "wanted" diamantaire Nirav Modi. The brilliant Harish Salve has his work cut out for him, in a way. He has announced he'll succeed in getting back the fugitive diamond merchant either hiding out or being held hostage in Dominica, who ran off with ₹3,500 crores of public money in the PNB scam. Please note, Shri Salve is saying this feat will be achieved in weeks, not months! That's Salve for you — brilliant, mercurial, well-connected, super-confident and successful.

While we hold our

breaths for the "Return of the Jewel Thief", the adventurous lady playing a starring role in the high seas action drama in the Caribbean is attracting a great deal of attention — not just from Choksi's wife Preeti, but the media at large. The official "*Jab we met*" versions keep changing, but when the kidnapping story broke, Barbara was *khullam khulla* described as Mehul's girlfriend. Till loyal wife Preeti protested and staunchly denied a romantic liaison, choosing to describe Barbara as a family friend who had tricked her sweet husband into accepting a "dinner appointment" (Preeti's description). That too, at 5.30 pm (why not call it "high tea" with *nashita paani*?). Between the wanted man and the bombshell, we expected a tad more action. What was this innocuous, chaste "appointment" Preeti was talking about? Please, madam, do describe it as a hot and daring dinner date a deux, then we are talking! Oh, wait a minute, when did the Bewakoof Barbara discover that she'd been had by Mehul Choksi in more ways than one? When did she find out she was just one more greedy woman conned by Mehul, who she alleges wooed her with "priceless" diamond trinkets, which turned out to be fake! During their "long walks" and "relaxed evenings"? As they say, beware the wrath of a woman diamond scorned... After the scandal broke, Barbara has been singing like a canary with a sore throat. Alas, there go her dreams of becoming a real estate tycoon in Antigua — another false promise made by Mehul to keep his lady love interested, while he figured out his next move — some say to

Cuba. Maybe what he didn't figure was the classic honey trap — "The End" — to his *pyaar mohabbat*!

Diamonds are forever, as the tagline goes. But Mehul was peddling cheap glass. God knows how many high net-worth customers in India have been similarly tricked by Mehul and his understudy Nirav. Funny part is, the cheated ladies can't file charges — those supposedly priceless and rare stones were probably sold minus receipts, to greedy and gullible clients eager to park unaccounted money in easy to store *heera motis*. I can visualise these ladies staring glumly at their obscene rocks and wondering what to do with the useless baubles. Meanwhile, "Bombshell Barbara" may be busy selling the rights to her story to Netflix. This is "Pirates of the Caribbean", without Johnny Depp! But with a roly poly Mehul Choksi playing Humpty Dumpty.

On the other side of the news cycle is a diminutive "ascetic" who is making some badass moves in Uttar Pradesh. Clearly prepping for the Assembly elections in 2022. Yogi wants it to be his solo show, not a group exhibition. Clearly, he is being backed by his RSS bosses, and encouraged to assert his individuality more emphatically, in order to defuse any argument as to who calls the shots in UP — Modi or Yogi? Political watchers believe a new axis is forming, which pitches the Modi-Shah combo against the Gadkari-Yogi jodi. If true, this could also pave the way for new power structures across India and dent the invincibility of those currently holding the reins at the Centre.

On the other side of the news cycle is a diminutive 'ascetic' who is making some badass moves in Uttar Pradesh. Clearly prepping for the Assembly elections in 2022.

Yogi, after several disastrous errors of judgment (all that nonsense about love jihads, anti-Romeo squads), quickly got his act together and took a firm position against the anti-CAA riots in Muslim dominated areas. But then came the horrifying sight of Covid corpses floating down the rivers of Yogi's vast state of 240 million! Not good! Not good! *Satyanaash*... But hey, he bounced back swiftly! Fans and supporters are pointing out how he tamed and tackled the Covid-19 numbers, even managing to beat other states at keeping cases down. The interesting thing is this: that even the hardcore, hard-bitten BJP supporters are now uttering Yogi Adityanath's name in the same breath as Narendra Modi's. Sacrilege! And hello!

Nobody is demanding their heads on a platter. They are also insisting Yogi is their guy. The main man. Which means the highest of the high commands is okay with the new narrative and is in fact encouraging such public talk. Frankly, this is a positive development — absolute power corrupts absolutely, as we all know. Throwing in a serious challenger to NaMo at this critical stage (the run-up to Elections 2022) is a smart, shrewd move. It means all players will have to work that much harder to win this round. It also signals Yogi's elevation to a more visible, pan-India position, from where he can leverage and consolidate his image before the *asli* biggie — the national elections of 2024. The person who should be watching these developments closely is Mamata Didi, given her prime ministerial ambitions. These two make worthy rivals — both come with their single-and-not-ready-to-mingle status: the guy is a Yogi and the lady is a Yogini. Their followers worship them and believe that they can do no wrong. The race to the hot seat has suddenly got hotter!

Instagram handle: @ShobhaaDe; Twitter: @DeShobhaa

LETTERS

KANGANA BROKE?

Actor Kangana Ranaut has said that she is unable to pay her income-tax dues as she has 'no work'. Maybe, she doesn't have any assignments at present, but what happened to her past earnings? Would anyone believe that she is living from hand to mouth? If the highest tax-paying actor in Bollywood claims that she is broke, one can imagine the plight of the common man in these trying times. The IT authorities are absolutely justified in charging interest on the actor's pending tax money.

P.G. Menon,
Chennai

SILENCING CRITICS

Modi made two major announcements aimed at silencing the critics of the government's vaccination policy and ameliorating the plight of millions of have-nots struggling to manage even food due to economic hardship caused by the coronavirus. Taking charge of vaccination back from the states, the Prime Minister announced that all vaccines would be procured by the Central government and given to the states free of cost. Twenty-five per cent of vaccines will continue to be procured by private hospitals while the states' 75 per cent quota will come from the Centre and that is a step in the right direction. Now, all aged 18 and above would receive free vaccines in government hospitals from June 21, which is also International Yoga Day. No state government will have to spend anything on vaccines. And also distribution of free rations under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana will be extended till Deepavali up to November for 80 crore poor who will receive free ration under the scheme. The PM made the right ticks at the right time.

Jayanthy Subramanian,
Coimbatore

TEASING ASHWIN

The loudmouth commentator Sanjay Manjrekar's teasing TN ace spinner Ravichandran Ashwin that he does not find him qualified to gain a place in the list of all-time greats is not a palatable statement. Sanjay is not new to this kind of getting into controversies and his memories seem to be short, while he was axed by BCCI for his unwarranted comment against Ravindra Jadeja as well as on his fellow commentator Harsha Bhogle sometime ago. When the BCCI dropped him from the panel of commentators, he was kneeling down to use his representation to apologise for his improper conduct. It's pertinent to note that while Sanjay Manjrekar continues to claim his place under the shadow of his great father late Vijay Manjrekar, Ashwin has got the formidable backup of his own records to have a stake in any team.

A.P. Thiruvadi,
Chennai

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"Oh Bachchoo what can you write
When your inspiration is gone
And the day of joy passed into night
And like a lone cloud forlorn
You drift across an empty sky
Propelled by a destined wind
And like sinners wondering why
And in what depth they have sinned?"

— From **Songs of the Randy Rundis** by Bachchoo

All the world's a stage: Gender, race, diversity & today's reality

Ann Boleyn, one of the wives Henry VIII condemned to be beheaded, was as white as an unburdened cloud or a ceramic sink or... You see, gentle reader, I am trying to get away from the cliché of "driven snow" because I have never understood what drives it. And yet in the now-running Channel 5 television drama, Ann is played by a black actress.

Idiosyncratic casting is not new — black actors have been cast as Julius Caesar, women as Titus Andronicus and black actors, female so far, as the three Chekhovian sisters.

In the case of Ann, however, no commentator has openly objected but a lot has still been said. The writer-director of the series and Channel 5

put out a press release saying that their version intended to correct the prevalent view of Ann Boleyn as a manipulative schemer who deserved what she got. Though they didn't say it, what the writer-director who cast the black actress and her black brother in their respective roles probably intended was to win sympathy for Ann as a victim and someone who resists this victimisation, all in tune with the zeitgeist of the Black Lives Matter explosion.

Another seemingly well-informed reviewer pointed out that most historians and three previous depictions of Ann Boleyn in drama and film, characterised her not a manipulative sorceress, but as precisely the victim of capricious power. The Channel 5 drama was pushing against an open door.

The story ends horribly and tragically for Ann and her brother and this cross-racial casting sets out to prove that the privileged white establishment is guilty of racism — gosh! What a revelation — why didn't I think of it — thank you, Channel 5!

My own viewing of the series, perhaps in total eccentricity, reminded me at several points of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle and had me

wondering whether Oprah Winfrey was about to appear in the role of marriage counsellor.

Integrated or gender-and-colour-blind casting has several purposes. It may be that it was introduced in Britain and America under pressure from black actors who complained of not having opportunities and work as there weren't many roles for them to play. As a member in the 1980s of two theatre companies, the Black Theatre Coop (BTC) and the Asian Co-operative Theatre (ACT, geddit?), we were very much in the thick of the clamour for parts for non-white actors. Our solution was not to cast blacks in traditional white roles, but to find and encourage the writing and production of plays about the black and Asian experience, contemporary, international, historical, epic, mythical and even sci-fi and fantastical. That vein of theatre has prospered in part and floundered in part but seems to have established itself firmly in the theatrical space of Britain, moving from the venues and audiences we played in and for, into the terrain of the nation's dramatic establishment. We were the proud and defiant fringe. Now black and Asian drama covers

the whole scalp, sometimes scantily as "racial" concession, but also occasionally in rich, dramatic, Rastafarian ringlets.

There was a parallel impulse which prompted racially integrated casting, which was the contention that all the stage is a world, a self-contained world removed from, though portraying the realities of racial and nationalistic tensions.

It was this impulse or determination that caused the maestro Peter Brook to cast any and every nationality and race in his masterful nine-hour production of the *Mahabharat*. Japanese and Caribbean actors played Indian heroes, heroines and gods. Brook's criterion was not race or nationality but something like "the best actor from all the world for the role". Akin to the players of Manchester United not representing the city of Manchester but drawn from anywhere and everywhere.

The Brook impulse was certainly not shared by sections of the Indian population. Inspired by Brook's liberality or, as some would say, liberties with the *Mahabharat*, I wrote a novel called *Bombay Duck* in which this same impulse — of universally inte-

grated casting — results in tragedy. The book progresses to other instances and narratives to question all our notions of authenticity.

Perhaps Peter Brook would, with these colour-blind casting eyes, direct *Othello* with a white female actor playing the principal part? I am almost certain that Channel 5 would not but am a bit doubtful about Britain's National Theatre or indeed the Royal Shakespeare Company, which might very well in the interests of "diversity" overcome the idea that the play depends to a large extent on perceptions of race and gender. When Laurence Olivier, palpably white, played Othello, he blackened his face to dramatise this dimension of the play. Through the last few decades, no choric group of white singers in the West would blacken their faces to represent black and white minstrels. If a white actor blacked up to play Othello there would be mass riots in the streets. But what if one of the established theatres cast a white female actor as Othello without a change into male clothes, skin colour or plummy accent? Interesting. Watch this space.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52474.76	0.33
Nifty 50	15799.40	0.39
S&P 500*	4,240.87	0.04
Dollar (₹)	73.06	0.00
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.38	-0.36
Euro (₹)	88.81	0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,530▲441	0.90
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	72.91	0.54
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.006	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.464	0.005

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Govt holds back release of full April IIP data

The government has held back the release of complete data of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) for April, as was done for the same month last year due to the lockdown. By the partial data released by the NSO, industrial production expanded by a whopping 134 per cent year-on-year in April, while it was 22.4 per cent in March. But compared with April 2019 data, industrial growth stood at 0.07 per cent.

Singh's daughters appointed as DLF directors



DLF boss Rajiv Singh's two daughters, Savitri Devi Singh (36) and Anushka Singh (34), have been appointed on the company's board. In a filing, DLF said the board has "co-opted" them as additional directors with immediate effect. Both will be non-executive and non-independent directors. Both hold BSc in Economics degree from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, DLF said.

US consumer sentiment rebounds in June

US consumer sentiment rebounded in early June as inflation fears subsided and households grew more optimistic about future economic growth and employment. The University of Michigan said its preliminary consumer sentiment index increased to 86.4 in the first half of this month from a final reading of 82.9 in May. The survey's gauge of current economic conditions edged up to a reading of 90.6 from 89.4 in May.

BHEL Q4 loss narrows to ₹1,036 crore

BHEL's consolidated net loss narrowed to Rs 1,036.32 crore in the March 2021 quarter, mainly on the back of higher revenues, compared with a consolidated net loss of Rs 1,532.18 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total income rose to Rs 7,245.16 crore from Rs 5,166.64 crore. In the full financial year 2020-21, the PSU's consolidated net loss widened to Rs 2,699.70 crore compared with Rs 1,468.35 crore in 2019-20.

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Pilot run is part of 'Medicines from the Sky' project Flipkart to test drone delivery of vaccine, meds in Telangana

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, JUNE 11

Homegrown e-commerce major Flipkart on Friday said it has partnered with the Telangana government to lead a consortium tasked with the development and execution of the drone deliveries of medical supplies to remote areas under the 'Medicines from the Sky' project. As part of the consortium, Bengaluru-based Flipkart will deploy drones and enable deliveries of vaccines and medical supplies. These efforts will be complemented with technologies such as geo mapping,



routing of shipments and track and trace of location etc, developed by Flipkart over the years in serving millions of customers across the country, a Flipkart statement said. A combination of these technologies will then be used to conduct 'Beyond Visual Line of Sight'

(BVLOS) deliveries in remote areas of the state. The pilot, to be conducted for over six days, will be tested out for delivering thousands of vaccines. "The Covid-19 crisis has pushed the envelope in the rapid development of scalable and robust technologies and the Medicines

HC okays CCI probe of e-com biggies

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 11

The Karnataka High Court on Friday dismissed pleas by e-commerce biggies Amazon and Flipkart challenging the probe ordered by the Competition Commission of India (CCI). The CCI had ordered a probe in January 2020 against both Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart in a complaint filed by the Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh (DVM), representing small businesses. The petitioner had alleged that the e-commerce companies were violating the competition laws while selling smart phones on their platform. The Delhi Vyapar

Mahasangh had levelled allegations of predatory pricing, deep discounting, preferential seller listing, and exclusive partnerships, among others, against Amazon and Flipkart. The Confederation of All-India Traders (Cait) too had implored as a party to the case. In February, the e-commerce players got stay on the probe from the Karnataka High Court, which found that the ongoing investigation by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) should be first completed before the CCI could initiate a probe. The ED in 2019 had initiated an investigation against Amazon and Flipkart for alleged

violation of Foreign Direct Investment laws. Following this, the petitioners again approached the court asking it to vacate the stay order. However, on Friday CCI argued that an investigation by the ED under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (Fema) does not bar another investigation by the CCI for violations of competition law. It said e-commerce players were twisting the pendency of an ED investigation to ward off CCI's probe. Responding to the court order, an Amazon spokesperson said: "We will review the judgement carefully and decide on the next steps."

Nifty-50, Sensex scale new peaks

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JUNE 11

The equity market's benchmark indices, Nifty-50 and Sensex, closed at new all-time highs on Friday, marking the fourth successive weekly close with gains. However, the upward momentum seems to be slowing down with relatively lower daily gains for the indices. The Nifty-50 gained 61.60 points or 39 per cent to close at a new peak of 15,799.35 after touching an intra-day high of 15,835. The Sensex also closed at a new high of 52,474.76, gaining 174.29 points, and registered a new all-time high of 52,641.53 intra-day. "The market is rallying on a slowed-down momentum, which can be properly visualised with the help of negative divergence in RSI (Relative Strength Index) in daily time-frame," said Nirali Shah, head of equity research, Samco Securities. "The traded volume of derivatives saw a sharp decline by 30-40 per cent. The fall in intraday volumes is primarily attributable to either the new peak margin requirements (became effective from June 1) or the drying

up of investor conviction at current levels. Overall, the market remained range-bound with an upward bias," Shah said in her weekly analysis. The broader market outperformed, with Nifty Mid-cap-50 Index up 2.56 per cent and the Nifty Mid-cap 100 Index up 3.28 per cent. NSE's India VIX Index dropped 13.04 per cent during the week to 14.10, indicating lower volatility ahead. The market's upward momentum has sustained on the back of Rs 15,520 crore net buying by the foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) in June so far and domestic mutual funds also lending support as shown by the 14-month high inflows in equity mutual funds in May 2021. On Friday domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth Rs 666.36 crore while the FPIs took a pause with Rs 18.64 crore net purchases. The IT sector emerged a top gainer during the week, with the Nifty IT Index moving up 4.52 per cent while the financials were the laggards, as the Nifty Bank was down 0.69 per cent.

ASSET QUALITY OF MICRO LOAN PORTFOLIOS DIP

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 11

With lockdowns hitting collections, the asset quality of micro loan portfolios is estimated to have deteriorated this month, exceeding the post-demonetisation levels. A drop in the collection efficiency of NBFC-MFIs owing to Covid-19 curbs will increase asset-quality pressures in the sector and loans in arrears for over 30 days could rise to 14-16 per cent of portfolio in June from a recent low of 6-7 per cent in March, says a Crisil report. This is higher than 11.7 per cent touched in March 2017 in the aftermath of demonetisation. "Pressure on asset quality would be higher (than last year) as borrowers do not have a blanket moratorium this time, while their cash flows have been impacted by the second wave," said Krishnan Sitaraman, senior director and deputy chief ratings officer, Crisil Ratings. Earlier, Sa-Dhan had reported that overall collections, which had bounced back to pre-Covid levels in March, dropped by 10 to 20 per cent in April-May 2021 as the lockdown was imposed in some of the key states.

KIMS Hospitals' ₹2144-crore IPO priced at ₹815-₹825

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JUNE 11

Hyderabad-based Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS Hospitals), one of the largest hospital chains in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, announced a Rs 2,144-crore initial public offering (IPO) in the price band of Rs 815 to Rs 825 per equity share of Rs 10 face value. The public issue opens on June 16 and closes on June 18. The KIMS Hospitals Group operates nine multi-specialty hospitals under the KIMS Hospitals brand across AP and Telangana. The hospital chain started with the first hospital, KIMS Nellore, set up in 2000 by cardiologist Bhaskara Rao Bollineni with the vision to create a hospital system for his home state of Andhra Pradesh. The current network of KIMS hospitals, with total 3,064 beds, are located at Secunderabad, Hyderabad, Vizag, Nellore, Rajahmundry, Srikakulam, Ongole, Anantapur and Kurnool, catering to the healthcare needs of neighbouring states of Karnataka, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and parts of central India. The IPO comprises a fresh issue worth Rs 200 crore and an offer for sale of over 23.56 million equity shares by private equity investor General Atlantic Singapore and promoter selling shareholders Bhaskara Rao Bollineni, Rajyasri Bollineni and Bollineni Ramanaiah Memorial Hospital.

FOREX RESERVES CROSS \$600 BN

Mumbai, June 11: The country's foreign exchange reserves crossed the \$600-billion mark for the first time after increasing by \$6.842 billion in the week ended June 4, RBI data showed on Friday. The reserves surged to a record \$605.008 billion, helped by a rise in foreign currency assets (FCA), a major component of the overall reserves. In the previous week ended May 28, the reserves had swelled by \$5.271 billion to \$598.165 billion. In the reporting week, FCA jumped by \$7.362 billion to \$560.890 billion. Gold reserves declined by \$502 million to \$37.604 billion. — PTI

Passenger vehicle sales dip 66% in May amid Covid disruptions: Siam

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JUNE 11

Passenger vehicle wholesales—dispatches from factory gates to the dealerships—declined month-on-month by 66 per cent to 88,045 units in May as compared to April as lockdowns across various states impacted dispatches to dealers, auto industry trade lobby the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, or Siam, said on Friday. Passenger vehicle wholesales in April stood at 2,61,633 units. Since both May 2020 and May 2021 were abnormal months because of the Covid-19 situation and lockdowns, comparison of these two months holds no meaning. But a comparison of May 2021 sales with April this year, presents a realistic picture. Siam said two-wheeler dispatches to dealers dropped by 65 per cent to 3,52,717 units compared with 9,95,097 units in April. Motorcycle sales declined 56 per cent last month to 2,95,257 units as against 6,67,841 units in April. Similarly, scooter sales were down 83 per cent to



50,294 units, from 3,00,462 units in April this year. Three-wheeler sales declined by 91 per cent to 1,251 units as compared to 13,728 units in April. Vehicle sales across categories witnessed a decline of 65 per cent to 4,42,013 units last month, as against 12,70,458 units in April this year. "Most part of May was under lockdown due to Covid-19 in many states, thus, impacting overall sales and production. Many members had shut down their manufacturing plants to divert oxygen from industrial use for medical purposes," Rajesh Menon, director general at Siam said. Last month, Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest carmaker despatched 32,903 cars to its dealer partners, down from 1,35,879 units in April.

Similarly, Hyundai Motor India's wholesales last month dropped to 25,001 units compared with 49,002 units in April. Kia India delivered 11,050 units, while Mahindra & Mahindra dispatched 8,004 passenger vehicle units to their respective showrooms last month as compared with 16,111 and 18,285 units respectively, in April for the automakers. The Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations, or Fada, said total vehicle retail sales in the country declined by 55 per cent in May due to Covid restrictions to 5,35,855 units compared with 11,85,374 units in April this year. The passenger vehicle sales dropped by 59 per cent to 85,733 units in May as compared with 2,08,883 units in April this year.

Crypto exchange WazirX faces laundering charges

New Delhi, June 11: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday said it has issued a show cause notice to the country's largest cryptocurrency exchange for undertaking transactions worth over Rs 2,790 crore in alleged violation of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (Fema). Mumbai-headquartered WazirX, a domestic crypto currency and bitcoin exchange start-up, is registered under the company name Zannai Labs Pvt Ltd, incorporated in December 2017.

The notice issued by the central probe agency under various sections of the Fema names the exchange (WazirX), the company and directors Nischal Shetty and Sameer Hanuman Mhatre. The exchange and its promoters denied any wrongdoing and said they are "in compliance with all applicable laws". The ED issued a statement saying that it stumbled upon the transactions of the exchange during an ongoing money laundering probe into "Chinese-owned" illegal online betting applications. The show-cause notice is for transactions worth Rs 2,790.74 crore, the ED said. Shetty, also the CEO of the exchange, took to Twitter and said WazirX was yet to receive any show-cause notice from the ED as mentioned in media reports. "WazirX is in compliance with all applicable laws. We go beyond our legal obligations by fol-

lowing know your customer (KYC) and anti money laundering (AML) processes and have always provided information to law enforcement authorities whenever required," he posted on his handle. He added: "We are able to trace all users on our platform with official identity information." In its statement, the ED described in detail its investigation. "It was seen that the accused Chinese nationals had laundered proceeds of crime worth about Rs 57 crore by converting Indian rupee deposits into cryptocurrency tether (USDT) and then transferred it to Binance (exchange registered in Cayman Islands) Wallets based on instructions received from abroad," it said. Binance is considered a market leader in this domain and had acquired WazirX in 2019. "WazirX allows a wide range of transactions with crypto currencies (CC), including their exchange with INR and vice-versa, exchange of CCs, person to person (P2P) transactions and even transfer/receipt of crypto currency held in its pool accounts to wallets of other exchanges, which could be held by foreigners in foreign locations," the ED alleged. WazirX, it alleged, "does not" collect the requisite documents in clear violation of the basic mandatory anti-money laundering and combating financing of terrorism (CFT) norms and also Fema guidelines.



BoM tops PSU banks in loan, deposit growth

New Delhi, June 11: Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has emerged as the top performer among public sector lenders in terms of loan and deposit growth during 2020-21. The lender recorded 13.45 per cent increase in gross advances at Rs 1.07 lakh crore in FY21, as per the published data of BoM. It was followed by Punjab & Sind Bank, which posted 8.39 per cent growth in advances with aggregate loans at Rs 67,811 crore at the end of March 2021. In deposit mobilisation, BoM, with nearly 16 per cent growth, was ahead of even the country's largest lender, State Bank of India, which recorded 13.56 per cent rise. However, in absolute terms SBI's deposit base was 21 times higher at Rs 36.81 lakh crore against Rs 1.74 lakh crore of BoM. Current account savings account (CASA) for BoM saw 24.47 per cent rise, the highest among the public sector lenders, during the year. As a result, CASA was 54 per cent or Rs 93,945 crore of the total liabilities of the bank. According to the announced quarterly numbers, Central Bank of India achieved the second spot by recording 11.46 per cent growth in CASA at Rs 1.61 lakh crore. Total business of BoM increased 14.98 per cent to Rs 2.81 lakh crore. For the full year 2020-21, BoM's standalone net profit jumped nearly 42 per cent to Rs 550.25 crore. In the previous year, the profit was Rs 388.58 crore. — PTI

HASTY | NOD Biogen drug was authorised based on evidence that it can reduce brain plaques

US FDA faces criticism over Alzheimer's drug approval

JULIE STEENHUYSEN & DEENA BEASLEY JUNE 11

In approving the first new Alzheimer's drug in nearly 20 years, the US Food and Drug Administration is taking its biggest risk yet with a strategy that allows new therapies onto the market without strong evidence that they work, regulatory and scientific experts say. The Biogen Inc drug, Aduhelm, was authorised based on evidence that it can reduce brain plaques, a likely contributor to Alzheimer's, rather than proof that it slows progression of the lethal

mind-wasting disease. The FDA has granted so-called "accelerated approval" in more than 250 instances since 1992, mainly for rare diseases or small patient populations that have had no effective treatments available to them. In these cases, the agency requires that drugmakers conduct additional clinical trials to prove their therapy works, or face withdrawal from the market. Aduhelm, however, is in a different league in terms of the number of potential patients and cost to the healthcare system. In addition, the FDA

approval ignored the recommendation of its outside advisors, who said Biogen did not provide enough evidence of clinical benefit. Three of the advisory panel's members have resigned in protest since the FDA decision was announced on Monday. "This decision has shaken the foundations of the scientific process and methods," said Dr Jason Karlawish, co-director of the Penn Memory Center in Philadelphia. Karlawish ran one of the trial sites for the Biogen drug. He said the FDA made its decision "by fiat," and



had not asked its advisors to consider whether the drug's ability to remove a type of brain plaques known as beta amyloid would improve outcomes for patients. "It's a disturbing set of events, scientifically, clinically, politically," Karlawish said.

Biogen has said that some 1.5 million Americans with early-stage Alzheimer's will be eligible for the drug, priced at an average of \$56,000 per year, with the federal Medicare insurance programme for seniors likely on the hook for most of the cost. The FDA approval allows Biogen to sell its product over several years - with forecasts for potential annual sales reaching as high \$10 billion to \$50 billion - until the company completes a required follow-up study. "No amount of unmet need can take the place of sufficient evidence," said

Johns Hopkins public health professor Dr Caleb Alexander, a member of the FDA advisory panel. The number of Americans living with Alzheimer's is expected to more than double to around 13 million by 2050, according to the Alzheimer's Association. Biogen research chief Alfred Sandrock said the FDA had painstakingly analysed its clinical trial data over two years before reaching a conclusion. "I believe they came to the right decision on behalf of the American public," Sandrock said in an interview. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Vinesh emerges on top in Poland

Warsaw: Star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat proved that her preparations for the Tokyo Games were on track by winning the 53kg gold at the Poland Open here on Friday, giving herself some crucial 'mat-time' ahead of the Olympics. It is third title of the season for the 26-year-old Vinesh, who claimed gold medals at the Matteo Pellicone event (March) and Asian Championship (April) earlier. The victory would potentially make Vinesh the top seed at the Tokyo Olympics. — PTI

No ministerial delegation for Oly

New Delhi: The Sports Ministry on Friday said it has decided against sending its delegation to Tokyo Olympics to accommodate "maximum" support staff, including coaches and physios, for the athletes competing in the Summer Games. A total of 100 Indian athletes have so far qualified and another 25 to 35 might make the cut. "The Ministry has decided to depute maximum additional support staff such as coaches, doctors, physiotherapists, to optimize the performance of the athletes," the Ministry said in a statement. — PTI

Tokyo undecided on spectators

Tokyo: The question of allowing any fans into Tokyo Olympic venues is still being debated with a decision unlikely to be announced before the end of the month. This would be just a few weeks before the Olympics are to open on July 23. Fans from abroad have already been banned in what is shaping up as a largely made-for-television Olympics. Tokyo and several prefectures are under a state of emergency until June 20. Infections have slowed recently, but the spread of variants is still a concern that could put pressure on already stressed medical facilities. — AP

Warner, Stoinis opt out of The Hundred

Melbourne: Star Australian opener David Warner and all-rounder Marcus Stoinis have pulled out of the inaugural edition of 'The Hundred' as the England and Wales Cricket Board gears up for more withdrawals in wake of the challenges posed by Covid-19 pandemic. Warner and Stoinis, who returned home from Covid-ravaged India after the suspension of the IPL, were named in Australia's squads for the limited over tours to the West Indies and Bangladesh. — PTI

Ngidi takes five as Windies crumble

Saint Lucia: Lungi Ngidi mowed through the lower half of the West Indies batting order on the way to a five-wicket haul as South Africa routed the home side for 97 on the opening day of the first Test of the two-match series at the Daren Sammy Cricket Ground in St Lucia on Thursday. — AFP

Brief scores (Day 1): West Indies 97 (Holder 20; Ngidi 5/19, Nortje 4/35) vs SA 128/4 in 43 overs (Dussen 34 (batting); Seales 3/34).

Live on TV

EURO

Group Stage: Wales vs Switzerland from 6.30 pm; Denmark vs Finland from 9.30 pm; Belgium vs Russia from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

TENNIS

French Open: Women's singles final from 6.30 pm; Men's doubles final from 8 pm on Star Sports, Select 1, HD

UFC

Fight Night: Israel Adesanya vs Marvin Vettori from 7.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, 3

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Belgium players pose after a training session. The Red Devils will face Russia in St. Petersburg on Saturday. — Twitter

Red alert for Russia

Top-ranked Belgium take on Russia in quest for Euro glory

St. Petersburg, June 11: What's being billed by some as the last hurrah for Belgium's "golden generation" begins with two of the team's long-time stalwarts likely to miss their opening match of the European Championship.

Injury and fitness concerns mean neither Kevin De Bruyne nor Eden Hazard are set to start against Russia on Saturday at Saint Petersburg Stadium, where the Belgians' World Cup hopes in 2018 died in a loss to France.

They return to the same venue three years later as the world's top-ranked team — they have been in that position since October 2018 — but with doubts about the availability of their two star attacking midfielders, and maybe a bit more.

De Bruyne is probably the least of coach Roberto Martinez's concerns, despite linking up with the squad a week late after fracturing his nose and eye socket during Manchester City's loss to Chelsea in the Champions League final. The playmaker required a minor operation and is likely to



Wales' Gareth Bale during a training session in Baku on Thursday. — AFP

be ready to start in Belgium's second game, against Denmark in Copenhagen on June 17, when he might be wearing a face mask.

Hazard's health is slightly less clear-cut, with the winger in far-from-perfect shape after an injury-dis-

HEAD-TO-HEAD

WALES-SWITZERLAND
● Matches: 7. Switzerland: 5. Wales: 2.

EURO MEETINGS

1999: Switzerland bt Wales 2-0 in Zurich.

1999: Switzerland bt Wales 2-0 in Wrexham.

2010: Switzerland bt Wales 4-1 in Basel.

2011: Wales bt Switzerland 2-0 in Swansea.

DENMARK-FINLAND

● Matches: 59. Denmark: 38. Finland: 11. Draw: 10

EURO MEETINGS

1986: Denmark bt Finland 1-0 in Copenhagen.

1987: Denmark bt Finland 1-0 in Helsinki.

RUSSIA-BELGIUM

● Matches: 7. Belgium: 5. Draw: 2.

EURO MEETINGS

2019: Belgium bt Russia 3-1 in Brussels.

2019: Belgium bt Russia 4-1 in St. Petersburg.

— S. PERVEZ GAISER

rupted season with Real Madrid and only being a substitute in Euro 2020 warmup games.

Martinez said Hazard still needed to get "match intensity" so is likely to be on the bench again for the game against Russia, whose chances of an upset

win suddenly have improved. Playing in front of a potential 30,000 fans, among the biggest group-stage attendances at the tournament, can only spur on Russia in their fifth straight appearance at the European Championship.

BALE 'NOT WORRIED' ABOUT DROUGHT

Wales captain Gareth Bale said on Friday he was unconcerned about his international goal drought on the eve of his side's Euro 2020 opener against Switzerland.

Bale, 31, last scored for Wales against Croatia in October 2019 but has created four goals in his previous seven appearances. "It doesn't matter. I've made assists. I'm still contributing. I'm not worried," he said.

"If the chances arise to score, hopefully I can take them," he added.

Bale's side start their campaign in Azerbaijan on Saturday in the competition that has been delayed by a year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Real Madrid forward, who spent last season on loan at Tottenham,

has scored 33 goals in 92 international appearances since making his debut in 2006 but his goalless run stretches back 11 matches.

Wales coach Robert Page, who will take charge of the side during the tournament as Ryan Giggs is facing trial in England, backed his star player.

FINLAND READY FOR DANISH TEST

Finland goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky didn't sugar coat things when summing up the difference between his team and Denmark at the European Championship.

"They have better players than us in every position," Hradecky said bluntly ahead of Finland's major tournament debut at Euro 2020.

Then the Bayer Leverkusen goalkeeper touched upon the one thing that could speak in his team's favor going into Saturday's Group B game in Copenhagen.

"But we have shown before that the sum of all the parts in our puzzle is greater than what people think," he said.

— Agencies

Quick passes

Spain vaccinate entire squad

Worried that a coronavirus outbreak could derail their chances at the European Championship, Spain sent in the army on Friday to vaccinate the national team three days before their opening match at the tournament. Medics from Spain's Armed Forces administered the shots at the team's training facility near Madrid. "We have had the privilege and the good fortune that the government decided to vaccinate us," said Spain midfielder Thiago, who was infected with Covid-19 last year. "While this is great news for us, I hope that we don't have any adverse effects before the match."

Scotland players to take a knee

Scotland's players will take a knee at the European Championship before the game against England in London but will stand ahead of matches in Glasgow against the Czech Republic and Croatia. The England team have been doing the anti-racism gesture since last year. Scotland captain Andy Robertson says "we have collectively decided to again take the knee as a team for the fixture against England at Wembley Stadium." The match will be played on June 18. The gesture has been booed by a section of England fans but the team will continue to take a knee at Euro 2020. England's first game of the tournament will be on Sunday against Croatia.

De Bruyne to miss opener

Kevin De Bruyne has not travelled to St. Petersburg with the Belgium squad for Saturday's European Championship game against Russia. The Manchester City playmaker only linked up with the team on Monday after having a minor operation on the fractured nose and eye socket he sustained during the Champions League final against Chelsea on May 29. Belgium coach Roberto Martinez says De Bruyne hasn't yet trained with the group and was still following an individual programme to "get him back to really being able to move freely."

Martinez says he expects De Bruyne to join full training with the squad when Belgium's players return to the training camp in Tubize after the group game against Russia.

COPA | AMERICA

Messi, Aguero in Argentina squad

Buenos Aires, June 11: Lionel Messi, Sergio Aguero and Angel Di Maria are headlining the Argentina squad that will head to Brazil for the Copa America, seeking their national team's first major title since 1993.

The list was published on Thursday by South American governing body, CONMEBOL.

Defender Juan Foyth and striker Lucas Ocampos are the most notable absentees from the 28-player squad, despite featuring regularly since Lionel Scaloni became head coach in 2018.

Foyth was involved late when Argentina conceded a last-minute equaliser to Colombia in a World Cup qualifying match earlier this week.

The Villarreal defender, a winner of the latest Europa League, lost possession at the edge of the penalty box. Colombia subsequently crossed and then found the back of the net with a header by Miguel Borja.

Sevilla's Ocampos had a lacklustre performance in the 1-1 draw against Chile last week, also in a World Cup qualifier. — AP

A Stef closer to Slam dream

Paris, June 11: Stefanos Tsitsipas went from way ahead to suddenly stuck in a five-set struggle against Alexander Zverev at the French Open on Friday before emerging to earn his first berth in a Grand Slam final.

The fifth-seeded Tsitsipas entered with an 0-3 record in major semifinals and it seemed as if he might let this one slip away, too, until a late surge carried him to the 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 4-6, 6-3 victory after more than 3 and a half hours at Court Philippe Chatrier.

On Sunday, Tsitsipas will face 13-time Roland Garros champion Nadal or top-seeded Novak Djokovic for the championship on the red clay.

Tsitsipas regained control of his semifinal on a cloudy afternoon in the late going thanks to a combination of more solid returning by him and a succession of ground-stroke unforced errors from the sixth-seeded Zverev, a 24-year-old from Germany.

The fifth set began with a key service hold after Tsitsipas double-faulted to fall behind love-40. From there, he won five consecutive points, including one with a cross-court forehand passing winner that he celebrated by shaking his racket as the crowd chanted, "Tsi-tsi-pas! Tsi-tsi-pas! Tsi-tsi-pas!"

Then Tsitsipas broke to go up 3-1 with plenty of help from Zverev, who double-faulted, then missed a backhand, followed by a forehand and another backhand.

Zverev winced and Tsitsipas raised his right fist. Fifteen minutes later, Tsitsipas earned his first match point, and while he needed five of them to



Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece celebrates a point against Germany's Alexander Zverev during their French Open semifinal at the Roland Garros on Friday. — AP

close the proceedings, he eventually did convert one with an ace.

Tsitsipas will be the first player from Greece in a Grand Slam singles final and youngest man to appear in the title match at the French Open since Nadal won the 2008 championship five days after his 22nd birthday.

And this is not some out-of-nowhere ascension. Tsitsipas has been build-

ing toward this over the past couple of seasons, reaching three major semifinals in a row and leading the ATP in total match wins (39 now) and clay-court wins (22) in 2021. Three of his seven career tour-level titles came on clay, including a pair this year — at the Monte Carlo Masters and Lyon.

Zverev's loss makes him 0-10 against members of

the Top 10 at Grand Slam tournaments, an especially confounding statistic when viewed in contrast to his 31-30 mark against such opponents in any other setting.

He hadn't faced a seeded player en route to the semifinals, including two matches against qualifiers and a quarterfinal victory over 46th-ranked Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. — AP

ANASTASIA AND BARBORA SEEK GRAND SUCCESS

Paris, June 11: Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova and Barbora Krejickova, two of the most unlikely Grand Slam finalists of the modern era, meet in Saturday's French Open title match at the conclusion of a shock-heavy tournament. World number 32 Pavlyuchenkova has reached this stage for the first time at the 52nd attempt, 10 years after making a first Slam quarter-final in Paris.

Krejickova, ranked one place lower, has long been labelled a doubles specialist and this is just her fifth appearance in a main draw singles at the Slams, having never previously got beyond the last 16. However, both women have capitalised on a draw where the top seeds fell and just kept falling.

World number one and 2019 champion Ashleigh Barty hobbled out in the second round. Serena Williams was knocked out in the fourth round, world number two Naomi Osaka withdrew after one match while 2018 champion Simona Halep never even made it to Paris. "The 14-year-old me would tell me 'What took you so long?'," said 29-year-old Pavlyuchenkova who played her first Slam event in 2007. "It's been a long road. I had my own long special road. Everybody has different ways. I'm happy I'm in the final."

Pavlyuchenkova is bidding to become the fourth Russian champion at Roland Garros. — AFP