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U.S. President Biden promises to strengthen voting rights  
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India exports surge 67% in May 2021, narrowing trade gap  
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Kohli says WTC final against New Zealand will be fought on equal terms  
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## NEARBY



SC verdict today on Vinod Dua's petition

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to pronounce its judgment on Thursday on a petition filed by senior journalist and Padma Shri awardee Vinod Dua to quash a sedition case registered against him in Himachal Pradesh for his YouTube telecast on the north-east Delhi riots last year.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

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## New IT rules don't apply to us, Google tells HC

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Google told the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that the new Information Technology Rules 2021, which came into effect late last month, did not apply to the U.S.-based tech giant as it was a "search engine" and not a "social media intermediary" like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

On April 20, the High

## Why not buy 100% vaccines if you get discount, SC asks Centre

Bench questions Union govt's logic that it is getting the sop due to bulk orders

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has questioned the Centre's logic that manufacturers are selling it COVID-19 vaccines for a hefty discount because it places bulk orders. The court then asked the government why it cannot buy 100% of the vaccines at a discount instead of leaving the States to fend for themselves.

"The Central government justifying its lower prices on account of its ability to place large purchase orders for vaccines raises the issue as to why this rationale is not being employed for acquiring 100% of the monthly CDL

 The Union Budget for 2021-2022 earmarked ₹35,000 crore for procuring vaccines. The Centre should clarify how these funds have been spent so far and why they cannot be utilised for vaccinating persons aged 18-44

SUPREME COURT



[Central Drugs Laboratory] doses," a Bench, led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, noted in a 32-page order.

The Centre can buy vaccines for ₹150, while the States have to shell out between ₹300 and ₹600.

"If the Central government's unique monopolistic buyer position is the only

reason for it receiving vaccines at a much lower rate from manufacturers, it is important for us to examine the rationality of the existing Liberalised Vaccination Policy against Article 14 [right to equality] of the Constitution since it could place severe burdens, particularly on States/Union Territories suf-

ferring from financial distress," the court held.

It said the Centre, with a ₹35,000 crore budget to buy vaccines, has money to spare unlike the States which have suddenly been burdened with the task to cough up funds for vaccines. "The Union Budget for 2021-2022 earmarked ₹35,000 crore for procuring vaccines. In the light of the Liberalised Vaccination Policy, the Central government is directed to clarify how these funds have been spent so far and why they cannot be utilised for vaccinating persons aged 18-44," the court ordered.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Let Centre distribute vaccines, says Odisha CM

SATYASUNDAR BARIK  
SHIV SAHAY SINGH  
BHUBANESWAR/KOLKATA

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has called for a consensus among all the States on a universal vaccination programme for COVID-19.

In a letter to all Chief Ministers, and personal calls to a few, he expressed grave concern at the prevailing COVID-19 situation and suggested that the Centre procure the vaccines and distribute them.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, too, said on Wednesday, "The Centre must procure and make vaccines available free of cost to all the States." She said Mr. Patnaik called her on Tuesday on the issue. "I fully support his views," she said.

Mr. Patnaik's letter said many States had floated global tenders for vaccine procurement. "However, it is quite clear that the global vaccine manufacturers are looking forward to the Union government for clearances. They are unwilling to get into supply contracts with the State governments, while the domestic manufacturers are having supply constraints and are not able to commit required supplies."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

KERALA FOR FREE JABS ▶ PAGE 5

## HC for 'manslaughter' charge on officials not acting on vaccine issue

'Untapped potential has to be utilised'

to cut this short".

Additional Solicitor General Balbir Singh informed the court that the Indian government has decided to procure Sputnik V vaccine from Dr. Reddy's alone. He said Panacea has to go through ethnicity and efficacy tests for any adverse effect on the population.

Reacting to this, the court remarked, "Then the bridge trials should have been conducted even with regard to the imported vaccine. You have done away with it for the imported vaccine. Why insist on it for the domestic manufacturer but not for the manufacturer abroad?"

"And the rule itself empowers you to actually waive this (tests), if you in your wisdom like to waive it. In the end they are identical products, one is imported and another manufactured here," the court said.

"The problem is of fear psychosis that some vigilance enquiry will take place, audit will take place. Tell them (officers), this is not the time to be wary of these investigations and audit reports. This is leading to deaths today... Actually some people need to be charged with manslaughter if they have been sitting over this untapped potential," the court remarked.

## Court in Dominica adjourns hearing in Mehul Choksi case

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

NEW DELHI

Hearing began on Wednesday against fugitive businessman and diamond trader Mehul Choksi at a court in Dominica, where he is facing charges of entering the island territory illegally.

Opposing the public prosecutor in the court, Mr. Choksi's team said he was "traumatised" after being

tortured in custody of alleged kidnappers, who took him from his residence in nearby Antigua where he had acquired citizenship.

The hearing will continue on Thursday. The case had taken a turn against Mr. Choksi after Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne claimed that Mr. Choksi had left his residence there out of his free will with

a female companion and that Dominica should hand him over to the Indian authorities, who were expecting that country to carry out the International Red Corner Notice against Mr. Choksi, accused of defrauding the Punjab National Bank and the State Bank of India of ₹13,500 crore.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Palestine flays India's abstention

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

NEW DELHI

India's abstention from the latest resolution on the Palestinian issue suppresses human rights of "all people", Palestine's Foreign Minister Riad Malki has said.

In an unusually strong letter sent to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on May 30, Dr. Malki said the resolution titled "Ensuring respect for international human rights law and humanitarian law in Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and in Israel" was a product of long years of multilateral negotiation. "Republic of India missed an opportunity to join the international community at this turning point on the path to justice and peace," he stated.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Himalayan task



Oil tankers crossing the snow-covered Rohtang Pass to reach Manali in Himachal Pradesh on Wednesday. ▶ PTI

## Wary of COVID-19, 8 convicts refuse parole

Mysuru jail inmates see greater danger of being exposed to the infection outside

LAIQAH A. KHAN

mysuru

At least eight convicts lodged in the Mysuru Central Jail in Karnataka have refused to go home on the 90-day parole offered to eligible inmates to decongest prisons in the wake of the second wave of COVID-19. They said the probability of contracting the virus was higher outside. They also feared that they may not be able to earn a livelihood amid the lockdown.

While more than 75 inmates had walked out of the Mysuru jail during the last few days, eight turned down the offer. Two more eligible convicts were undergoing treatment for COVID-19 and the jail authorities were yet to hear



To leave or not to: A view of the entrance of the Central Prison in Mysuru, Karnataka. ▶ M.A. SRIRAM

from them on whether they would take parole or not.

The jail authorities began releasing convicts and undertials on COVID-19 parole in the second week of May to decongest the prison, which houses about 750 inmates, as per the guidelines issued by the Supreme Court last year. "This year, eight inmates have refused to return home.

They claim that they feel safe from COVID-19 inside the jail," she said. Though a few inmates tested positive in the last few days and had been treated, almost all the 700 inmates of the Mysuru jail, who were above 45 years, had been given the first dose of the vaccine. Many inmates in the 18 to 44 age group had also been given the first dose, while all the staff members had finished both their doses.

Some refused parole in view of the livelihood challenges that people were facing during the lockdown. The inmates have to remit ₹1,000 as surety before being let out on parole, but the amount would be returned on their return to the jail.

## Bail for 7 accused of stealing shrouds in U.P.

Refurbished and repackaged cloth allegedly sold as that of a Gwalior company

OMAR RASHID

LUCKNOW

A local court in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat has granted bail to seven persons, including three cloth traders related to each other, after the police failed to produce evidence regarding the fake stickers and ribbons they allegedly used to sell the cloth made by repackaging shrouds stolen by them from crematoriums and graveyards.

The seven were arrested last month on charges of allegedly stealing pieces of cloths used as shrouds in crematoriums and graveyards before cleaning them and packing them with fake stickers and ribbons of a Gwalior company. They allegedly sold the repackaged cloth for a good price in the market.



The accused were arrested on May 9. ▶ U.P. POLICE VIA TWITTER

and ribbons of a Gwalior company allegedly used by the accused to market the refurbished shrouds.

Judge Sazia Nazar Zaidi, session judge (in-charge) in the bail order dated June 1, noted that the prosecution neither produced any document regarding any criminal case previously filed in the matter nor the fake stickers

vin Jain and his son Ashish Jain, run a cloth store in Baraut, while their relative Rishab Jain, who runs a separate store, was visiting them on the day of their arrest on May 9, the accused said. The other four persons – Sharav Kumar Sharma, Raju, Bablu and Shahrukh – are Mr. Pravin's staffers who were allegedly working from home due to the lockdown.

The Jain father-son argued that due to the lockdown, they were assorting setting them right" and packing them. The accused have submitted bills towards proving that they purchased the cloth allegedly recovered from the traders and shown to be shrouds would be a matter of evidence.

The court said the cloth allegedly recovered from the traders and shown to be shrouds would be a matter of evidence.



**Timings****DELHI**

|                      |
|----------------------|
| THURSDAY, JUN. 03    |
| RISE 05:24 SET 19:16 |
| RISE 01:23 SET 13:07 |
| FRIDAY, JUN. 04      |
| RISE 05:24 SET 19:16 |
| RISE 01:53 SET 14:00 |
| SATURDAY, JUN. 05    |
| RISE 05:24 SET 19:17 |
| RISE 02:22 SET 14:53 |

|               |     |     |
|---------------|-----|-----|
| Delhi Weather | max | min |
| Delhi City    | 37  | 22  |
| Safdarjung    | 37  | 22  |
| Palam         | 36  | 24  |

**Delhi Pali Today**  
37°C Comfortable morning and very warm day likely to prevail with occasional partly cloudy sky. Thunderstorm likely at isolated places.

**Delhi Pali Tomorrow**  
38°C A comfortable morning and hot day. Thunderstorm may occur at few places.

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**THE HINDU**

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**IN BRIEF**

**Govt. aims at planting 33 lakh saplings: Rai**

NEW DELHI Environment Minister Gopal Rai said that the government will start the annual plantation drive on Saturday and they aim at planting 33 lakh saplings. "Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had given a guarantee before elections that we will plant 2 crore saplings in the next five years and our target is to plant 33 lakh saplings this year, which is nearly twice the Centre's target," Mr. Rai said.

**North body chalks out plans to resolve waterlogging**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI North Delhi Municipal Corporation Mayor Jai Prakash held a meeting with officials of various departments regarding waterlogging in Kirari during monsoons, on Wednesday.

In addition to officials from the corporation, officials from the Public Works Department, DSICD and Irrigation and Flood Control Department were also present.

Mr. Jai Prakash said waterlogging issues arise every year during the monsoon in Agar Nagar, Mubarakpur Dabas, Kirari Suleman Nagar and Kirari area under the Kirari Assembly constituency, due to which citizens have to face a lot of problems.

During the meeting, Mr. Jai Prakash directed all the officers to ensure that there is no issue of waterlogging anywhere in Kirari during this year's monsoon and they should take all measures to deal with it.

# HC asks Delhi govt. whether it can give 2nd dose of Covaxin

Court asks why so many jab centres were launched if supply was uncertain

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sent a notice to the AAP government seeking its stand on whether it could provide the second dose of Covaxin to those who got the first jab, before expiry of the six-week incubation period between the two doses.

Justice Rekha Palli remarked that if the Delhi government could not ensure people received both Covaxin doses within the stipulated time, then it should not have started so many vaccination centres with "much pomp and splendour".

The HC also issued notice to the Centre on two pleas to make second doses of both Covaxin and Covishield available in the Capital.

"Why did you [the Delhi government] start it [vaccination] if you were not sure you can also provide the second dose? You should have stopped." Maharashtra



COVID-19 vaccination in progress at a centre in Lalbagh on Wednesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

stopped when it found it could not provide the second dose," the HC said.

"You opened so many vaccination centres with so much pomp and splendour, and now you say you don't know when the second dose stock would be available," the court remarked.

One of the petitions is filed by an advocate, Ashish Virmani, who received the first dose of Covaxin on May 3 and since May 29 has been

unable to book a slot for receiving the second dose, which has to be taken within six weeks of the first.

Mr. Virmani said he had to travel to Meerut in Uttar Pradesh to receive the second dose of the vaccine.

The Delhi government's Additional Standing Counsel Anuj Aggarwal said that the matter of securing stocks was presently between the State and the manufacturer.

The counsel said he, too,

was yet to receive his second dose and added that there was scarcity of Covaxin.

**Incubation period**

The counsel said he would seek instructions on by when Covaxin stock would be available, and whether those who received the first dose could be provided the second dose within the stipulated time of six weeks.

The second petition filed by one Rajeev Parashar said he was administered the first dose of Covaxin on March 4 and the second dose of the same vaccine had to be administered to him between June 1 to 15.

Mr. Parashar, 35, said the decision of the Delhi government to put on hold the vaccination drive for the 18-44 years age group on hold till June 10 puts him at a significant risk of failure to receive the second dose in time.

The Delhi HC will hear the case again on June 4.

## Positivity rate in Gurugram drops to 1.63% after 32-day lockdown

Daily cases fall from 4,435 on April 30 to just 86 on June 1

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
GURUGRAM

The COVID-19 positivity rate in Gurugram has dwindled by more than 33 points to 1.63% during the 32-day lockdown till June 1. The number of daily cases has also gone down from 4,435 to 86 over this period.

The Haryana government had imposed the lockdown in Gurugram on April 30 night to contain the spread of the virus. As per the district health department, Gurugram had a positivity rate of 34.9% on April 30 with 4,435 fresh cases and the recovery rate stood at 69.76%. The cases were doubled every 23.35 days.

However, a sharp improvement has been recorded in the situation during the lock-



A girl getting vaccinated at a centre in Gurugram. ■ MANOJ KUMAR

down with just 86 fresh cases being recorded on June 1, as per the daily health bulletin, and the positivity rate falling to 1.63%. The recovery rate has also gone up to 98.79%.

The number of daily cases further fell down to 83 on Wednesday. The district now has 1,073 active cases, as per the latest statistics. As many as 836 people have died so far

with nine more deaths on Wednesday. Besides, 184 patients with mucormycosis, better known as "black fungus", are under treatment at various hospitals in the district and 45 have recovered.

**Sero-survey**

In a related development, Chief Medical Officer Virender Yadav said the third round of sero-survey in the district would be kicked off in the second week of this month. A total of 400 samples will be collected.

The survey will be conducted in four urban clusters falling under Urban Primary Healthcare Centres of Mullahera, Basai Enclave, Naharpur and Patel Nagar. A dozen rural areas will also be covered.

## Court order shows BJP's complete failure: AAP

No corporation has been asked by court to sell its property to pay salaries'

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday said that the BJP has "completely failed" in managing the municipal corporation. Their failure and mismanagement are incomparable," Mr. Sisodia said in a statement.

**'Own responsibility'**

He said that the BJP should take full responsibility and accept its "absolute failure" in managing the corporation.

"Municipal corporation is facing one of the biggest challenges in its basic functioning. No corporation has ever

been asked by the court to sell its property, their assets to pay salaries of its employees. This situation would not have arisen if BJP had made dedicated efforts in managing it. Our workers who have been in the forefront of the crisis in municipal corporation would not have had to face this kind of embarrassment and insult of not being paid had the BJP managed its operations well," he said.

Mr. Sisodia said the situation that the civic body is facing is because of the BJP and their "corruption and petty politics". He said that one of the main areas that the corporation is responsible for is cleanliness, but the BJP cannot point towards even a single ward in Delhi and claim that they have made it into a 'model ward'.

"Nobody knows where the money earmarked for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and its employees is going. How will our teachers teach? How are doctors going to treat patients? How is the cleaning staff going to sanitise Delhi? We don't know where the money is going," the Minister said.

## Stuck at home, centenarian struggles to get vaccine

NGO seeks govt.'s help to get her vaccinated at home, highlights difficulties of disabled in getting jab

**NIKHIL M BABU**  
NEW DELHI

Padma Ranganathan, a 100-year-old woman, is finding it difficult to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and an organisation has sought government's help to get her vaccinated at home.

The organisation, which works for differently abled people, also highlighted other problems faced by differently abled and transgenders in accessing vaccination.

"She has not stepped out of the house since the beginning of the pandemic and because of it, she has been safe so far. It is not easy for her to go to a hospital because of her advanced



Padma Ranganathan at her house in Saket.  
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

age. She lives on the first floor and it is difficult to bring her down too. Also, we don't want her to be exposed to the virus by going outside," Reena Ramachan-

dran (80), her daughter, told *The Hindu*.

She said her mother had turned 100 last year. "If home vaccination is happening in other parts of the country, then why not here?" she asked.

"There are a lot of differently abled people who are facing issues to get vaccinated and the government should vaccinate them on priority basis," Ms. Johar.

**Lagging behind**

The organisation, 'Doctors with Disabilities: Agents of Change', has written to the Chief Minister about the issue and also said that Delhi government is unfortunately "lagging behind" in socially affirmative drives towards disabled and transgenders.

"Despite the claims from the same government in the previous as well as the current tenure, Delhi got neither a separate department for persons with disabilities as promised by the Social Welfare Minister nor the Transgender Welfare Board. The pandemic has disproportionately affected the marginalised community and we are not even seeing vaccine equity," the letter read.

When contacted, Satendra Singh, a government doctor, who is the founder of the collective, said that the 100-year-old is "disabled due to her age". He has spoken to the officials to get her vaccinated.

## Positivity rate dips further to 0.78%, city sees 576 new cases

There are 9,364 active cases; 103 deaths push toll to 24,402

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

The downward trend in COVID-19 cases continued with 576 new cases being reported in the last 24 hours, taking the total cases to 14,27,439, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Wednesday.

The test positivity rate (TPR) fell to 0.78%, which means that less than one person out of 100 people taking COVID-19 tests are now positive for the virus.

The TPR was 0.88% on Tuesday and this is the third consecutive day in which the figures are below 1%. The TPR was as high as 36% on April 22 and has been coming down since then.

Also, 103 deaths were reported and the total number of deaths stood at 24,402.

A total of 73,451 tests were done in a day, the bulletin said. Of the total cases, 13,93,673 people have recovered and there are 9,364



Medical workers conducting COVID-19 test in north Delhi's Indira Nagar on Wednesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

active cases.

Delhi has been facing a shortage of vaccines and free vaccination for the 18-44 age group has not been happening in government schools for over about 10 days now, as per an official bulletin.

**Shortage continues**

"Delhi does not have vaccines for the youngsters between the age of 18-44 years. This is a segment that wants to get vaccinated. Even now, the youngsters are being ad-

ministered the vaccines only in the private hospitals. This is a matter of concern for the youth. Those who had got vaccinated in the first week of May, have to get their second dose soon," AAP leader Atishi said.

A total of 54,60,010 doses of vaccine have been administered in the city and there are more than 42 lakh people, who have been administered the first dose and 12,41,000 people have been administered both the doses, she said.

## Police to deploy COVID-19 Quick Reaction Teams

**STAFF REPORTER**

NEW DELHI

Taking lessons from the past, the Delhi police are readying themselves in advance to fight against an expected third wave of cases.

They are going to deploy COVID-19 Quick Reaction Teams (QRT) in the South

West district.

After facing many challenges and disastrous situations during the second wave of the pandemic, the South West District police is planning to deploy four well-equipped QRTs for providing immediate medical assistance and oxygen support

for infected patients.

DCP (South West) Ingit Pratap Singh said that under the YUVA initiative of Delhi Police, they have selected 30 YUVA trainees and is training them on first aid, CPR, disaster management operation of oxygen concentrators etc. through NGO partners

and hospitals.

"After completing the training, these YUVA volunteers will be equipped with oxygen concentrators. They will be deployed in QRT vans to respond to emergency calls for providing first aid support to COVID-19 patients," said Mr. Singh.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday accused the Delhi government of stepping on the three civic bodies.

Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta alleged that as many as 111 corporation employees including doctors, paramedical staff, nurses, teachers, safai karamcharis had lost their

lives in the line of duty over the last year. These included 57 from the North body, 38 from the South body and 16 from the East body. But sadly the Ke

## Meghalaya MLA faces rape charge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The Opposition Congress in Meghalaya has demanded the removal of an MLA accused of raping a woman from the committees of the 60-member Assembly.

The police on Tuesday confirmed that a woman had lodged an FIR against National People's Party (NPP) legislator Thomas Sangma for allegedly abusing her sexually.

The NPP heads a coalition government, with the BJP as a constituent. The legislator, representing the Tura Assembly constituency, is also the chief advisor to Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma.

In a letter to Speaker Metbah Lyngdoh, former Minister and senior Congress leader Ampareen Lyndoh said the Tura MLA must be removed from the House committees because of the seriousness of the charges against him.

Mr. Sangma is the Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Estimates and a member of the Committee on Public Accounts.

# 60 lakh people affected due to Cyclone Yaas, says Odisha govt.

The natural disaster also caused financial loss to the tune of ₹610 crore'

SATYASUNDAR BARIK  
BHUBANESWAR

A week after very severe cyclonic storm, Yaas, struck Odisha coast, the State government on Wednesday said 60 lakh people in 11,000 villages were affected while the natural disaster caused loss to the tune of ₹610 crore.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik reviewed the loss incurred due to Cyclone Yaas and post-cyclone restoration activities here. The cyclone had made a landfall in Balasore district affecting many northern and coastal districts on May 26 and 27. The government had then announced to complete damage assessment within a week.

### CM lauds efforts

"The district administrations had made commendable efforts to save lives of people. They had also completed restoration within a very short time. We need to document right from



Seawater inundates agricultural fields during landfall of Cyclone Yaas at Chandipur in Balasore district. \*FILE PHOTO: PTI

prediction of cyclone, our preparedness, evacuation of people, cyclone's landfall and our response so that it will help us in disaster management in the future," said Mr. Patnaik.

Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mohapatra and Special Relief Commissioner P. K. Jena briefed the Odisha Chief Minister about loss caused by the cyclone and post-cyclone restoration works.

"A total of 150 villages were submerged in the storm. Saline water damaged standing crop in vast agricultural fields," said Mr. Mohapatra.

"About 60 lakh people in 11,000 villages were affected by Cyclone Yaas. The loss of government infrastructure in the cyclone was to the

tune of ₹520 crore while private assets worth ₹90 crore were lost. The total loss was ₹610 crore while ₹66 crore is required for carrying out relief work," said Mr. Jena. According to report, schools, anganwadi centres and panchayat roads suffered damage worth ₹277 crore.

### Power restored

As far as power restoration is concerned, 99.8% of 30 lakh affected consumers have been supplied electricity. As many as 230 transformers had to be replaced. The total loss to energy infrastructure was ₹150 crore. Similarly, 246 roads were damaged in the cyclone.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced ₹500 crore as immediate relief assistance for the State after reviewing impact of the cyclone in Odisha and West Bengal. However, an inter-ministerial team is likely to visit the State to assess the extent of damage.

**Examine excessive powers given to GST panel: Badal**  
**'GST Council nod must for decisions'**

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal has asked the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to examine with 'all seriousness', what he termed 'excessive delegation' of powers to GST implementation committee (GIC).

In a letter written to Ms. Sitharaman in the backdrop of the recently held GST Council meeting, Mr. Badal said in the meeting he raised the issue of the need to obtain the Council's approval for decisions taken by the GIC. The GIC involves bureaucrats, which takes decisions in the period between Council meetings.

Pointing out that Punjab's decision to proffer this concern emanates not from any desire for deliberate fault finding, but to enhance the Council's ability to collectively make decisions that are backed by consensus and unsusceptible to potential future legal challenges, Mr. Badal said he deemed it necessary to



Punjab Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal

clarify the State's intent because despite some support from other States during the meeting, Punjab's observations were not well received and the discussions that followed were tangential and inconclusive.

### 'Examine issue'

"It is my firm conviction that this issue is of the utmost importance and must be examined with all seriousness by the Finance Ministry, and perhaps even considered in consultation with the Law Ministry and the Advocate General," said Mr. Badal.

**No cell phone use on duty: Bihar DGP**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
PATNA

Bihar Director General of Police S.K. Singh has asked policemen and officials on duty not to use mobile phones, other electronic devices and social media as it "affects image of the police".

"It has come to notice that mobile phones and other electronic devices are being used unnecessarily by policemen and officials on duty. The unnecessary use of mobile phones and connecting with social media for their personal entertainment distracts attention of policemen from their responsibilities which impacts their capabilities and efficiency and this also comes off as indiscipline," Mr Singh said.

"Such conducts affect the image of the police among common people and media too brings this into light, which has a negative impact on the impression of the police force. So, policemen and other officials are directed not to use mobiles and other electronic devices on duty," the DGP said.

## OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

### DEATH

**Kapil Kakar**  
1956 - 2021

The love and laughter of our lives,  
Taken away in swift flight...  
Fortitude and pride  
Your teachings we will abide.

Raj Kumari Kakar  
Thayabae Kakar  
Simrin & Vikram Khanna  
Samia & Mukul Jindal  
and family

**Smt. Vanaja Ramesh**  
DOB: 10-06-1956 • DOD: 29-5-2021

AMMA - one word that supersedes the meaning of love, care, affection & even GOD. My mother has exhibited the true way of living spiritually and as well as a human. Unconditional love and affection shown to every living being, be it plants, pets or humans.

There are many tears pouring across the world for this kind heart. Our love and affection towards you remains unchanged and your voice will always be heard in our ears.

It is with sad to announce the demise of our Mother & Grandmother

**Family members :**  
C.Ramesh - Husband  
Ganesh Ramesh - Son - Prashant Ganesh - Daughter-In-Law  
Anusha Vijayekhar - Daughter - S.Vijayekhar - Son-In-Law  
S.Gurunath - Brother - Jayothi Gurunath - Sister-In-Law  
Vignesh, Aaryana & Aaryahi - Grandchildren  
And all near and dears.

Her rituals are being performed in New Zealand as per the vedic procedures towards her happy and peaceful journey towards the heaven.

What's app: +64211693222

### SAD DEMISE

**DEATH ANNIVERSARIES**

**2<sup>nd</sup> YEAR ANNIVERSARY**

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## Manjhi-Sahani meet sparks speculation

The leaders are said to be disenchanted with Bihar govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
PATNA

The recent closed-door meeting between leaders of two alliance partners of the ruling NDA in Bihar has sparked speculations in the State's political corridor of a new power equation.

Though the two leaders, Jitan Ram Manjhi of the Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) and Mukesh Sahani of Vikashil Insaan Party, said it was a courtesy meeting, it

has set tongues wagging since they have of late been critical of the ruling NDA while being soft on the Opposition RJD leader Lalu Prasad.

### 'Govt. won't last long'

"The NDA government in Bihar will only last a few days or months. Leaders of the two allies are not comfortable in the government," senior State Congress leader and Rajya

Sabha member Akhilesh Singh told media persons on Wednesday.

Asked if an RJD-led government would be formed in Bihar, he said, "the RJD has the most number of MLAs, so who else will lead the formation?"

Another senior Congress leader and party spokesperson Prem Chandra Mishra said it appeared that Mr. Manjhi was disappointed with the NDA.

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Public Notice

## IN BRIEF



Include vaccine brand in certificates, says HC

A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to consider a plea for including the original brand name of the Covishield vaccine, Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, as well as the passport number in the vaccination certificates of Non-Resident Indians. The Bench directed the Centre to take a decision on the plea in three weeks.

## Lockdown likely to be extended in Karnataka

BENGALURU  
Lockdown restrictions are likely to be extended by at least another week after June 7 in Karnataka, in line with the recommendations of the COVID-19 Technical Advisory Committee. However, the State is expected to allow industries and the construction sector to resume from June 7.

## Gangster Ravi Pujari flown in to Kochi

KOCHI  
Two days after the additional chief judicial magistrate court here granted it nine-day custody, the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) of the Kerala police brought gangster Ravi Pujari to Kochi in Kerala on Wednesday night in connection with the Panampilly Nagar beauty parlour firing case.

## Cartoonist Ibrahim Badusha passes away

KOCHI  
Cartoonist and former vice-chairman of the Kerala Cartoon Academy Ibrahim Badusha died at Aluva in Kerala on Wednesday. He was 37. He was undergoing treatment for post-COVID-19 complications at the Aluva Taluk Hospital. He was active in creating awareness of COVID-19 through cartoons.

## Kerala House resolution seeks free jabs

It slams Centre's policy that pushed States to compete in the open market

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala Assembly on Wednesday passed a unanimous resolution urging the Union government to provide COVID-19 vaccine free of cost to the State.

Minister for Health, Women and Child Welfare Venna George moved the resolution on Wednesday as the State faced an acute shortage of vaccines. The resolution was moved one day after Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan reiterated in the House that his government would make available COVID-19 vaccines free of cost to the citizens and that one crore vaccine doses had been ordered by the government.

The resolution moved by the Health Minister was also approved by the House after incorporating amendments moved by the Opposition.

critical of the Union government's vaccine policy, which pushed States to compete in the open market for vaccine purchase from manufacturers. Free vaccines to combat dangerous infectious diseases were adopted as a national policy earlier. The Centre was now asking the States to procure vaccines from the open market and this was highly condemnable, the resolution said.

The first wave of COVID-19 had weakened the economy and now the country was battling to overcome the second wave. Speeding up the vaccination would help the economy and save lives, Ms. George told the House.

The Centre was also asked to allow other vaccines that had the approval of the



Beating the virus: Beneficiaries outside a vaccination centre in Palakkad, Kerala, on Wednesday. • MUSTAFAH K.K.

World Health Organization (WHO) for emergency use and those approved by the European Medicines Agency, Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency and Food and Drug Administration.

The resolution was approved by the House after incorporating amendments moved by the Opposition.

This is the second time in the ongoing first session of the 15th Assembly that the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) joined hands to pass resolution. The first was on May 31 in which the Assembly unanimously passed a resolution demanding the recall of Lakshadweep Administrator Praful Khoda Patel.

## 'An attempt to cover up COVID deaths'

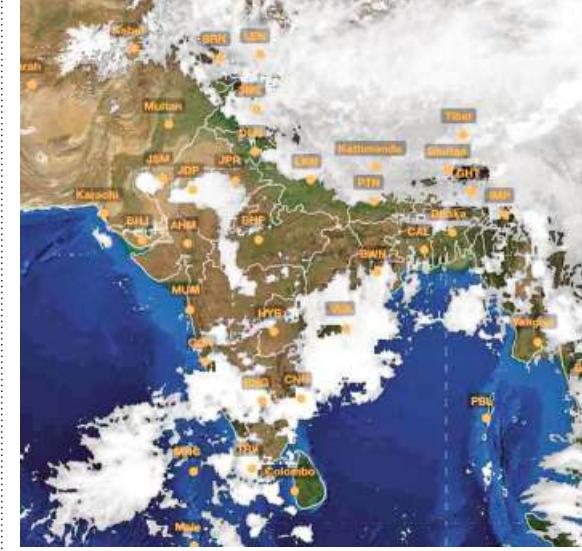
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) in the Kerala Assembly on Wednesday alleged that attempts were on to cover up COVID-19 deaths in the State to project the "Kerala model" to contain the pandemic.

Moving a notice for an adjournment motion in the Assembly, Indian Union Muslim League legislator M.K. Munee said health authorities had not been able to pinpoint which variant of the virus had caused more deaths. "There has been an attempt to cover up deaths," he said.

## WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Thursday:** Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Odisha, Telangana, central Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala. Thunderstorms with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over east Rajasthan, Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Karaikal, Mahe and Lakshadweep.

| CITY        | RAIN    | MAX     | MIN     | CITY               | RAIN   | MAX     | MIN  |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|--------------------|--------|---------|------|
| Agartala    | 51...   | 34.0... | 24.0... | Kozhikode          | 9...   | 33.6... | 24.6 |
| Ahmedabad   | —       | 38.6... | 27.1    | Kurnool            | —      | 38.9... | 28.2 |
| Aizawl      | 11...   | —       | 21.9    | Lucknow            | —      | 37.4... | 25.1 |
| Allahabad   | —       | 37.9... | 25.5    | Madurai            | 0.2... | 40.5... | 27.3 |
| Bengaluru   | —       | 33.7... | 22.2    | Mangalore          | —      | 31.4... | 23.0 |
| Bhopal      | —       | —       | 25.2    | Mumbai             | 23...  | 33.1... | 25.4 |
| Bhubaneswar | 19.6... | 35.0... | 26.9    | Mysuru             | —      | 33.0... | 21.6 |
| Chandigarh  | —       | 35.6... | 23.2    | New Delhi          | —      | 36.6... | 22.2 |
| Chennai     | —       | 38.6... | 26.9    | Patna              | 17...  | 34.2... | 20.6 |
| Coimbatore  | —       | 35.6... | 23.4    | Puducherry         | —      | 32.4... | 25.6 |
| Dehradun    | —       | 33.9... | 20.2    | Pune               | —      | 36.4... | 26.8 |
| Gangtok     | 0.3...  | 22.2... | 17.5    | Raipur             | —      | 39.8... | 29.0 |
| Goa         | 2...    | 33.1... | 22.2    | Ranchi             | 43...  | 32.6... | 20.5 |
| Guwahati    | 0.5...  | 33.7... | 25.3    | Shillong           | 5...   | 25.4... | 17.0 |
| Hubballi    | —       | 30.0... | 22.0    | Shimla             | 0.2... | 26.4... | 15.4 |
| Hyderabad   | 28...   | 34.7... | 22.0    | Srinagar           | —      | 27.0... | 12.4 |
| Imphal      | 2...    | 30.1... | 21.3    | Thiruvananthapuram | —      | 33.6... | 25.0 |
| Jaipur      | 19.0... | 30.9... | 20.2    | Tiruchi            | —      | 41.6... | 27.8 |
| Kochi       | 3...    | 31.4... | 25.0    | Vijayawada         | —      | 39.8... | 29.0 |
| Kohima      | —       | 27.0... | 17.0    | Visakhapatnam      | —      | 36.2... | 29.2 |
| Kolkata     | 1...    | 35.0... | 25.7    | Visakhapatnam      | —      | 36.2... | 29.2 |

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

| CITIES        | SO <sub>2</sub> | NO <sub>x</sub> | CO | PM <sub>2.5</sub> | PM <sub>10</sub> | CODE |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|-------------------|------------------|------|
| Ahmedabad     | 50              | 44              | 27 | 59                | —                | ■    |
| Bengaluru     | 4               | 37              | 57 | 28                | 33               | ■    |
| Chennai       | 93              | 6               | 35 | 36                | 44               | ■    |
| Delhi         | 14              | 35              | 39 | 228               | 142              | ■    |
| Hyderabad     | .5              | 10              | 28 | 52                | 55               | ■    |
| Kolkata       | 10              | 19              | 22 | 59                | 59               | ■    |
| Lucknow       | 10              | 62              | 63 | —                 | 112              | ■    |
| Mumbai        | 41              | 18              | 36 | 29                | 50               | ■    |
| Pune          | .6              | 13              | 93 | .75               | 55               | ■    |
| Visakhapatnam | 14              | 30              | 33 | .53               | .76              | ■    |

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Sonipat, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 238 indicating unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 11.

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

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

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

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

**PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

## Virus-hit Maoist leaders being treated in Chhattisgarh forest

Maoist who came to Warangal for treatment arrested

ABHINAY DESHPANDE  
HYDERABAD

Senior Maoist leaders, including central committee members Katakan Sudarshan, alias Dula Dada, and Thippuri Tirupathi, alias Kummu Dada, have tested positive for COVID-19 and are undergoing treatment at the Dandakaranya forest in Chhattisgarh.

This was revealed to the Telangana police by another COVID-affected senior Maoist leader, Gaddam Madhukar, who was caught in Warangal while on his way to a private hospital in the town from Chhattisgarh for medical assistance.

Madhukar, who hails from

Kumram Bheem-Asifabad district, was head of communications for the Dandakaranya special zonal committee. While Madhukar had managed to evade the police for more than two decades, it was COVID-19 that forced him to break his self-imposed security measures.

The Telangana police said COVID-affected Maoists may step out of their "safe zones" to opt for treatment at private hospitals in the bordering districts.

Warangal Commissioner of Police Tarun Joshi said they received reliable inputs about a large number of Maoist cadre infected with the virus.

## 'Kerala BJP paid ₹10 lakh for tribal leader's support'

Surendran gave it, claims JRP treasurer

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A "payment" controversy appeared to dog the BJP on Wednesday around party State president K. Surendran and tribal leader and chairperson of the Janadhipathy Rashtriya Party (JRP) C.K. Janu.

JRP State treasurer Praseeda Azheekode claimed that Mr. Surendran had paid Ms. Janu ₹10 lakh in cash to ensure her allegiance to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and her presence at an election meeting attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Ms. Praseeda said she was party to the alleged deal. Anonymous persons had flooded social media with a

voice clip, which was allegedly a recording of a conversation between the JRP treasurer and Mr. Surendran.

Ms. Praseeda alleged the male voice at the opposite end was that of Mr. Surendran. She said the BJP seemed intent on securing Ms. Janu's re-entry into the NDA.

She alleged that Ms. Janu had demanded ₹10 crore, five Assembly seats and a berth in the Union Cabinet. Mr. Surendran had paid her ₹10 lakh for immediate expenses.

However, Ms. Janu told presspersons in Wayanad that a conspiracy was afoot to scuttle the JRP and damage the NDA. She said the allegations were baseless.

## WEST

## Maharashtra announces financial help for kids orphaned by COVID-19

Scheme to cover those below 18 who have lost both parents since March 1, 2020

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Cabinet on Wednesday announced a scheme of financial assistance for children who lost their parents to COVID-19, in which a sum of ₹5 lakh per child would be set up as a fixed deposit.

"If none of the relatives come forward to take care of a child, the child will be taken to care centres. In case the family members are ready to take up the responsibility, the State government will extend financial aid from the child care scheme," Yashomati Thakur, State Women and Child Development Minister, said.

The scheme will cover those below 18 years who



A health worker administers COVID-19 vaccine to a specially abled boy during a drive at Jai Vakeel Foundation in Mumbai on Wednesday. • EMMANUEL YOGINI

have lost both parents to COVID-19 since March 1, 2020. Children who had already lost one parent and lost the

surviving parent to the virus will also be covered by the scheme.

The Maharashtra govern-

ment scheme will be in addition to the special PM-CARES initiative announced by the Centre to support orphans.

The amount kept as a fixed deposit will be handed over to the individual after the completion of 21 years of age.

Ms. Thakur said that an action plan was being prepared under which the children would be offered psychological support and skill development training.

"We had formed a district level task force to look out for such children. We have identified 141 children and a few more will be identified soon. We have made the financial provision of ₹10 crore for the scheme," she said.

## 'Mental, physical fatigue' no excuse to shun duty, private doctors warned



## Exam fear

The CBSE Class XII exam has been cancelled, but the Centre must act to secure education

Several anxieties faced by students, parents and schools have been calmed by the decision to cancel the Central Board of Secondary Education Class XII examination following a review by the Centre. Shaken by the carnage wrought by the second wave of the pandemic, the Government had little choice but to act against possible fresh clusters of infection, although that will mean considerably limited opportunities for students. Hopes for predictability in 2021, after the traumatic experience of students all through last year, have been dashed by the emergence of the double mutant variant of the coronavirus that has spread far and wide because of superspreader events. The Government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were obviously anxious to be seen as acting decisively on the examination question, after a long phase of dithering in formulating a national response. The decision to cancel the crucial Class XII public examination and replace it with an objective assessment for certification will help boards of education in the States to move in the same direction. Some pointers to an assessment scheme can be found in the CBSE's submission to the Supreme Court last year, when the pandemic prevented the completion of Class XII examinations: for students who could not take the examination, as in Delhi, the internal, practical, and project assessment was proposed as a proxy to arrive at results, with an option to improve performance at a subsequent examination. The Board must now come up with a model scientific scheme.

The decision to cancel the examination in 2021 may have resolved a prickly issue, but the question of national entrance examinations – such as NEET and JEE – need to be addressed. Importantly, the Centre must recognise that major factors such as non-availability of enough vaccine doses, absence of a systematic vaccine coverage plan, and poor understanding of where virus variants are spreading, contributed to the second wave, and may, in fact, cause a third. For instance, there is better comprehension in Britain of where the variant of concern initially isolated from India, B.1.617.2, is spreading in that country because it has a robust genome sequencing programme. Such sharp insight, together with the availability of free and widespread testing, is crucial to stop waves of infections that threaten to hobble the country. The plight of students, which is engaging governments, has to become a top priority. Singapore has just approved mRNA vaccine coverage for children 12 years and older, just as the U.S. regulator FDA has for 12 to 15-year-olds. Britain has thought of 100 extra tuition hours for schools from 2022. There cannot be an interminable wait for vaccines to trickle down to all. The Centre must take responsibility to provide them to everyone, including students.

## Embracing children

Speedy implementation of relief schemes for children orphaned by COVID-19 is essential

Well begun is not always half done, and, in any case, half done is never good enough. The Centre's response to the Supreme Court that the modalities of the expansive assistance programme for children orphaned by COVID-19, announced by the Prime Minister, were yet to be formulated comes as a disappointment. While rightly feted for its announcement of a comprehensive programme for the most vulnerable section of the population during this COVID-19 pandemic, children, the Centre did not lay down procedural formalities for implementation. It is clear from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights' submission in the Supreme Court that nearly 10,000 children are in need of immediate care and protection. They include children aged between zero and 17 years orphaned or abandoned during the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. The total was 9,346 children who have been affected, including 1,742 children who lost both parents, 7,464 who have lost one parent, and 140 who have been abandoned from March 2020 to May 29, 2021. It further told the apex court that these children run a high risk of being pushed into trafficking and the flesh trade. There is thus no doubt that time is of the essence here.

Given the urgency of rescuing these children, the Government cannot dawdle over figuring out implementation strategies. A swift laying down of processes and monitoring mechanisms to kick start rescue and relief, besides undertaking the continuing process of estimating beneficiaries is needed. Children have little or no agency of their own and are still dependent on adults to get by, and the disruption that COVID-19 has wrought on their lives is devastating. The experience of States that sprang to the assistance of children orphaned by the Indian Ocean tsunami can be factored in – they were embraced into the safety net of the social security system, and funds were placed in a trust for them for use when they reach a certain age. While the plans announced under the PM CARES Fund include this, and are far more expansive looking at funding schooling, higher education, even health insurance, a promise is nothing if not fulfilled. The responsibility of the Government now is to go the full mile to ensure that these benefits reach every child fitting the criteria, besides making sure that the children are not exploited with an eye on the eventual bounty. Several States have announced their child-care packages on similar lines too, with some setting up monitoring committees to ensure implementation. Sincere implementation through committed staff, and using existing systems such as 1098 for periodic identification of children in need would be the cornerstones of such a project, especially at a time when the onslaught of COVID-19 is far from over.

# Adverse changes, federalism imperilled

There needs to be a federal coalition to preserve the idea of a plural India, in terms of culture and politics



KALAIYARASAN A.  
M. VIJAYABASKAR

**W**hen Dr. Vinod K. Paul, NITI Ayog Member (Health), asserted last week that it was the lack of centralisation that has led to poor management of the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination drive, States joined issue with this statement. Going by the response to this assertion from State governments, it was clear that this claim was not backed by good evidence. Not many could have misread the subtext of this claim for centralisation. It lies within, and simultaneously contributes to, a narrative and practice of the growing centralisation of power by the current government. This sits well with the growing incursions of the Union government into sectors where State governments have a primary responsibility to govern such as health, education and agriculture. Slogans such as 'one nation-one tax, one market and one ration' are again part of such appeals to a narrative of a strong nation state rather than one of governance.

### Union encroachment

To be sure, such moves to erode the powers of State governments are not new. In post-independent India, the Centre, on several occasions, has used its powers to dismiss or use the Governor to intimidate democratically elected governments. During the Emergency, education was moved to the Concurrent list which was until then a State subject under the constitutional division of responsibilities. However, the adverse changes to federal relations at present are more systemic.

To understand what has changed, at the risk of repetition, there has been increasing centralisation in resource allocations and welfare interventions. The gap

between the revenue that State governments are allowed to generate and the expenditure that they are expected to incur has been widening, particularly with the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST). The shortfall of GST this year and the Centre's lackadaisical response to demands for compensation by State governments are again known.

On the other hand, the Centre has been encroaching into domains under State government control through centrally sponsored schemes in sectors such as education and health where States are required to spend about 85% and 82% of public expenditure, respectively (<https://bit.ly/3z734Ai>). Though some of these have been initiated and supported by previous governments, the intensification of this process is aligned strongly with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014. This is particularly visible across the following three domains. While we identify these domains based on Tamil Nadu's experience, they are equally relevant to States such as Assam, Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal.

### State-capital relations

While coalition governments in the past enabled the rise and the visibility of regional businesses in post-reform India, the current dispensation is working towards centralising economic power in conjunction with political centralisation. It is becoming clear that aligning politically with the BJP is critical to do business. While the rise of yoga guru Baba Ramdev's business empire is indicative of this, the decline of business groups from southern India over these last few years suggest the reverse of this process.

We can also see the consolidation and expansion of a few big business groups seen to be close to the BJP, probably at the expense of smaller players. On the one hand, the Centre has sought to insulate Indian big business from global competition by choosing not to enter into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership



(RCEP), but has eroded the power of small businesses through support for GST and the call for a single national market. Clearly, bigger players are more likely to benefit from a removal of State-level barriers to trade at the expense of smaller regional players. This re-calibration of State-capital relations works against smaller entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.

The BJP also seeks to centralise rent-seeking in parallel to restrict the political financing of regional parties. Regional parties tend to rely on region-specific rent-thick sectors for political funding such as mining and real estate. The BJP has sought to curtail this through a levelling of corruption allegations and the use of central agencies to keep them in check. The reduced avenues for accumulation among regional capital weaken the ability of regional parties to compete with the BJP electorally.

### Institutional transgression

The second challenge is in the use of executive and legislative aggression.

Central institutions are increasingly weakening the policy levers of State institutions. Institutions such as the Income Tax Department, the Enforcement Directorate and the National Investigation Agency are being used to intimidate opponents. Appointments are not untouched either.

For instance, the Centre has been meddling with the appointments of vice-chancellors in universities funded and run by State governments. Direct transfers to beneficiaries of welfare schemes

bypassing States are also contributing to this dynamic. Further, as recent events suggest, the Centre is increasingly ignoring elected representatives of State governments, holding meetings with State secretaries and district collectors on issues that are primarily under State control. An example was a recent meeting by Minister of Education Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank with State Education Secretaries on implementation of the New Education Policy.

Such transgressions, often with the help of Governors, allow the BJP to actively control administrative decisions including faculty recruitments to align with a majoritarian agenda. Governors perform active administrative roles instead of their signatory roles. Importantly, such moves are also meant to ensure national uniformity in educational institutions. One such example is NEET, or the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test in medical education, which subverts the affirmative action policies developed at the regional level in response to local political demands.

This is evident in the domain of health as well. Apart from imposing a national lockdown during the first wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic without consulting State governments, the Centre has now put State governments at a disadvantage in vaccine usage by fixing differential pricing for procuring vaccines for them. This forces State governments to pay more even as they are deprived of their revenue shares.

### Socio-cultural foundation

The third and crucial challenge lies in the social-cultural foundations of federalism.

As Partha Chatterjee argues, beside the legal-constitutional aspects of federalism, it is diversity in cultural foundation of regions that sustains Indian federalism. Regional identities and cultural traditions have worked against the homogenisation agenda of the BJP. However, this diversity is being challenged at present. Markers of regional identities and regional socio-cultural

practices are now interpreted as belonging to a pan-Indian Hindu tradition. Tamil, which has stood as a symbol of an anti-Vedic tradition, is now seen as a segment of that Hindu past, with Tamil Muslims and Christians becoming outsiders. 'Dravidian' is attacked as a creation of the British with support from Christian missionaries, emptying the term of its anti-caste politics. Tamils, therefore, need to be mainstreamed by reuniting them with their 'Hindu' past. A similar narrative is being built in other regions – Muslims and Christians become less Malayalee, less Bengali and less Assamese. In Bengal, the BJP tried a strategy of linking "Sonar Bangla" to a Hindu past.

### Key variables

This erosion of federal relations is often countered through appeals to restore the constitutional powers of States. However, history tells us that such calls may not amount to much in the absence of regional political assertion. Constitutional powers including fiscal relations are inherently biased towards the Centre. Vesting of all residuary powers with the Centre and giving over-ruled powers to the Centre on matters in the Concurrent list are the primary sources of this bias. What is seldom recognised is that the degree of federalism in India has depended largely on two variables: the nature of political coalitions at the Centre and role of States in such coalitions (the period 1996 to 2014 for example), and the cultural diversity of regions.

This is evident in the domain of health as well. Apart from imposing a national lockdown during the first wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic without consulting State governments, the Centre has now put State governments at a disadvantage in vaccine usage by fixing differential pricing for procuring vaccines for them. This forces State governments to pay more even as they are deprived of their revenue shares.

### Institutional transgression

The second challenge is in the use of executive and legislative aggression.

Central institutions are increasingly weakening the policy levers of State institutions.

Institutions such as the Income Tax Department, the Enforcement Directorate and the National Investigation Agency are being used to intimidate opponents. Appointments are not untouched either.

For instance, the Centre has been meddling with the appointments of vice-chancellors in universities funded and run by State governments. Direct transfers to beneficiaries of welfare schemes

of its vaccines. This has to change. Team Europe is launching an initiative to this end – backed by €1 billion funding from the EU budget and European development financial institutions – with African partners to boost manufacturing capacity in Africa for vaccines, medicines and health technologies.

### Issue of licensing

Voluntary licensing is the privileged way to ensure such transfer of technology and know-how. If it turns out to be insufficient, the existing Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement and the 2001 Doha Declaration already foresee the possibility of compulsory licensing. We have been listening carefully to countries complaining about how difficult it is to use these flexibilities. To speed up these technology transfers, the EU will come forward with a new proposal in the World Trade Organization framework by early June.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that health is a global public good. Our common global COVID-19 vaccine action to close the vaccination gap must be the first step toward genuine global health cooperation, as foreseen by the Rome Declaration recently adopted at the Global Health Summit.

**Josep Borrell** is European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

# Close the vaccination gap, in global lockstep

Immunisation needs cooperation and is a prerequisite for lifting the restrictions holding back economies and freedoms



JOSEP BORRELL

**B**y the end of May 2021, only 2.1% of Africans had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. We need to close the vaccination gap between advanced economies and developing countries to avoid what the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has called "vaccination apartheid". Doing so is both morally right and in everyone's interest.

Therefore, we need global multilateral action to increase the production of vaccines and accelerate the roll-out worldwide. Since the beginning of the novel coronavirus pandemic, this is the path chosen by the European Union (EU). It is now also the path defined by the G20 leaders at the Global Health Summit in Rome on May 21.

### A worry

The pandemic is still killing thousands of people every day and at the current pace, the whole world will not be vaccinated before 2023. Yet, a widely vaccinated world population is the only way to end the pandemic; otherwise, the multiplication of variants is likely to undermine the effectiveness of existing vaccines.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Exams cancelled

The decision to cancel the Class XII Board examinations has come very late, and after causing much agony to students and parents (Page 1, "CBSE, CISCE scrap Class XII exams after review by PM", June 2). The decision is incomplete without the involvement of all States. Keeping in mind the possibility of a third wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Government should draw up plans for the next course of action as far as the next academic

session is concerned.

Students and parents do not want more stress.

**NAVIN KATALV,**  
New Delhi

■ The decision cannot be termed progressive and will have a cascading impact on the academic pursuits of students. Adoption of alternate methodologies now, based on previous academic performance and other parameters to declare examination results and the awarding of marks and grades, is neither wise nor ethical. Further, conducting

examinations by changing the pattern of questions or through online mode by curtailing significant portions from the textbooks certainly loses its value and potential. Already, students have patiently waited thus far and once a conducive ambience emerges, the process of the written mode of examinations could be set in motion without delay.

**V. JOHAN DHANAKUMAR,**  
Chennai

■ The annual ritual, when thousands of young hearts and minds are perforce



peans can be proud of this record. India's "Vaccine Maitri" is another example of global solidarity.

In 2020, the EU supported the research and development of vaccines on a large scale and contributed significantly to the new generation of mRNA vaccines.

The EU then became a major producer of COVID-19 vaccines with, according to WHO, around 40% of the doses used globally so far. The EU has also exported 240 million doses to 90 countries, which is about as much as we have used within the EU.

The EU with its member states and financial institutions – what we call "Team Europe" – is also donating vaccines to neighbours in need, particularly in the Western Balkans. It aims to donate at least 100 million more doses to low- and middle-income countries before the end of 2021, as agreed at the last European Council. With €2.8 billion, Team Europe has also been the main contributor to the COVAX facility, which enables poorer countries to access vaccines; around one-third of all CO-

required to surrender their unique, capable, curious, and wondrous learning capabilities to the senseless guillotine of the board examinations, has been ended this year, ironically, by the pandemic. We are all complicit in this degenerate annual ritual. For want of an imagination that celebrates human and humane learning, a convenient examination system, systematically enervates and obfuscates learners from exploring opportunities to engage with possibilities and growth. Offering

VAX doses delivered so far have been financed by the EU. However, this effort is still far from sufficient to prevent the vaccination gap from widening.

To fill this gap, countries with the required knowledge and means should increase their production capacities, so that they can both vaccinate their own populations and export more vaccines, as the EU is doing. In cooperation with vaccine manufacturers, we are working to increase the EU vaccine production capacities to more than three billion doses a year by the end of 2021.

Our European industrial partners have committed to deliver 1.3 billion doses of vaccines before the end of 2021 to low-income countries at no-profit, and to middle-income countries at lower prices. They have also committed themselves to further deliver over 1.3 billion doses for 2022 – many of which will be delivered through COVAX.

### Supporting Africa

All countries must avoid restrictive measures that affect vaccine supply chains. We also need to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and technology, so that more countries can produce vaccines.

For our part, we are strongly encouraging European producers to do so, especially in Africa. I participated at the Paris summit on financial support for Africa on May 18, where the continent's leaders stressed that Africa imports 99%

countervailing perspectives – the pandemic now allows us to see what is taken for granted about gate-keeping practices and epistemology – invites bad actors to exploit often ignored vulnerabilities.

**ANTHONY JOSEPH,**  
New Delhi

■ **Population policy**  
Humans are sentient beings and cannot be considered robots to have offspring according to the demands, needs of the state or the authorities. Under China's new three-child norm, it is not clear how it benefits the minorities in that country as they have been treated differently. Worldwide, preferences have shifted toward having smaller families because of rising costs. Even in States of concern in north India, the trend is toward lower numbers. One way to encourage the right demographic balance is to provide a range of supportive policies on child care and measures to curb costs.

**H.N. RAMAKRISHNA,**  
Bengaluru

To read more letters online, scan the QR code



# The cautionary tale in Osaka's exit

The high-handed world of tennis must open its eyes to the delicate subject of mental health



K. SRINATH REDDY

Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open tennis championship after the organisers would not accept her request to be excused from post-match interactions even as she cited a history of suffering from bouts of depression and severe anxiety while facing the media. Indeed, the organisers had imposed a fine of \$15,000 after Osaka excused herself from the post-match press conference after her first-round victory. This despite the fact that she had already communicated her concerns about her mental health to the organisers at the beginning of the tournament. They, in turn, threatened her with expulsion if she did not participate in post-match media interactions.

Osaka was as gracious in her exit statement as she is in her tennis. She said she did not want to be a distraction to other players because of the continuing controversy. She explained that she had suffered long bouts of depression since the US Open in 2018. "Anyone who knows me knows that I am introverted and anyone that has seen me at tournaments will notice that I'm often wearing headphones as that helps dull my social anxiety," she said, adding, "I am not a natural public speaker and get huge waves of anxiety before I speak to the world's media."

#### Deep hypocrisy

The French Tennis Federation did not cover itself in glory when it displayed an utter lack of empathy towards a vulnerable young woman who rose to the top of the game because of her immense talent and not because of her speaking abilities. What would the Federation do if a player with a severe speech impediment requested to be excused from answering questions at a press conference? Would they be as unyielding in dealing with a physical disability as they were while dealing with a serious mental health concern?

To add irony and insult to injury, Gilles Moretton, the president of the French Tennis Federation, made a



Naomi Osaka had said earlier that she suffered long bouts of depression since the US Open in 2018. • AFP

statement to the press about Osaka's withdrawal and left without fielding questions. The incident lays bare deep hypocrisy.

#### The example of Norway

Contrast this with the experience of a Norwegian Prime Minister, who took leave to address his mental health issues while still serving in office. Kjell Magne Bondevik was Prime Minister of Norway from 1997 to 2000 and from 2001 to 2005. He was diagnosed with depression in 1998 during his first term in office. The pressure of an intense workload and the recent deaths of three close friends, all from brain cancer, weighed heavily on his mind. He revealed his illness to the public and went on medical leave for three weeks to recuperate, while a colleague became the acting Prime Minister.

In an interview with Ben Jones, published in the Bulletin of the World Health Organization (WHO) in December 2011, Mr. Bondevik revealed the reasons for the public disclosure. He said, "I could contribute to more openness about mental health problems and help to combat the stigma attached to them."

He came back from his leave better equipped with greater mental tranquillity to lead his nation as

Prime Minister, not once but twice. Not only does his candour deserve appreciation, but the understanding shown by the people of Norway also calls for applause. The unstinted support extended by his ministerial colleagues, who did not see this as an opportunity to replace him, is unusually generous and upright in the world of politics, which is notorious for high ambition and low intrigue.

In recent years, we have had several celebrities open up about their mental health concerns, from Deepika Padukone and J.K. Rowling to Beyoncé and Meghan Markle. That is because the world has started responding with greater empathy and replacing stigma with solidarity.

But for the 23-year-old Osaka, not only such support was unavailable, but she was also made to publicly expose her vulnerabilities and pay the price of severe damage to her mental health. Such conduct by unfeeling officials is callous, cruel, and characteristic of the highly commercialised sport. The high priests of tennis tournaments must be reminded that Osaka was there to demonstrate her sporting talent in an open court, not for a gladiatorial display of psychological wounds in the enclosed arena of a press room under the glare of flashing lights. Even if media interac-

tion was written into her contract, special circumstances must merit exceptions.

The WHO Special Initiative for Mental Health, which was launched in 2019 and will extend till 2023, aims to bring to attention the high global burden of disability arising from disorders of mental health, and accelerate a multi-sectoral response to improve care for a whole range of mental health problems.

The Naomi Osaka episode comes right in the middle of the period chosen for this special initiative. Will the WHO speak up for her and other sportspersons who face similar challenges? Many other prominent sportspersons have extended support to Osaka. However, as the leading global public health agency of the world, the WHO's open support would add weight to the cause of mental health in tennis and other competitive sports.

#### A wake-up call

In Harper Lee's classic, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the young girl protagonist, Scout, wants to reveal to the world that it was the shy and reclusive Boo Radley who had come out of his self-imposed home isolation to save her life when he saw that she was in danger of a murderous attack on the street outside. Atticus Finch, her lawyer father, was a man of great wisdom and moral courage. He gently advised Scout not to do so, as it would expose a sensitive soul who was scared of contact with others to the glare of unwanted attention and distressing public interaction. Atticus told Scout that it would be like killing a mockingbird.

In Lee's book, the mockingbird represents innocence and vulnerability. Scout's confidante and neighbour, Miss Maudie, later explained to her the significance of what Atticus said:

"Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy ... but sing their hearts out for us. That is why it is a sin to kill a mockingbird."

Perhaps the guardians of the Grand Slam galaxy should revisit that book. They might then allow Osaka to do the one thing she does best – make music with her racquet.

*Prof. K. Srinath Reddy, a cardiologist and epidemiologist, is President, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). The views expressed are personal*

# A far-reaching tax measure

The U.S. push for a global minimum corporate tax may help India, but it can also cause international disagreements



IPSLITA AGARWALLA &amp; MEYYAPPAN NAGAPPAN

The Pillar Two proposal was the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) plan to plug the remaining Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) issues and provide jurisdictions the right to "tax back" where other jurisdictions have either not exercised their primary taxing right or have exercised it at low levels of effective taxation. The move intends to achieve minimum effective taxation of more than 10%, possibly up to 15%, given the latest proposal put forward by the United States. The objective is to minimise tax incentives and ensure that companies choose to be situated in a particular country based on other commercial benefits.

In its recent proposal, the U.S. sought to impose a global minimum tax on foreign income earned by U.S. corporations. The proposal is perhaps intended to disincentivise American companies from inverting their structures due to the increase in the U.S. corporate tax rate. The proposal is similar to Pillar Two, except for the rate of the effective minimum tax. While the OECD was considering a 10-12% rate, the U.S. proposed a 21% rate. This caused pushback from countries such as Ireland, which made a case for fiscal autonomy for smaller jurisdictions to compete with larger economies. The U.S. is now discussing a floor of 15% for the minimum tax rate despite the fact that it may have difficulty securing Congress support if the floor is too low. Even at 15%, it is unclear whether Ireland would agree, given its 12.5% marginal rate, thereby impacting a European Union-wide adoption of the 15% rate.

India has been part of the Pillar Two discussions and has not objected in principle to the proposal. The proposal, along with the increased tax bill for U.S. companies, may benefit the Indian revenue department. The tax department might benefit even at a 10% rate since the proposal would cover offshore structures set up by Indian companies.

Pillar Two acts as a set of controlled foreign corporation rules, where, for instance, if an Indian-headquartered multinational corporation (MNC) has an entity in Singapore or the Netherlands through which global operations are run, and its income from global operations is not taxed at an effective rate of 10% or 15%, then it can be taxed in India. The State of Tax Justice report of 2020

notes that India loses over \$10 billion in tax revenue due to the use of offshore structures, particularly through investments made by Indian residents through Mauritius, Singapore and the Netherlands. This is supported by the overseas direct investment (ODI) data from 2000 to 2021 published by the Reserve Bank of India, where the cumulative ODI for the period primarily went through Singapore, Mauritius, the U.S., the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Start-ups and large Indian conglomerates commonly use offshore structures for conducting global operations. Revenue from such operations is often retained offshore and not repatriated to India. Tax advantages incentivise such structures, due to which taxes on such income are not paid in India. Once these proposals are implemented, Indian companies would have to pay additional taxes on their offshore structures to the extent that the effective rate of tax is lower than the global minimum tax rate.

#### Other major factors

With tax incentives neutralised, countries may have to compete on other factors like better regulatory regimes, ease of doing business, access to global talent, among others. The U.S. proposal indicates that the country is pushing the OECD to swiftly achieve consensus on the global minimum tax rate, in the absence of which the U.S. proposes to apply its domestic law version of Pillar Two at a rate of 21% (which may now be 15%).

Several countries have taken a different approach to the rate of global minimum tax. While France and Germany have expressed support, the EU has raised concerns regarding the high rate proposed by the United States. Countries have stated that the proposal infringes upon their tax sovereignty and that the fight against unfair tax competition should not become a fight against competitive tax systems. Given that the U.S. is now pushing for a 15% rate, the fate of Pillar Two will depend on whether this proposal is acceptable to other countries.

The U.S. appears keen on closing the negotiations around the 15% floor, which should also benefit India. Presumably, the remaining obstacles to gaining a consensus are the issues with Pillar One. As economies struggle amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the necessity of encouraging trade and economic activity should be prioritised over disagreements on tax allocations. A tax-related trade war or entrenchment of unilateral levies may further harm both global and national economies.

*The authors are tax experts with Nishith Desai Associates*

## Asking the right questions

The Naomi Osaka episode is a deeply nuanced issue and calls for a larger conversation

#### PREETHI RAMAMOORTHY

Naomi Osaka attended a post-match press conference at Brisbane in 2019 in her usual style – a paradoxical mixture of uneasy calm and assured self-deprecation. A reporter questioned her on the upcoming round, and she answered in jest, "Do you have anything interesting to ask? I'm sorry. You guys are so serious." The room burst into guffaws. "Just doing our jobs," the reporter ploughed on.

It is this part of the job that has catapulted Osaka into a controversy, leading to an abrupt withdrawal from the ongoing French Open tournament. Predictably, the entire episode has garnered polarising reactions, most lacking any nuance or understanding of an issue that is comprised of many angles.

#### What went wrong

Osaka has been a voice of reason on several issues in the past. This time, too, with her media boycott, she stood up for the mental well-being of athletes. But the timing and method of her announcement left much to be desired. Osaka posted a poorly-worded statement on social media barely four days before the tournament. The Grand Slams are sticklers for tradition and post-match pressers, which are considered sacrosanct and which players are mandated to attend irrespective of whether they win or lose. Of course, rules pertaining to players can and must change in an ever-evolving sport, but that requires time and conversation.

Osaka was expectedly fined \$15,000 after missing her round-one press conference. But being the highest-paid female athlete in the world as per the latest reports, she can afford penalties till the dawn of Championship Day. Other players, who may be living on a shoestring budget, struggling to merely qualify tournaments without any support system, cannot. The conversation surrounding players' mental health must accommodate all.

The four Grand Slams, in a joint statement, threatened Osaka with defaults and suspensions in future tournaments. If the governing bodies were worried about optics, then firing such heavy artillery was hardly a

genius move. It backfired horribly – they wanted Osaka to talk about the tennis she was playing, but she has now stopped playing because she does not want to talk about it.

Osaka's statement after her withdrawal was telling, hinting at larger battles such as depression and anxiety. But she acknowledged that the press has always been kind to her. The fact that Osaka could tell the media to do a better job by asking "interesting questions" and be rewarded with laughs and not scorn shows what she is – a media darling. Her popularity is as much about her foreground shots as it is about how the media has portrayed her, which has been fairly positive. It explains why several journalists are surprised at the suggestion that their questions caused her anxiety. It is yet another example of the disconnect between what critics and spectators interpret the gruelling nature of this sport to be and what it actually is.

There exists a larger question of what we expect from our sporting icons. Are we satisfied with them just doing their job – playing, winning – or do we want to get to know the person, the tactical genius, behind the champion? It takes a particular brand of mental fortitude to thrive in a punishing and lonely sport such as tennis. It is this trait that journalists most often want to probe and showcase. The ideal way to do that would be through long-winded, private chats. But those are offered only to a select few. Others are then left with only one avenue – the press conference. If it is such an integral part, the powers that be must then focus on making it more player-friendly and nurturing a connection with journalists based on trust and empathy.

The effect of a star's presence, both on and off-court, permeates deeply. It means more coverage, and, in turn, more income for the sport, which trickles down to every player. A champion's night match increases television ratings. In this case, a few minutes spent in an interview room can make millions in sponsorship deals. Hopefully, the sport and its players will be able to figure out ways to work together on this.

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#### DATA POINT

**At any cost** Though manufacturers are selling the Covishield and Covaxin vaccines to private hospitals at ₹600 and ₹1,200 per shot, respectively, some centres have been charging as high as ₹1,800 for one shot of Covishield and ₹1,500 for one shot of Covaxin. The median cost of Covishield at private centres makes up for 22% of an average urban household's monthly expenses. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan & Sumant Sen

#### PRICE RANGES

Out of the 325 private centres offering Covishield, 84% had fixed the price at ₹800 to ₹1,000 per shot. As many as 25 of them charged >₹1,000, while only 14 of them charged less than ₹600. Out of 149 private centres administering Covaxin, 90% charged between ₹1,200 and ₹1,400.

#### COVISHIELD

| Price range (₹) | Hospitals  |
|-----------------|------------|
| <600            | 14         |
| 600 to 800      | 13         |
| 800 to 1,000    | 273        |
| 1,000 to 1,200  | 20         |
| 1,200 to 1,400  | 3          |
| >=1,400         | 2          |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>325</b> |

| COVAXIN        | Hospitals  |
|----------------|------------|
| 250            | 6          |
| 1,200 to 1,400 | 134        |
| >=1,400        | 9          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>149</b> |

Note: Prices are from Co-WIN portal as of 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday | Source: Data compilation courtesy Pratap Vardhan

#### SHARE OF EXPENSES

Covishield's median price at the private hospitals sampled was 22% of an average urban household's monthly budget

#### Parameter

| Parameter   | ₹     |
|---|-------|
| Median price of Covishield  | 850   |
| Median price of Covaxin   | 1,250 |
| Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) of an urban household (2017-18) | 3,858 |
| MPCE on medical needs   | 156   |
| Covishield median price as a % of urban MPCE                          | 22%   |
| Covishield median price as a % of urban MPCE on medical needs         | 545%  |

#### AFFORDABILITY MATRIX

Covishield's median price at the private hospitals sampled was 75% of the average monthly expenditure of the poorest urban households; the figure was 7% for the richest

| Frailty class | Average urban MPCE (₹) | % of MPCE |
|---------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Poorest 5%    | 1,126.36               | 75%       |
| Middle class  | 2,932.12               | 29%       |
| Richest 5%    | 13,017.21              | 7%        |

#### MINIMUM PRICE

In Uttarakhand, the minimum price for a Covishield shot at private centres was ₹900, the highest among the States listed. However, only two such hospitals from the State (mentioned inside

FROM PAGE ONE

## Why not buy 100% vaccines, SC asks Centre

The Centre's liberalised vaccination policy gives it only a 50% role to purchase COVID-19 vaccines. The other half is equally shared between the States/Union Territories and private hospitals. The court said the Centre had left the States with very little bargaining powers by pre-fixing with the manufacturers both the quantity and the price of vaccines for the States.

"*Prima facie*, the only room for negotiation with the two vaccine manufacturers [Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech] was on price and quantity, both of which have been pre-fixed by the Central government," the court reasoned. Besides, the court said the States were handicapped in their direct talks with foreign vaccine manufacturers as the latter preferred negotiating with federal governments.

The court also sought confirmation from the States about the Centre's claim that "every State/UT

government shall provide vaccination free of cost to its population."

"It is important that individual State/Union Territory governments confirm/deny this position before this court. Further, if they have decided to vaccinate their population for free then, as a matter of principle, it is important that this policy is annexed to their affidavit, so that the population within their territories can be assured of their right to be vaccinated for free at a State vaccination centre," the court explained.

The Bench directed the States and UTs to file their affidavits in this regard within the next two weeks and clarify their individual policies for free vaccination.

The court has asked the Centre to place on record its "written policy" to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines, and how this would factor into the rationale of equal apportionment between State/UT governments and private hospitals.

## Let Centre distribute vaccines, says Odisha CM

In his letter, Mr. Patnaik said, "After the second wave, people are very scared about future waves and variants. Every citizen in India has been affected by this pandemic in one way or the other. It could be losing a loved one or losing a job or loss in business or just the mental trauma because of the present situation. None has been spared by this pandemic."

After the Union government announced the Phase-3 of the vaccine policy, allowing vaccination of those above 18 years and procurement by State governments and the private sector, there has been great demand for vaccines, the five-time Chief Minister of

Odisha said.

No State was safe unless all the States adopted vaccination as a top priority and executed it on war-footing. "This cannot be a battle among the States to procure vaccines," he wrote.

Ms. Banerjee added that the Chief Minister of Kerala had also written to the Centre on the issue. She said there were about 140 crore people in India and unless the Centre provided vaccines, it was going to take a lot of time to vaccinate the population.

Ms. Banerjee pointed out that the BJP had promised free vaccination to the people of Bihar during the Assembly polls but had not kept the promise.

## New IT rules don't apply to us, Google tells HC

Google urged the High Court to quash its April 20 order which applied the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 to it, while dealing with an issue related to removal of offending content from the Internet.

It said the High Court in its April 20 order had "generally" observed that for removal or access disablement of offending content, they must be blocked throughout the world. This observation, it said, was "overbroad and cannot apply to all takedown orders for all grievances".

"Global removal is applicable to such objectionable content which is universally recognized as unlawful (for eg. child pornography). However, there may be content which is prohibited in India but is lawful in other countries," Google said.

Acting on Google's plea, a bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh issued notice to the Centre, Delhi government, Internet Service Providers' Association of India, Facebook, the pornographic site and the woman on whose plea the April 20 order was passed.

The bench said it was not going to issue any interim order at this stage and posted the case for further hearing on July 25.

Google said the function of a search engine was to only "crawl and index existing information as available or published or hosted by independent third-party websites".

This process of search did not censor the findings – it found material that corresponded to the request of the search, hosted by other independent third-party websites that were beyond the control of search engines.

## Dominica court adjourns hearing in Choksi case

On Wednesday, Mr. Choksi's team claimed that his human rights were violated ever since he was allegedly "abducted" from Antigua. "My husband is in hospital and I have been able to speak to him. He is traumatised and has lots of wounds. He was also mentally tortured. We are deeply anguished by comments of Antigua PM Browne," Priya Choksi told WION, a TV channel.

During the hearing, Mr. Choksi's team also raised questions about a female friend who allegedly plotted his removal from Antigua to

## Cabinet gives nod to Model Tenancy Act

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Model Tenancy Act to be sent to the States and Union Territories to enact legislation or amend laws on rental properties. The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"It will help overhaul the legal framework with respect to rental housing across the country, which would help spur its overall growth...It will enable creation of adequate rental housing stock for all the income groups thereby addressing the issue of homelessness," a government statement said.

The model Act, if passed by the States and UTs, would prescribe the norms for lease agreements, deposits, dispute handling and other aspects of rental properties. "It will enable institutionalisation of rental housing by gradually shifting it towards the formal market and facilitate unlocking of vacant houses for rental housing purposes," the government said.

## Cong. panel submits report on poll debacle

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Congress's five-member panel, headed by former Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan, that was set up to study the party's poor performance in the recently concluded Assembly elections has submitted its initial report to party president Sonia Gandhi.

While the post-mortem of Assam and Kerala results have been done, the process is yet to be complete for West Bengal, where Congress drew a blank.

## Fourteen nations kept away from the Human Rights Council resolution

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE  
NEW DELHI

India's abstention from the latest resolution on the Palestinian issue suppresses human rights of "all people", Palestine's Foreign Minister Riad Malki has said.

In an unusually strong letter sent to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on May 30, Dr. Malki said the resolution titled "Ensuring respect for international human rights law and humanitarian law in Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and in Israel" was a product of long years of mul-

## Caste categories for NREGS pay

It will complicate payment system, may lead to a reduction in funding: experts

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked the States to split wage payments under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme into separate categories for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and others from this financial year. Workers' rights advocates said this will complicate the payment system, and expressed fears that it may lead to a reduction in scheme funding.

"Government of India has decided to provide separate budget heads for SC and ST categories under MGNREGA from the financial year 2021-22 for wage payment. The existing system for wages under the scheme is for only one type that is there is no category wise provision of wage payment," said the ad-



**New changes:** MGNREGA scheme workers at a project site at Ramakrishnapuram in Telangana. ■ FILE PHOTO

visory sent by Rural Development Ministry Director Dharmvir Jha to all State governments on March 2. *The Hindu* has seen a copy of the advisory, which does not include any rationale for the new procedure.

A video conference was held with State representatives to lay out the new process in March. One of the

participants said that States were asked to verify if job cards for SC and ST beneficiaries are being properly allocated at the field level. They were told they would be given fund allocations according to this criteria, indicating that labour budgets would also be segregated on a caste basis.

"The Ministry may be

thinking that this allocation is all being taken by the general category people, so they want to segregate based on the population of the district. And even the projection is done like that. Government thought: 'Why not take exclusive allocation for SC and ST?'" said the State representative, who did not wish to be named.

"These new modalities are bound to create complications in a payment system that is actually begging to be simplified," said a statement by the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha.

"All NREGA workers have the same rights. Segregating them into three groups for purposes of budgeting and wage payments serves no purpose," it added.

Some activists expressed the fear that the reform is meant to reduce funding.

## HC dismisses Juhi Chawla's plea on 5G

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday termed the petition filed by actor Juhi Chawla against the roll-out of 5G technology in India as "defective" and done for "media publicity".

Justice J.R. Medha also asked why the actor had moved the court directly without first giving any representation to the government. "It is a defective plaint. This suit has been filed only for media publicity and nothing more than that. It is very shocking," the judge said while reserving the order on the plea.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Central government, also said that the suit was frivolous. Mr. Mehta said 5G policy was obviously not prohibited in law.

## Judgment will deter rape victims from fighting case'

Women's groups slam Tejpal verdict

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

that a survivor of sexual assault has to face in an insensitive court atmosphere and the relentless, cruel and often scandalous, illegal and irrelevant cross examination that a prosecutrix also faces," according to the joint statement. The signatories of the statement include organisations like the All India Democratic Women's Association, All India Progressive Women's Association, and Forum Against Oppression of Women and former MP Subhasini Ali, Prabhat Patnaik of the JNU and Arundhati Dhuru of the National Alliance of People's Movement.

Last month, a sessions court in Goa acquitted former Tehelka editor-in-chief Tarun Tejpal of all charges in a 2013 rape case involving a junior colleague. The judgment has been widely criticised for detailing the woman complainant's WhatsApp chats, email messages and past relationships to discredit her as an unreliable witness. The Goa government has appealed against the judgment.

"The judgment showcases the kind of gruelling trial on record at all."

## 'Row over Alapan a closed chapter'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said "the Alapan Bandyopadhyay chapter is now closed". She said the government will continue to extend support to him.

"No questions on Alapan Bandyopadhyay as the chapter is over now... Alapan has retired. So I do not want to talk about it," she told journalists when asked about the Centre issuing show-cause notice to the former Chief Secretary.

Mr. Bandyopadhyay opted to retire from services on May 31, despite a three-month extension after the Centre issued a notice to him on May 28 and May 31. The Centre has issued the notice to the former bureaucrat under the Disaster Management Act.

TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee also defended Mr. Bandyopadhyay and said instead of him charges should be brought against those responsible for the eight-phase polls in West Bengal.

## SC stays HC order on oxygen device

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

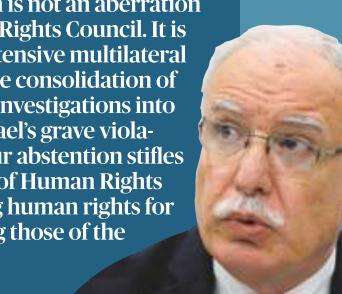
Purchasing an oxygen concentrator from abroad will now attract an IGST of 12% as opposed to 28%, following the Supreme Court stay on Tuesday of a Delhi High Court order on the issue.

Commercial imports of concentrators are taxed at 12%. Imported concentrators received as a gift were tax-free after the HC order.

## Palestine flays India's abstention from vote

**G** The resolution is not an aberration to the Human Rights Council. It is the by-product of extensive multilateral consultations. It is the consolidation of years and thorough investigations into and reporting on Israel's grave violations...Therefore, your abstention stifles the important work of Human Rights Council at advancing human rights for all peoples, including those of the Palestinian people

RIAD MALKI  
PALESTINIAN FOREIGN MINISTER



tilateral negotiation.

"Republic of India missed an opportunity to join the international community at this turning point, both crucial and long overdue, on the path to accountability, justice and peace," he stated.

India abstained in the voting on the resolution at the Human Rights Council [HRC] on May 27 that came

up against the backdrop of the latest round of conflict between Israel and Gaza strip, the coastal part of the Palestinian territories.

### Death of Indian citizen

India had condemned the death of an Indian citizen in the rocket attacks by Hamas from Gaza but in a rare United Nations Security Council

meeting on May 17, Permanent Representative T.S. Tirumurti expressed India's support to the "just Palestinian cause". India has maintained that two-state solution to equal sovereign rights is the way forward to resolve the century-old crisis.

However, India abstained from voting on the resolution, which is aimed at securing Israel's compliance with international human rights.

"The resolution is not an aberration to the Human Rights Council. It is the by-product of extensive multilateral consultations. It is the consolidation of years and thorough investigations into and reporting on Israel's grave violations by States, United Nations experts, Human Rights Treaty bodies, and international organisa-

tions...Therefore, your abstention stifles the important work of Human Rights Council at advancing human rights for all peoples, including those of the Palestinian people," Dr. Malki wrote.

The resolution was adopted with the vote of 24 members. Nine voted against, and 14, including India, abstained. The passing of the resolution led to the setting up of an independent commission of inquiry to investigate violation of international law by Israel.

Dr. Malki said the Palestinian people were deprived of applicability of international law. The "root causes of the injustice" against the Palestinian people was "dispossession, displacement, colonisation" by Israel, the Minister noted.

## New pension rules will gag critics of govt.'

May 31 notification warns ex-intelligence officials on publishing any information

VIJAIITA SINGH  
NEW DELHI

The new pension rules notified on May 31 warning retired intelligence officials of forfeiture of pension benefits if they publish any information related to the organisation they served without government clearance are not applicable to their counterparts in the IAS, the IFS, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), former Union Ministers or the armed forces.

Retired officials pointed out that such restrictions already exist and the notification was vague and will be used to gag the vocal critics of the government. Former Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) chief A.S. Dulat said the notification will discourage many from writing and hoped that the rule is uniformly applied.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) notified the Central Civil Services (Pension) Amendment Rules, 2020 on May 31. The said rules first drafted in 1972 have been amended 47 times. In 2008, Rule 8 pertaining to "pension subject to future good conduct" was first amended by inserting the condition that retired intelligence and security officials will not publish any material that affects the "sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, or relation with a foreign State or which would lead to incitement of an offence".

The May 31 amendment expands the scope to include any information related to "domain of the organisation, any reference or information about any personnel and the

designation, and expertise or knowledge gained by virtue of working in that organisation".

It also requires the retired officials to sign an undertaking – Form 26 – and declare that without the prior approval of the competent authority they will not publish any information related to the "domain of the organisation and obtained by virtue of my working in the said organisation".

The rules would cover retired officials of the Intelligence Bureau, RAW, National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), Indian Revenue Service (IRS), Customs officials and all other organisations exempted under the Right to Information Act (RTI) such as the National Security Council Secretariat, Defence Research and Development Organisation,

Border Road Organisation among others.

The DoPT officials refused to comment and the immediate trigger for the fresh amendment was not clear.

A government source said the rules were brought to bring clarity and the intention is always to safeguard national interest.

"By no means do these rules deny any such former official from expressing his/her views. In fact, it makes it easier for them to do so, given that they can now contact the head of their former employer organisation and seek clarification on whether the proposed material is sensitive or non-sensitive," said the source.

However, officials pointed out that the amendment has been under preparation for some time but it cannot be applied retrospectively.

## BJP-JJP govt. policies behind unemployment'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

Congress national general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala on Wednesday said owing to anti-youth policies of the BJP-JJP government in Haryana, the unemployment among the youth in both rural and urban areas of the State was on the rise.

Mr. Surjewala said the latest unemployment figures of Haryana released by the Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy have exposed the 'anti-youth' face of the BJP-JJP government. "The rate of unemployment is 29.10%... it is the result of the inefficiency, incompetence and the negative policies adopted by the Khattar-Dushyant Chautala government towards youth."

## Dominica court adjourns hearing in Choksi case

## Idea of GST is dead, says Chidambaram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

In a scathing attack on the government's implementation of the goods and services tax (GST), former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Wednesday said the idea of GST was dead.

### 'Talking shop'

In a series of tweets, Mr. Chidambaram alleged that the GST Council had been reduced to a talking shop and accused tax officers of turning into 'hounds'.

His attack on the Central government came a day after Congress Chief Ministers Ashok Gehlot and Bhupesh Baghel slammed the Finance Ministry's constitution of Group of Ministers of the GST Council by excluding Finance Ministers of their States.

## Webinar on connections between law, humanities

Part of SRM Virtual Conclave, 2021

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

The 12th of the 15-part webinar series – SRM Virtual Conclave for Career Guidance 2021 – is scheduled to be held at 11 a.m. on June 5.

The SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST), in association with The Hindu Group, has launched the 15-part webinar series – SRM Virtual Conclave for Career Guidance 2021 – that spotlights science, engineering, technology, law, humanities and medical health sciences courses and their relevance to the 2020s workplace.

The 12th in this webinar series, "Interdisciplinary connections between law and humanities", will feature eminent panellists such as V.M. Kannan, advocate at the Supreme Court; Sridhar Krishnaswami, Deputy

## Economy resilient, will rebound: Thakur

Union Minister says Chidambaram chose to ignore hard data and went ahead with 'whataboutery'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Taking on former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram for his criticism of the state of the economy, Minister of State for Finance Anurag Thakur said that it was resilient and would rebound in the times ahead. He cited international agencies' projections of India as the only "major economy" to record a double digit growth in 2021-22.

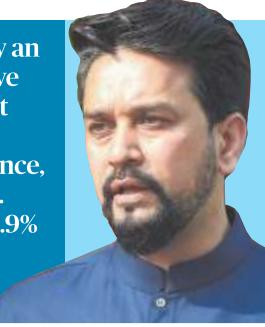
"Is the Indian economy an island in isolation; have other major economies not faced a GDP contraction? Are you not aware that France, Germany, Italy and the U.K. contracted by 8.2%, 4.9%, 8.9% and 9.9% respectively

**ANURAG THAKUR**  
Minister of State for Finance

7.3% contraction in GDP in 2020-21.

"Consistent reforms have ensured strong fundamentals through these difficult times... [so] India had a swift rebound from a contraction of 24.4% in the 1st quarter of FY 2020-21 to a growth of 1.6% in the 4th quarter." India had been resilient despite the disruptions in the globalised world, he noted.

"I am not surprised that the Former Finance Minister chose to ignore hard data



and instead went ahead with 'whataboutery' - the Congress leadership has embodied this clueless approach over the years." Facts believed Mr. Chidambaram's advice on initiating cash transfers to people to help cope with the second wave, he said.

Mr. Thakur urged Mr. Chidambaram to "shift gears from his gloom and doomsday prediction". It was evident that the "lockdown saved lives and gradual unlocking allowed green

shoots" in the economy, as reflected in the record GST collections, growth in auto sales, steel, cement and international air cargo, he pointed out.

"The Index of Eight Core Industries grew 11.4% in March 2021 and a staggering 56.1% in April 2021... Steel and cement sectors grew 27.3% and 32.7%, respectively, in March 2021. Important to note, since this growth is over and above the pre-lockdown period of March 2020. The two sectors grew 400% & 549% in April 2021," he said.

Mr. Thakur told Mr. Chidambaram, "While you doubt the resilience of Indian entrepreneurs, small businesses, traders and MSMEs to revive themselves; various international agencies project India to grow by 12.5% in FY 2021-22 making

us the only major economy to have a projected double digit growth."

### Cash transfers

On Mr. Chidambaram's advice to initiate cash transfers to help the poor cope with the second wave of the pandemic, he cited the higher procurement of wheat, pulses and rice during the National Democratic Alliance tenure. He alleged that the Congress had misled farmers on agricultural laws.

"Today, farmers are happy and have differentiated the truth from the false narrative of Congress leaders," he observed.

"Over ₹ 2.65 lakh crore has been sanctioned by public and private sector banks and NBFCs to over 92 lakh accounts. Does this not provide 'cash' flow for business?" he said.

## Paid vaccination policy arbitrary, irrational: SC

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has called the Union government's paid vaccination policy for citizens 18-44 years of age as "prima facie arbitrary and irrational".

The court said the Centre's "liberalised vaccination policy", which covered the age group, expected them to pay through their noses.

The first two phases of the vaccination drive had the Centre in the driver's seat. The vaccination was also free of cost. However, the onset of the second wave and expansion of the immunisation drive to cover the 18-44 age group saw the Centre give ground and take responsibility for only 50% of vaccine purchase and distribution, leaving the States and private hospitals to buy vaccines at a higher price, it stated.

"The policy of the Central government for conducting free vaccination themselves for groups under the first two phases, and replacing it with paid vaccination by the State/UT Governments and private hospitals for the persons between 18-44 years is, prima facie, arbitrary and irrational," a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed in a 32-page order released on Wednesday.

It asked the Centre to come clean on the preparedness with respect to specific needs of children in the event of a third wave.

The Bench sought details on the percentage of population vaccinated (with one dose and both doses). "This shall include data pertaining to the percentage of rural population as well as the percentage of urban population so vaccinated," it clarified.

The digital registration and booking of vaccine slots through CoWIN, coupled with the current scarcity of vaccines, ensured that the rich got vaccinated first, it said.

Given major global moves on Afghanistan as the U.S. prepares to pull out all troops in September this year, New Delhi is keen that its stand is not seen as taking a position against Afghanistan, and officials stressed that the vote was not an indicator of bilateral ties with either country.

## SC flags digital divide citing Co-WIN chaos

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said even the digitally literate are finding it hard to get vaccine slots on Co-WIN.

"A vaccination policy exclusively relying on a digital portal for vaccinating a significant population of this country between the ages of 18-44 would be unable to meet its target of universal immunisation owing to such a digital divide," a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said in an order released on Wednesday.

ability of vaccines till December 31, 2021. It ordered the Centre to submit all the "relevant documents and file notings reflecting its thinking and culminating in the vaccination policy" along with an affidavit in two weeks.

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The digital registration and booking of vaccine slots through CoWIN, coupled with the current scarcity of vaccines, ensured that the rich got vaccinated first, it said.

To top it all, the "liberalised" vaccine policy did not prioritise people with comorbidities, disabilities or belonging to vulnerable groups within the 18-44 age group.

The court directed the Centre to place on record a road map of projected availability of the drug for mucormycosis.

## Webinar on connections between law, humanities

Part of SRM Virtual Conclave, 2021



Dean and Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRMIST; and Professor Gurudath Anantharamaiah Chilkunna, Dean, Faculty of Law, SRMIST. It will be moderated by Yashasvini Rajeshwar, founder and CEO, AuxoHub.

The session will conclude with questions and answer with the speakers. To register for the free webinar, visit <http://bit.ly/SRMTHE12> or scan the QR Code.

## UNGA head: India to vote for Maldives

Decision will disappoint Afghanistan, which has Zalmay Rassoul in the race

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI



Abdullah Shahid

According to a senior official in Kabul, the Ghani government has formally requested India to vote for Mr. Rassoul, and was still hopeful of securing support. However, at least three government officials aware of the process here have said that India has made it clear that it cannot vote for Afghanistan

as it had committed support for the Maldives, and suggested that Mr. Rassoul's candidature had been announced only in January, which was quite late for the race. "Normally it takes about a year to canvass for a position like the UNGA President," said one official. "While Afghanistan had sounded us out earlier, they did take very long to announce the candidate, and by then we had already taken a call [on the Maldives]."

Sources suggested that

the announcement of Mr. Rassoul's decision to run had taken many in Delhi by surprise, as they had hoped that Mr. Shahid to be a consensus candidate in the Asian grouping, which gets its turn once every five years.

A vote for the President of the GA is always very divisive both for the concerned regional group, as well as for the wider membership of the UNGA. Such a situation allows the major powers who have veto privileges outside the UNGA to use the elections to pursue their own agendas," former Indian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Asoke Kumar Mukerji told *The Hindu*.

In 2016, Fiji won the election after a bitter contest with Cyprus that saw the U.S. and China taking different sides.

Officials suggested that in the current contest, China could support Afghanistan.

While most countries have not disclosed their vote yet, India had confirmed its support to the Maldives during a virtual meeting between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Mr. Shahid in August 2020, and Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla had made a public statement during a visit to Male last November.

"With his vast diplomatic experience and leadership qualities, Foreign Minister Shahid has the best credentials to preside over the General Assembly in these tumultuous times," Mr. Shringla had said.

Given major global moves on Afghanistan as the U.S. prepares to pull out all troops in September this year, New Delhi is keen that its stand is not seen as taking a position against Afghanistan, and officials stressed that the vote was not an indicator of bilateral ties with either country.

## Activists flay choice of NHRC chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

A group of human rights activists on Wednesday raised concerns over appointment of former Supreme Court judge, Justice Arun Kumar Mishra, as the chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

The Centre's decision "smacks of brazen arrogance and indifference to public opinion and once again highlights the cynical disdain of the government for democratic norms and constitutional proprieties".

The activists pointed out that the selection of Justice Mishra by a committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was despite the objection of another committee member, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge.

The Congress leader had suggested appointing someone from Dalit, Adivasi or minority communities, "considering that the bulk of victims of state abuse comes from these communities".

It was "very clear", according to them, that Justice Mishra seemed to have been "rewarded for having declared his fealty to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a judicial conference involving judges from 24 countries on 20th January, 2020".

Among the signatories were People's Union for Civil Liberties president Ravikiran Jain, Supreme Court advocate VRinda Grover, writer and activist Harsh Mander and former member of the Planning Commission Syeda Hameed.

**NATIONAL BOARD OF EXAMINATIONS IN MEDICAL SCIENCES**  
(Autonomous body of the M/o. Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India)  
NAMS Building, Medical Enclave, Ansari Nagar, New Delhi – 110029

No. 21005/RECT/2020 Dated 01/6/2021

### VACANCY NOTICE

The National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences is an Autonomous body of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India, that conducts Post Graduate Examinations of High standards in the field of Modern Medicine and Allied specialties at National level. The NBE invites applications from eligible candidates for Regular appointment to the following administrative posts, through a Computer Based Test:-

| Name of Post      | Pay Level | No. of Vacancies* |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Senior Assistant  | 7         | 8                 |
| Junior Assistant  | 2         | 30                |
| Junior Accountant | 4         | 4                 |

\* No. of Vacancies are liable to change. Reservation as per G.O.I. norms

For further details on Online Registration, Last Date, Eligibility, Reservation, Syllabus and other terms and conditions, please refer to the detailed Vacancy notice at NBE website [www.natboard.edu.in](http://www.natboard.edu.in)

Executive Director

E-mail: [vacancy@natboard.edu.in](mailto:vacancy@natboard.edu.in)

### TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS:TIRUPATI EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

T.T.Devasthanam invites Expression of Interest (EOI) for Consultancy Service for providing Architectural lighting / Special lighting / Delightful illumination to Sri Govindaraja Swamy temple, Tirupati, Chittoor Dist., Andhra Pradesh from the prequalified lighting consultants.

For details log on to [www.tirumala.org](http://www.tirumala.org) (or) Contact No. 9849218181.

RoC.No.PRA/13931/Advn.No.34/PRO/2021/Dated:02-06-2021 **EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

### कार्यालय जोधपुर विकास प्राधिकरण, जोधपुर

रेखे अंतराल के साथ, शताब्दी, जोधपुर-342001

क्रमांक :- 112 दिनांक:- 31/05/2021

इन्होंने विकास प्राधिकरण, जोधपुर की ओर से प्राप्तकरण एवं राजस्व विभाग में नियमानुसार उपयोग श्रीमि में विद्युत कार्यों हेतु पैकेजिंग विभाग से नियमानुसार प्राप्त में प्रौद्योगिक प्रयोग से जान तथा ग्राम लालन की दिनांक, विद्युत कार्यों का संपूर्ण वेबसाइट <http://www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> पर देखा जा सकता है। NIB CODE - JOD2122A0017, Tender ID/UBN No. - JOD2122WSOB0025, JOD2122WSOB0026, JOD2122WSOB0027 Raj Samwad/C/1767/2021-22 अधिकारी अधिकारी अधिकारी (जोन-विद्युत-II)

### OFFICE OF CHIEF ENGINEER (URBAN & NRW), PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT, JAL BHAWAN, 2-CIVIL LINES JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

#### BID NOTICE

On behalf of the Governor of Rajasthan, PHED invites bids online in electronic format on website <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in> from manufacturers for Procurement of ISI Marked MS Pipes size 125-150mm conforming to IS: 1239 (Amended / Revised up to date) against NIB NO MS Pipes (125-150mm)/21-22/14 Dated 27.05.2021. For details please visit website [www.sppr.rajasthan.gov.in](http://www.sppr.rajasthan.gov.in) & <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>

NIB Code PHE2122A12

## IN BRIEF



## DRDO's 500-bed facility opened in Uttarakhand

NEW DELHI A 500-bed COVID-19 care hospital set up by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in Haldwani was virtually inaugurated by Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Tirath Singh Rawat on Wednesday. "This facility comprises 375 oxygen beds and 125 intensive care unit [ICU] beds with ventilators. With 100% power backup, it is centrally air-conditioned for all weather conditions," a DRDO statement said.

## Cong. launches campaign for free vaccination

NEW DELHI The Congress on Wednesday launched an online campaign to press for free universal vaccination against COVID-19. "Vaccines are the strongest shield to protect us against the COVID-19 pandemic. You all should also raise your voice for free vaccination of all citizens and wake up the Central government!" former Congress president Rahul Gandhi tweeted as part of the campaign.

## Won't allow use of repaired ventilators: HC

MUMBAI The Aurangabad Bench of the Bombay High Court on Wednesday said it would not permit the Central government to use ventilators which undergo major repairs as it could put the lives of patients at risk. The Bench was hearing a case on the procurement and supply of faulty ventilators. The Centre submitted that ventilators would be replaced if they did not function after repairs. The court said it would not permit use of ventilators that had undergone major repairs.

## 24 held for assaulting doctor in Assam

GUWAHATI The police in Hojai district in central Assam have arrested 24 people for assaulting a doctor at a COVID-19 Care Centre (CCC). Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he would monitor the investigation into the assault. A mob had attacked Seuj Kumar Senapati, the doctor, and other staff of the Udaali CCC on Tuesday besides damaging the healthcare facility, a video showed. The clip showed the mob hitting the doctor on his head. The attackers alleged that negligence by the doctor and his medical team led to the death of a patient.

## Solution to puzzle 13262

**HEIST**    **BLAISE**  
**MATINEE**    **SAMMEL**  
**PILGRIM**    **PARTIAL**  
**ENNUI**    **ESTRANGED**  
**NCGR**    **TERRED**  
**DITCHWATER**    **KNEE**  
**TREX**  
**AWRY**    **MAKEASCENE**  
**SEED**    **CTELIA**  
**HIGHFLIER**    **ROAST**  
**RNFDAOSI**  
**AVARICE**    **TIGHTEN**  
**MINCATEEING**  
**STEER**    **SNACK**

## Some States too cancel Class 12 exams

Punjab Education Minister urges Centre to hold consultations on alternative assessment formula

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Following the decision to cancel the CBSE Class 12 exams due to the pandemic, several State boards have followed suit.

The BJP-ruled Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat were the first to announce cancellation on Wednesday, but Central officials expect a majority of States to follow their cue.

"During the consultation with State governments last week, most of them indicated that they were looking to the CBSE as a reference point. A majority of State boards are now likely to cancel their exams as well," a senior Education Ministry official told *The Hindu*.

"If they instead choose to hold their own board exams later, and postpone it too much, it is their own students who will suffer once the higher education admission season begins. That is one reason this [cancellation] was done, so that the next academic session is not



Testing times: Many CBSE schools have completed the practical exams for Class 12 students. ■ K. PICHUMANI

too badly impacted. We have learnt the lesson from last year," said the official.

States such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh said they are still considering their options and will take a decision in a day or two.

Maharashtra Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad tweeted her appreciation of the CBSE cancellation, and said the State board would also take a decision "keeping students' health and sa-

fety in mind". The State has previously said the Centre and States need to follow a uniform policy.

Punjab Education Minister Vijay Inder Singla also called for the Centre to coordinate better with States.

"Out of the blue, they come out with a decision which was half-baked. We agree exams are cancelled in the interests of children, but they should have consulted and rolled out a plan on the alternative assessment formula

and then made an announcement," he told *The Hindu*.

"The Government of India should convene a meeting, so States can give inputs for whatever formula is being worked out. Every State board looks up to the CBSE, and we want to ensure that our children are not being left behind," he said.

## Evaluation criteria

CBSE officials say it will take a few days to structure the criteria for Class 12 evaluation. "There is no need for students to panic. Tomorrow, we will inform the Supreme Court of the decision to cancel. Then we will start working on the assessment methodology. It will take some days," said Controller of Examinations Sanyam Bhardwaj.

Another CBSE official indicated that two main options are being considered. "One option is to grade students based on their internal assessment and practical exam marks in Class 12, just as we are doing for Class 10 stu-

dents. To prevent mark inflation by schools, the students' grades would be rationalised based on the last three years' board examination performance of the school. The mark distribution given by the school should be in tune with the historical data," said the official.

"The other option is to use the average of the Class 9, 10 and 11 marks. But this may not be reliable, because there may not be consistency over three years, plus the subjects taken by students in Class 11 and 12 are different," said the official.

The senior Education Ministry official said school boards must also strengthen their continuous assessment methods going forward, considering the possibility that COVID may prevent Class 12 exams even in 2022.

"In a way, this can be seen as a blessing in disguise, if school boards are forced to realise it is possible to grade children without a singular focus on the year-end exam alone," said the official.

## Central varsities wait for clarity on CUDET

Consultation was held in March

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
NEW DELHI

With major school boards cancelling their Class 12 examinations, students looking to apply for college are now waiting for clarity regarding a new avatar of an old admission method – the Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUDET).

In March, about 45 Central universities were told that the National Testing Agency would conduct the CUDET this year for all aspiring students, but the pandemic may have cast a pall of uncertainty over those plans.

"We were told that the NTA would take over the conduct of the exam, and it would be used for all admissions, with separate tests for UG and PG courses... About 45 universities consented," said the admissions director of one of the newer universities in southern India, who did not want to be named.

He claimed that the older

universities such as the Jawaharlal Nehru University, the Delhi University (DU), Jadavpur and Shantiniketan were not so keen on a common entrance test, as they have their own admission processes.

However, the controller of examinations from one of the older institutions said all Central universities were on board. "All the controllers were unanimous that apart from a common entrance test, we should have a common counselling process as well, as is done for [engineering admissions via] JEE," he said.

DU Vice-Chancellor P.C. Joshi told *The Hindu* on Tuesday that if the Education Ministry approves the use of the CUDET, that could be implemented, adding that the DU would not compromise on merit.

Officials at the Education Ministry, NTA and UGC did not respond to queries regarding CUDET 2021.

## Only Delta is a variant of concern: WHO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
UNITED NATIONS

rance claims under the 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) – Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting COVID-19'.

The Union Health Ministry noted that the claims would be certified by District Collectors and settled in 48 hours after approval.

The move follows several States raising the matter of delays in processing the claims. "This latest order is aimed at cutting down delays and to further streamline and simplify the processing of the insurance claims," said the Ministry.

The B.1.617 variant was first detected in India and was divided in three lineages – B.1.617.1, B.1.617.2 and B.1.617.3.

In the COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update published on Tuesday, WHO said available findings for lineages B.1.617.1 and B.1.617.2 were initially used to designate B.1.617 a global Variant of Concern (VOC) on May 11.

"Since then, it has become evident that greater public health risks are currently associated with B.1.617.2, while lower rates of transmission have been observed for the other two lineages," said the release.

Sandeep Rathod, MD of Haffkine BioPharma, said the company proposes to produce 22.8 crore doses of Covaxin in a year. "For undertaking production of Covaxin, Haffkine Biopharma has been provided with ₹65 crore grant by the Centre and ₹94 crore from the government of Maharashtra," he said.

"We have been given a timeline of eight months and the work is being executed on a war footing," he added.

It said the B.1.617.1 strain has been reclassified to a Variant of Interest.

## Delhi lost 107 doctors, Bihar 96: IMA



On the frontline: Doctors have to spend long hours in protective gear in the fight against COVID-19. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

## Association updates toll from COVID-19 to 594

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has said that 594 doctors died in the second wave of COVID-19 across the country.

It released an updated list on Wednesday and noted that Delhi (107), Bihar (96), Uttar Pradesh (67) and Rajasthan (43) lost the most number of doctors so far.

While no such count is available for other medical staff currently, the Central

government earlier this week announced a new system of processing their insu-

## 1.32 lakh new cases, 2,865 deaths recorded

23.97 lakh vaccine doses given

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

India recorded 1,32,704 new COVID-19 cases and 2,865 new deaths till 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday. The country has so far reported a total of 2,84,39,675 cases and 3,37,980 deaths.

Tamil Nadu reported 25,317 new infections, followed by Kerala (19,661) and Karnataka (16,387). Maharashtra recorded 553 new casualties on the day, followed by Tamil Nadu (483) and Karnataka (463). Maharashtra's fatalities include backlog deaths which were missed in the previous reports. The figures do not include cases and deaths from Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Ladakh. The data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins.

Around 32.65 lakh samples were tested in the country on Tuesday (the results

for which were made available on Wednesday), which includes testing data reconciled by States.

## Positivity rate

India's average daily test positivity rate (positive cases identified for every 100 tests) continues to decline. It was 7.5% on June 1 compared to 11.4% recorded a week before.

About 23.97 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the country in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Wednesday, which is 3.83 lakh doses fewer than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours. However, it is 3.58 lakh more doses than what was recorded during the same period a week ago.

The seven-day rolling average of daily vaccinations in the country stood at 24.43 lakh on June 1, which is marginally more than the 22.71 lakh recorded on May 1.

## Requirement to test every batch has been waived

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

To ease the supply of imported COVID vaccines, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) on Tuesday waived the requirement of conducting bridging clinical trials and testing of every batch of vaccine by the Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL), Kasauli for foreign-made vaccines.

The decision applies to vaccines that have the approval of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration; European Medicines Agency; Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, U.K.; Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency, Japan; or those listed in WHO

notice, said scrutiny of the summary lot protocol and certificate of analysis of batch or lot shall be undertaken by the CDL for release as per standard procedures and requirement of assessment on the first 100 beneficiaries for seven days for safety outcomes before the vaccine is rolled out for further immunisation.

The Health Ministry on Wednesday said with the aim of vaccinating the entire eligible population at the earliest, domestic production is being steadily ramped up.

"As part of this initiative, three public enterprises are being supported by the Department of Biotechnology under Atmanirbhar Bharat 3.0 Mission Covid Suraksha. These enterprises are Haffkine Biopharmaceutical Corporation Ltd, Mumbai; In-

diaan Immunologicals Ltd, Hyderabad and Bharat Immunologicals & Biologicals Ltd, U.P. Haffkine Biopharma is getting ready to manufacture Covaxin under technology transfer arrangement with Bharat Biotech Ltd, Hyderabad. The production will take place at the Parel complex of the company," said the release.

The DCGI, in its one-page

Emergency Use Listing. As millions of individuals have already been vaccinated with them, the requirement of conducting post-approval bridging clinical trials and of testing every batch of vaccine by CDL, Kasauli can be exempted, if the batch/lot has been certified and released by the National Control Laboratory of the country of origin, the DCGI said.

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notice, said scrutiny of the summary lot protocol and certificate of analysis of batch or lot shall be undertaken by the CDL for release as per standard procedures and requirement of assessment on the first 100 beneficiaries for seven days for safety outcomes before the vaccine is rolled out for further immunisation.

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The DCGI, in its one-page

Emergency Use Listing. As

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already been vaccinated with



PRIYADARSHINI PAITANDY

Many magicians work on perfecting the disappearing act. But in the case of Amaan Mahtani, it is his family that does the disappearing act, when he has a trick to practise on them... for the 10th time in a day.

The 11-year-old magic enthusiast spends at least four hours every weekend and an hour-and-a-half on weekdays, perfecting his craft. A fan of magic ever since his grandfather showed him the disappearing thumb trick at the age of six, Amaan says he managed to seriously pursue magic when the lockdown last year made everything go virtual, and outdoor play time shrunk drastically. "I took a magic course on Udemy, and constantly keep learning from YouTube channels such as MLT Magic Tricks, EvanEraTV and Spidey-Hypnosis," he says.

Amaan's repertoire now includes 30 tricks, including mentalism. "I came up with a few myself after a lot of trial and error," he says. As we speak over a video call, he makes sponge balls disappear and reappear out of thin air. Gradually, his friends too became invested in the hobby. "I give them a few pointers but never part with secrets of the trade," he laughs, adjusting his bow tie – Amaan's always dressed for the part, with dreams of making it to *America's Got Talent* some day.

Thanks to free classes on YouTube channels, many have been drawn into the fascinating world of magic. International entertain-

ers such as Penn and Teller are available on MasterClass teaching their skills for a small fee. "Knowing a few fun tricks can make one stand out at parties and other gatherings. It's also a great ice-breaker," says Chennai-based magician Arun Loganathan who has been teaching the craft for the last few years.

Since 2020, he started taking virtual classes for students of all age groups – seven to 70 – from within the country as well as Switzerland, the US and Papua New Guinea. This means a lot of late nights and early mornings for Arun. "I have woken up at 3.30 am to teach a student in Philadelphia," he says.

"The demand has gone up by 65% in one year," says Arun adding that people are comfortable with online classes as they are more accessible and customised. His students are a mix of novices and those that learn off YouTube, who then approach him to learn advanced magic or the finesse and flourishes that go with the act. It is interesting to note that people do not mind spending hefty sums on acquiring a skill that may just be for recreational purposes; some of Arun's interna-



tional clients pay upto a lakh for 30 days.

Magicians are normally known to bamboozle their audience but Arun sometimes feels the tables turn when his young students already know the trick he is teaching and come up with different techniques to solve it. Thanks to Arun's experience of over two decades in the field, he finds ways to keep challenging them.

While kids form 60% of the student base, magician Nikhil Raj from Bengaluru notices that his sessions for adults are mostly booked by corporates. "I conduct a 50-minute session for them which includes mentalism, illusions, conjuring and hypno-

"You don't get into magic, magic gets into you"  
DAVID BLAINE



Alahamora (Clockwise from top left) Amaan Mahtani practises a set; Penn & Teller demonstrate a trick; and Akshaya performing on stage • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND MASTERCLASS

tism," says 25-year-old Nikhil, whose dad was also a magician.

Although Nikhil has been conducting workshops for many years, the last year has been especially busy with over 500 children taking online classes. Sometimes parents learn along with their kids, at times it is

the grandparents who learn to entertain their grandchildren... the clientele is diverse. After completing their course, many of them also put up virtual shows for their families and friends.

Nikhil says that his workshops also weave in personality development and communication

skills. "Magic workshops are a lot more than just learning tricks. It prepares you to face any situation that might arise during a show. There could be hecklers... You need to deal with them in a calm manner and make them your fan," says magician Akshaya over a call from Pune.

Trained by her father, the 25-year-old has been performing on stage since she was three. She did her last show this year in Goa, in the month of April, and was all set to perform at a wedding in New York later this year, when the second wave of COVID-19 disrupted all plans.

"COVID-19 is the reason I started teaching online last year in September, otherwise I would have never done it," says Akshaya, who has conducted over 40 classes in the last eight months. Though she believes that magic should be experienced live, she says, "Virtual has its own charm and advantages. A lot of things can be done virtually that may not have been possible in a live show. But I can't disclose what they are," she laughs mysteriously.

#### Flair of the craft

Learning magic requires a lot of patience, hard work and constant practice. Not all students have the discipline to persevere. Those that stay are the ones with undying curiosity and dogged determination. "There is a saying, 'You don't get into magic, magic gets into you!'" says Akshaya.

"There is a joy when people look in wonder and ask 'how did you do it?'" says Amaan, who often practises in front of the mirror – not because he is vain – to make sure he can see himself performing from all angles. "You have to make sure that you don't give away anything from any angle," he adds.

Akshaya records her practice sessions to make sure every movement is going according to plan. Sleight of hand is important. 'You can learn the basics but you have to train your hands too,' is the common refrain.

While practitioners of this art form are often associated with vibrant costumes, over the top equipment and material, Arun, Nikhil and Akshaya are being practical and keeping it simple for now. "Because of the lockdown not everyone can access materials and kits, so it is best to use household items like pens, coins, cardboard..." says Nikhil. "Ultimately, what matters is the finesse with which one performs a trick."



Something old, something new  
The retrofitted 1948 Volkswagen Beetle and Jawaad Khan • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Beetle's internal combustion engine with lithium-ion batteries, taking care to ensure they sourced the perfect motor, gearbox and batteries to suit both the car and the major's requirements.

Using the term 'retrofitted' to describe the internal makeover he gives cars, Khan believes this method can help India reach its 2030 EV goal. "I knew my design could make electric cars more popular without adding new cars on Indian roads."

He founded Tadpole Projects, a start-up currently working with IIT-Delhi. "It is not just rare models – a lot of people are sentimental about their first cars or family heirlooms. Sadly, most of these cars don't pass emission control norms. Retrofitting them is an eco-friendly solution."

"We have converted four cars till now. Two vintage vehicles – the major's 1948 VW Beetle and 1946 Austin as well as two modern cars – a Swift DZire and a Honda City. Retrofitting a car can cost between three lakh to nine lakh rupees, and based on the model it can achieve a mileage of 80-500 kilometres."

"When it was finally ready and I drove it for the first time I was pleasantly surprised. It was smooth and soundless. While it has lost its 'classic' status, it drives far better than it did with a petrol engine," says Maj Rajain.

The Department of Posts introduced a rubber stamp earlier this year, commemorating the successful conversion of the Beetle from classic to eco-friendly. As for Maj Rajain's 1948 VW electric Beetle, he donated it to CERCA and it is now permanently stationed at the IIT campus where visitors can view it.

a student of Electrical Engineering from Swami Vivekanand Institute of Engineering and Technology (SVIET) in Punjab. Following the summit, Khan was invited to IIT-Delhi where he met with Duggal and Rajain, and the project to make the Beetle eco-friendly took off.

#### 2030 EV goal in sight

Hailing from Chenab Valley in Jammu, Khan (23) says he used to tinker with machines even as a young boy. While a student at SVIET, he converted a Maruti 800 into an electric vehicle for his college project. Named SVIET Volta, the car quickly garnered a lot of attention and won him a sponsorship to the InnoFest. Working over a period of six months, Khan replaced the

lantic, among other rarities.

Maj Rajain recalls how his first grandchild loved riding with him in the Chevy. "On one hand, I was aware that we were polluting the atmosphere by driving these vintage models. At the same time, I wanted my granddaughter to enjoy this car."

As luck would have it, a conversation with his friend, Arun Duggal, founder of Centre of Excellence for Research on Clean Air (CERCA) at IIT-Delhi, led them to a solution.

"Converting a classic car into an electric one would still preserve its beauty and charm, and at the same time address the issue of pollution," says Duggal.

Earlier in 2019, one of Duggal's acquaintances had seen the prototype of a 'converted' electric car at the InnoFest global summit in Singapore presented by Jawaad Khan,



## Don't let sleeping dogs lie

Are your pets getting their fair share of exercise and mood boosters during the lockdown?



DEEPA ALEXANDER

While every dog has its day, for over a year now, six-year-old Roger has not. The German Shepherd who loves long walks, used to sniff out interesting corners and quizzically cock his ears as he watched birds build nests. He now spends most of the pandemic watching clouds flit past from the apartment window. He has gained weight and is mostly bored – his new-found past-time is endlessly licking his paws.

"A number of dogs exhibit Obsessive Compulsive Behaviour such as incessant licking of paws, resulting in inflammation and wounds. They also develop an obsession with food due to the lack of anything else to keep them occupied," says Chennai-based veterinarian Dr Priyadarshini Govind.

An alumnus of Madras Veterinary College, Dr Priyadarshini also holds a postgraduate diploma in Behavioural Medicine from the University of Sydney and specialises in treating companion animals and pet birds.

Unlike the wild sheep in Wales that ran riot on the roads during the pandemic and the



Exercise is key Walking your pet with adequate precautions in place can keep them healthy; Dr Priyadarshini Govind • RAVINDRAN AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

leopards roaming backyards in Bengal, pets have been house-bound like their owners. Weight gain from lack of exercise has been a condition most veterinarians are seeing.

"I haven't heard of any Government restrictions to people walking their dogs, but pet parents have generally become lazier or probably are just too self-preserving due to the pandemic," says Dr Priyadarshini,

adding "Even in normal circumstances, some canine parents walk their dogs only under duress. The pandemic has become an excuse to not walk them at all. Dogs are intelligent animals and need a lot of activity to engage their mind and body to prevent unwanted behavioural patterns. While dogs enjoy the company of their humans, it is still important that they be kept occupied."

While the problems are not breed-specific and affect both indie and foreign dogs, the pandemic has had a very different effect on cats.

"Cats are a fairly independent species who while they love their human companions value their time alone. They don't constantly seek approval from their caregivers. With families staying in and people working from home it has resulted in stress-related disorders among cats such as feline lower urinary tract disease and excessive grooming."

But given the stringent lockdown how can this be prevented? "For dogs, even an outing outside your gate or a run in the terrace helps. Also, over-use of strong disinfectants that result in skin-related contact dermatitis and foot issues should be avoided. Dogs and cats are genetically sensitive to disinfectants that are safe for humans. There are a number of pet-friendly options. We do know that the Coronavirus is airborne but there is no need for us to assume our animals are going to be bringing in infection because they go out for walks."

On the number of people buying pets to stave off loneliness, Dr Priyadarshini comments, "It's not a great idea. People bought puppies for thousands from breeders but they weren't open to adopting a stray rescue or even a rescued pet of a person who had succumbed to the virus. You should be able to continue giving your pet the time and care even when things return to normal. Unless you are ready to do that it's best not to get one."

## The Beetle scuttles again

How the classic was transformed into an electric, eco-friendly car in IIT-Delhi

RUTH DHANARAJ

Thanks to a new method developed at IIT-Delhi, owners of vintage cars need not keep their beauties locked up. The 1948 VW Beetle and 1946 Austin can now zoom out on the streets, retrofitted to be electric and so, eco-friendly.

"I acquired a 1948 Volkswagen Beetle around 14 years ago. The car originally belonged to the German Ambassador to Nepal and I added it to my collection," says Major Manjith Rajain (retired), speaking from Gurugram.

"I don't call myself a collector. I acquire cars that I can restore and use as I believe these beautiful cars should be kept in running condition and enjoyed, not just locked up for a few private eyes," adds Maj Rajain, who also owns a Chevy 1926, a Morris Eight and a Morris Minor At-

## The crocodiles' newest ally

Pramila Rajan, Madras Crocodile Bank's new director, has a lot on her plate already

MEGHNA MAJUMDAR

Pramila Rajan's relationship with the Madras Crocodile Bank dates back to the 1970s. Yet, her recent appointment as the director of the bank was sparked by something innocuous – a social media advertisement. "I first saw the ad calling for candidates last January, and jumped at the chance to interview," says Pramila.

Before she elaborates on her plans for the Croc Bank, the conservationist looks back at her decades-long tryst with it as an outsider. Her first experience with the organisation was facilitated by the late Jagannathan Vijaya. A pioneering herpetologist, Vijaya back in the late 1970s was just, "a dear friend," recalls Pramila. "We graduated in Zoology together from Ethiraj College. I started spending weekends at Madras Snake Park with her and have measured baby pythons and weighed and fed vitamin drops to baby crocodiles. I also visited the Croc Bank with her, way back then."

"Around the same time, my father SJ Rajan, the officer-in-charge of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) research centre in Kovai, initiated turtle conservation activities under the guidance of Mr Romulus Whitaker. I used to help them collect and hatch turtle eggs at the centre and release hatchlings into the ocean," she recalls. Ironically, due to the pandemic, she has been unable to visit the bank since her appointment.

### Plan of action

"The park has been closed since March 16, 2020. It reopened and welcomed visitors for a brief period between November 10, 2020 and April 20, 2021 when it was forced to shut down again due to the second wave," says



**On the job** The appointment was announced in the last week of May

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

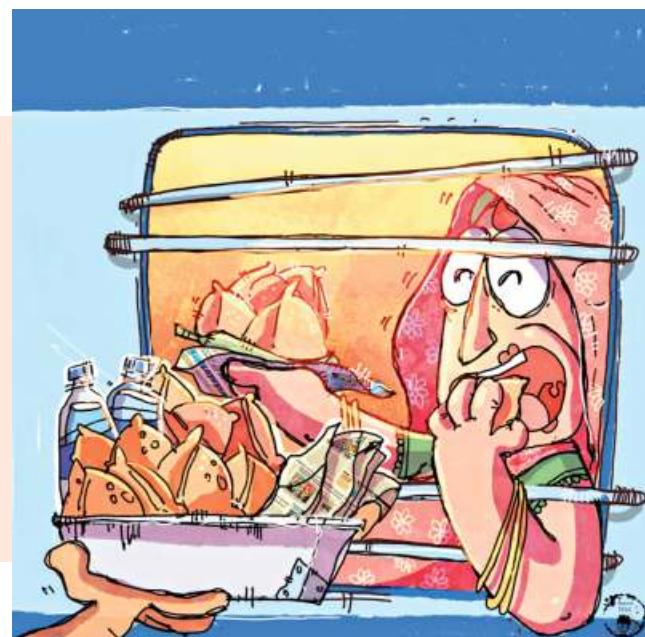
Digital illustrator Bhavya Desai's latest series is an ode to train journeys and their chaotic energy — a warm reminder of life before the pandemic

GOWRI S

If you haven't met a "binge-eater Pushpa" at a railway station, you have been one; the person who hastily grabs a few samosas wrapped in newspaper out of a platform vendor's basket, through the train window grill.

It is also through these window grills that we see bits of life unfolding in a train, as families unpack tiffin boxes, heave suitcases down from the upper berth, and socialise with strangers to kill time. The pulse of the Indian Railways is inevitably etched onto all of our travel experiences.

For Chennai-based artist Bhavya Desai, a recent train journey from Chennai to Bengaluru opened the floodgates to many such memories and observations. He translates this experience into a series of illustrations that delves into the nostalgia-inducing, chaotic energy of the Indian Railways as we know it. 'Binge-eater Pushpa' is one of the many characters that make an appear-



## Life, one berth at a time

rance in this series titled Chaotically Organised.

Bhavya recalls having five hours to kill in that train journey to Bengaluru. "I made the most of it. I spent a lot of time walking on the platforms. The journey instantly spoke to me," he says. "There is so much more life in a train."

Here, adds Bhavya, you see people being themselves.

From this treasure trove of interesting sights, Bhavya listed down all that he wants to show

case. "I have created sub categories. One is on life on the platform, which includes everything from water dispensers to coolies who drag heavy carriages. Another would be on the train itself – a look inside

**The current sub-series, By the Window, looks at characters and life in a train through the cross section of a window**



### SOMA BASU

Last November, Gurugram-based wildlife photographer Rajeev Dasgupta hit the jackpot when he got the first photographic evidence of the rare subspecies of male Koklass pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha meyeri* near the Helmet top in the Walong forests, Arunachal Pradesh.

Earlier, a few birders had caught a flitting glance in April-May 2015, and later in January 2021. But there has been no definitive evidence as the elusive, reclusive bird is not easy to photograph. The previous birders had recorded their observations about the rare subspecies only verbally on the eBird website.

Aibase, the world bird online taxonomic database, and books such as *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* By Richard Grimmet, Carol and Tim Inskip and *Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide* mention Koklass pheasant as a resident bird of the Western Himalayas. Of the nine subspecies identified across the world, four are found in the states of Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh in India. The male subspecies – meyeri – had not been recorded outside China and Tibet. The bird bears a distinctive golden ring and its emerald green head distinguishes it from the female. While the bird has been declared extinct in Tibet now, the golden collar is not seen in the other subspecies found in India.

### The lucky shot

On November 22, 2020, Dasgupta got lucky enough to get a clear shot of the bird. "It is not one of my best photographs," he says, "because the bird was perched on a pine tree 500 metres away. Not only was the distance long, there was no place to fix the tripod either."

He then climbed down a steep valley to reduce the distance between him and the rare catch by 200 metres. Hiding behind the trees, he finally found a narrow gap between him and the bird and clicked with his Canon 1D X Mark II held in hand. "Initially, the bird stayed put, oblivious of my presence. When I tried to get closer, I



## The surprise visitor in Walong

The rare subspecies of the male Koklass pheasant has been photographed for the first time in India

### Rare sightings in the Northeast

■ Of the 1,293 species, over 900 are found in the Northeast parts of the country

■ The beautiful and rare Mandarin duck showed up after a century in Assam's Maguri Motapung wetland in February this year and was also spotted a week later at Siikhe lake, Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh

■ In January 2021, the rarely seen Indian golden oriole was spotted in Assam

■ A pair of black-necked cranes were also sighted on the outskirts of the Panbari range of Manas National Park, for the first time in Assam



stepped on a twig, accidentally. With that soft crackling sound, the bird flew away immediately," he recalls.

Binanda Hatiborah, a well known birding guide from the Northeast who has been taking birders to Walong since 2011, is the happiest. "I go into the Walong forests at least six times a year but had never seen this bird. On this trek,

when I heard the prolonged 'keek-keek-kok-kok' throaty territorial call of the Koklass pheasant, I told Dasgupta to quickly take a photo," he says over a phone call from Assam. "And he gave us a lifer in the year of pandemic and lockdown!"

"While reviewing the images, we noticed the golden ring near the bird's neck, which was not there in my earlier images of Koklass pheasant."

**Rare documentation** (Top) photo of the rare male subspecies of the Koklass pheasant called the *Pucrasia macrolopha meyeri* taken by wildlife photographer Rajeev Dasgupta and below he is seen with birding guide Binanda Hatiborah in Walong ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## Garden in a dish

Jeffery Vardon's kusamono, kokedama and terrariums can make any room greener

SUSAN JOE PHILIP

Jeffery learnt about kusamono online. "I saw a photograph and tried to recreate it, and it came out well. Traditionally, kusamono is set in a ceramic bowl. But I have upcycled old pans in my house for it. I make soil with high water retention capacity to grow the plants, using coco peat, vermicompost, etc. It is very easy to maintain. All you have to do is spray it with water when the top soil dries up," he explains.

Along with kusamono, he has been experimenting with kokedama and terrariums. Kokedama is another ancient Japanese practice



**Green thumb** Jeffery with a kusamono ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

– it involves planting an ornamental plant in a mud ball. The ball can be covered by moss or rope. "It is gaining popularity in our country now," says Jeffery, who has also started a YouTube channel, DIY With Jeff, where he talks about the basics of gardening.

## Laughter challenger

Out on bail, stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui is dusting himself off and moving on, strengthened by poetry and rap music

NAHLA NAINAR

The year began on a serious note for stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui, when he was arrested for allegedly offending religious sensibilities, along with five others, just before he was about to begin his act at a cafe in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. Munawar spent 37 days in jail until the Supreme Court granted him interim bail on February 5.

While the comedian in him does see the absurdity in the situation, the 27-year-old YouTube sensation is astute enough to not discuss the matter further as it is sub-

"I don't want to revisit this experience ever again in my life," he says over a video call from Mumbai. Munawar got back to work barely a fortnight after his ordeal, releasing a music video titled *Aazmaish* featuring rapper Nazz, which earned over

million views online.

"Quitting comedy was never an option, mainly because I didn't want to prove my detractors right," says Munawar, who has been on the comedy scene only since January 2020. In April, he started a new YouTube channel called Munawar Faruqui 2.0 that already has over 50,000 subscribers. (His first official channel has over 10,80,000 subscribers with

57,594,259 views for his monthly video releases).

It is hard to believe that Munawar has been on the comedy scene only since January 2020. His sidelong look at society and politics is sharp and funny, with unexpected depth. "Comedy is essentially saying what you feel, especially about things that you see daily," he says.

"Sometimes a joke can highlight a major truth." When he is

not penning his biting satirical comedy routines, Munawar indulges in his other passions: Urdu poetry and rap music.

"Music is the world's best art form. A song can convey in minutes, what a story can take four hours to narrate," he says. A resident of Dongri in Mumbai, the comedian is originally from Junagadh in Gujarat. After a tumultuous time in their hometown, his father, a driver, shifted the family (Munawar and his three sisters) to Mumbai in 2007, to make a fresh start.

"My father fell sick and was bedridden from 2008, so I had to take charge from the age of 17. I worked at a utensil store from 2007, while attending school. I taught myself English and Hindi from the newspapers that my boss used to buy, and by watching films," he says. "Last year has been testing. I lost my father in February and around the same time got my first ticketed shows in Mumbai, that opened to rave reviews."

"There were days I cried in the green room just before being called to the stage."



**Marching ahead** Comedy apart, Munawar Faruqui indulges in Urdu poetry ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

### Dense forests

■ At Mayodia pass, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajeev Dasgupta spent six days and photographed the elusive Himalayan Wood Owl and even rarer Scaler's Monal. En route Walong, he also photographed birds like the White-hooded Babbler, Pale-billed Parrot Bill, Coral-billed and red-billed Scimitar Babbler. Anupam Nahardeka and Ashutosh Nahardeka were the other two birding guides from the Northeast in the team that went on a 15-day expedition across forests of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh from November 14, 2020

sant taken in Uttarakhand. I checked with ornithologist Neerav Bhatt, and Pravin Jayadevan, the editor of *Indian Birds*, who confirmed this was indeed the rare male subspecies," says Dasgupta.

### Rare recording

Dasgupta is now writing a paper on his experience of sighting the rare subspecies and hopes to get it published in *Indian Birds* or the *Bombay Natural History Society Journal*.

Delhi-based ornithologist Sarwandeep Singh says though people know about the existence of Koklass pheasant, since the subspecies has not been mentioned in popular literature and guides for lack of evidence, Dasgupta's photographic documentation is a rare record.

He says Koklass pheasants are not known for migration and are essentially residential birds of mid-altitude dense forests in the Himalayas. The easternmost town in India, Walong is roughly 20 km south of the China border, so there is a possibility that the birds may have flown as part of general shift in their geographical location. It can be assumed that the subspecies may be residing in Walong's terrain but not spotted as hunting is rampant in that area. "You have to be lucky to photograph the shy bird in dense foliage and from that distance," he says.

**Rare documentation** (Top) photo of the rare male subspecies of the Koklass pheasant called the *Pucrasia macrolopha meyeri* taken by wildlife photographer Rajeev Dasgupta and below he is seen with birding guide Binanda Hatiborah in Walong ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ELSEWHERE



Pandemic pushes 100 mn more into poverty: UN

GENEVA

The pandemic has pushed over 100 million more workers into poverty, the UN said, after working hours plummeted and access to good quality jobs evaporated. The UN's International Labour Organization cautioned that the labour market crisis was far from over, with employment not expected to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels until 2023 at the earliest. AFP

Russia House adopts Bill to bar critics from polls

MOSCOW

Russia's Upper House on Wednesday backed legislation expected to be used to ban allies of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny from running in elections. The Bill would make it impossible to run in parliamentary elections for leaders, sponsors and rank-and-file members of "extremist" groups. AFP

China's Guangdong tightens COVID-19 curbs

BEIJING

Cities in China's most populous province of Guangdong have locked down compounds and streets and required negative COVID-19 test results for travellers as local health officials sought to control fresh outbreaks. All 10 of China's locally confirmed mainland cases for June 1 were in Guangdong. REUTERS

U.S. halts oil drilling in Alaska wildlife refuge

WASHINGTON

The Biden administration has said it was halting petroleum development activity in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, reversing a move by former President Donald Trump to allow drilling. The Interior Department said it was notifying firms of the freeze, pending an environmental review. AFP

# China, Pakistan, Afghanistan to hold talks amid U.S. withdrawal

The trilateral dialogue will address the 'new uncertainties' in Afghanistan

ANANTH KRISHNAN



Conflict continues: Members of Afghan security forces taking positions during a clash with the Taliban in Mazar-e-Sharif. ■ AFP

China on Thursday will chair a meeting with the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan and Pakistan, as Beijing looks to step up its engagement with both Kabul and Islamabad amid the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

China's Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday the fourth meeting between the three countries' Foreign Ministers will be held via video link and would be chaired by China.

The trilateral dialogue, started by China, would address "new uncertainties" in the wake of "the unilateral withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces at a critical stage" of the reconciliation process, the Ministry said.

The U.S. Central Command said this week bet-

ween 30-44% of the withdrawal of troops had been completed, with President Joe Biden announcing in April a complete withdrawal by September 11 this year.

The three countries' Vice Foreign Ministers, at a virtual dialogue in July, had "urged for an orderly, responsible and conditioned withdrawal".

Afghanistan's Ambassador to China, Javid Qaem, was quoted as telling Chinese media this week that China's "good relations with both Afghanistan and Pakistan" could see Beijing playing "a critical role in building trust between these two neighbouring countries".

The Afghan envoy "appreciated China's offer to facilitate Afghan peace talks in the future," the official Xin-

hua news agency quoted him as saying, noting that Foreign Minister Wang Yi had in May 17 phone call with Afghan National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib offered "to facilitate internal negotiations among various parties in Afghanistan, including creating necessary conditions for negotiations in China."

He also called on India and China to work together despite their other bilateral problems. "Afghanistan being a stable country is in favour of countries such as the U.S., China and India," the Communist Party-run *Global Times* quoted him as saying. "It is more important how we and Pakistan can build trust and how China and India can build trust regarding Afghanistan regardless of other issues."

# Remembering the Tulsa race massacre 100 years later

Hundreds were killed in Tulsa by racist mobs in 1921

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN



Hate crime: This June 1921 photo shows smoke billowing from buildings set on fire in Greenwood, Tulsa. ■ AFP

hoods burned down by the rampaging mob.

Covering up tracks

What followed was in a sense even worse – survivors, gripped by fear of reprisals and unable to speak out about the violence they had faced, and losses suffered, had to contend with an elaborate attempt to cover up the massacre and protect the perpetrators.

In 1921, it was the affluent, predominantly African American neighbourhood of Greenwood, Tulsa, founded by descendants of slaves and having earned a reputation as the "Black Wall Street" of the U.S., that faced the carnage unleashed on May 31 and June 1.

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## MARKET WATCH

|           | 02-06-2021 | % CHANGE |
|-----------|------------|----------|
| Sensex    | 51849      | -0.16    |
| US Dollar | 73.09      | -0.26    |
| Gold      | 48772      | -0.24    |
| Brent oil | 70.98      | -0.01    |

## NIFTY 50

|                   | PRICE    | CHANGE |
|-------------------|----------|--------|
| Adani Ports       | 811.50   | 13.30  |
| Asian Paints      | 2903.70  | -27.30 |
| Axia Bank         | 737.00   | -8.15  |
| Bajaj Auto        | 4295.05  | 56.10  |
| Bajaj Finance     | 11823.60 | -6.30  |
| Bharti Airtel     | 529.50   | -3.40  |
| BPCL              | 474.65   | 3.80   |
| Britannia Ind     | 3475.25  | 28.50  |
| Cipla             | 954.70   | 8.25   |
| Coal India        | 149.10   | 1.50   |
| Divis Lab         | 4214.25  | -5.85  |
| Dr Reddys Lab     | 5312.35  | -4.15  |
| Eicher Motors     | 2677.75  | 11.95  |
| Gasim Ind         | 1442.25  | -2.30  |
| HCL Tech          | 943.75   | -6.95  |
| HDPC              | 2562.15  | -18.60 |
| HDFC Bank         | 1504.00  | -7.70  |
| HDFC Life         | 675.90   | 10.65  |
| Hero MotoCorp     | 2972.60  | -4.15  |
| Hindalco          | 398.80   | 4.10   |
| Hind Unilever     | 2358.80  | 0.50   |
| ICICI Bank        | 648.35   | -1.75  |
| IndusInd Bank     | 1028.00  | 17.95  |
| Infosys           | 1378.65  | -8.55  |
| Indian Oil Corp   | 110.85   | 0.95   |
| ITC               | 209.00   | -6.25  |
| JSW Steel         | 706.05   | 11.55  |
| Kotak Bank        | 1783.10  | -13.90 |
| L&T               | 1471.05  | -3.60  |
| M&M               | 806.20   | -0.10  |
| Maruti Suzuki     | 7184.70  | 93.55  |
| Nestle India Ltd. | 17653.50 | -10.00 |
| NTPC              | 111.15   | 0.95   |
| ONGC              | 117.75   | 0.15   |
| PowerGrid Corp    | 227.45   | 3.05   |
| Reliance Ind      | 2201.25  | 32.35  |
| SBI Life          | 984.40   | 18.10  |
| State Bank        | 437.25   | 4.70   |
| Shree Cement      | 27893.90 | 270.75 |
| Sun Pharma        | 677.45   | 6.40   |
| Tata Consumer     | 673.55   | 7.75   |
| Tata Motors       | 323.00   | 4.90   |
| Tata Steel        | 1124.05  | 23.15  |
| TCS               | 3129.45  | -23.55 |
| Tech Mahindra     | 1016.95  | -13.55 |
| Titan             | 1585.70  | -5.70  |
| UltraTech Cement  | 6594.20  | -7.15  |
| UPL               | 837.60   | 21.80  |
| Wipro             | 543.00   | 0.20   |

## EXCHANGE RATES

| CURRENCY           | TT BUY | TT SELL |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| US Dollar          | 72.89  | 73.21   |
| Euro               | 88.67  | 89.06   |
| British Pound      | 102.90 | 103.36  |
| Japanese Yen (100) | 66.32  | 66.63   |
| Chinese Yuan       | 11.41  | 11.46   |
| Swiss Franc        | 80.76  | 81.12   |
| Singapore Dollar   | 55.02  | 55.27   |
| Canadian Dollar    | 60.29  | 60.55   |
| Malaysian Ringgit  | 17.67  | 17.76   |

Source: Indian Bank

## 'Raise ethanol blending in surplus States'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
COIMBATORE

The Indian Sugar Mills' Association (ISMA) has said that to achieve the target of 8-8.5% ethanol blending, it is important to increase the blending level to at least 12% in surplus States and adjoining ones.

In a release, the association said on the ethanol front, against the total Letter of Intent quantity of 346.52 crore litres, 321.18 crore litres were contracted for and 145.38 crore litres of ethanol were supplied, as on May 24, 2021. On an average, in the current ethanol supply year (December 2020 to November 2020), the blending percentage is 7.56%, it said.

Meanwhile, oil companies have floated expressions of interest (EOI), inviting bids from producers for another 26 crore litres of ethanol for supply till November 30, ISMA said.

## Exports surge 67% narrowing trade gap

Deficit narrowed to an eight-month low in May helped by a reduction in gold, oil imports

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India exported merchandise worth \$32.21 billion in May 2021, 67% higher on a year-on-year basis and almost 8% more than May 2019's pre-pandemic shipments.

The country's merchandise trade deficit shrank to an eight-month low. Imports grew 68.6% to \$38.53 billion, compared with May 2020, but were 17.5% lower than the same month in 2019.

Major sectors that saw a spurt in exports in May, compared with the pre-COVID times, included cereals, iron ore, cotton yarn and handloom products, jute, rice and ceramics. However, leather, tea, readymade garments, oil seeds, handicrafts and gems and jewellery, saw a significant dip over the



Stable trend: Non-oil, non-gold imports remained largely steady over April and May, says ICRAs Nayar. ■ REUTERS

same period.

The Federation of Indian Exporters' Organisation (FIEO) chief Sharad Kumar Saraf said that 19 out of 30 major product groups had recorded impressive growth

over May 2020, and that the gradual opening up of major global markets was bolstering orders.

ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar attributed the contraction in the trade deficit

to \$6.3 billion in May from \$15.1 billion in April to the State-level restrictions that widened over May and curbed domestic demand for both gold and oil.

A predominant 63% of the decline in the trade deficit in May 2021 relative to April 2021 was on account of the collapse in gold imports, with the balance led by a narrower oil deficit, led both by higher exports and lower imports," she said, adding that exports had displayed a mixed trend.

## Rise in oil exports

"There is a sharp sequential rise in oil exports, even as non-oil exports dipped for the second consecutive month to \$26.9 billion in May from \$31 billion in March. Importantly, non-oil, non-

gold imports remained largely steady over April and May. To an extent, rising global commodity prices would have masked a dip in domestic demand," she said.

"The need of the hour is to soon notify the RoDTEP [Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products] rates to remove uncertainty and help expedite new contracts with foreign buyers," said Mr. Saraf. "The government must address... key issues including priority status to exports sector," he added.

Engineering Exports Promotion Council president Mahesh Desai said the release of assured duty refunds would provide a major push to the sector which recorded a 53% growth in May over last year and 16% over May 2019 levels.

## Brazil economy expands 1.2%, returns to pre-pandemic size

Record tax collection, job growth spur upward revisions

## REUTERS

BRASILIA

Brazil's economy expanded by 1.2% in the first quarter, from three months earlier, data showed on Tuesday, as rebounding services and investments took Latin America's largest economy to its pre-pandemic size at the end of 2019.

It was the third consecutive quarter of growth, and although the rebound has slowed, some underlying figures suggest stronger foundations for a continued recovery this year.

"This makes the outlook for the coming quarters very positive," said Jason Vieira, chief economist at Infinity



Asset Management in Sao Paulo, calling the data "a really good set of numbers, especially fixed business investment."

Brazil's first-quarter growth was driven by services, industry and fixed business investment and agriculture grew by 5.7%, its fastest pace in four years.

A clutch of upbeat indicators recently, including record tax collection and formal job growth, has triggered a wave of upward revisions to economists' full-year GDP growth forecasts.

## U.S. sets, stays tariff on 6 nations for digital taxes

India, U.K. among countries targeted

## REUTERS

WASHINGTON

The United States on Wednesday announced 25% tariffs on over \$2 billion worth of imports from six nations over their digital services taxes, but immediately suspended the duties to allow time for international tax negotiations to continue.

The U.S. Trade Representative's office said it had approved the threatened tariffs on goods from Britain, Italy, Spain, Turkey, India and Austria after a "Section 301" investigation concluded that their digital taxes discriminated against U.S. companies.

USTR said it would impose 25% tariffs on a range of goods from the six countries including \$118 million worth from India.

The tariffs aim to equal the amount of digital taxes that would be collected from U.S. firms

tries including \$118 million worth from India.

The potential tariffs aim to equal the amount of digital taxes that would be collected from U.S. firms, a USTR official said.

The move underscores the U.S. threat of retaliation as finance leaders from G7 countries prepare to meet in London on Friday and Saturday to discuss the state of tax negotiations, including taxation of large technology companies and a U.S. proposal for a global minimum corporate tax.

## Favour tech transfer for vaccines, says Nasscom

'Support IPR but situation is unique'

## YUTHIKA BHARGAVA

NEW DELHI

Given the extraordinary situation due to the global pandemic, the National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom) is in favour of transfer of technology for COVID-19 vaccines, its newly elected chairperson Rekha M. Menon said.

"We strongly support IPR [Intellectual Property Rights] protection. Yet, considering this extraordinary situation where the world needs to come together to fight a global pandemic, and India's position as the largest manufacturer of vaccines, we welcome the transfer of technology," said Ms. Menon, the first woman to chair the industry group.

With the pandemic still raging in India and other parts of the world there is a debate over whether COVID-19 vaccines should be exempted from IPR protections to address shortages and disparity-related issues.

## 'Humanitarian crisis'

On the impact of the COVID-19 second wave on the information technology (IT) sector, Ms. Menon said while the first wave of the pandemic had been more of a business continuity planning crisis for companies, the second wave had turned out to be a humanitarian crisis for the industry.

"We recently conducted a survey of technology companies, where most organisations reported a 2-3% impact on workforce, but they also reported zero to minimal productivity and business impact with the industry continuing to witness a robust deal and demand pipeline," she said.

Ms. Menon, who is also senior MD and chairperson,



Accenture in India, said scale was one of the biggest challenges in the vaccination efforts for India, and a public-private partnership was needed to overcome it.

"We had asked the government to allow the import of WHO-approved vaccines and have also offered to work with manufacturers directly to support them with supply chain issues. We are also collaborating with other associations such as CII to procure WHO-recognised vaccines," she said, adding that the industry was committed to getting its more than 40 lakh employees and their families vaccinated.

The IT association, which recently wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging a temporary relaxation of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) norms, has also sought a comprehensive data utilisation strategy with a focus on quality, access, responsible usage, and security.

"We also recommend [that] States learn from proven models and set up processes and resources to monitor data around vaccination, supply of emergency medical equipment, hospital beds and testing, among others, to ensure proactive planning for future calamities," the Nasscom chairperson said.

## FICCI urges graded tack to unlock economy

'Surveillance testing must continue'

## PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

With the number of coronavirus infections declining in the country, industry chamber FICCI has urged the government to follow a graded approach in unlocking economic activities.

It said any unit that is able to create an isolation bubble should be allowed to operate at all times even if it does not qualify as essential.

The chamber said the ferocity of the second wave highlighted that waiting too long to impose restrictions can result in a surge of cases thus putting immense strain on medical infrastructure.

Learning from the first and second coronavirus waves, FICCI suggests a graded approach to permissible economic activity which balances lives and livelihoods", it said in a letter to Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.

It said that there should be surveillance testing on a continuous basis, even if the number of cases come down sharply. It added that units that have vaccinated at least 60% of the workforce with a single dose can be exempted from restrictions.

## Jewellers seek extension of moratorium

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) has urged the Finance Minister (FM) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to provide immediate financial assistance and banking related relief for the stressed gem and jewelry sector and allied businesses.

In a letter, the GJC cited the K.V. Kamath Committee report which had included the gem and jewelry sector among 'stressed industries'. Since several jewellers affected by the spate of lockdowns were finding it difficult to repay loans, the GJC sought extension of the moratorium on interest payments for a period of six months.

# WTC final will be fought on 'equal terms': Kohli



Ultimate goal: Shastri and Kohli will be keen to make the WTC final memorable. ■ FILE PHOTO

Coach Shastri calls it 'biggest ever' occasion, bats for best-of-three decider in future editions

## CRICKET

AMOL KARHADKAR  
MUMBAI

The conditions early in the English summer could suit New Zealand better than India in the inaugural World Test Championship final. And with the benefit of having played a two-Test series in England ahead of the big clash, New Zealand could well be the better-prepared side. But India captain Virat Kohli has stressed that the WTC final will be a clash of equals.

"Things are as potent for New Zealand as they are for us. Australian conditions should have favoured Australia but we beat them twice in two series," Kohli said on Wednesday in a virtual interaction with the Indian media ahead of the squad's departure to England.

"If you want us to board the flight from here feeling like New Zealand has got the edge, then there's no point

taking that flight. We're going to board that flight knowing that we're on equal terms and whichever team performs well session by session, hour by hour, is going to win that championship."

Kohli also disagreed that India would be less prepared than New Zealand.

### No issues

"In the past we have landed even three days prior, even in proper schedules, and have had a hell of a series," he said. "It is not the first time you are playing in England, we all know what the conditions are like. We don't have any issues heading into the game. We are absolutely sure of what we can do as a team."

With India having topped the complicated league stage on route to the final and multiple Test specialists equating the WTC final to a World Cup final, head coach Ravi Shastri summed up the occasion.

"It is the first time that

there is a WTC final and when you look at that and the magnitude of the game that is going to be played, I think this is the biggest ever [moment]," Shastri said.

### Toughest form

"It is the toughest form of the game. It is not that it has happened over three days or three months, it has happened over two years where the teams have played each other around the world and earned their stripes to play the final. It is one heck of an event."

While Kohli said that the final "holds a lot of value" to the squad since Indian cricket has progressed "in the last five-six-seven years", Shastri hoped that in the future the WTC final would be contested over three Tests.

"Ideally, in the long run, if they want to pursue this WTC, a best-of-three final would be ideal, as a culmination of a two-and-a-half-year cycle," Shastri said.

"At the moment it is happening because of the current situation and restrictions on travel. But you never know in future... if you want to expand the game in the shorter formats, it could be the way to go," Shastri said ahead of the team's departure to England.

"If you want to have that kind of volume of cricket... If you are talking about Olympics in four or eight years' time, then you need more countries to play the game."

Kohli added that the mental toll of life in a biosecure bubble could also contribute to the trend.

"It's very difficult for players to stay motivated for long periods of time and find the right kind of mental space," he said. "Just confined in one area and just doing the stuff day in, day out, and dealing with high-pressure situations... so, this will definitely become a norm where apart from the workloads, I think the mental health side of things will also come into picture big

## India's tour of UK

### THE SCHEDULE

#### WORLD TEST CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

June 18-22: India vs. New Zealand, Southampton, 3 p.m.

#### INDIA VS. ENGLAND

##### TESTS

August 4-8: Nottingham, 3.30 p.m.

August 12-16: Lord's, 3.30 p.m.

August 25-29: Leeds, 3.30 p.m.

September 2-6: The Oval, 3.30 p.m.

September 10-14: Manchester, 3.30 p.m.

All times IST

time because you don't have an outlet at all in today's day and age."

Kohli said that the team management is trying its best to help players deal with the COVID-19 protocols.

"As much hard work as we have done to create this team, you don't want players falling out because of the mental pressures and not having the capacity or space to express themselves," he said.

"That channel has to be always open – the management has left it open – for the players to approach them and tell them: 'Look, I am not feeling right in the head. I just need a little break and I just want to disconnect from the game.' That's going to be a huge factor and I am sure Ravi bhai and the management feels the same."

Shastri hinted that a rotation policy is likely to be adopted in the series against England, considering the mental health aspect and the challenges of "playing five Tests in six weeks".

'Multiple national teams could be the way to go'

Shastri, Kohli say expansion of game, mental health challenges may force issue

AMOL KARHADKAR  
MUMBAI

Head coach Ravi Shastri and captain Virat Kohli said that countries may increasingly be forced to field different teams at the same time, if international fixtures across formats begin to overlap.

India is faced with such a situation – with the Test squad engaged in England, a separate group of white-ball cricketers will tour Sri Lanka for ODIs and T20Is in July.

"At the moment it is happening because of the current situation and restrictions on travel. But you never know in future... if you want to expand the game in the shorter formats, it could be the way to go," Shastri said ahead of the team's departure to England.

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# Conway makes dream debut with century at Lord's

His partnership with Nicholls gives Kiwis the upper hand

## NZ IN ENG

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
LONDON

Devon Conway became just the sixth player to hit a Test century on debut at Lord's, with the left-handed opener brilliantly anchoring New Zealand to 246 for three against England on day one of the first match of the series on Wednesday.

The 29-year-old was unbeaten on 136 to maintain the stunning start to his international career in all formats.

Just before stumps, Conway ran for three to surpass Ganguly's 131, which stood as the highest ever score by a

### Hundred on debut at Lord's

- Harry Graham 107 (Aus vs Eng, 1893)
- John Hampshire 107 (Eng vs WI, 1969)
- Sourav Ganguly 131 (Ind vs Eng, 1996)
- Andrew Strauss 112 (Eng vs NZ, 2004)
- Matt Prior 126 n.o. (Eng vs WI, 2007)
- Devon Conway 136 batting (NZ vs Eng, 2021)

debutant at Lord's. He is the 11th New Zealand Test debutant to reach three figures. Henry Nicholls closed the

## SCOREBOARD

New Zealand – 1st innings: T. Latham b Robinson 23, D. Conway (batting) 136, K. Williamson b Anderson 13, R. Taylor lbw b Robinson 14, H. Nicholls (batting) 46; Extras (b- 6, lb-7, nb-1); 14; Total (for three wkts. in 86 overs): 246.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-58, 2-86, 3-114.

**England bowling:** 20-5-55-1, Broad 20-5-42-0, Robinson 16-4-50-2, Wood 18-6-49-0, Root 12-1-37-0.

**Toss:** New Zealand.

day on 46 not out and was sharing an unbeaten fourth-wicket stand of 132 with Conway, after skipper Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor had fallen cheaply.



Sparkler: Conway began his Test journey with a bang. ■ AFP

### Who is Devon Conway?

- Age: 29; Born: Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa
- Major teams: New Zealand, Dolphins, Gauteng
- ODI debut: vs Bangladesh, Dunedin, 2021
- Matches: 3; Runs: 225; HS: 126 (vs Bangladesh, Wellington, 2021); Avg.: 75.00; Strike rate: 88.23
- T20I debut: vs West Indies, Auckland, 2020
- Matches: 14; Inns: 11; Runs 473; HS: 99 n.o. (vs Australia, Christchurch, 2021); Avg.: 59.12; Strike rate: 151.17
- First Class: Debut: Gauteng vs Easterns, Johannesburg, 2009

# Zverev cruises into the third round

Laaksonen stuns Agut; Nishikori outlasts Khachanov in five-setter

## ROLAND GARROS

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
PARIS

Down 4-1 in the third set, Alexander Zverev decided it was time to shorten his match at Roland Garros.

He was determined to avoid another lengthy fight following a five-set battle in the previous round, so he applied pressure on qualifier Roman Safiullin.

The sixth-seeded German won the next game at love, broke back by pushing his rival into unforced errors and was nearly flawless in the tiebreaker.

The reward was a 7-6(4), 6-3, 7-6(1) victory to advance into the third round at the French Open.

### Fighting spirit

Zverev, facing a rival he has known since their days in the boys' categories, dropped his serve three times on Court Suzanne Lenglen but managed to catch up with Safiullin with his fighting spirit.

It wasn't smooth – he hit 10 double faults and challenged several calls – but he kept his cool when it mattered. For the third straight year, Stefanos Tsitsipas will be playing in the third round at Roland Garros following another straight-set win Wednesday.

The fifth-seeded Greek player excelled at the net and saved 11 break points to defeat solid baseliner Pedro Martinez of Spain 6-3, 6-4, 6-3.

Kei Nishikori needed five sets again to win at the French Open.

The former U.S. Open finalist rallied past 23rd-seeded Karen Khachanov 4-6, 6-2, 6-4, 6-4.

Nishikori next faces Swiss qualifier Henri Laaksonen, who upset 11th-seeded Roberto Bautista Agut 6-3, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 for his first victory

### The highlights



1 The loss to Henri Laaksonen is the first for Bautista Agut against a player ranked 150 or above at a Grand Slam since 2013

1 First time since 2015 Azarenka is into the third round at Roland Garros

23 Number of aces fired by Isner in his straight-sets victory over Krajnovic

26 Nishikori has won 26 of 33 five-set matches he has played in his career

### THURSDAY'S PICKS

- MEN:** 1-Djokovic vs Cuevas  
8-Federer vs Cilic  
3-Nadal vs Gasquet (night session)  
**DOUBLES:** Bopanna-Skugor vs Monroe-Tiafoe  
**WOMEN:** 1-Barty vs Linette  
8-Swiatek vs Peterson  
9-Pliskova vs Stephens

I don't have time anymore for TikTok and making videos. Maybe off-season. I hope I will not have this time here

FORMER FRENCH OPEN QUARTERFINALIST KASATKINA, WHO IS INTO THE THIRD ROUND OF A MAJOR FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE WIMBLEDON 2018

I'm happy not to have played another five-setter. It's going to be important for me during the course of this tournament. I'm looking forward to the next match

ZVEREV, AFTER HIS STRAIGHT-SETS VICTORY ON WEDNESDAY

### Fallen seeds

- Men: 11-Bautista-Agut, 23-Khachanov
- Women: 10-Bencic, 29-Kudermetova

against a top-20 player.

### IMPORTANT RESULTS

**Second round: Men:** 5-Stefanos Tsitsipas (Gre) bt Pedro Martínez (Esp) 6-3, 6-4, 6-3; 6-Alexander Zverev (Ger) bt Roman Safiullin (Rus) 7-6(4), 6-3, 7-6(1); Henri Laaksonen (Sui) bt 11-Roberto Bautista Agut (Esp) 6-3, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2; 15-Casper Ruud (Nor) bt Kamil Majchrzak (Pol) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4, 27-Fabio Fognini (Ita) bt Marton Fucsovics (Hung) 7-6(6), 6-1, 6-2; 2-Federico Delbonis (Arg) bt Pablo Andújar (Esp) 4-6, 6-1, 3-6, 6-3, 6-1; 31-John Isner (USA) bt Filip Krajinovic (Srb) 7-6(6), 6-1, 7-6(5); Kei Nishikori (Jpn) bt 23-Karen Khachanov (Rus) 4-6, 6-2, 6-2, 6-4, 6-4.

**Women:** 15-Victoria Azarenka (Blr) bt Clara Tauson (Den) 7-5, 6-4; 16-Katerina Siniakova (Cze) bt 29-Veronica Kudermetova (Rus) 7-6(7), 5-7, 7-5; Daria Gavrilova (AUS) bt Carla Suarez Navarro (Esp) 3-6, 7-6(4), 6-4.

ship of Venus Williams and Coco Gauff didn't go very far at the French Open.

The 40-year-old Williams and 17-year-old Gauff lost to 13th-seeded Ellen Perez and Zheng Saisai 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-3 in the first round.

### TUESDAY'S RESULTS:

**First round: Men:** 1-Novak Djokovic (Srb) bt Tennys Sandgren (USA) 6-2, 6-4, 6-2; 9-Matteo Berrettini (Ita) bt Taro Daniel (Jpn) 6-0, 6-4, 4-6, 6-4; 10-Diego Schwartzman (Arg) bt Lu Yen-Hsun (Tpe) 6-2, 6-2, 6-3; Kwon Soon Woo (kor) bt Kevin Anderson (RSA) 7-5, 6-4, 2-6, 7-6(4); Sloane Stephens (USA) bt Carla Suarez Navarro (Esp) 6-3, 7-6(4), 6-4.

**Women:** 24-Coco Gauff (USA) bt Aleksandra Krunic (Srb) 7-6 (11), 6-4; Sloane Stephens (USA) bt Carla Suarez Navarro (Esp) 6-3, 7-6(4), 6-4.

**Men:** 15-Victoria Azarenka (Blr) bt Clara Tauson (Den) 7-5, 6-4; 16-Katerina Siniakova (Cze) bt 29-Veronica Kudermetova (Rus) 7-6(7), 5-7, 7-5;

## TV PICKS

**Roland-Garros:** SS Select 1 & 2 (SD & HD), 2.30 p.m.  
**England vs New Zealand:** 1st Test: Sony Six (SD & HD), 3.30 p.m.  
**FIFA WC 2022 Qualifier:** India vs Qatar, Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Star Sports 3, 10.30 p.m.

## IN BRIEF



**Barcelona recalls Emerson**

MADRID  
Barcelona has recalled the Brazilian defender Emerson from his loan at Real Betis, adding to two new signings in the close season. The 22-year-old Emerson joins centre-back Eric Garcia and forward Sergio Aguero, who both switched to Barcelona from Manchester City. He originally left Brazil's Atletico Mineiro for Barcelona two seasons ago but was farmed out as a future prospect to Betis, with whom he enjoyed a run to sixth last season. AFP



**Tillakaratne is SL women's team's head coach**

COLONBO  
Former Sri Lanka skipper Hashan Tillakaratne has been appointed as the country's women's cricket team head coach. He took up the role officially on June 1 and will be contracted upto December 2021. His first job will be to prepare the team for the 2022 ODI World Cup and Commonwealth Games qualifiers scheduled for early next year reported ESPNcricinfo. ANI

**Aussie players to help in India's COVID-19 relief**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
SYDNEY  
Top Australian cricketers including star pacer Pat Cummins will participate in a 12-hour gaming live stream on Thursday to raise money for UNICEF Australia's India COVID Appeal.

The brainchild of pacer Josh Lalon, the initiative will let fans watch the likes of Cummins, spinner Nathan Lyon and the pace duo of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood on a live stream when they talk about cricket and showcase their gaming skills in a bid to raise AU\$ 100,000.

The fundraiser will begin at 1:30 pm IST and will also see participation from all-rounder Moises Henriques, women cricketer Alyssa Healy and South African Rilee Rossouw among others.

**Unique relationship**  
"Being a cricketer from Australia, we have a unique relationship with Indian people," Lalon told *cricket.com.au*. It's a beautiful part of the world, they're absolutely cricket mad and they bend over backwards to make every cricketer feel welcomed and accommodated. If we're able to raise any money at all to help what's going on in India, that'll go a long way," he added.

Cricket Australia's new CEO, Nick Hockley and Todd Greenberg, the CEO of the Australian Cricketers' Association will also make an appearance.

"I thought it'd be great for those guys (Hockley and Greenberg) to sit back and talk cricket with the public," Lalon said. The live-stream will be available on Lalon's Twitch page.

Australian Cricket has so far raised more than AU\$ 280,000 as part of UNICEF Australia's India COVID-19 Crisis Appeal.

## No burden of expectations

Fouaad Mirza says the focus is on keeping the horses fit and in good form

## EQUESTRIAN

**RAKESH RAO**  
NEW DELHI

Given India's forgettable track record in Eventing in the 1996 and 2000 Olympics, twice Asian Games silver medalist Fouad Mirza has no burden of expectations when he arrives in Tokyo for the Games.

After over two decades, India will be represented in the Olympics Eventing arena when Mirza along with his two qualified mounts – Seigneur Medicott and Dajara 4 – starts his campaign.

Last week, in the Baborowko Equestrian Festival in Poland, Mirza completed the Minimum Eligibility Requirement (MER) to clear his passage to Tokyo. Having sealed the Olympic quota place in November, 2019, Mirza has now met all stipulations.

What will be factors for Mirza to consider when choosing his mount in Tokyo? "I will be looking at many factors. Medicott is more experienced. He was out of injury for two years. A fight-



**Poetry in motion:** Fouad Mirza and his steed in action at the Baborowko Equestrian Festival in Poland. • INSTAGRAM/FOUAADMIRZA

er, he is back and really wants to compete. We have managed to help him back to form.

"Dajara is less experienced but has far more potential. A very exciting horse for the future."

**Change in surroundings**  
"Medicott does not take well to his change in surround-

ings. He stops eating. He is like any athlete. You cannot have an athlete not eat and perform well. Now the focus is on keeping the horses fit and in good form.

"We will have to think hard about different ways of managing these horses. I will pick the horse that is in the best shape."

As per Mirza's estimate,

around ₹2 crore was spent in the past two years on his preparation for Tokyo.

Surprisingly, in spite of booking the Olympic quota place in 2019, Mirza was inducted into TOPS in April this year.

Thereafter, he gained an entitlement of ₹50,000 per month as out of pocket expenses.

## 'I will miss you at the Olympics'

Sindhu sends friend and rival Marin a get-well message

## BADMINTON

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

Star Indian shuttler P.V. Sindhu on Wednesday wished Spain's Carolina Marin a speedy recovery, after the latter was forced out of the Tokyo Games due to a freak knee injury, and said she will miss the reigning Olympic champion at the quadrennial event.

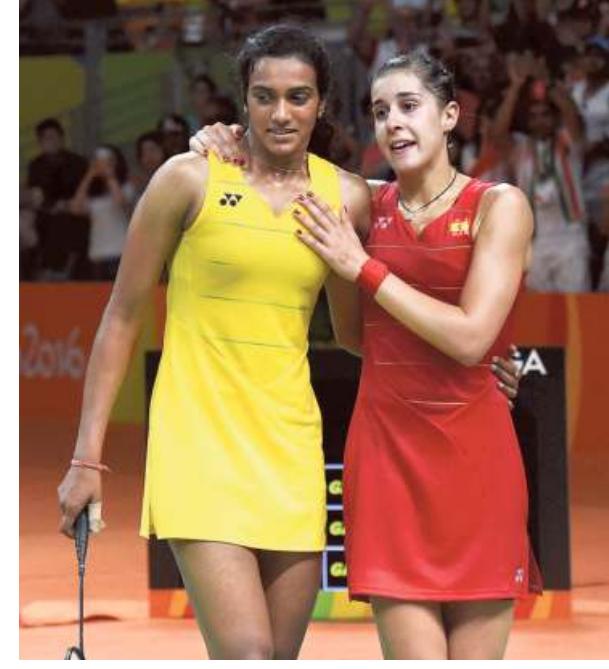
Marin, a prime contender at the Tokyo Games, suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee during training and pulled out of the showpiece event on Tuesday.

"So sorry to hear about your injury. Hoping that you will recover soon and come back stronger," Sindhu, who claimed the silver medal at Rio Games after losing to Marin in the final, said in a video message posted on Twitter.

"We will have to think hard about different ways of managing these horses. I will pick the horse that is in the best shape."

Surprisingly, in spite of booking the Olympic quota place in 2019, Mirza was inducted into TOPS in April this year.

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**Showing concern:** P.V. Sindhu, with Carolina Marin after the 2016 Rio final, has wished the Spaniard well. • FILE PHOTO

the final. It was really good competing against you so I'm going to miss that again, and I've been missing you, seeing you on court.

"I will miss you at the Olympic Games but hope we compete against each other

soon, so come back fast and recover soon. Lots of love."

Marin, a three-time World Champion, was a title favourite as she had been in red-hot form this year, winning four of the five finals that she played.

## Happy with show despite loss: Panghal

The young pugilist says he has improved but third rounds can be better

## BOXING

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

He is still a bit angry about that "unfair" loss in the final but Olympic-bound Indian boxer Amit Panghal (52kg) on Wednesday described his silver-winning performance at the Asian Championships as the best of his career.

The 25-year-old was the defending champion before he lost to his nemesis, Uzbekistan's reigning World and Olympic champion Shakhabidin Zoirov, 3-2 in Dubai. A protest, seeking a review of the bout's second round, was rejected by the jury.

"This is by far the best performance by me in the 52kg category. I should have won that final and I was angry when I did not," said Panghal, the reigning Asian Games champion.

"I had given it my all and I felt I deserved to win but it's OK, it can happen. It was still way better than the last time I lost to him. The scoreline has narrowed down to 2-3, it was 0-5 earlier," he said referring to the World's final



**Catching the eye:** Amit Panghal's display in the recent Asian Championships was quite compelling. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

loss to Zoirov in 2019.

Proud of his performance he might be but Panghal said there are some chinks in the armour that he hopes to iron out before the Olympics.

"I have improved but my third rounds can be better. I don't think I land enough scoring punches in the third round. I have improved enough to ensure that my

first rounds start early, I used to hold back earlier," he elaborated.

Panghal's performance through the Asian Championships was quite compelling. If his pace was eye-catching in the quarters, the semifinal win was a masterclass in effective close range boxing.

A new-found ability to

score through body shots while being held in clinches was another addition to his skill set. "This was the first time, I tried that (punching during clinches)," Panghal said.

"It is something that my personal coach Anil Dhankar ji taught me. He told me that clinches should not be about stopping, that I should keep hitting. I had worked on this," he added.

Panghal said he has his concerns about the pandemic but they wouldn't come in the way of what he does inside the ring.

"Practice mein to disrupt hua hi hai (Our practice has been disrupted). Another fear that we face is that if we test positive and are put in quarantine, we would miss out on crucial training time. We cannot afford that now."

He promises to be at his best at the Olympics.

"Pehla Olympics bhi hai, saath mein COVID bhi hai (My first Olympics and this COVID is also there). Let's see what happens but I intend to make it special," said Panghal.

## Veda recalls the trauma in family

'Broken to pieces after the death of my mother and sister'

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

India women's team cricketer Veda Krishnamurthy, "completely destroyed" after losing her mother and sister to COVID-19 recently, says she is slowly learning to tune herself out of that grief and stressed on the importance of mental health assistance in crisis situations.

Nine members of Veda's family battled the disease and her mother and sister passed away within two weeks of each other last month in Karnataka.

"I'm a big believer in what destiny holds for you, but I really hoped that my sister would come back home. When she didn't, I was completely destroyed. All of us were broken to pieces," Veda told ESPNcricinfo in a lengthy post detailing her trauma.

**Keeps coming back**

"...I still had to put up a brave face for the rest of the family. What I had to do in those testing couple of weeks was learn to tune myself out of my grief. But it keeps coming back to haunt



**Veda** • FILE PHOTO  
I really hoped that my sister would come back home. When she didn't, I was completely destroyed

you." The middle-order batter said she was the only one in the family not to contract the virus and ended up coordinating all the medical needs at that time.

**Mental aspect**  
Speaking about the mental aspect of dealing with a health crisis and the ensuing tragedy of such a magnitude, Veda said her mother

and sister also suffered from anxiety while battling the illness.

"Mental strength is important. My oldest sister, Vatsala, had panic attacks before she passed away due to COVID-19," the 28-year-old said.

Veda revealed that she has dealt with mental health issues of her own in the past and called for a structured support system for those in need.

"I've had mental-health issues and I've sought support to resolve them myself."

Veda has played 48 ODIs and 76 T20Is.

The BCCI had drawn flak from several quarters for not keeping in touch with the bereaved player after which Veda received a phone call from Board secretary Jay Shah.

"I'm not upset with people who didn't call me or message me. I thank everyone who checked on me."

"I did get a call from the BCCI secretary, which I didn't expect, to be honest. He said when he is in Bengaluru, he would visit me," she said.

## Ronak emphasises on process

A medal at Olympics validates your prowess as an athlete'

## SHOOTING

**KAMESH SRINIVASAN**  
NEW DELHI

Ronak Pandit has been a top-class shooter, shaping into a sharp coach.

"Heena Sidhu and Shazia Rizvi set world records and achieved world No. 1 ranking under my training," recalled Ronak.



**Coachspeak:** Ronak feels the shooters have to stay focused on the process and keep building on it. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Isolated in his room in a hotel in Zagreb as part of the protocol, the pistol coach of the Indian team that has been based in Croatia, Ronak expressed happiness that the outfit was "in the best space".

After having Ved Prakash Pilaniya as the only pistol coach to accompany the team when it took a chartered flight to Europe on May 11, the Indian team will soon have five pistol coaches.

"Our duty is to prepare the whole team. We are together and delegate work on a daily basis. Everyone responds differently to instructions. Going into a high pressure event like the Olympics, we have to ensure that our communication is clear, concise, positive and without scope for interpretation."

"Stay process oriented. Our entire team is high on skill, experience and motivation. It has performed well. We have to stay focused on the process and keep building on it. The key is to keep working on making one a better athlete and a better human being on a daily basis," he said.

With dentist wife Heena, a phenomenal shooter herself, expecting the couple's first baby in a few months, it

was hard for Ronak to detach from home and join the team promptly. He answered the national call.

Having learnt a lot from coaches Tibor Gonczol, Antalii Piddubnyi and sports scientist Dr. Pierre Beauchamp, Ronak has tons of knowledge, which he combines with his practical ability to still shoot "competitive scores" with minimum training.

"There is an aura around the Games. A medal at the Olympics validates your prowess as an athlete. The aura makes it tougher to perform at the Olympics. To find your way around all these challenges and to come out on top on that given day is something every athlete lives for," he said.

## Neeraj Chopra's departure delayed

Javelin thrower awaits an authorisation letter from France

## ATHLETICS

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI

national competition after more than a year, has been delayed "by a few days" as he awaits an authorisation letter from France.

The 23-year-old was originally set to leave on Monday to prepare for the Tokyo Games. "...Neeraj Chopra's travel plan to France has

been delayed by few days as India is currently placed as a high-risk country with COVID-19 infection and thus a person travelling to France requires an internal authorisation letter issued by French Interior Ministry to travel," the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said in a state-

ment. Accordingly, his travel plans have been rescheduled and SAI is in regular touch with officials of MEA, who are further pursuing the matter with the Indian Embassy in Paris," it added.

An AFI source said that he could be leaving on Thursday.

## Debut for senior team at Olympics will be a fairytale, says Manpreet Kaur

All are pumped up and working hard, according to the young defender

## HOCKEY

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
BENGALURU

Aspiring to make a "fairy-tale" debut for the Indian women's hockey team at the Tokyo Olympics, young defender Man