

IN BRIEF

Fake currency racket busted, 4 arrested

New Delhi: With the arrest of four persons, the Delhi police, on Saturday, has claimed to have busted an inter-state fake Indian currency notes (FICN) syndicate in the national capital. The police said that it has also recovered over FICN ₹1.30 lakh and semi-finished Rs 20,000, all in denomination of ₹100 notes. The accused have been identified as Mohammad Azeem Khan (47) and Akil Ahmed (42), both residents of district Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh (UP), Dr Akeel Ahmad (45), and Nitin Patel (46). According to DCP (Special Cell) Sanjeev Kumar Yadav, on August 30 specific inputs were received that two members of a syndicate have procured a huge quantity of FICNs from UP and would shortly deliver it to their contact in Delhi, somewhere near Anand Vihar ISBT. "A trap was laid and Azeem Khan and Akil Ahmed were apprehended. Over ₹1 lakh FICN in denomination of ₹100 was recovered from their possession."

Noida: ATM robbers held after gunfight

Noida: Two motorcycle-borne men, who are suspects in a string of ATM thefts, were held after an encounter with police in Noida on Saturday, officials said. The gunfight took place around 4 am near the ARTO office in Sector 24 of the city, when the duo was intercepted for inquiry during a police checking, the officials said. "The men instead tried to speed away while opening fire on the police team. One of them got injured in retaliatory firing by the police team, while the other managed to escape from the spot but was later caught during a combing operation," additional deputy commissioner of Police, Noida, Ranvijay Singh said. Those held have been identified as Aslam and Sabu, both natives of Alwar district in Rajasthan, police said, adding two illegal firearms and some ammunition was recovered from them. The accused also led officials to the recovery of parts of a broken-down ATM which they had struck recently and are suspected behind a string of such strikes recently in Noida and nearby region, police said.

Govt's anti-dengue campaign kicks off

New Delhi: The Delhi government is relaunching the "10 Hafte 10 Baje 10 Minute" campaign on Sunday, a 10-week mass awareness campaign against dengue and chikungunya. The campaign, which begins September 6, will continue every Sunday and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will kickstart the campaign on Sunday at 10 AM for 10 minutes by inspecting his own residence for stagnant clean water inside his home or his surroundings, which can lead to the breeding of mosquitoes that spread diseases such as dengue, malaria, and chikungunya. Last year, the 10 Hafte 10 Baje 10 Minute campaign garnered the support of many celebrities as well as officials of the government and other autonomous bodies. Under the "10 hafte, 10 baje, 10 minute campaign" (10 weeks-10 o'clock-10 minutes), the citizens must inspect their homes for any possible sources of stagnant clean water, which can lead to the breeding of Aedes mosquitoes that spread vector-borne diseases like Dengue and Malaria.

Nizamuddin Dargah to reopen from today

New Delhi: The famous Hazrat Nizamuddin Dargah here will open after over five months on Sunday, but there will be no Qawwali evenings at the shrine due to the Covid pandemic, the dargah's caretakers said. Safety measures like use of sanitisers and face covers as well as social distancing will be strictly followed at the dargah of Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin, which was closed in the wake of the Covid outbreak, they said. "We have also covered the graves of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia and Amir Khuro with plastic sheets so that people do not touch them while paying obeisance, as it could lead to people getting infected with the virus," Nazim Nizami, one of the caretakers of the shrine, said. The entry and exit points of the dargah will be separate, and markings have been made on the floor to ensure social distancing by devotees, he said.



Students from a slum area, who do not have access to internet facilities and missed their online lessons, attend an open-air class after the authorities closed all schools following the coronavirus outbreak at Yamuna Khadar in New Delhi on Saturday.

■ **Situation under control, spike due to increased testing: CM**

Delhi records highest spike in Covid-19 cases in 71 days

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 5

Amid a rise in the number of coronavirus cases in Delhi, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said that there is no need to panic as the situation is completely under control. The city on Saturday recorded its highest single-day spike in coronavirus cases in over two months. According to Delhi government health department data, 2,973 new coronavirus cases and 25 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, taking the total to over 1.88 lakh. The city has reported 4,538 deaths. Out of total 1,88,193 patients, 19,870 are active while 1,73,785 patients have recovered. About 39,000 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours.

Mr Kejriwal mentioned that in the last few days, the Corona cases in Delhi have slightly increased and some people have expressed concern over the same. "Yesterday, Delhi witnessed 2,914 Corona cases in the capital. I have spoken to many experts in the last few days, some say it is a second wave and some have opined against a

Noida reports 213 coronavirus cases, biggest single-day spike

Noida, Sept. 5: Gautam Buddh Nagar on Saturday recorded its highest single-day spike of 213 fresh Covid cases, pushing the tally to 8,686, official data showed. The number of active coronavirus cases reached 1,299, up from 1,188 on Friday, 1,163 on Thursday, 1,114 on Wednesday, 1,067 on Tuesday, 1,055 on Monday and 1,009 on Sunday, according to data released by the Uttar Pradesh Health

Department for a 24-hour period. The district's death toll stands at 46. On the brighter side, the mortality rate among positive patients continued to decline and reached 0.52 per cent on Saturday, one of the lowest in the state, data showed.

Also, 94 more patients got discharged during the 24-hour period and so far, 7,341 patients have recovered from Covid in the district, it showed.

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of 100 infected people, one is losing their life. The fatality rate of the country is 1.7 per cent.

"Daily death rate in the city is not only the lowest in the country but also across the world. The fatality rate is 1.4 per cent, which is lower than the national rate, which lies at 1.7 per cent. Out of 14,000 Corona beds in hospitals, only 5,000 remain occupied out of which 1,600-1,700 beds are assigned to residents of states other than Delhi," he said.

Mr Kejriwal reiterated that there should be no scope of complacency during Corona and also said that more and more people should get tested. "I have been witnessing since the last few days that some people in Delhi are being complacent. They do not wear masks when getting out of their homes or follow social distancing in public places. This is not right. We have to go to work, earn a living, run the economy, and look after our family, but we should not be careless about Corona. We must wear masks and follow social distancing whenever we get out of our homes," said the chief minister.

Lawyer, associates assault policemen at Saket court

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 5

A Delhi Police constable and an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) were allegedly assaulted by a lawyer and his associates outside the Saket court, police said on Saturday.

The incident took place on Friday following which Anuj Gaur and Honey were arrested, they said. The constable and the ASI were on sentry duty at the Saket Court's gate number two when they were attacked by Gaur, Honey, Vinay Nagar and the lawyer Chinmaya Sejwal, police said, adding that policemen were on the 8 pm to 8 am shift.

The accused assaulted them and fled with the ASI's phone, they said.

Police received information about a quarrel at the court's gate at 9.20 pm on Friday.

Police said around 8.30 pm, a car tried to enter the Saket court complex and guards stopped it. The car's driver entered into an argument with the guards, following which Constable Hitesh was called to gate number two.

Those in the car told the constable that they had to visit an advocate in the lawyers' chambers. After verification, the car was allowed to enter the court complex, police said.

▶ **The constable and the ASI were on sentry duty at the Saket Court's gate number two when they were attacked by Gaur, Honey, Vinay Nagar and the lawyer Chinmaya Sejwal**

The constable had asked the guards to record the details of the car in a register, they said.

After sometime, the car came back with another man sitting in the backseat and he appeared to be in an inebriated state. The men, who had argued with the guards, pointed at the constable and told the person in the backseat that he had stopped them from entering the court complex, a senior police officer said.

The man in the backseat came out of the car and hit Hitesh on his face. Hitesh tried to stop him, but when the man did not relent, the constable called ASI Kaishash to the

spot, the officer said.

The ASI tried to bring the situation under control, but the accused pushed him. The ASI fell on the ground and his spectacles and mobile got damaged. The accused picked up his phone and fled, the officer said.

Both the police personnel have undergone medical examination. CCTV camera footage is being retrieved, police said.

"On the statement of Hitesh, a case under sections 186 (obstruct public servant during duty), 353 (assault public servant), 332 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 379 (theft) of the IPC has been registered at the Saket police station," DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

Gaur (27), a resident of Sangam Vihar, who is an aide to Sejwal, has been arrested and the ASI's phone has been recovered, the DCP said, adding that Honey has also been apprehended.

"On interrogation, Gaur had disclosed the names of other accused as Vinay Nagar, Chinmaya Sejwal and Honey. Further investigation is in progress," Thakur said.

BJP leader wants MCDs to be self-reliant, says AAP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 5

Senior AAP leader and party in-charge for civic bodies Durgesh Pathak, on Saturday, said that for the first time in the last 14 years a BJP leader has spoken about making the MCD self-reliant. AAP councillors will march on Monday from Rajghat and sit on a dharna in support of the municipal employees at the Civic Centre.

According to Mr Pathak, for the first time a BJP leader of the MCD has accepted the fact that the people of Delhi have given the responsibility of running the municipal corporations to the BJP.

"South Delhi mayor Anamika ji, on Friday, told the media that the MCDs will not need any help from the Delhi government and that she wants to make the MCDs

self-reliant," said Mr Pathak.

Mr Pathak offered that if BJP likes, AAP would like to train saffron party leaders and their MCD officials on how corruption is minimised, how the government is run, and how the budget is raised.

"The citizens of Delhi have witnessed that whenever there were any allegations against the BJP-led MCDs, the BJP leaders always blame the government," Mr Pathak added.

Reacting to AAP, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor has said, "Mr Pathak should know that worldwide no municipal body is financially self-sufficient but the problem of AAP leaders is that they neither have any knowledge as to how municipal bodies work nor are they ready to learn or respect the municipal working."

'Missing' teen sisters found at uncle's Noida home

Noida, Sept. 5: Two teenage sisters who had gone "missing" from their home in Uttar Pradesh's Noida last week were found safe and staying with their maternal uncle on Saturday, police said. The girls, aged 16 and 13, were upset over scolding by their parents after which they had decided to leave home, police added. "The family lives in Ilaahabas village in Sector 86. Their father had approached police with a missing complaint on August 28 and an FIR was lodged against unidentified accused," an official from local Phase 2 police station said.

An investigation was taken up in the case and the girls were traced down to their maternal uncle's home in nearby Chhipiyana Buzurg village, he said.

"The girls were found safe and they told police that they had left home because of frequent scoldings by parents," the official added.

The minor sisters have been handed over to their family, police said. Meanwhile, Two motorcycle-borne men, who are suspects in a string of ATM thefts, were held after an encounter with police in Noida on Saturday, officials said.

38-year-old held for duping women on matrimony sites

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 5

A 38-year-old man was arrested for allegedly duping several women on the pretext of marriage, police said on Saturday.

The matter came to light when a woman lodged a complaint against him at Kotla Mubarakpur police station. According to her complaint, the accused, posing as a British citizen, approached her on a matrimony site.

Vishal alias Mohit Tokas convinced the complainant that he needs some money and after getting the amount, he will marry her, police said.

The woman transferred Rs 1,21,900 into his bank account and after receiving the money, he stopped taking her calls, they said.

During investigation, police checked all the numbers through which

the accused had contacted the complainant and found that they were issued on fake IDs, Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

"Police analysed the account in which the complainant transferred the money and found one mobile number of the account holder was attached with that. Police apprehended the accused person on Thursday," Thakur said.

In the past, Vishal had duped several other women on matrimony sites after promising to marry them, police said.

The accused told police during interrogation that he used to lure divorced women for marriage and would convince them to transfer money into his bank accounts on the pretext of sending them expensive gifts.



Police personnel try to control the members of Tibetan community during a protest against China outside Chinese Embassy in New Delhi on Saturday.

Akshardham-Saharanpur project taken up on priority basis: Tiwari

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 5

The work on six-lane access controlled road with service roads on both sides — starting from Akshardham to Loni Ghaziabad border — is expected to start soon with the ministry of road transport and highway initiating tendering process. The proposed link costing ₹1,375 crore is part of the Centre's Delhi-Saharanpur bypass project. The "access controlled corridor" with service roads on both sides is part of the Union transport ministry's 155 km corridor between Akshardham in East Delhi and Saharanpur in UP.

In a letter to Northeast Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari, Union minister for road transport and highway

▶ **THE ROAD declared as NH-709B aims to provide seamless connectivity between the two cities and will also decongest parts of Northeast Delhi**

Nitin Gadkari said that the development of the stretch is being taken up on 'priority basis.'

"The bids for the development of Akshardham-Geeta Colony-Shastri Park-Khajuri Khas-Delhi-UP border section has already been invited and is likely to be received by September 30," Mr Gadkari wrote. The road declared as National Highway 709B aims to provide seamless connectivity between the two cities and will also decongest parts of Northeast Delhi.

Heavy rains, thunderstorm hit Delhi, lead to waterlogging in several areas

New Delhi, Sept. 5: A thunderstorm barrelled through the national capital on Saturday evening, uprooting trees and bringing moderate rains that flooded low-lying areas.

Heavy waterlogging disrupted traffic movement on key roads.

Rains had been evading Delhi for the last few days, with the city recording just traces of rainfall in the first five days of September.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides official figures for the city, recorded nil rainfall till Saturday morning. Normally, the observatory records 28.8 mm precipitation during the period.

The Palam and Lodhi road weather stations



Traffic jam on Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway due to waterlogging following heavy rains in Delhi on Saturday.

have also reported a rain deficiency of 99 and 100 percent, respectively, this month.

Overall, the city has recorded 555.6 mm rainfall against the normal of 552.6 mm since June 1, when the monsoon sea-

son starts.

Delhi recorded 237 mm rainfall in August this year, the highest for the month in seven years, according to an India Meteorological Department data. The capital had gauged

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▶ **THE PALAM and Lodhi road weather stations have also reported a rain deficiency of 99 and 100 percent, respectively, this month.**

119.6 mm precipitation in August last year, and 206.5 mm in 2018. It recorded 152.2 mm and 122.1 mm rainfall in August 2017 and 2016, respectively.

The August rainfall in 2015 and 2014 stood at 195.4 mm and 139.1 mm. The rainfall in August 2013 was 321.4 mm.

SHORT TAKES

Man wanted for BJP leader's murder held

Mumbai: A 32-year-old criminal carrying a reward on his head was nabbed from suburban Mumbai on Saturday in connection with sensational killings of a businessman in Noida and BJP leader Rakesh Sharma in Hapur district of Uttar Pradesh, the police said. The accused, Pravin alias Ashu alias Akash Rajendra Singh, heads the infamous Mirchi gang, a crime branch official said. The Uttar Pradesh police had announced a reward of ₹2.5 lakh on Singh and his gang members, he said. Singh was staying in Mumbai since the last few months by changing his identity and looks. He used to sell fruits at a market in Prem Nagar area of Vile Parle. In September 2019, BJP leader Rakesh Sharma was allegedly shot dead by Singh and his associates in Hapur. A case of murder has been registered at Dhaulana police station in Hapur, he said. — PTI

CM: Guj will be 1st to implement NEP

Ahmedabad: Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani on Saturday said his government aims to become the first to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and will soon form a task force to create a road map for the same. Mr Rupani was speaking at an event organised in Gandhinagar to felicitate 44 teachers on the occasion of the Teachers' Day. "The new NEP has been translated into Gujarati, and a task force is being formed to make a road map for Gujarat soon," chief minister Rupani said. On the basis of this road map, the state will make drastic changes in education, right from primary to secondary and higher education, from KG to PG (kindergarten to post graduation), he said. — PTI

2 groups clash in UP's Bulandshahr

Bulandshahr: Around half-a-dozen people were injured in a violent clash between two groups of the same community on Saturday, the police said. The incident took place in Gadiyan locality in Anoopshahar area here and there was stone pelting and firing from both the sides during the clash, they said. According to senior superintendent of police Santosh Kumar Singh, four people have been arrested by the police in this matter. — PTI

Kin allege PLA abducted 5 men in Arunachal

■ Continued from Page 1
process of reaching out to the villages and villagers who reported this incident in social media posts. Security sources in the intelligence wing, engaged in international border management, said that Indian Army headquarters have also been establishing contact with the patrolling teams operating in remote areas along the McMahon line to verify the villagers' claim. The incident came to light through WhatsApp messages circulating in Arunachal Pradesh. Jarpum Gamlin, a senior journalist in Itanagar, told this newspaper that they spoke with the family members who claimed that they came to know about the incident through a wireless message of Indian Army. The message also claimed that the boys were from the Nacho administrative block and have been identified as Tanu Bakar, Prasad Ringling, Ngaru Diri, Dongtu Ebiya and Toch Singkam. "We have received information from our village people that my brother along with four others have been abducted by the PLA near McMahon Line," Prakash Ringling, the elder brother of Prasad Ringling told the Itanagar-based newspaper, *Eastern Sentinel*. "My brother was part of 36 people serving as porters near the China border that took at least 12 days of foot march to reach a place called Sera-7 where the incident took place," said Prakash while saying that villagers received a wireless message from Indian security personnel about the incident. "I appeal to the state and Central government to take immediate initiative to bring back all the five persons safely, including my brother, who have been allegedly abducted by the PLA," he said.

Trump wades into India-China row

Prez calls it 'very nasty' situation, says US ready to mediate and would 'love to get involved'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 5

United States President Donald Trump waded into the Sino-Indian border dispute for the second time in the past four months, calling it a "very nasty" situation and saying the US was ready to mediate to help both countries and would "love to get involved".

This comes even as Russia has emerged as a key player and is seen to have been nudging India and China to talk to each other at a political level to resolve the situation in the Ladakh sector and ease

Sino-Indian military tensions.

US President Trump was quoted by news agencies, as saying in Washington, "While we're at it, we're talking about China and India are going at it pretty good on the border, as you know. It's been very nasty. And we stand ready to help with respect to China and India. If we can do anything, we would love to get involved and help. And we are talking to both countries about that."

When asked whether he thought China was bullying India, the US President was quoted as saying, "I hope not... But

While we're at it, we're talking about China and India are going at it pretty good on the border, as you know... we would love to get involved. And we are talking to both countries about that.

— Donald Trump, US Prez

they (China) are certainly going at it. They are going at it much more strongly

than a lot of people even understand."

It may be recalled that President Trump had first offered to mediate between the two Asian giants in May-end, well before the deadly Galwan valley clash in the Ladakh sector in mid-June between Indian and Chinese troops. However, India had politely but indirectly declined the mediation offer then, saying it was talking directly to China which had also rejected the US President's offer then. The response of both feuding neighbours to the fresh offer is expected to be the same as then.

But a resolute India is also sending out other clear strategic signals to China such as strengthening defence ties with American allies in Asia such as Japan with which China has a maritime dispute. Some media reports indicate Prime Minister Narendra Modi could hold a bilateral virtual summit with his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe next week on September 10 in which a crucial proposed defence logistics pact between India and Japan could be inked which will provide the navies of the two countries access to each other's bases.

Take nation into confidence on Ladakh row: Cong to PM

New Delhi, Sept. 5: The Congress on Saturday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and defence minister Rajnath Singh to take the nation into confidence on talks with China on the border row in Ladakh, saying people want to know about the outcomes of the repeated conversations with the Chinese side.

The Opposition party's demand comes a day after defence minister Rajnath Singh and his Chinese counterpart Gen. Wei Fenghe held an over two-hour-long meeting in

Moscow with a focus on easing escalating border tension in eastern Ladakh. Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said it was "Rajdharna" of the PM and the defence minister to take the nation into confidence on the important issue.

Listing the various levels of talks held with the Chinese from the foreign ministers level and corps commanders level to the defence ministers' discussions, Surjewala asked what is the outcome of these talks. — PTI

In noble gesture, Army provides help to 3 stranded Chinese along LAC in Sikkim

New Delhi, Sept. 5: At a time it is engaged in a fierce standoff with China's PLA in eastern Ladakh, the Indian Army on Wednesday provided food, warm clothes and medical assistance to three Chinese citizens who had lost their way in sub-zero temperatures at an altitude of 17,500 feet in a border area in North Sikkim, officials said.

The Army personnel deployed in the area also guided the Chinese citizens, including a woman, to return to the Chinese side and reach their desti-

nation. The humanitarian gesture by the Army came when it is dealing with an aggressive behaviour by the Chinese troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

The Army, in a statement, said the three Chinese citizens lost their way in the Plateau area of North Sikkim.

"Realising danger to the lives of the Chinese citizens in sub-zero temperatures, the soldiers of Indian Army immediately reached out and provided medical assistance including oxygen, food and

warm clothes to protect them from the vagaries of extreme altitude and harsh climatic conditions," the Army said.

It said the Indian troops also gave them appropriate guidance to reach their destination after which they returned.

"The Chinese citizens expressed their gratitude to India and the Army for their prompt assistance," the Army said.

The Indian and Chinese troops are locked in a bitter border row in eastern Ladakh for the last four months. — PTI

Army gears up to battle elements at strategic heights

VIKRAM SHARMA
HYDERABAD, SEPT. 5

On the hilltops and inhospitable ridgelines at mind-numbing altitudes of more than 15,000 feet, when the temperatures plummet to -25° Celsius and lower, all that one has for "company" constantly are frostbite, chilblain, blood clots, lung infection and even memory loss amid the heavy snowfall. The windchill factor makes it worse. Taking it easy for a while could mean sure death, a painful one at that.

High altitude warfare is nothing new for the Indian Army which has battled the elements at Siachen glacier, Ladakh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and several points along the Line of Control with Pakistan. Now, with massive deployments on the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso, after capturing strategic heights from where soldiers are keeping an eye on the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Indian Army is gearing up to battle the elements at strategic heights even as the "road open period" to Ladakh from Rohtang and Srinagar-Kargil route will soon close due to heavy snowfall.

■ **HIGHLY PLACED** sources said that the Army has procured a large number of extreme cold weather clothing systems and mountaineering kits for the soldiers who have been deployed in huge numbers along the LAC

This placed sources told this newspaper that the Army has procured a large number of extreme cold weather clothing systems and mountaineering kits for the soldiers who have been deployed in massive numbers along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. The soldiers have begun to put on the special clothing as night temperatures have begun to drop. These are similar to the ones used by soldiers deployed in the Siachen glacier, the world's highest battlefield.

With unpredictable weather throwing a major challenge and frequent avalanches, large quantities of K-oil (kerosene), canned food, medical supplies, repair equipment for communication, vehicles among other logistics are being supplied to the strategic locations.

7 migrants killed, many hurt in C'garh road mishap

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, SEPT. 5

At least seven guest workers were on Saturday killed and a dozen others injured when a bus in which they were travelling had a head-on collision with a truck on the outskirts of Raipur in Chhattisgarh.

The horrific mishap took place at around 3.30 in the morning, Raipur police said.

The ill-fated bus was carrying around 75 guest workers from Ganjam in Odisha to Surat in Gujarat.

The passengers who had returned to their villages in Ganjam district following nationwide lockdown enforced in March due in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak were migrating to Surat to join their jobs. This was the first tragedy reported in the country involving guest workers who were returning to join their jobs from their villages post-coronavirus outbreak.

"Seven people were killed and seven others injured in the incident. All the injured have been admitted to local government hospital", Raipur senior superintendent of police Ajay Yadav said.

The tragedy took place when the speeding truck coming from the opposite side rammed into the speeding bus near Indira Gandhi Agriculture University in Raipur.

The death toll may go up, the police said.

NATION CELEBRATES TEACHERS' DAY



Sand artist Ajay Shankar Mahto creates a sand sculpture in Bokaro on Saturday to pay tribute to former President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan on his birth anniversary, which is celebrated in India as Teachers' Day. — PTI

NCB arrests Sushant's house help Dipesh

Rhea called for questioning by CBI after brother's testimony

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, SEPT. 5

A day after the arrest of actress Rhea Chakraborty's brother Showik and late actor Sushant Singh Rajput's former house manager Samuel Miranda, the NCB arrested house help Dipesh Sawant on Saturday.

Showik and Miranda have been remanded to the NCB custody till September 11 in connection with the narcotics angle pertaining to the actor's suicide probe. The Central agency sent summons to Rhea for questioning next week after Showik claimed to be acting at her behest and procuring drugs. The officials are also probing the mode of payment used for obtaining the narcotics substances.

ED to register fresh case against Showik

New Delhi: A day after Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) arrested Showik Chakraborty in connection with the drugs probe linked to actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death case, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is now preparing to register a fresh money laundering case against him on the basis of NCB's complaint.

The investigators said that the probe in the case has revealed debit and credit card transactions. The details of the debit and credit cards are being investigated to ascertain whom did they belong to and how many such trans-

actions were done in the past.

The officials said that they would grill Showik and he would be confronted with Rhea in a joint questioning session of the NCB. The revelation has also hinted towards the possibility of her passing on the contraband to others, including celebrities, identities of whom are yet to be established.

"NCB is a national probe agency and we wouldn't shirk the responsibility. We are discussing evidence with the public prosecutor and all those found involved will be picked," said Mutha Ashok Jain, deputy DG of NCB.

On Friday, the NCB raided Rhea Chakraborty's and house manager Samuel Miranda's residence in connection with the ongoing case.

Raut softens stand, says no personal issue with Kangana

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, SEPT. 5

The Shiv Sena on Saturday appeared to have softened its stand on the controversy involving Kangana Ranaut, who had likened Mumbai to PoK. Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut said he does not have any personal issue with the actress and added that he raised his voice because she spoke against Maharashtra. Meanwhile, RPI chief and Union minister for state Ramdas Athawale said his party would take care of Ranaut's security in Mumbai.

Mr Raut said that those who are insulting Maharashtra, should remember that Maharashtra is because of Chhatrapati



Shivaji Maharaj and Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray. "I don't have any personal issue with Kangana Ranaut. But insulting Mumbai and Maharashtra will not be tolerated," the Shiv Sena leader said, adding that linking Mumbai with PoK is a very serious offence.

The Sena leader said that he read few statements of the BJP leaders. Ashish Shelar has asked Kangana Ranaut to not teach Mumbai, Maharashtra and its people how to behave.

Army jawan killed, two others hurt in Pak firing

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, SEPT. 5

An Army jawan was killed and two others were injured in latest incident of cross-border firing in Jammu and Kashmir's northwestern Kupwara districts on Saturday.

Defence spokesman, Col. Rajesh Kalra, said that Pakistani troops "initiated an unprovoked ceasefire ceasefire violation" along the Line of Control (LoC) in Nowgam sector of Kupwara by firing mortars and other weapons resulting in the on-the-spot killing of one Indian Army soldier and injuring two others.

"They were evacuated to the 92-Base Hospital in Srinagar's Badami Bagh Cantonment and their condition is stable," the spokesman said.

He added that "befitting response" was given to the Pakistani artillery firing. It was not immediately known if there were any casualties on the Pakistani side of the de facto border as well.

Though the Army refused to divulge the name of the slain soldier maintaining that as per the practice his family will have to be informed first, the police sources identified him as Bopender Singh and those injured as Lance Naik Venkatesh and Sepoy Shajal.

Earlier this week, two Army soldiers were killed in separate sniper attacks reportedly from across the LoC in J&K's Rajouri district.

Domestic violence case against Odisha BJD MP by actress wife

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, SEPT. 5

BJD Lok Sabha member from Kendrapara, Anubhav Mohanty, on Saturday landed in trouble as his wife and noted Odia film actress Barsha Priyadarshini filed a case of domestic violence against him. The case was filed under Section 12 of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act against the legislator for allegedly assaulting and harassing Barsha.

In her petition filed before the sub-divisional judicial magistrate court,



Barsha Priyadarshini and Anubhav Mohanty

Cuttack, Barsha in her appeal to the court has sought monthly maintenance from Anubhav, besides an indemnity of ₹15 crore.

Barsha in her plea said that Anubhav is a habitual drunkard and he often

drinks with his friends at home. The MP also assaulted and harassed her mentally, she alleged.

"He would invite his friends to our bedroom and drinks with them. If I resisted, he would beat me up severely. He often asked me to leave his home," the actress said.

She further alleged that whenever she tried to prevent Anubhav from drinking, he would get violent and physically assault her.

Levelling another serious allegation, the actress said Anubhav has extramarital affairs with many women from the Odia film industry.

SHORT TAKES

6 cops suspended over custody death

Shravasti, UP: Six police personnel, including an SHO, were suspended and three of them booked for murder for their alleged roles in the custodial death of a 22-year-old man here, officials said on Saturday. One of the booked policemen, a sub-inspector of Gilaula police station in the district, has been arrested, said Shravasti Superintendent of Police Anoop Kumar Singh.

He said a case under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was registered last month against Wajid Ali (22) for allegedly harassing a girl. Ali was taken into police custody on Friday for questioning but his body was found hanging later in the toilet of the Gilaula police station, he added. The SP said the father of the deceased alleged that his son was illegally kept in police custody for two to three days and the policemen indulged in corruption for his release.

— PTI

Soren writes to PM over GST proposal

Ranchi: Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the centre not giving full GST compensation to the states, saying this “act of sovereign default” runs against the very spirit of the cooperative federalism. In a letter addressed to the prime minister, Soren said this is symptomatic of the “withering trust” between the centre and the states. In the letter, dated September 4, Soren said the states were given assurance that the centre would compensate the losses they suffer for the next five years, but it has just been three years, and “we find ourselves deserted”. Soren is the latest non-NDA chief ministers to come out against the Centre’s offer on GST compensation to the states. — PTI

2 held with drugs worth ₹8cr in MP

Noida: Two men were arrested while allegedly transporting 1,727 kg cannabis in Madhya Pradesh’s Agar Malwa district on Saturday, the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) said. The action was carried out around 12.30 pm by a team of the local Madhya Pradesh Police and the Noida unit of the STF, the agency said. “Two men were arrested and a container truck impounded which had a secret cavity in which the contraband was stored, Additional Superintendent of Police (STF) Raj Kumar Mishra said. “As much as 1,727 kg of illegal cannabis pegged worth approximately Rs 8 crore has been seized,” he added. — PTI

4 dead as SUV falls into Kinnaur nullah

Kinnaur: Four men died and three others were injured after an SUV fell into a nullah in Himachal Pradesh’s Kinnaur district, police said on Saturday. The accident took place near Kharogala on Sangla-Chhitkul link road when the vehicle was going from Raksham to Sangla, they said. Three men died on the spot while one succumbed to injuries on the way to a community health centre (CHC) in Sangla, police said. Three of the deceased, identified as Anshuman (20), Om Krishan (19), Sikander (20), were from Sangla village while the fourth one, Aadesh (20), was a resident of Boning Saaring, they said. The three injured, identified as Paras (20), Ankit (19) and Nikes (19), were provided first aid and referred to a Rampur hospital. All the injured are residents of Sangla, police said. — PTI

Punjab CM tests -ve, ends isolation

Chandigarh: Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday tested negative for the coronavirus infection. This was the third time that the chief minister had got himself tested for Covid-19 since the outbreak of the pandemic. Singh also ended his week-long self-isolation after testing negative for the contagion. The CM had gone into seven-day self-quarantine on August 28 after he came in contact with two Congress legislators, Kulbir Singh Zira and Nirmal Singh, who had tested positive after the one-day Punjab Assembly session. Singh disclosed during the interaction that he had got himself tested on Saturday and was found negative. — PTI

RJD-led alliance in Bihar may be in a fix over seats

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, SEPT. 5

Seat sharing among grand alliance partners has turned into a thorny affair as most of the political parties including smaller partners have been demanding sizable seat share for the assembly elections slated to be held this year.

Political analysts believe that Tejashwi Yadav, the political heir of RJD chief Lalu Yadav will have to leave his rigidity to end brewing resentment among grand alliance partners over the issue of seat adjustments in Bihar. RLSP leaders in Patna recently met RJD state president Jagdanand Singh and submitted a list of seats it wanted to contest in the coming assembly elections. Sources in the grand alliance said that negotiations among partners were in the final stages and likely to get sorted out by mid-September.

RLSP insiders told this newspaper that the party has staked claims on 48 seats which include 23 seats it contested in 2015 besides 25 other constituencies where the party claims to have a vote base. Besides, three left parties CPI, CPM and CPI-ML have also submitted their lists and have urged RJD to finalise the seat-sharing deal without delay. Another smaller partner Mukesh Sahani of the Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP) has also sent a list of its candidates demanding “sizeable seat share” for the party.

With Jitan Ram Manjhi

► **SOURCES IN the grand alliance said that negotiations among partners were in the final stages and likely to get sorted out by mid-September. RJD and Congress will take a call on the number of seats that would be distributed to alliance partners RLSP, VIP and left parties.**

in NDA fold and no clarity yet on Sharad Yadav’s Loktantrik Janata Dal (LJD), the grand alliance in Bihar comprises of RJD, Congress, Upendra Kushwaha’s RLSP, Mukesh Sahani’s VIP and three left parties (CPI, CPM and CPI-ML). Upendra Kushwaha with around 10 per cent voter base of his Koeri community is considered a strong player in the grand alliance. Mukesh Sahani’s Nishad community accounts for 14 per cent of the state population and the RJD’s M-Y combination forms about 30 per cent vote share (Muslims 16 and Yadav 14 per cent).

Sources said both RJD and Congress will take a call on the number of seats that would be distributed to alliance partners RLSP, VIP and left parties. The date of their meeting is yet to be finalised but “things will be sorted out soon. There is no trouble regarding seat-sharing among the grand alliance partners”, a senior RJD leader said.

He further said that the formula will need final approval from Lalu Yadav who is serving a jail term in fodder scam case.

Covid +ve cases: 30L to 40L in 13 days

India also records highest single-day recoveries, 70,000 patients discharged

New Delhi, Sept. 5: India’s Covid-19 infection tally sprinted past 40 lakh, just 13 days after it crossed 30 lakh, with a record 86,432 cases being reported in a day, while recoveries have surged to 31,07,223 on Saturday pushing the recovery rate to 77.23 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 40,23,179, while the death toll climbed to 69,561 with 1,089 people succumbing to the disease in a span of 24 hours, data updated at 8 am showed.

India’s Covid-19 cases jumped from 10 lakh to 20 lakh in 21 days. It took 16 more days to race past 30 lakh and 13 days more to cross the 40-lakh mark. It took 110 days for the Covid-

19 cases in the country to reach one lakh while it had taken 59 days more to go past the 10-lakh post.

The Covid-19 case fatality rate due to the novel coronavirus infection has further declined to 1.73 per cent. There are 8,46,395 active cases of coronavirus infection, which is 21.04 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated. India’s Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7 and went past 30 lakh on August 23.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), a cumulative total of 4,77,38,491 samples have been tested up to September 4 with 10,59,346 samples being tested on Friday.

Of the 1,089 fresh deaths,

COVID WATCH

86,432
CASES ACROSS NATION

77.23%
RECOVERY RATE

378 are from Maharashtra, 116 from Karnataka, 79 from Tamil Nadu, 76 from Andhra Pradesh, 71 from Uttar Pradesh, 58 from West Bengal, 49 from Punjab, 30 from Madhya Pradesh, 29 from Bihar, 22 from Chhattisgarh, 20 from Puducherry, 19 from Haryana, 15 from Assam, 14 from Gujarat, 13 each from Delhi and Rajasthan.

Twelve fatalities each have been reported from Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand, 11 each from Kerala and Telangana, nine from Odisha, eight from Goa, seven from Tripura, five from Chandigarh, three each from Jharkhand and Manipur, two from Himachal Pradesh while Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Nagaland have registered one fatality each.

Of the total 69,561 deaths, Maharashtra has reported the maximum at 25,964, followed by 7,687 in Tamil Nadu, 6,170 in Karnataka, 4,513 in Delhi, 4,276 in Andhra Pradesh, 3,762 in Uttar Pradesh, 3,452 in West Bengal, 3,076 in

Gujarat and 1,739 in Punjab.

So far, 1,513 people have died of Covid-19 in Madhya Pradesh, 1,108 in Rajasthan, 877 in Telangana, 759 in Haryana, 755 in Jammu and Kashmir, 701 in Bihar, 531 in Odisha, 447 in Jharkhand, 345 in Assam, 337 in Chhattisgarh, 326 in Kerala and 312 in Uttarakhand.

Puducherry has registered 280 fatalities, Goa 220, Tripura 136, Chandigarh 68, Himachal Pradesh 50, Andaman and Nicobar Islands 49, Ladakh and Manipur 35 each, Meghalaya 14, Nagaland 10, Arunachal Pradesh seven, Sikkim five and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu two. — PTI



A rainbow appears in the sky following rainfall in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday. A spell of moderate rains along with thundershowers drenched parts of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh on Saturday, while Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana witnessed light showers in some areas.

— PTI

‘Make Pawar chief after merging NCP with Congress’

Mumbai, Sept. 5: Observing that Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are not keen on donning the mantle of Congress president, Union minister Ramdas Athawale on Saturday suggested the NCP be merged with the grand old party and Sharad Pawar be made new chief of the merged entity.

The Republican Party of India (A) president also said that such decision should be taken jointly by the Congress and Pawar. “Currently, Rahul and Sonia Gandhi are not keen on becoming the Congress president. It is my instruction to Congress of getting NCP merged and making Sharad Pawar party president. The decision should be jointly taken by Pawar and the Congress,” Mr Athawale tweeted.

Mr Athawale’s merger suggestion came against the backdrop of a leadership churn in the Congress, with a group of leaders demanding a “full-time and active leadership”. — PTI

Yechury hits out at Modi govt over Atma Nirbhar Bharat

Kolkata, Sept. 5: CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury has hit out at the BJP-led government at the Centre saying it is pursuing the policy of “Atma Samarpnan Bharat” in the name of “Atma Nirbhar Bharat” by privatising all government entities and PSUs.

Yechury, who was speaking at a closed-door virtual meeting of CPI(M) state committee Friday night, apprehended that the coming parliament session has been convened to pass “few ordinances which will further scuttle the democratic rights of the people”.

Criticising Modi government’s foreign policy of “turning the country into a subordinate ally of the USA”, he iterated the importance of peaceful talks to resolve the ongoing border crisis with China. — PTI

‘Saffron party determined to improve lives of farmers in the state’ BJP will form next govt in Odisha: Nadda

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, SEPT. 5

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national president J.P. Nadda on Saturday expressed confidence that the saffron party will form the government in Odisha. Addressing the party’s virtual state executive meeting, Mr Nadda said: “The days are not far when we will form government in Odisha. We take the vow.”

“In 2014 Lok Sabha election, we got 21 per cent

votes, while the tally increased to 38 per cent in the 2019 elections. We need to be determined to get 50 per cent votes in the ensuing polls,” the BJP chief said while lauding party workers’ effort for reaching out to people during Covid-19 pandemic.

“BJP is determined for the betterment of Odisha farmers. The Union government has provided ₹18,000 crore under PM Kisan Yojana’s second instalment,” Mr Nadda informed.

Lauding Narendra Modi-

In 2019 Lok Sabha election, we got 38 per cent votes in Odisha. We need to be determined to get 50 per cent votes in the ensuing polls.

— J.P. NADDA, BJP national president

led government’s effort in containing the spread of the virus, Mr Nadda said:

Maoists kill 4 in C’garh, accuse them of spying

Raipur, Sept. 5: Naxals have allegedly killed four villagers in Chhattisgarh’s Bijapur district after accusing them of being police informers, a senior official said on Saturday.

The killings took place in the last two days in the forest of Dumri-Palnar village under Gangaloor police station area, inspector general of police (Bastar range) Sundarraj P. told PTI.

As per preliminary information, ultras had called a few villagers, who were supporting development activities, including road construction, to the forest and brutally killed four of them after accusing them of being police inform-

ers, he said.

The deceased have been identified as Punem Sannu, Gore Sannu alias Dhruva and Aaytu alias Falli, all residents of Pusnar village and Bhushu alias Tulsi from nearby Metapal village, he said.

Naxals also beat up a few others villagers, the senior official said. However, it is not immediately known if the victims were killed altogether or at different times in the last two days, he said.

On getting information about the incident on Saturday morning, a team of security forces rushed to the spot and further details are awaited, he added.

In the last couple of

months, the Bastar region has witnessed a spike in alleged atrocities committed by ultras on villagers.

On Friday night, Naxals had killed two men after branding them as police informers and also assaulted a group of people accompanying the duo when they had gone to a village in Bijapur from Dantewada district for finalising a marriage plan.

Last month, 10 villagers, including women, were brutally thrashed by Naxals in Chikpal village of Dantewada, while in a similar incident, in July, 25 villagers were beaten up by ultras in Parcheli village in Dantewada. — PTI

Famous Bundelkhandi folk singer dies

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, SEPT. 5

Renowned Bundeli folk singer Deshraj Pateria, credited with composing a record 10,000 folk songs in the last five decades, died of cardiac arrest at his home in Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday. He was 67.

Late Pateria has become synonymous with Bundeli culture with his folk songs still being heard in whispering tones sung un mindfully by farm workers during agriculture operations



Deshraj Pateria

► **LATE DESHRAJ Pateria has become synonymous with Bundeli culture with his folk songs being sung by farmers during agricultural operations in Bundelkhand region covering Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh**

in the whole Bundelkhand region covering Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

“His folk songs spell magic on people of Bundelkhand as well as connoisseurs of folk music in the country”, edi-

tor of a Bhopal-based local daily, Rajesh Sirothia, who hails from Bundelkhand city of Sagar in MP, observed.

Born on July 25, 1953 in the village of Nandini in Chhatarpur district, late Pateria did a degree in

music in applied music after completing his higher secondary. He had later landed a job in the state government’s health department.

He gave his first performance in public in 1972 and four years later, he was offered to sing folk songs in All India Radio in Chhatarpur. His first cassette hit the market in 1980 and since then he never looked back.

“In his death, the world of music has lost one of its stars”, chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said.

THE ASIAN AGE

6 SEPTEMBER 2020



Krishna Shastri
Devulapalli

Off the beaten track

Blame it all on those vile Mughals

Apparently, our glorious land was ruled at various times by, among others, the Mauryas for 550 years, the Chalukyas for 600 years, the Satavahanas for 500 years, the Cholas for 1,000 years, the Pandyas for 600 years and the Kapoors for 100 years (okay, the last one I made up). But all we hear about, Facebook and WhatsApp tell me of late, is the wretched Mughals who ruled for a measly 300 years. And that this injustice should be corrected at once on a war footing as we scream *Jai Hind*.

As a baby step, I don't know, perhaps we could ban biryani, a diabolical Mughal invention that has enslaved us for several centuries. And make Chole Bhature, an all-time favourite of Raja Raja Chola's, the most ordered dish on Swiggy for the next one year and show those arrogant, if dead, Mughals a thing or two. And be declared the most patriotic nation in the universe by Nasa. And have that underwritten by Unesco.

Jokes apart, why is it important that we read up on these kings? With immediate effect? As opposed to those other terrible kings about whom far too much has been written?

Well, could it be because, unlike those dastardly Mughal invaders, these were all good, benevolent, tolerant kings, who didn't bump off their own family members to ascend the throne, had no blood on their hands, whose armies didn't rape, pillage or plunder, didn't hanker after power, were uniformly kind to their subjects, didn't ever impose taxes, planted shady trees, built wide roads and never ate biryani? And that Kangana Ranaut and Arnab Goswami have in their possession UHD videos from centuries ago as incontrovertible proof of their munificence?

Indulge me as I relate a tiny tale with a happy ending.

A man was travelling with his family along a long and winding road. It had been quite a journey. There was no denying the path had been bumpy and unpredictable, and his car rattled and wheezed a bit from the strain. But there was also no denying he had made progress. Mainly because he had kept his eyes open. And on the road ahead.

Suddenly a man waving a bright red flag jumped in his path and stopped the car.

"You know what a horrible, dangerous, pot-hole filled road you have been driving on so far?" he said. "Don't you see the injustice of it? Shouldn't you be taking all those responsible for building such an evil, un navigable road to task, make them pay? And keep looking out for how dangerous and harmful the road behind you is?"

"Yes, you are absolutely right, sir," the driver said gratefully. "From now on, I won't take my eyes off the rear-view mirror when I drive. I'll keep a keen eye on how bad the road behind me is. Thanks for the invaluable tip."

The driver restarted his car, and proceeded, his eyes firmly on the rear-view mirror. And promptly drove off a cliff at the next bend, family and all. And they all lived happily ever after.

Not a believable story? Why then are so many of us obsessed with the road that we have already negotiated? Good, bad and ugly, though it might have been. Like any long road. At the expense of looking at the road ahead?

Understanding history and its older sibling, mythology, is okay. Good even, up to a point. But isn't it obvious that we have gone way past that? Obsessively looking at the past — real and mythical — is merely not wanting to look at the present; an inability to deal with reality. And an unwillingness to take responsibility.

How about we put history aside for a bit, and mythology, too, and brush up on reason, scientific thinking and logic instead. Even get ourselves a (slim) book on compassion, perhaps. Maybe it's time to forget yesterday for a minute and figure out what we need to do today so that we actually have a tomorrow. Not be diverted by people who don't want us to see the here and now.

See what we've allowed to happen because we've been told to stare at the rear-view mirror.

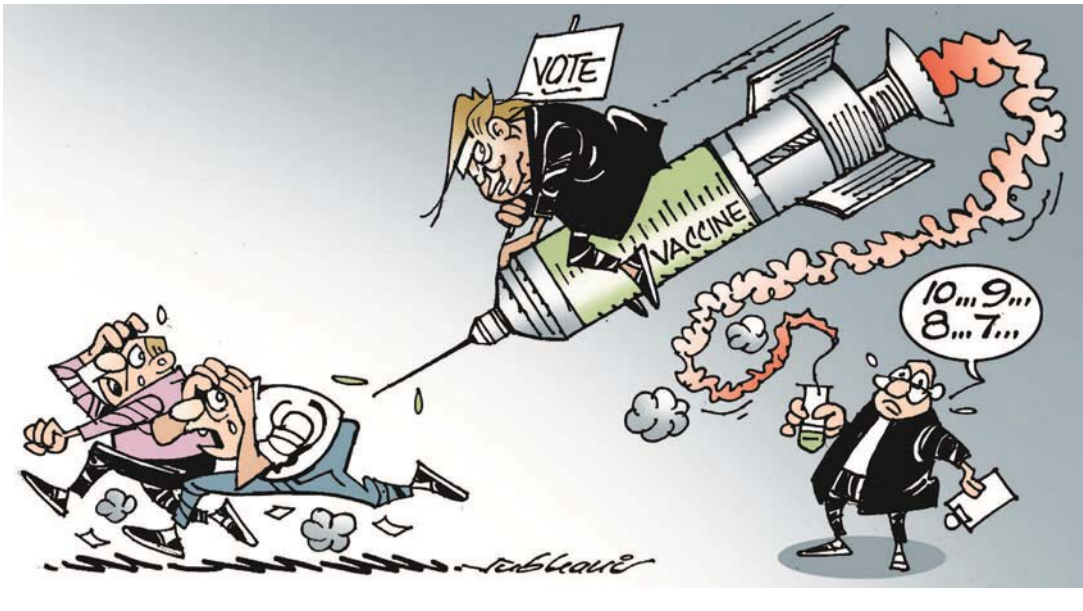
And, yes, let's thank god for biryani.

Krishna Shastri Devulapalli is a humour writer, novelist, columnist and screenwriter



As a baby step, I don't know, perhaps we could ban biryani, a diabolical Mughal invention that has enslaved us for several centuries. And make Chole Bhature, an all-time favourite of Raja Raja Chola's, the most ordered dish on Swiggy for the next one year and show those arrogant, if dead, Mughals a thing or two.

Subhani



For democracy's sake, don't scrap Q-Hour



Pavan K. Varna

Chanakya's View

Frankly, to have a Parliament session without question hour is like visiting a forest without trees. The BJP's decision to scrap question hour in the forthcoming parliamentary session is both worrisome and opportunistic. The BJP may be in power right now, but surely it must remember its days in the Opposition, and not lose sight of the fact that it could be there again. In democracy — and in life — nothing ever remains unchanged. Ghalib's immortal line comes to mind: *Har bulundi ke naseebon mein hai pasti ek din*: it is the in the destiny of every pinnacle to hit the dust sometime.

If the BJP would have been in the Opposition today, would it welcome a parliamentary session without the opportunity to put the government on the mat? Especially if there were burning issues to discuss like there are today: the economic crisis, the handling of the Corona pandemic, and Chinese aggression on the border. The reasons being touted against holding the question hour are hardly convincing. Democratic governments function on the basis of accountability. Within the hallowed precincts of Parliament, the nation's highest democratic forum, question hour is the one institution where government ministers can be directly questioned. Nothing else substitutes for this interrogatory interaction, and compels the government to explain and defend its

actions and policies.

Let us examine the arguments against question hour being put by the ruling dispensation. Firstly, it is said that even in the absence of question hour, written answers can be provided to questions provided in advance. My experience of being in Parliament compels me to unhesitatingly throw this argument out of the window. There are two categories of questions that can be asked in Parliament, unstarred and starred. The first merit only written replies. This incorporates the art of drafting a reply, that mostly says as little as possible, while fulfilling the perfunctory requirement of answering the question. As a diplomat-bureaucrat before joining politics, I have been on the other side of the fence of drafting replies to unstarred questions. The achievement lay in hiding the full truth, and revealing only what is unavoidably necessary, playing on words, and using the loopholes in the question itself — many of which are badly drafted — to get off the hook. The answers are circulated in Parliament, and mostly forgotten, except as a written record of what little the government had to say when asked a straightforward question.

Starred questions, on the other hand, come up in question hour. The concerned minister, and sometimes the Prime Minister himself, has to physically answer the question. Moreover, each question allows for a minimum of three sup-

The argument that question hour can be substituted by zero hour or by special leave mentions, is fallacious. Both are usually about urgent but localised issues, and do not allow for the range of interrogation that a question hour does.

plementary questions related to the original question. This requires the minister to prepare himself fully, and gives the Opposition a much needed opportunity to hold the government accountable in a much more direct way than the anonymity of a written reply. If the minister prevaricates, or seeks to evade the questions asked, the Chair of the House can pull him up, and if she does not have the answers it becomes an embarrassment for the government. In other words, if Parliament's principal purpose is to provide a democratic forum for holding the government accountable, this is the hour when it happens best.

The argument that starred questions require the minister to be accompanied by a number of officials from the ministry concerned since, depending on the question asked, they can quickly send across from the officials' gallery briefing notes or facts to the minister, is fallacious. If even MPs will now be able to enter Parliament only with a negative certificate on Corona, why can't each ministry identify a few selected officials required to be present on question day, to do the same?

The argument that question hour can be substituted by zero hour or by special leave mentions, is fallacious too. Both are usually about

urgent but localised issues, and do not allow for the range of interrogation that a question hour does. Short duration discussions on specific subjects, or call attention motions, are difficult to schedule, and do not allow the exercise of accountability to be exercised on a daily basis as happens during question hour. The fact that some state Assemblies have dispensed with question hour, should be no reason why Parliament, the apex legislature where national issues need to be discussed, has to do the same. Similarly, for the BJP to argue that because question hour has frequently been disrupted by the Opposition, question hour itself can be dispensed with, is hardly tenable. Unfortunately, disruptions do take place in Parliament. But, the BJP when in Opposition perfected the art of such disruptions. Would it have then agreed that as a result of its behaviour question hour should be scrapped?

It is true that these are not normal times. The Corona pandemic has led to modifications in the working of institutions. It is for this reason that the session of Parliament is taking place after a prolonged hiatus, and for a truncated period. Parliament cannot only be a mechanical institution for a ruling party with a brute majority in the Lok Sabha, and a usually managed majority in the Rajya Sabha, to pass legislation. A government has to be held accountable. It is hoped that the BJP's own professed commitment to democracy will prompt it to rescind its decision to do away with question hour.

The writer, an author and former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

KHOYA IN DEMAND

The government should take all steps to raise production of khoya by organised sector and co-operative giants including Mother Dairy, Amul, Saras, Delhi Milk scheme, Vita, Verka, Sudha and others ahead of the festive season. Mother Dairy and Amul, enjoying a substantial market share in Delhi, should also arrange door-delivery of khoya for bulk purchasers on advance booking in a routine manner. Mother Dairy markets khoya. But because of extraordinary fat content, its product is not only costlier but difficult to use. Mother Dairy should decrease the fat content in khoya and make its price comparable with that of khoya sold in the open market.

Madhu Agrawal
New Delhi

CSK'S LOSS

VETERAN OFF-SPINNER Harbhajan Singh pulling out of IPL 2020 for personal reasons must come as a blow to CSK's fortunes. Harbhajan's decision comes close on the heels of influential all-rounder Suresh Raina exiting the tournament on the same grounds. MS Dhoni and company do not have another off-spinner in the squad and may seek a replacement. The pandemic has also hit the squad hard with two players and a host of staff members testing positive for the virus.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

ROBUST DEFENCE

AFTER INDIAN defence minister Rajnath Singh's meeting with his Chinese counterpart Gen. Wei Fenghe in Moscow at the request of Beijing, the Chinese government said in a statement that the responsibility of the recent border row erupted in Ladakh lies "entirely with India" and that Chinese military is "fully determined, capable, and confident" to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity. It leaves no doubt that China is adamant on its policy of falsely claiming and capturing Indian territories. New Delhi needs to ensure a robust defence of Line of Actual Control at its disputed borders.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

REASON TO WORRY

WHILE RESEARCHERS across the world are maximising efforts to come up with a vaccine for curing COVID-19, WHO's chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan revealed that a global distribution for the same will not begin before the second half of 2021. India has reason to worry because of the highest ever one-day surge among all major countries over a month in succession.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com. Else, send to Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110002.

Post Shah illness, now stars don't seem aligned for BJP rejigs

Scindia kept waiting

The expansion of both the BJP national executive and the Union Cabinet is unlikely before the Parliament session. It has been nine months since J.P. Nadda took over as party president but there is no sign of a new team. The BJP office bearers were supposed to be appointed in August but home minister Amit Shah's illness is said to have delayed it. Now the stars have turned hostile. BJP insiders now claim that an "inauspicious" Shraadh fortnight has come in the way of a BJP executive and Cabinet expansion. Jyotiraditya Scindia will be disappointed if he fails to join Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet before the Madhya Pradesh Assembly bypolls. Mr Scindia thinks he can influence voters in 27 constituencies if he is given a Cabinet rank.

Mukul must pay

The Congress Party's Mukul Wasnik is finding himself on a sticky wicket following his move to align with the 23 dissenters. Mukul is AICC general secretary in charge of Madhya Pradesh where crucial

Assembly by-elections are to be held. But Mr Wasnik is unable to visit on account of his 'rebel' stance. There are four AICC secretaries under him who in private are giving him an earful for allegedly 'compromising' their integrity and loyalty to the party. In principle, AICC secretaries are supposed to take direction and guidance from the general secretary but in Mukul's case, neither side is speaking to one another. Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath fears this deadlock would cost the party dearly.

Thirty minutes only

Criticised for cancelling 'Question Hour', the Narendra Modi government will allow a 30-minute question hour in the upcoming Parliament session scheduled to be held from September 14 to October 1. So far, India and Russia had been two democracies dithering on convening their Parliaments in the wake of Covid-19. On the other hand, as many as 105 parliaments worldwide have been meeting and discussing issues amid the pandemic. In the British Parliament, Prime Minister Boris



By WAQYANAWIS

Johnson has been fielding questions after spending a considerable time in the hospital

ICU after getting infected by the coronavirus.

A piece of Mukherjee

With former President Pranab Mukherjee gone, attempts to usurp his legacy are underway by non-Congress parties, particularly by the BJP and the Trinamul Congress. PM Modi had a picture of him touching Pranab's feet while Rahul Gandhi's rather 'perfunctory' tweet was subject to social media criticism.

Pranab's diaries

Mukherjee's daughter Sharmistha, currently the Congress spokesperson and the Delhi Mahila Congress unit head, is said to be in possession of her father's diaries. These entries, written at the end of each day as his habit, are more than a goldmine. Sharmistha's brother Abhijit is also in the Congress, having served two terms in the Lok Sabha. Pranab's diaries are being eyed by the Congress, the BJP, the Trinamul and several publishing houses.

Sonia calls Sharmistha

When Pranab was battling for his life at the Army's Research and Referral (RR) hospital in Delhi, Sonia Gandhi reportedly called up Sharmistha enquiring not just about Pranab but her as well. When she learnt that Sharmistha was alone, Sonia reportedly got restless and worried over the young Mukherjee, who had to calm and assure her that she was fine.

Priyanka's new abode

Priyanka Gandhi has a new address in New Delhi. She has a duplex in Sujan Singh Park, facing the Ambassador Hotel and in the close vicinity of Khan Market. It is one of the most sought-after addresses in the capital. Built by Khushwant Singh's father, Sujan Singh Park is one of the first residential apartments of Delhi, where stories of the residents are as interesting as its architecture. Sujan Singh was Khushwant's grandfather. Priyanka, reliably learnt, is staying there as a tenant.

The writer is a keen observer of the goings-on in backrooms of power

SHORT TAKES

AFGHAN FORCES
KILL 46 TALIBAN
TERRORISTS

Kabul, Sept. 5: The Afghan forces have killed 46 Taliban terrorists and injured 37 others during an operation in the northern Faryab province.

Several Taliban units attacked the Qaisar district of the Faryab province but were pushed back by the military, Mohammad Hanif Reza, a spokesman for the 209th corps of the Afghan National Army, also known as the Shaheen Corps, told Sputnik on Saturday.

The spokesman added that the district was under the control of the Afghan forces.

At the same time, Reza said the military operation was still underway, while the Afghan armed forces were clearing the area from the Taliban terrorists.

Meanwhile, the provincial government said several high-ranking members of the Taliban were injured during the operation.

The movement has not yet commented on the incident.

16 KILLED IN
BANGLA MOSQUE
GAS EXPLOSION

Dhaka, Sept. 5: A suspected gas explosion tore through a Bangladesh mosque killing at least 16 people while dozens suffered life-threatening burns, police said on Saturday.

Worshippers were at Friday evening prayers when the blast sent a ball of flames through the mosque in the central district of Narayanganj, emergency services said.

Investigators suspected a spark from an air conditioner — which came on after a power cut — set off the gas.

“Leaked gas entered the mosque,” Narayanganj fire chief Abdullah Al Arefin said.

“When they shut the windows and doors and switched on the air conditioners there was an electricity spark that led to the explosion inside the mosque.” The 16 who died were among 37 taken to a specialist burns hospital in Dhaka, said hospital spokesman Samanta Lal Sen.

He added that the condition of the remaining 21 patients was “very critical” and all had suffered 70 to 80 percent burns.

Police said at least 45 were injured by the blast and that people had spoken of smelling a gas leak.

SUDAN DECLARES
EMERGENCY OVER
DEADLY FLOODS

Khartoum, Sept. 5: Sudan on Saturday declared a three-month national state of emergency after record-breaking torrential floods that cost 99 lives.

“A nationwide three-month state of emergency has been announced as Sudan is considered a natural disaster zone,” the interior ministry said on social media.

Floods caused by more than a month of heavy rains have killed 99 people, injured 46 and left 1,00,000 damaged properties in their wake, one of the worst natural disasters in decades, according to state news agency SUNA.

North Darfur in the country’s west and Sennar state in the south were among the hardest hit areas. Heavy rains usually fall in Sudan from June to October, and the country faces severe flooding every year.

“The Blue Nile has reached an all-time high since records began more than a century ago,” said the irrigation and water ministry last week.

The latest report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Sudan said on Thursday that over 3,80,000 people had already been “affected” by this year’s floods.

Postal voting marks start
of US Presidential election

North Carolina was to begin mailing out more than 6 lakh ballots

Washington, Sept. 5: The US election is officially open: North Carolina on Friday launched vote-by-mail operations for the November 3 contest between President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden, which is getting uglier by the hour.

With two months until Election Day, Trump is seizing on fears over violent protests in US cities and questioning the integrity of voting by mail, while challenger Biden intensified his criticism of a “deplorable” leader who he said is not fit for office.

Worries about the unabated spread of Coronavirus are expected to prompt a surge in the number of ballots cast by mail, as millions seek to avoid polling stations.

In a country on edge over the health crisis and a national reckoning about race, the next 60 days will test the ability of the world’s largest economy to organise its election while

profoundly changed by a pandemic that has killed 1,87,000 Americans.

North Carolina was to begin mailing out more than 6,00,000 ballots, in response to a major spike in demand. Other key battleground states such as Wisconsin — which both candidates visited in recent days — will follow in the coming weeks. How Americans vote has become another flashpoint in an increasingly divisive political landscape.

A recent poll by USA Today and Suffolk University showed that 56 percent of Republican voters surveyed said they would go in person to vote, while only 26 percent of Democrats plan to do the same.

One out of every four Biden voters said that if the Democratic former vice president loses on November 3, they would not be ready to accept a Trump victory as “fairly won.” About one in five Trump voters said a simi-

lar thing. As he seeks a second four-year term, Trump has for months sowed doubt among his base about the legitimacy of an election with a significant number of mail-in votes.

Trump — who himself votes by mail in his adopted home state of Florida — has repeatedly, and without evidence, said mail-in voting could lead to widespread fraud.

He even has suggested to his supporters that they try to vote twice to test the system — earning him scorn on social media and from Democrats.

The tense campaign battle heated on Thursday when *The Atlantic magazine* reported — citing four anonymous sources who said they had firsthand knowledge of the discussions — that Trump had referred to US Marines buried in a World War I cemetery in France as “losers” and “suckers” for getting killed in action. — *AFP*

Don team pushes SM
limits as polls loom

Washington, Sept. 5: A message saying you “won’t be safe” in Joe Biden’s America. The former vice president shown “sleeping” during a television interview. Biden “hiding” — alone — in his basement.

All three videos featured in social media of President Donald Trump and his team as recently as the past week as he sought to close the gap on his Democratic rival. And each was labeled as false or manipulated content by social media giants and fact checkers.

While negative campaigning has long been a fixture of American politics, the open use of digitally-altered images by Trump and other candidates in 2020 has tech giants worried.

Twitter has cracked down by removing or labeling several of the president’s tweets. Facebook, citing the risk of civil unrest, announced on Thursday that it would not allow new political ads on its platform in the last week of the November 3 race.

There remain questions whether such messages — almost impossible to stop once they become viral — are working on voters but a line has already been crossed.

“There’s a long tradition in politics of competing politicians presenting their opponents’ words or beliefs in edited ways, right? That’s part of politics,” Ethan Porter, assistant professor of media and public affairs at George Washington University, said. — *AFP*

FB FORBIDS
LIVESTREAMED
DEATH

Dijon, Sept. 5: Facebook said on Saturday it would block the livestream of a Frenchman suffering from an incurable condition who wanted to broadcast his death on the social media platform.

Earlier, Alain Cocq announced that he was now refusing all food, drink and medicine after President Emmanuel Macron turned down his request for euthanasia.

Cocq, 57, who suffers from a rare condition which causes the walls of his arteries to stick together, said he believed he had less than a week to live and would broadcast his death from Saturday morning.

“Although we respect (Cocq’s) decision to want to draw attention to this complex question, following expert advice we have taken measures to prevent the live broadcast from Saturday morning,” a Facebook spokesman said. — *AFP*

UK CLIMATE
ACTIVISTS TARGET
NEWSPAPERS

London, Sept. 5: Climate change protesters in Britain blockaded two printing presses on Saturday, disrupting the distribution of numerous national newspapers as they step up 10 days of protests demanding action on environmental issues.

Activist group Extinction Rebellion (XR) targeted both the plants, just north of London and near Liverpool in north-west England, causing delays to deliveries of papers including *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun*.

Dozens of activists blocked roads outside the sites using vehicles and by attaching themselves to other obstacles, “to expose the failure of these corporations to accurately report on the climate and ecological emergency.” — *AP*

Tanker fire under control



Tug boats and ships battle the fire on MT New Diamond in the Indian Ocean, on Saturday. The fire on the large oil tanker off Sri Lankas coast has been brought under control but is still not extinguished, the navy said on Saturday. The tanker, carrying nearly 2 million barrels of crude oil, was drifting about 20 nautical miles (37 kilometers) from Sri Lankas eastern coast and on Friday evening a tug boat towed it to the deep sea away from land, said navy spokesman Capt. Indika de Silva.

— AP

Biden confirms Covid-19 test,
says he’ll be tested regularly

Wilmington, Sept. 5 : Joe Biden has said that he’s been tested at least once for the Covid-19 virus and promised he will be tested regularly during his general election campaign against US President Donald Trump.

The Democratic presidential nominee on Friday told reporters of his testing protocol during a wide-ranging news conference in which he blasted Trump for downplaying the Coronavirus and thus ensuring that it will continue to kill Americans and ravage the economy.

For much of the summer, Biden’s advisers deflected questions about whether the former vice president was being tested himself as he anchored his campaign almost exclusively from his Delaware home, travelling sparingly as a precaution.

“They’re going to do it on a regular basis,” Biden said of the testing. He noted that the Secret Service agents assigned to protect him and “everyone” else who comes into his home is tested already. Biden said he didn’t know specifically when his next test would be. “I just, ‘yes, sir,’ show up and put my head back,” Biden said.

“I imagine it’ll be sometime this week, but it will be a regular basis,” Biden and Trump offer voters a sharp contrast on the pandemic and its economic fallout.

In the Oval Office on Friday, Trump hailed a new jobs report and repeated his optimism that a Covid-19 vaccine could be available even before the November 3 election.

Hours later, during a fundraiser, Biden said, “I

hope like hell they have a vaccine,” but questioned Trump’s timeline and ability to distribute it. “We’ve got to make sure they’re not just hyping... that they actually finish all the testing,” Biden said, adding that Trump’s public questioning of scientists and medical experts will reduce confidence in a vaccine whenever it comes online.

“People don’t trust a damn thing he says,” Biden quipped. Further, the former vice president questioned how well the administration is planning for distribution, given the White House’s rocky distribution of Covid-19 tests and protective equipment. “Discovery of a safe vaccine isn’t enough,” Biden said. “The road from approval to injection is a long road.” — *AP*

BIDEN SLAMS DON
FOR MOCKING
U.S. MARINES

Washington, Sept. 5: Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden declared President Donald Trump “unfit” for the presidency on Friday, delivering an impassioned reaction to a report that Trump — who never served in uniform — allegedly “mocked American war dead.”

The allegations, sourced anonymously, describe multiple offensive comments by the president toward fallen and captured US service members, including calling World War I dead at an American military cemetery in France “losers” and “suckers” in 2018. — *AP*

Russia defiant
over Navalny

Moscow, Sept. 5: Russia defied threats of new sanctions over the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, as US President Donald Trump said on Friday he had not yet seen proof that the Kremlin critic was a victim of Moscow’s Novichok programme.

A new crisis in ties between Russia and the West broke out after Germany said this week there was “unequivocal evidence” that President Vladimir Putin’s top foe had been poisoned using the Soviet-era nerve agent.

Western leaders and many Russians have expressed horror at what Navalny’s allies say is the first known use of chemical weapons against a high-profile opposition leader on Russian soil.

The 44-year-old lawyer fell ill on a Siberian flight last month and was evacuated to Germany for treatment. He has been in an artificially induced coma for the past two weeks.

The Kremlin again denied responsibility for the attack on Friday.

● **WESTERN LEADERS** and many Russians have expressed horror at what Navalny’s allies say is the first known use of chemical weapons against a high-profile opposition leader on Russian soil.

“A whole number of theories including poisoning were considered from the very first days,” Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. “According to our doctors, this theory has not been proved.”

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Germany’s justice ministry had so far failed to share any findings with Moscow’s prosecutors, adding that Russian authorities had “nothing to hide”.

Trump said on Friday he had yet to see proof from Berlin that Navalny had been poisoned.

“I don’t know exactly what happened. I think it’s tragic, it’s terrible, it shouldn’t happen,” the president told a press conference. — *AFP*

Taliban say team
in Qatar for
Afghan peace talks

Kabul, Sept. 5: The Taliban’s negotiating team has arrived in Qatar, a spokesman said on Saturday, in a sign that long-delayed peace talks with the Afghan government are inching closer to starting.

A date for the talks, to be hosted in Doha, has not been set but the warring sides have this week made signals that negotiations could launch soon, including efforts to wrap up a drawn out prisoner exchange.

“All members of our negotiating team have arrived in Doha. The talks will begin once some small technical issues are resolved,” Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen said.

The Taliban team had recently been in Pakistan discussing the peace process with the government in Islamabad.

Qatar authorities have been imposing a seven day quarantine period on

all arrivals to the country, but have made exemptions for some delegations who undergo regular testing.

The Afghan government’s negotiating team remained in Kabul on Saturday, but a logistics team landed in Doha earlier this week.

Faraidoon Khawzoon, a spokesman for the Afghan government’s reconciliation council, said its negotiating team was ready for talks.

“The release of the prisoners is completed and there is no excuse for delaying the talks,” he tweeted.

“But the Taliban don’t seem to be ready for the talks. We expect the Taliban to get ready and start the negotiations.” The talks were initially due to begin in March as set out in a deal between the United States and the Taliban in February, from which Kabul was excluded. — *PTI*



Waves batter the coastline as Typhoon Haishen approaches in Makurazaki, Kagoshima Prefecture on Saturday.

— AFP

Violent typhoon
heads for Japan

Kagoshima, Sept. 5: An extremely powerful typhoon was barreling towards southwestern Japan on Saturday as authorities issued evacuation advisories to thousands of residents, warning of unprecedented violent winds, heavy rain and high waves.

Haishen churned near Okinawa in southern Japan on Saturday afternoon and was expected to approach Kyushu late Sunday or early Monday, the meteorological agency said.

The storm is expected to affect Japan from late Saturday, with winds of up to 290 kilometres per hour (180 miles per hour), making it a “violent” storm — the top level on the country’s classification scale.

“There is a danger of record winds, heavy rain, high waves and storm surge,” Yoshihisa Nak-

amoto, an agency official, told a news conference, calling for an early evacuation and “maximum caution.” Yuhai Takamura, a government official, said, “A disaster will occur. There is almost no doubt about it.” About 4,600 people in Tarumizu, Kagoshima, were urged to evacuate swiftly, while authorities in other areas of Kyushu were warning their residents to prepare.

Satoshi Sugimoto, another agency official, said the latest typhoon could generate high waves as powerful as a tsunami.

“It’s going to be the last chance to flee” when the agency formally issues the nation’s highest storm warning, Sugimoto told reporters.

Authorities on Minami-daitojima instructed about 1,300 residents to evacuate as the storm was expected to hit the remote island, east of Okinawa. — *AFP*

NEW | LIFE Pak court had approved the relocation of an elephant to Cambodia after a campaign

‘World’s loneliest elephant’ okayed to quit zoo

Islamabad, Sept. 5: An elephant who has become a cause celebre for animal rights activists around the world will be allowed to leave his Pakistani zoo and transferred to better conditions, the animal welfare group helping with the case said on Saturday.

Dubbed the ‘world’s loneliest elephant’ by his supporters, Kaavan has languished at a zoo in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad for more than 35 years.

Martin Bauer, a spokesman for Four Paws, said the elephant has been finally given medical approval to travel, most likely to Cambodia, where he will find companionship and better conditions.

The overweight elephant Kaavan underwent a full medical examination at the zoo on Friday, said Bauer.

In May, Pakistan’s High Court ordered the Marghazar Zoo closed because of its abysmal conditions

blamed on systemic negligence. Rescuing Kaavan from the zoo’s dire conditions attracted the attention of animal activists around the world, and celebrities including US singer Cher, who lobbied for his relocation.

“Unfortunately, the rescue comes too late for two lions that died during an attempted transfer at the end of July after local animal handlers set a fire in their enclosure to

force them into their transport crates,” Bauer said in a statement released on Saturday.

He said Four Paws was invited by the Islamabad Wildlife Management Board to safely transfer the remaining animals in the zoo.

Kaavan has until now been forced to live a solitary life in a small enclosure.

Friday’s medical examination showed the elephant was over-

weight, even as he showed signs of malnutrition. His nails were cracked and overgrown apparently from years of living in an improper enclosure with flooring that damaged his feet.

“Following the checks, which confirmed Kaavan is strong enough, steps will now be taken to finalize his relocation to an animal sanctuary potentially in Cambodia,” Bauer said. — *AP*



A team of veterinarians from the international animal welfare organization Four Paws briefs media prior to examining an elephant Kaavan at Maragzar Zoo in Islamabad, Pakistan.

— AP

OUR CRITIC'S RATING Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

Chudails' feminism: Sometimes fiery, sometimes faux

SUPARNA SHARMA

"Look Darling, Mazloom auratein are like diamonds — Forever. We will get to them."

Jugnu (Yasra Rizvi), in her designer-wear and stilettos, is delicately lolling on the top of a table in what is her workplace. She's smoking. Or, perhaps, not right then. She is drinking for sure, or has just had a swig. Whatever. Jugnu, posh, single and now a former wedding planner, doesn't simply utter these words. She exhumes this belief from her gut — a belief marinated in clear-eyed, pragmatic view of the world. The words emanate from her gut with fumes of bored exasperation at those who don't seem to get it. This nonchalant is part of Jugnu's privilege, of course, which she embraces, but it also speaks of her sharp understanding of what makes the world go round: It's money, bitches. These trenchant lines also summarise and convey *Chudails'* politics, its chutzpah and, of course, its motto: *Chudails* will deal with heavy subjects, but since its threshold for chest-beating and boredom is low, it'll entertain, seduce and let women — in the show and out of it, in burqas and without — fantasise for a bit.

Chudails, a 10-part series set in Karachi, opens with a cryptic interrogation scene inspired by Big Little Lies. We see some women, hear a cop asking questions, but we don't see who he is, don't know who they are, what has happened.

Questions or their answers cut to flashbacks, to the lives these women lived, the world they came from, what they got up to.

There's Sara (Sarwat Gilani) who is married to Jamil Khan (Omair Rana) and lives in elegant, deluxe bliss. Three kids, one pool, many servants.

Jamil seems like a catch because he doesn't mind interviewing gardeners Sara has shortlisted.

She's lost in her world, busy managing it, being the perfect mother and wife.

But something is missing.

That's why, perhaps, when Sara is hyper-ventilating because a child in her son's school told him that "*noni*" is actually called penis, and the school principal suggests that she take up knitting to calm her nerves, she loses it.

And then one night, a phone buzzes...

College-going

Zubaida (Meher Bano) is fed-up with her baba ka joota, ammi ki khamoshi and the blackmailing ways of her fat chaperon.

She takes out her rage by boxing and checking out gents log ke pecks on her phone. Especially the pecks and poses of Shams (Kashif Hussain). Her parents have a plan to fix her wayward ways. Or so they think.

Batool (Nimra Bucha) the killer arrives encased in a thick, transparent membrane that ensures impenetrable solitude. She seems to be still even when she is moving. And when she talks, there's more silence. Whenever Batool chews a paan, we feel the cogs in her head moving and sit up, expecting the unexpected.

All these women carry some typically feminine hurt. All except Jugnu. She is a victim of her own comfortable cowardice and choices. She stomped her way into witchdom long ago, and is still swaying with a glass in hand as she curses a Hydrangea tragedy that let "Karachi ke homos" take over her business. She says she wants to "die in Dior" but hides more than a hip flask in her designer bags.

Chudails, written and directed by Asim Abbasi, tells the story of four *mazloom* women who come together to create a secret crime-fighting enterprise in the basement of a burqa boutique. Halal Designs, which cradles in its bowels their rage, desires, powers their mission and enterprise: They call it, *Mard Ko Dard Hoga*.

Candidates are interviewed and seven are hired — six women, one trans woman. Some criminal, some skilled, all piqued.

The glue that binds them is *naari shoshan* of various hues, but the immediate trigger is infidelity. Cheating men is their forte and main target, sometimes at the cost of others.

Two congenial men — Shams (Kashif Hussain) and Jugnu's assistant Dilbar (Sarmed Aftab Jadraan) — also join this gaggle of girls.

There's energy in their secret operations. They like spying on cheating miyaans on behalf of paying wives — some of whom seek more control, some just want peace of mind, some desire a bigger

Chudails

CAST: Sarwat Gilani, Yasra Rizvi, Nimra Bucha, Meher Bano, Omair Rana, Adnan Malik, Sania Saeed, Kashif Hussain, Sarmed Aftab Jadraan
DIRECTOR: Asim Abbasi
RATING: ★★★
Streaming on Zee5

piece of the alimony pie. All goes well till it doesn't.

The twist in the show comes at a predictable moment, in a predictable way. But that's not what I am referring to here. I am talking about two cases, two moral dilemmas, and how the righteous falter.

Chudails, which creates a kind of utopia where heterosexual men and women, lesbians, trans women exist happily, is fun and fearless in many aspects. It breaks several taboos and is quite brazen about doing so. It's also not afraid to show its own characters as flawed and politically incorrect.

But, when faced with a dilemma, when it has to choose between its investment in the monoculture of *mazloom auratein* and those who may be worse off, it doesn't see the other. And herein lies a glimpse of *Chudails'* small-minded politics, and the show's plotting weakness.

In both the incidents the story is a bit vague, inarticulate. And the one that bothered me a great deal can be described as marital infidelity versus love that's forbidden in a society which celebrates heterosexual virility and punishes gay love with a 10-year jail sentence.

It involves ritualistic killing that's planned and executed with skill, spices and a seductive score. It's also shot gleefully, as if desperate to distract us from what's really going on.

I felt irritated, cheated because a fabulous opportunity to foreground forbidden love and a trans character had been squandered rather blithely.

Chudails' characters and plot

throw up some interesting moral whirlpools that challenge the myopia of straight, heterosexual feminism. But like a loyal, almost sycophantic supporter, it can't, or won't, see the other.

Women and their marital concerns remain paramount. Their hurt, instead of creating empathy for the other, sometimes gets weaponised to hurt another.

For a series that calls itself feminist, *Chudails* has a very narrow, insular view of feminism.

Chudails eventually winds its way to become a suspenseful thriller in search of two missing girls, slowly unmasking a strange sexual-fantasy club of abuse and misogyny, like those Nordic crime dramas.

While clues are dropped and it becomes obvious who, what, why... women get reduced to bit players in the story, rather than being the story themselves.

Chudails' plot is straightforward, but splicing the narrative with interrogation scenes creates intrigue. It also introduces to us one of the finest male actors I have seen on television — Inspector Jamshed played by Fawad Khan, the other. His grimy cop with a pink, pocket-sized, hand-held fan who nurses a massive crush on a former inmate reminded me a lot of Jaideep Ahlawat's Hathiram Chahuary in *Paatal Lok*.

Chudails tackles a lot — sexual abuse, marital rape, class divide, racism, prostitution, domestic abuse, the subcontinent's obsession with all that is *angrezi* and *gora*, forced marriages, laws written and implemented by men, how we bring up our boys, how we teach them to see and treat women, the irksome existence of an *akeli aurat*... And it does so while drawing a lot from its many illustrious, Pakistani predecessors.

Marvel's New Jersey-based Kamala Khan, or Ms Marvel, of course, who made her solo debut in 2014, as well as Pakistani Girl in long green boots whose dupatta is her fluttering cape as she fights corruption and domestic abuse. There was

also *Burka Avenger*, the lead character in an animated TV series who fights the corrupt politician "Vadero Pajero".

What's its own is *Chudails'* moxie.

Witches rhymes with bitches, and Asim Abbasi doesn't just give each of his female characters some scars and a sharp bite, but also oodles of badass chudail swag.

His chudails take charge of their desires — to be with someone, or to leave them. They abuse, drink, smoke, make out. There's gay, lesbian love, and modest skin-to-skin touching — male to male, female to female and female to male.

In its first half, *Chudails* has a spring in its step and moves like a delighted caper, loving its own chic insolence. There's liberating coolness to its crudeness. Foul-mouthed women and their *gaalis* linger on, like designer perfume. But there's also a disturbing superficiality to its daring-do. A large part of that is a result of the show pretending that it's equally about four women even as it's constantly fawning over two upper class women.

Class keeps raising its ugly head in *Chudails*. While it shows us how power remains concentrated in a certain class and its own unease with class divide is at times apparent, but so is its acceptance of it.

Chudails seems to shrug and say, "Darling, all this *class-vlass* is just terrible, but it is what it is."

Chudails keeps presenting the rather elitist, entitled behaviour of its two main characters — Sara and Jugnu — as cutely silly, without ever really interrogating them.

In fact, *Chudails* hardly ever holds anyone to account. Not even the men, despite its abiding obsession with infidelity. And definitely never the system.

Not in the show at least.

Chudails is split in episodic chapters and each one opens with an artistic, angsty, feminist essay — a commentary through a composition of visuals, some abstract, some obvious, some bathed in vaginal blood.

The one I liked a lot is about the gaze.

A dance

director is recording an item number but one girl's navel is not showing.

He shouts at the stylist who arrives to pull down the girl's jeans a bit. Item resumes.

But then the camera cuts to a row of bare-chested men. We don't see their faces or legs. Just their oblong, hairy, sagging stomachs, with dark, oblong holes in them.

This juxtaposition of images articulates the violence and unfairness of this one craving that one. But more importantly, it creates an accompaniment to the smooth, almost concave female midriff — next time you see it, a hairy, male one will pop up in your head, chipping away at the male gaze's intent to titillate.

Wedged in between luscious houses, gorgeous clothes, *gandi gaalis* is the detailing of the lives of the show's main characters and their desperation. Even others, who are not lit by back stories, seem to come from a recognisable, believable world they want to escape.

Chudails likes Jugnu and Sara the most, and both these characters are entrusted to fine actors, though if I had to pick my favourites, I'd go with Yasra Rizvi and Nimra Bucha.

Sarwat Gilani and her Sara is the pivot on which *Chudails* spins. But she's too goody-goody, perfect, dull for me — the actor and the character.

I prefer Yasra Rizvi, Nimra Bucha — women with uniquely angular personalities, flawed beauty. They are insanely compelling, because they look like life tried its best to leave some marks on them, and they let those show.

The world is changing and it needs a new vocabulary. Cocky, ballsy, eight-inch, 56-inch won't do.

We urgently need words that can at least begin to describe women and their battles, their suffering and grit, words that can convey both — the "span of her hips and the stride of her step", words that don't draw their power from the male anatomy or try to masculinise female courage.

We need words that are born from the lived reality of women, words that don't try to hide the "curl of her lips", but also convey the "fire in their eyes", words that are not shy of "the ride of her breasts", nor wary of "the bend in her head".

To that end, *Chudails* is an excellent start.



Time-bending thriller for bended times

Tenet

CAST: John David Washington, Robert Pattinson, Elizabeth Debicki, Dimple Kapadia, Michael Caine, Kenneth Branagh
DIRECTOR: Christopher Nolan
RATING: ★★★

I went in fresh to *Tenet*. I didn't have any real sense of the plot, yes, but it's more that it had been some five months since I was last in a movie theater. That's a long hiatus — a dark ages for sitting in the dark — for someone, anyone, used to going to the movies more days than not. The last film I had seen in a cinema, back in March, was the Vin Diesel vehicle *Bloodshot*, so you can imagine my eagerness for a new aftertaste.

It's complicated, in a way, to parse the experience. There's the feeling of being back in a movie theater, and then there's the sensations particular to *Tenet*.

For Christopher Nolan, whose films build their conceptual architecture around the metaphysics of movies themselves, it's kind of one and the same.

His movies are designed, from a molecular level, to unlock innate cinematic powers and glorify the almighty Big Screen — a lonely god these last few months.

As the first major film released in theaters since the pandemic began, *Tenet* has swelled in the minds of anxious moviegoers, adopting the role of savior. Nolan vs. Covid-19 is as much part of the drama of *Tenet* as anything on screen, and just as convoluted and disorienting.

Seeing *Tenet* for this critic meant crossing numerous state lines and watching it at a nearly empty movie theater — a luxury of social distancing that won't be possible for most, even in reduced capacity theaters. At its best, moviegoing has always been thrilling, even dangerous. That may be doubly so right now.

For better and worse, *Tenet* is just a movie. It

won't beat the virus and it won't single-handedly save movie theaters. It won't even really blow your mind. But for much of its 150-minute running time, Nolan's globe-trotting sci-fi riff on the spy thriller will provide a dazzling escape, one dense with singular imagery and intellectual puzzles. And, perhaps most vitally, it will give a cool, brutalist refresher of the movies' capacity for awe, for imagination, and, yes, for tiresome grandiosity. For the palindromic *Tenet*, it cuts both ways.

Naturally, *Tenet* opens on a crowded auditorium. At an opera house in Kyiv, just as the conductor is raising his baton, a barrage of bullets rings out and masked men take the stage. Outside, a squadron of covert American agents are stirred. They pick a local police patch for their shoulders, and one among them (John David Washington, known only as "the Protagonist" in the credits) maneuvers to rescue a man who sits in a closed balcony. He greets him with the coded phrase "We live in a twilight world."

As he's trying to stop bombs from going off in the theater, an odd thing happens. Tussling with one of the terrorists, a bullet seems to fly backward into the gun. After being taken hostage and tortured, he blacks

out. When he wakes up much later, he's told that he's been released from the CIA and been enlisted in a shadowy organisation known as Tenet. The mission goes beyond borders, he's told. A Cold War — "ice cold" — is brewing. He's to try to prevent World War III and an apocalypse worse than nuclear holocaust.

The details of this secret war — who's on what side, what's at stake — take a while to unspool. But just as Nolan's last film, the gorgeously synchronised WWII survival tale *Dunkirk*, was arranged elementally by land, sea and air, *Tenet* is spliced between past, present and future. A heady genre movie that puts James Bond-like tropes through a collider, it's very much a companion piece to *Inception* (a heist movie with a sci-fi spin) and just as laden with continual explanation. — AP



In 'Copperfield,' Iannucci brings Dickens to life

It's not hard to draw a straight line from Charles Dickens to Armando Iannucci. In each there's a passion for human frailty and absurdity, and, above all, a richness of people. Nobody filled pages with a vivid cast of characters like Dickens, so who better to take a shot at "David Copperfield" than the man behind the teaming ensembles of *Veep*, *In the Loop* and *The Death of Stalin*?

In his third film as director, following his farce of bumbling and bloody

Kremlin power struggles, Iannucci has turned to Dickens' most quintessential and autobiographical novel with the same zeal he previously reserved for political parody. *The Personal History of David Copperfield* is one of the more lively, colorful and whimsical Victorian costume dramas you're likely to see. It's a movie flowing with fresh air, which isn't something normally said of adaptations of 700-something-page books.

Iannucci, famed for his improvisational style and

The Personal History of David Copperfield

CAST: Tilda Swinton, Dev Patel, Hugh Laurie
DIRECTOR: Armando Iannucci
RATING: ★★★

expletive-laden barrages, clearly finds in Dickens a writer simpatico in fond-

ness for language and taste for multitudes. In many ways, they make a good match, with Iannucci's more anarchic, free-wheeling style animating the wit and idiosyncrasies of Dickens' tome.

And just as in the absurdly deep bench of *Veep*, casting has made a difference. Dev Patel winningly plays Copperfield, once out of childhood (as a boy, he's played by compelling youngsters Jairaj Varsani and Ranveer Jaiswal), with wide-eyed wonder, always alive to the world around

him, if generally rather mystified by it. Still, the film belongs largely to the overall cast, including Tilda Swinton, as David's aunt Betsey Trotwood; Hugh Laurie as the mentally ill, King Charles I-obsessed Mr. Dick; Peter Capaldi as the creditor-evading Wilkins Micawber; Rosalind Eleazar as the romantic interest Agnes Wickfield; Benedict Wong as the wine-swilling Mr. Wickfield; Ben Whishaw as the plotting Uriah Heep.

The performers, a distinctly multicultural cast,

add considerably to the vibrancy of the film, collectively making a fairly irrefutable argument for colorblind casting, for anyone who needs one.

But while *The Personal History of David Copperfield* keeps a restless, brisk pace as it rushes through Copperfield's life, Iannucci and his co-writer Simon Blackwell arrange the film in such distinct chapters that the movie feels more like a litany of scenes than dramatic evolution of a young man. Some sections are better than others. — AP



SHORT TAKES

Hami takes pole with record lap

Monza, Italy: Lewis Hamilton claimed pole position with a new lap record at Monza for Sunday's Italian Grand Prix with Valtteri Bottas taking second in Saturday qualifying for another Mercedes front row lock-out. McLaren's Carlos Sainz posted the third fastest time and is joined on the second row by Sergio Perez for Racing Point. The session proved another humbling experience for out-of-sorts Ferrari with Sebastian Vettel going out in Q1 and Charles Leclerc, who won at the circuit last year, in Q2. This means no Ferrari inside the top 10 at Monza for the first time since 1984. The championship leader and six-time champion clocked a fastest lap in one minute and 18.887 seconds to beat the Finn by 0.069 seconds. In pure speed, Hamilton's track lap record performance produced an unconfirmed fastest lap in F1 history. — *AFP*

Messi misses Barca training

Barcelona: Lionel Messi was a no-show at training with Barcelona on Saturday morning despite his decision to stay at the club under sufferance, AFP reporters at the training ground said.

The Argentine superstar announced on Friday he had been forced to remain at Barcelona, claiming after club president Josep Maria Bartomeu broke his word to let him leave. It came after 10 days of tension since his bombshell fax telling Barcelona he wanted out. But while other players including Jordi Alba and Philippe Coutinho arrived for the session, Messi failed to appear at the Joan Gamper training complex for the session which began at 0730 GMT. — *AFP*

Dutch go past Poland; Italy held

London: Steven Bergwijn ensured the Netherlands did not feel the absence of recently departed coach Ronald Koeman to beat Poland 1-0 in the Nations League, while Italy were held 1-1 by Bosnia and Herzegovina on Friday. Koeman left to take charge of Barcelona last month, less than a year before he was due to lead his country to a major international tournament for the first time. A rejuvenated Netherlands reached the final of the inaugural Nations League under Koeman last year after missing out on the 2018 World Cup. Also in Group 1, Italy extended their two-year unbeaten run but had to settle for a point against Bosnia in Florence. — *AFP*

Heat push Bucks to brink with win

Miami: Jimmy Butler powered the Miami Heat to a 115-100 victory over Milwaukee on Friday that pushed the top-seeded Bucks to the brink of elimination in the NBA playoffs. Butler scored 17 of his 30 points in the Heat's scorching fourth quarter, Miami out-scoring the Bucks 40-13 in the final period to seize a 3-0 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semi-final series. It was the most lopsided final period in a playoff game since the NBA introduced the shot clock in 1954. Western Conference top seeds the Los Angeles Lakers were also beaten Friday in the NBA's coronavirus quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida, falling 112-97 to the Houston Rockets in game one of their conference semi-final series. "I'm not surprised," Butler said of the fifth-seeded Heat's commanding position. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

England vs Australia 2nd T20 from 6.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

FORMULA ONE

Italian Grand Prix Main Race from 6.35 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

CARIBBEAN PREMIER LEAGUE

St Kitts & Nevis Patriots vs Trinbago Knight Riders from 7.30 pm; St Lucia Zouks vs Jamaica Tallawahs from 11.30 pm on Star Sports 1, 2, HD

US OPEN TENNIS

Matches from 8.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, 2, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. And Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9, Sector-III, Noida-201301. Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep. Rs. 20.00 per copy.

DJOKER ON A ROLL

Novak eases into Rd 4; Corona scare delays a match

New York, Sept. 5: Novak Djokovic sailed into the last 16 of the US Open on Friday as off-court intrigue forced the delay of a men's singles match over issues linked to coronavirus.

Djokovic outclassed Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 in a routine victory for the world number one, who is chasing an 18th Grand Slam singles title.

Far from routine was a last-minute attempt by New York health officials to prevent France's Adrian Mannarino from playing his last-32 encounter against German fifth seed Alexander Zverev.

The intervention led to a back and forth between tournament organisers and the state government and resulted in the match, which Zverev won in four sets, starting over three hours late.

"It was a weird situation for me," said Mannarino, one of 11 players put under enhanced safety protocols earlier this week after compatriot Benoit Paire was withdrawn from the tournament after testing positive for coronavirus.

"I was just laying on the sofa still trying to be focused just in case I would go on court," he said, following

Zverev's 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-2, 6-2 victory. Zverev will now play unseeded Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the last 16 while Djokovic will play Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta for a place in the quarter-finals.

TSITSIPAS STUNNED In the men's draw, Croatia's 27th seed Borna Coric staged a remarkable Houdini act to stun fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in a 4hr 36min late-night thriller.

Coric appeared to be heading for certain defeat after Tsitsipas, leading by two sets to one, opened up a 5-1 lead in the fourth.

But Coric rallied superbly, saving six match points and fighting back to take the set 7-5 to force a decider.

Tsitsipas went a break up once more in the fifth but couldn't press home the advantage as Coric forced a tie break before clinching a 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) win.

Twelfth seed Denis Shapovalov recovered from 5-2 down in the fourth set to pip American number 19 seed Taylor Fritz 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2.

Fritz, 22 was within two points of victory before the 21-year-old Shapovalov completed a remarkable comeback. — *AFP*

THE RESULTS

Men's singles third round (number in brackets denotes seeding): Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Jan-Lennard Struff (GER x28) 6-3, 6-3, 6-1; Denis Shapovalov (CAN x12) bt Taylor Fritz (USA x19) 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Pablo Carreno-Busta (ESP x20) bt Ricardas Berankis (LTU) 6-4, 6-3, 6-2; David Goffin (BEL x7) bt Filip Krajinovic (SRB x26) 6-1, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Jordan Thompson (AUS) bt Mikhail Kukushkin (KAZ) 7-5, 6-4, 6-1; Alejandro Davidovich (ESP) bt Cameron Norrie (GBR) 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 6-2, 6-1; Alexander Zverev (GER x5) bt Adrian Mannarino (FRA x32) 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-2, 6-2; Borna Coric (CRO x27) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x4) 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 4-6, 7-5, 7-6

(7/4); Corentin Moutet (FRA) bt Daniel Evans (GBR x23) 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/1)

Women's singles third round: Jennifer Brady (USA x28) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA) 6-3, 6-3; Angelique Kerber (GER x17) bt Ann Li (USA) 6-3, 6-4; Yulia Putintseva (KAZ x23) bt Aliaksandra Sasnovich (BLR) 3-6, 6-2, 6-1; Petra Martic (CRO x8) bt Varvara Gracheva (RUS) 6-3, 6-3; Naomi Osaka (JPN x4) bt Marta Kostyuk (UKR) 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2; Anett Kontaveit (EST x14) bt Magda Linette (POL x24) 6-3, 6-2; Shelby Rogers (USA) bt Madison Brengle (USA) 6-2, 6-4; Petra Kvitova (CZE x6) bt Jessica Pegula (USA) 6-4, 6-3.



Germany's Alexander Zverev returns to Adrian Mannarino of France in their US Open third round match in New York on Friday. Zverev won 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-2, 6-2. — *AP*

Osaka battles into Last 16

New York, Sept. 5: Two-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka battled into the last 16 of the US Open on Friday, requiring three sets to defeat 18-year-old Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk.

Osaka, the 2018 US Open champion, needed 2hr 33min to beat the unseeded world number 137 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2 inside an empty Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"She was very good. I'm kind of scared of how she is going to be in the future," Osaka said of her vanquished opponent.

Frustration got the better of the Japanese fourth seed in the second set. After recovering from 5-3 to force a tie-break she threw her racquet when Kostyuk tied the match 1-



Japan's Naomi Osaka wears a protective facemask with the name Ahmaud Arbery stenciled on it after winning her third round match against Marta Kostyuk of the Ukraine on Friday. — *AFP*

1. "I just felt like I had so many points that I didn't capitalise on. I think when I went up, I became

a bit passive and then she came in because she has no fear," Osaka said. But Osaka's experience

came through in the deciding set as she held her serve and broke Kostyuk twice for a place in the quarter-finals.

Osaka walked onto the court wearing a facemask emblazoned with the name of Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed black man who was shot dead in broad daylight while jogging in the town of Brunswick, in southern Georgia, in February.

Elsewhere, sixth seed Petra Kvitova breezed past American Jessica Pegula 6-4, 6-3 to set up a last-16 encounter with Shelby Rogers, also of the United States.

Eighth seed Petra Martic of Croatia swept aside unseeded Russian Varvara Gracheva 6-3, 6-3. — *AFP*

BOPANNA IN MEN'S DOUBLES SECOND ROUND

New York, Sept. 5: Experienced Indian Rohan Bopanna and his Canadian partner Denis Shapovalov advanced to the second round of the US Open men's doubles event here. Bopanna and Shapovalov hardly broke a sweat to get past their American rivals Ernesto Escobedo and Noah Rubin 6-2, 6-4 in their tournament opener that lasted one hour and 22 minutes on Friday.

The Indo-Canadian pair will next play sixth seeds Kevin Krawietz and Andreas Mies. Bopanna is the lone surviving Indian in the tournament after the exits of Sumit Nagal and Divij Sharan. — *PTI*

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Watson relieved after 1st session

Dubai, Sept. 5: Former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson on Saturday said it won't take long to regain touch despite a bit of rustiness as he hit the nets with his Chennai Super Kings teammates ahead of the 13th IPL beginning on September 19.

Rocked by a series of Covid-19 cases, Chennai Super Kings led by Mahendra Singh Dhoni could finally start training on Friday after clearing a third round of testing for the virus.

"How exciting it was to be back with all of my @ChennaiIPLmates for our first training session!!! It was so much fun. There was a little rust that will not take long to go," Watson wrote on his twitter handle.

The 39-year-old, who was bought by CSK ahead of the 2018 IPL, has scored 953 runs in 32 matches for the franchise in the last two years, besides capturing six wickets.

His highest score was 117 not out in the finals of the 2018 edition against SunRisers Hyderabad.

Watson is an important member of the CSK team which has been left depleted after the pull out of senior players Suresh Raina



Shane Watson

● **The 39-year-old, who was bought by CSK ahead of the 2018 IPL, has scored 953 runs in 32 matches for the franchise in the last two years, besides capturing six wickets.**

and Harbhajan Singh. CSK was forced to delay its training plan after completing the six-day quarantine after Deepak Chahar and Ruturaj Gaikwad tested positive last week along with 11 members of the the contingent.

The 13th IPL is scheduled to be held from September 19 to November 10 across three venues — Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah. — *PTI*

EMPTY STADIUMS CAN BE CHALLENGING: RCB COACH

Dubai, Sept. 5: Royal Challengers Bangalore head coach Simon Katich feels that while younger guys will feel lesser pressure in empty stadiums but it could well be a challenge for the senior cricketers as they gear up for Indian Premier League.

The 13th edition of the IPL, which begins on September 19, will be held in a bio-secure environment behind closed doors — at least the first phase — in wake of the raging Covid-19 pandemic.

"Personally, I think some of the younger players actually enjoy the fact that there will be a little less pressure with less people at the ground, creating all that noise and distraction," Katich said during RCB's YouTube show 'Bold Diaries'.

"I think it will be more of a challenge for some of the older guys that are used to the buzz of the crowd and getting their adrenaline going. But I think there will still be a lot of motivation within our squad to go out and perform well," he added.

Experienced mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton had earlier said that cricketers like Virat Kohli who depend on external stimulation and are used to 'pressure' are "really going to struggle" in front of empty stadium but self-motivated players will "do a hell lot better" in this year's IPL.

RCB completed their mandatory quarantine upon their arrival in Dubai and had started their training camps last week. — *PTI*

England pip Aussies in final-ball thriller

Southampton, Sept. 5: Tom Curran held his nerve as England beat Australia by two runs in a final-ball thriller to win the first Twenty20 international at Southampton on Friday and go 1-0 up in a three-match series.

Australia, in their first competitive match for nearly six months because of the coronavirus, were making light work of a target of 163 while captain Aaron Finch (46) and David Warner (58) were putting on 98 for the first wicket.

But star batsman Steve Smith's exit for just 18 sparked a collapse that saw

FIRST | TWENTY20

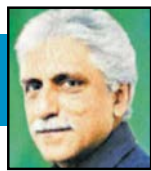
Australia lose four wickets for nine runs in 14 balls.

A target of 15 off six balls became five off one.

But Marcus Stoinis, having hit a six off Curran earlier in the over, couldn't hit another six needed for a win or the four that would have tied the scores and taken the match into a Super Over. — *AFP*

Brief scores: England 162/7 in 20 overs (D. Malan 66,J. Buttler 44; Richardson 2/13, Maxwell 2/14) bt Australia 160/6 in 20 overs (D. Warner 58, A. Finch 46; Archer 2/33, Rashid 2/29).

Are sudden IPL pullouts signs of an emergency?



Ayaz Memon Over The Top

The past few days haven't been kind to Chennai Super Kings. Two players (from 13 in all, including support staff and management) tested positive for Covid with barely a fortnight for the IPL to start, raising doubts whether the franchise would be ready to play in the opening tie on September as scheduled.

While the two players, Deepak Chahar and Rituraj Gaikwad, have tested negative since, CSK suffered other serious setbacks. Within days of each

other, senior pros Suresh Raina and Harbhajan Singh have pulled out of the tournament for 'personal reasons'.

This leaves the three-times champions beleaguered, however CSK is not the only team to feel distress. Mumbai Indians veteran Lasith Malinga, the highest wicket-taker in IPL history, and still a force to reckon with despite his advancing years, has also pulled out for personal reasons.

Malinga's decision has not invited as much media scrutiny as Raina's and

Harbhajan's because he is not an Indian star. But overall, the timing of these pull-outs as well as lack of clarity in why they have done so has left diehard IPL followers flummoxed.

The timing of the pull-outs by these players, as well as lack of clarity in why they have done so has fueled speculation and set tongues wagging about whether there is more than meets the eye about what the real reason for their belated withdrawal.

There is nothing that can, or should, prevent a player to withdraw from an event or tournament. As free agents, players have the absolute right to ply their skills — or not — within contractual limits.

'Personal reasons' is ordinarily a valid enough ground for a player's absence, but extremely

● **There is nothing that can, or should, prevent a player to withdraw from an event or tournament. As free agents, players have the absolute right to ply their skills - or not - within contractual limits.**

wide in its ambit to find complete acceptance in these trying times where the usual yardsticks don't apply and it is incumbent on players, teams, federations to be upfront on such matters to prevent misapprehensions.

The issue with Raina, Harbhajan and Malinga is not of the kind that Leo Messi, who wants to leave Barcelona Football Club

after spending a lifetime with them because of a tussle with the team's management. But it could be argued Messi also wants to leave Barca for 'personal reasons'.

That Messi has since backtracked because of a complex contract that could cost him dear is another story altogether. Seen in a wider perspective, how much better that the real issue in the Messi story was in the public domain. This prevented misplaced conjecture and needless conspiracy theories.

Transparency is all the more important in these extraordinary times, when the fear of Covid is all pervasive. It redounds to the credit of Rafael Nadal that he took a decision early and candidly on not participating in this year's US

Open because of the coronavirus factor.

In the case of the three cricketers under discussion, their sudden pull-out from the IPL bespoke of an emergency. But in the present circumstances, it is imperative to know what this urgency was about? Is it family related, Covid-linked or some other?

I don't know much about Malinga's recent situation, but Raina has had a terror assault on his family which may have brought him back. (Though why he went to UAE then remains unanswered). Harbhajan's mother has been ailing for a while, and he may have stretched the waiting period to take a final call.

These are strong reasons for not playing a tournament. And if so, why can't these be publicly disclosed? In Raina's case, the

flip-flop statements by the owner of CSK N. Srinivasan and the player himself added more grist to the rumour mill.

Within the IPL fraternity itself, lack of clarity leads to rise in conjecture and paranoia. I've received class from people associated with different franchises, wanting to know what's happening.

The issue goes beyond salacious gossip about dissonance within teams. Given the present environment, these people may be more worried about Covid infection, and whether they are being told the truth about the scale of problem, and how safe it is to be playing the tournament.

That's a dangerous route, which is why full disclosure in such matters is imperative.