

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SATURDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2020



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Army admits killing of 3 J&K youth in alleged fake encounter; orders action



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Investigative journalism can't be used to target a community: Top court



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Dining out dilemma: To eat out or not to eat out, that is plaguing people

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Devotees immerse idols of Lord Vishwakarma in Kolkata on Friday. — PTI

Pak Army targets forward areas along LoC in J&K

Jammu: Pakistan Army continued ceasefire violations for the second consecutive day on Friday by resorting to heavy firing and mortar shelling in forward areas along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district, officials said. Indian Army retaliated befittingly to the Pakistani aggression, they added. Pakistan troops have violated the ceasefire agreement 31 times so far this month. On Thursday, an Indian Army jawan was injured in Pakistani firing in Balakote sector. — PTI

Sushant probe: NCB arrests 5 persons

Mumbai: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), probing drugs angle in the actor Sushant Singh Rajput death case, on Friday arrested five persons in separate cases and seized over 1.4 kg of contraband, an official said. The NCB has so far arrested more than a dozen persons, including actor Rhea Chakraborty and her brother Showik.

Designer, 63, found dead in Kolkata

Kolkata: Eminent fashion designer Sharbari Dutta was found dead under mysterious circumstances at her Kolkata residence, prompting the police to register a case of unnatural death and initiate a probe on Friday. Ms Dutta, 63, was found dead in the bathroom of her residence in South Kolkata on Thursday midnight. Full report on Page 4

COUNTERPOINT



Thank God, there is no data!

WEATHER

Max: 38°C
Min: 27°C
RH: 55%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Adhika-Ashvina Suddha Dwitiya till 9.11 am and then Adhika-Ashvina Suddha Tadiya till 5.38 am (Sunday)
Star: Chitta till 1.21 am (Sunday)
Varjyam: 11.11 am to 12.36 pm
Durmuhurtam: 6.08 am to 7.44 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
SUNSET TODAY 6.21 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.09 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.04 PM
MOONSET TODAY 7.58 AM

■ 'Sad my voice wasn't heard... don't destroy agriculture in Punjab'

Harsimrat asks govt to rethink farm bills, refer them to panel

New Delhi, Sept. 18: A day after resigning from the Union Cabinet in protest against three farm bills, senior Akali Dal leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal said on Friday that she feels "saddened" that her voice in support of farmers was not heard and demanded that the government should pause on these laws by referring them to a parliamentary panel for wider consultations. "I left my mother in the ICU in the hospital to fulfil my duty to attend the Parliament debate on these three bills and register my protest. Then I resigned in protest against these proposed bills," Ms Badal said. She resigned soon after her husband Sukhbir Singh Badal, Akali Dal president, strongly opposed the bills in the Lok Sabha Thursday night, claiming these proposed laws will "destroy" the agriculture sector in Punjab, and announced that Harsimrat Kaur Badal will quit the Union Cabinet in protest against these three bills. Badal, who first became Union minister for food processing in 2014 and retained the portfolio in the NDA government's second term from 2019, said she kept on pleading with the government not to move ahead with these bills without taking the farmers on board. The Akali Dal voted against the three bills — Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill — which were passed by voice

■ Turn to Page 4

PM: Bills will 'free' farmers, Opp. trying to mislead them

New Delhi, Sept. 18: In a forceful defence of the farm sector reform bills, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asserted that they have brought "freedom" to farmers and given them a "protection shield", as he accused the opposition of standing with middlemen and "misleading" peasants by "lying" to them. With opposition parties dubbing the three bills, passed by Lok Sabha and now to be tabled in Rajya Sabha, as "anti-farmers" and the BJP ally Shiromani Akali Dal quitting his government to protest them, Modi refuted their criticism, describing these proposed laws as "historic" and stating that they will



Narendra Modi

unshackle farmers by allowing them to sell their produce anywhere at a better price. Speaking at the virtual launch of several rail projects in Bihar, Modi chose to speak at length on these bills, which have sparked protests by farmers in states like Punjab and Haryana, and sought to assuage concerns of the

farming community by assuring them the government procurement of their produce will continue and so will the minimum support price (MSP). "This misinformation is now being spread that the government will not give MSP benefits to farmers. Manufactured claims are being made the government will no longer purchase wheat, rice and other grains. This is a blatant lie aimed at deceiving farmers," Modi said. In the 21st century, these bills are the need of the country, he said, adding that farmers will no longer remain in shackles and sell his produce wherever they want. — PTI

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BJP hopes break with Akalis to help it in 2022 state polls

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

In Punjab, where Assembly polls are due in 2022, the resignation of Akali leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal from the Narendra Modi government over three farm sector bills, and the resignation's acceptance, is seen as a message to its ally by the BJP top brass, including Prime Minister Modi, and also a signal of the BJP's strategy in Punjab. For many years, the BJP's Punjab unit was urging the central leadership to go it alone in the state as it felt the party was not growing organisationally and limiting itself to urban areas as rural areas were seen as an

Akali stronghold. While the central BJP is yet to react to Ms Badal's resignation amid the speculation over whether or not the Akali Dal will remain in the NDA, BJP Punjab unit chief Ashwini Sharma said it was a "political decision" by the Akalis and it was still part of the NDA. Ms Badal, who was holding the food processing industries portfolio, resigned on Thursday and her portfolio was allocated to agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Friday.

Despite the Akalis, whose core votebank comprises mainly "Panthaks" and farmers, urging the BJP to delay passage of the bills as the Congress

and the AAP had made a major political issue against the SAD, the Modi government went ahead with it. In Punjab, where the SAD is considered the "big brother" of the NDA coalition, the BJP had to limit itself to urban areas, and had to compete with the Congress and AAP for urban voters. According to the BJP's feedback, many urban voters, including the youth, were unwilling to support it because of its alliance partner. With the Akalis' influence on the Panthak votebank, the BJP also lacked any prominent Sikh leader joining it. However, after the 2015 sacrilege controversy and the recent controversy

■ Turn to Page 4

Minister's attack on Gandhis leads to LS high drama

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

There was high drama in the Lok Sabha as minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur made disparaging remarks about the Nehru-Gandhi family, which led to several adjournments, as Congress Lok Sabha leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury called him "a chhokra from Himachal Pradesh". Later, the proceedings resumed only at 6 pm after four adjournments, when Mr Thakur "apologised" to the House, saying he was "pained" if his words had hurt anyone, on the insistence of Speaker Om Birla. Earlier, the trouble began when during the introduction of the Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation and Amendment of Certain Provision) Bill by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Opposition members criticised the PM-Cares fund's validity. Mr Thakur counter-attacked immediately and accused the Gandhi family of "cheating" people by pooling public money through creation of various funds under different names.



Thakur

W h i l e Opposition leaders — Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury — were critical of the PM-Cares fund during the discussion on the legislation, Mr Thakur said: "From the high court to the Supreme Court, all courts have validated the PM-Cares fund. Even children have contributed to it from their piggy banks. Nehru had set up a fund that has not been registered to date. You (Congress) only made a trust for the benefit of the Gandhi family. You made Sonia Gandhi its chairman. It should be probed." "Nehruji ordered the creation of Prime Minister's National Relief Fund in 1948 like a royal order, but its registration has not been done even till today. How did it get FCRA clearance?" Mr Thakur sought to know. This irked the Opposition and Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury lashed out at Mr Thakur, calling him a "chhokra", demanding an apology for maligning the Nehru-Gandhi family.

96,424 cases in a day; Delhi schools to be shut till Oct. 5

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

With 96,424 fresh detections, India on Friday recorded close to 52.15 lakh coronavirus cases. The number of deaths in one day was 1,174, taking the total fatality count 84,372, according to Union health ministry figures. However, Covid-19India.org said the total number of cases had crossed 52.50 by Friday evening and deaths were close to 85,000. Health ministry officials said India saw an "unprecedented high" of single-day recoveries as 87,472 persons recovered and were discharged in the past 24 hours. The recovery rate has reached 78.86 per cent as the total recovered cases touched 41.12 lakhs. With a spurt in cases in the national capital, said to be a "second wave", the Delhi government on Friday announced that schools would continue to remain shut at least till October 5. ■ More on Page 4

■ America follows India ■ Questions raised over Oracle deal

US imposes ban on TikTok, WeChat

Washington, Sept. 18: The US will ban the downloads of the Chinese apps TikTok and WeChat on Sunday, with a total ban on the use of the latter, citing national security and data privacy concerns. A total ban on the use of TikTok will follow on November 12, but commerce secretary Wilbur Ross said early Friday on Fox Business Network that access to that app may be possible if certain safeguards are put into place. "At the President's direction, we have taken significant action to combat China's malicious collection of American citizens' personal data," The government order also raises questions about California tech giant Oracle's recent deal to take over US operations of TikTok, a requirement by the Trump administration for the app to continue operating in the US.

promoting our national values, democratic rules-based norms, and aggressive enforcement of US laws and regulations," Ross said in a prepared statement. The government said its order, previously announced by President Donald Trump in August, will "combat China's malicious collection of American citizens' personal data." The government order also raises questions about California tech giant Oracle's recent deal to take over US operations of TikTok, a requirement by the Trump administration for the app to continue operating in the US.

Details of the Oracle-TikTok deal were sketchy at best. Oracle was among the pool of bidders, including Microsoft and Walmart, to buy TikTok's American operations. Oracle, in confirming it was the winning bidder Monday, didn't refer to the deal as a sale or acquisition, instead saying it was chosen as TikTok's "trusted technology provider." It's unclear at this point what assets, if any, Oracle would actually acquire. Some security experts have raised concerns that ByteDance Ltd., the Chinese company that owns TikTok, would

maintain access to information on the 100 million TikTok users in the United States, creating a security risk. Like most social networks, TikTok collects user data and moderates users' posts. It grabs users' locations and messages and tracks what they watch to figure out how best to target ads to them. Similar concerns apply to US-based social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, but Chinese ownership adds an extra wrinkle because the Chinese government could order companies to help it gather intelligence. — AP

Slam-bang IPL action begins in UAE today

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

It's billed a "positive distraction", a catalyst that's going to "change the mood of the nation" and a "much-needed chaos" in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. The 13th edition of the Indian Premier League that begins in Abu Dhabi on Saturday is expected to grab more eyeballs than usual as the five-month delay caused by Covid-19 has whet cricket aficionados' appetite for slam-bang action. The IPL juggernaut had to be moved out of India,



M.S. Dhoni

LIVE on TV
Chennai vs Mumbai on Star Sports 1 & 2
@ 7.30 PM

was forced to part ways with the title sponsor — a Chinese brand — and suffered many a nervous moment with over a dozen Covid-19 positive cases in

its UAE bio-bubble, but has marched on and is now ready to enthrall millions of fans watching from the convenience of their living rooms. Unlike previous editions, the show begins without a glamorous opening night and boisterous crowds, but the high-octane clash between defending champions Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings promises to be a blockbuster start. The two teams had featured in the final of the last edition of IPL with CSK going down by one run. Saturday's match will be

M.S. Dhoni's first appearance in a competitive game since July 2019. The recently retired player had his task cut out, motivating the players amidst the Covid-19 scare in the CSK bio-bubble. The twin pullouts of Suresh Raina and Harbhajan Singh added to their pre-season drama. Despite suffering a delayed start to their training camp, the Super Kings are raring to go. The clash between Mumbai and Chennai is known as IPL's "El Clásico". However, it's Mumbai who have an edge, having won all their last five meetings.

IN BRIEF

Covid: 6 workers held for violating norms

Noida: Six sanitation workers were arrested in Uttar Pradesh's Noida during a protest over salary and other issues on Friday, police officials said. They said scores of workers had gathered at the Noida Authority's Sector 6 office when they were held for violating Section 144 of the CrPC, which bars the assembly of over four people at a place. A senior official said the authorities have imposed the restrictions keeping in view of the Covid pandemic. "Police tried to pacify the protestors and later six of them were arrested under IPC Section 151 (knowingly joining or continuing in assembly of five or more persons after it has been commanded to disperse)," the officer said. The gathering outside the office was eventually dispersed while a section of the protesters reached the nearby Shimla Park and deposited garbage on the road, demanding the release of their colleagues. — PTI

Cop hangs himself at South Delhi house

New Delhi: A 37-year-old Delhi Police constable allegedly hanged himself from a ceiling fan at his house in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar, police said on Friday. No suicide note was recovered from the spot, they said. Police were informed about the incident around 11.26 pm on Thursday. The deceased constable, Satender, was posted at Daryaganj ACP's office in Central district of Delhi Police and lived with his wife and child at PTS colony in Malviya Nagar, police said. Deputy commissioner of Police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said the constable came home around 10 pm and after sometime, he was found hanging. Satender was taken to Max Hospital where he was declared brought dead, the DCP said. Police are yet to ascertain the reason behind the alleged suicide. Inquest proceedings are going on, they said. The body will be handed over to the family after post-mortem, police said.

Horse electrocuted in South Delhi

New Delhi: A horse allegedly died of electrocution in Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti in South Delhi on Friday, police said. The incident happened at Alvi Chowk around 11 am, a policeman present at the spot said. The owner of the horse had come to buy fodder for the animal from Turkman Gate, locals said. Waste water from overflowing sewers led to the incident, Kamal Hassan, a resident of the area, claimed. Sheikh Mohammad Umar, the secretary of the Nizamuddin West Resident Welfare Association, said people have repeatedly complained about the overflowing sewers and the pathetic condition of electricity wires to authorities concerned, but the problem persists. "A big mishap could have taken place. The horse sensed the danger and kicked his owner away, but the poor animal itself collapsed to the ground. A dog has also been injured in the incident," he said. — PTI

Man plans revenge on girlfriend, arrested

New Delhi: After his girlfriend was caught stealing and humiliated, a man decided to take revenge by creating a fake profile on Facebook and uploading obscene pictures along with vulgar captions, tagging her employer's phone number with them, police said on Friday. The accused, Suraj (27), a resident of Chirag Dilli, was arrested by the police. The woman used to work as a maid at a house, whose employer had caught her stealing clothes but retained her employment after warning her. The man, along with his girlfriend allegedly decided to take revenge for the humiliation she faced, police said. The man created a fake profile and posted obscene pictures of her employer, her phone number along with obscene images of other women, police said. On the complaint of a resident of Masjid Moth, Greater Kailash, a case was registered and an investigation was taken up, said Atul Kumar Thakur, deputy commissioner of police (South).

■ 'Principals are authorised to call staff as per requirement'**City schools to remain closed for all students till Oct. 5: Govt**

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

All schools in the national capital will continue to remain closed till October 5 in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Delhi government announced on Friday. The latest guidelines by the Centre, however, have allowed calling students of classes 9 to 12 to schools from September 21 on voluntary basis. "All government and private schools will remain closed for all students till October 5. However, online teaching and learning activities will continue as usual," an official order issued by the DoE said. School principals are authorised to call "staff as per requirement for smooth conduct of online classes or any other work", it said.

Universities and schools across the country have been closed since March 16 when the Centre announced a countrywide classroom shutdown as part of measures to contain the spread of the Covid. On March 25, the central government

500 extra ICU beds for patients added across pvt hospitals: Jain

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Friday said over 500 extra ICU beds are now available for Covid patients after an order was issued recently to several private hospitals to earmark designated percentage of those beds for the purpose. Last week an order was issued that 80 per cent ICU beds in 33 private hospitals here are to be reserved for Covid patients, Mr Jain had earlier said. "As per the Corona app, over 500 extra ICU beds are now available for Covid patients," he told reporters on Friday. According to the Thursday bulletin, the positivity rate stood at 7.38

per cent and the death rate stood at 0.68 per cent based on data of the last 10 days, the minister said.

"It is good that death rate is less than 1 per cent lately, it used to be above 3.5-4 per cent for a month earlier," Jain said. He also reiterated that reports of the seroprevalence survey conducted in the first week of September will be first put before the high court.

Cases of Covid in the city will show a rise in the next ten days, as testing capacity has been quadrupled, Mr Jain had earlier said, while asserting that plan is to contain spread of infection in the long-run through effective isolation. — PTI

continue to be closed. The government has announced four phases of the "Unlock" so far and in the guidelines for the latest phase, the home ministry said schools will continue to remain closed till

September 30. At the same time, it stated that students of class 9 to 12 may be permitted to visit their schools after September 21 in areas outside Covid-19 containment zones only, on a voluntary basis, for taking guidance from their teachers.

"This will be subject to written consent from their parents/guardians and will be permitted with effect from September 21, 2020, for which SoPs will be issued by the ministry of health and family Welfare," it was stated in the guidelines. Meanwhile, city official on Thursday said that high cost of procuring RT-PCR machines might prove to be a hurdle in implementing the Delhi high court's suggestion to ramp up RT-PCR testing in the city amid a surge in the cases, officials said on Thursday. The Delhi high court on Wednesday suggested that the AAP government increase the RT-PCR test capacity to the maximum possible to detect Covid infection, as Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) were only 60 per cent accurate.

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Should suspend public events until cases brought under control: BJP

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

With more party leaders testing positive for Covid-19, a section of the Delhi BJP leaders have opined that the party should suspend all public events for a while until the positive cases are brought under control. Reportedly, the party has planned a series of events starting with the PM's birthday till October 2, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Recently, several BJP leaders including state unit president Adesh Gupta, LS members Parvesh Verma and Meenakshi Lekhi, NDMC mayor Jai Prakash, and few councillors and office bearers tested positive for Covid. A senior party leader said that apart from these leaders, many, without making it public,

pointed out that despite taking all the precautions sometimes social distancing norms go for a toss thus putting lives at risk. A senior party leader said that a few dozen workers, who are eyeing key positions in the new state unit, are not objecting to holding political events despite knowing the risks believing that it will hamper their chances to get an appointment.

"Fearing that giving right suggestions may hinder their chances of becoming a part of the new team, they blindly follow instructions," he added. On September 15, 17 persons including office staff and their family members living at the Delhi BJP headquarter tested positive. Delhi BJP office was closed on September 16 for sanitisation.

Another party leader pointed out that despite taking all the precautions sometimes social distancing norms go for a toss thus putting lives at risk. A senior party leader said that a few dozen workers, who are eyeing key positions in the new state unit, are not objecting to holding political events despite knowing the risks believing that it will hamper their chances to get an appointment.



DPPC President Anil Kumar Chaudhary interacts with the residents of JJ clusters after Supreme Court directed the removal of 48,000 slum dwellings at Anna Nagar Camp near Tilak Bridge in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Organisers: 'Ayodhya Ramleela' to be available in 14 languages

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

The Ramleela in Ayodhya, to be participated by BJP MPs Manoj Tiwari and Ravi Kishan, will be available in 14 regional languages including Urdu and Bhojpuri.

Besides Mr Tiwari and Mr Ravi Kishan, many famous Bollywood and TV actors including Vinu Dara Singh (Hanuman), Ritu Shivpuri (Kaikeyi), Asrani (Narad), Shahbaz Khan (Ravana), Rakesh Bedi (Vibhishan), Rakesh Puri (Nishadraj), Raza Murad (Ahravana), and Avatar Gill (Janak) will be part of the Ramleela.

Goarakhpur MP Ravi Kishan will reprise the role of Bharat, said the organisers of 'Ayodhya Ki Ramleela.' Northeast Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari, who will appear as Angad in 'Ayodhya Ki Ramleela,' said in a press conference

on Friday that there was "great joy" among the people in the country over the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya which inspired the holding of a grand Ramleela in the birthplace of Lord Ram.

According to former Delhi BJP president, the Ramleela will be staged at Lakshman Qila on the banks of Saryu River in Ayodhya, a few kilometers from the site where the Ram temple is being constructed.

Chief media advisor of the organising committee Neelkant Bakshi said that it will be held before a limited number of audiences, in view of Covid-19, from October 17 to 25.

West Delhi BJP MP Parvesh Verma is the chief patron of the organising committee. The Ramleela is being held jointly by two organisations, "Meri Maa Foundation" and "Ram Ki Ramleela." — PTI

IMD: Light rain likely in Delhi

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Light rain is likely in the national capital on Friday, the weather department said.

There has been no rain in Delhi for the past 10 days, though monsoon is not over yet.

The last time the Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded any rainfall (1.3 mm) was on September 8.

Lack of rains pushed the mercury up in Delhi over the last few days.

The national capital has recorded 78 per cent less rainfall in September so far, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD) data.

The Safdarjung Observatory has recorded just 20.9 mm rainfall so far this month against the normal of 94 mm. — PTI



MCD employees wait for their turn to give samples for Covid test at Municipal Corporation in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

L-G calls for re-strategising Covid unlocking measures

4,127 cases push Delhi's tally to over 2.38 lakh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

With Covid-19 cases continuing to surge in the national capital, lieutenant-governor Anil Baijal, on Friday, directed authorities to prepare a blueprint to re-strategise containment policy, unlocking measures, and aggressive contact tracing.

Delhi recorded 4,127 new cases with 30 deaths in the last 24 hours. Of the total 2,38,828 patients, 32,250 are active while 2,01,671 have recovered. With 30 deaths, the total death count rose to 4,907.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal attended the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) meeting where his health minister Satyendar Jain, revenue minister Kailash Gahlot, and top officers were also present.

"Advised officials and experts to jointly prepare blueprint for re-strategising containment zone policy to reduce positivity and mortality rate. Emphasised on aggressive IEC campaign particularly in vernacular languages to engage stakeholders for ensuring Covid appropriate behaviour," Mr Baijal said in a tweet. According to a government official, it was emphasised in the meeting that the focus of



Anil Baijal

Covid-19 management in Delhi should be on containing transmission, strengthening medical infrastructure, improving recovery of patients, and reducing Covid-19 fatalities.

"The lieutenant-governor, who chaired the DDMA meeting, also directed the district magistrates and deputy commissioners of police for proper delineation and strict perimeter control of containment zones and active house-to-house surveillance with special focus on high risk management as per Central government guidelines," he said.

It was also directed that field officers will strictly ensure home isolation as per ICMR guideline, social distancing measures, wearing of masks, and hygiene practices.

The officers were also directed to take action against unauthorised weekly markets. It was also advised to shift the

weekly market at larger, open spaces to ensure social distancing. In order to achieve behavioural changes among the people in view of the pandemic, the officers were directed to go for aggressive campaigning and engaging youth, resident welfare associations, and non-profit groups for the purpose.

Management of vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria were also reviewed during the meeting. The officers were directed for effective surveillance in identified vulnerable areas and ramp up preventive and preparatory measures.

"They were also asked to ensure sufficient diagnostic kits, medicines, and beds in hospitals," added the officials. Delhi government's principal secretary (Health) made a detailed presentation in the meeting about Covid-19 situation in the national capital.

Noida reports 134 new Covid cases, total tally crosses 11K

Noida, Sept. 18: Gautam Buddh Nagar on Friday recorded 134 new Covid cases, pushing the district's infection tally to 11,043, official data showed. The number of active cases, however, came down to 1,868 from 2,004 on Thursday, according to the data released by the UP health department for a 24-hour period.

On the brighter side, 271 more patients got discharged during the period and the total number of recoveries in the district reached 9,127, the data showed. The district, adjoining Delhi, has so far recorded 48 deaths linked to the infection, with one of the lowest mortality rates – 0.43 per

cent — in the state, it showed.

Meanwhile, the recovery rate remained at 82.64 per cent, up from 82.18 per cent on Thursday as well as Wednesday. It was 81.14 per cent on Tuesday, 80.38 per cent on Monday and 79.82 per cent on Sunday, as per the statistics.

Noida now ranks seventh among the 75 districts in the state in terms of active cases as well as recoveries and 29th in death toll, according to the official figures. There were 67,825 active cases across UP on Friday. So far, 2,70,094 patients have recovered across the state, while the death toll linked to Covid climbed to 4,869, the data showed. — PTI

Should oppose farm bills: CM appeals to all non-BJP parties

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal appealed to all non-BJP parties on Friday to unite in the Rajya Sabha and oppose three bills that he claimed would leave farmers in the hands of big companies for exploitation. In a tweet in Hindi, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief asked the non-BJP parties to ensure that all of their members are present in the House and that they do not stage a walkout "drama".

"All three bills of the Centre will leave farmers in the hands of big companies for exploitation. I request all the non-BJP parties to unite in the Rajya Sabha and oppose these bills, make sure all your MPs are present and do not stage a walkout drama. Farmers all over the country are watching you," he said.

The Centre introduced the Farmers' Produce Trade And Commerce (Promotion And Facilitation) Bill, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill in Parliament on Monday to replace ordinances promulgated earlier.

These bills seek to provide a barrier-free trade for farmers' produce outside the notified farm mandis (wholesale markets) and empower farmers to enter into farming agreements with private players prior to production for the sale of their produce.

SHORT TAKES

'Unemployed in UP victims of injustice'

New Delhi: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday alleged that youth are facing injustice due to unemployment and poor state of recruitment processes in Uttar Pradesh. She also asserted that employment was youth's right and the government will have to give it to them. Gandhi's attack on the UP government came in a tweet following her interaction with 12,460 candidates for teacher recruitment. They got good marks in the exam, but were not recruited, the Congress general secretary said in a tweet. Lakhs of youth are facing injustice due to unemployment and poor state of recruitment processes in UP, she alleged. Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday directed senior officials to start recruitment drives in the coming three months and issue appointment letters for selected candidates in six months' time. — PTI

Mayawati: Pay heed to farmers' wishes

Lucknow: BSP president Mayawati on Friday opposed the passage of two farmer-related Bills in Parliament and asked the central government to pay heed to the wishes of agriculturalists. In a tweet, the BSP president said, "Two Bills related to farmers were passed by Parliament yesterday without removing their doubts. The BSP does not approve of this." "What does the farmer of the country want. It would be better if the central government pays attention in this regard," she said in a tweet in Hindi. The Lok Sabha on Thursday passed two bills related to the agriculture sector, including the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill.

Modi to address IIT Guwahati convocation

Guwahati: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be addressing the 22nd convocation of Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati virtually on Tuesday. Informing that union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' and his deputy Sanjay Dhotre would also be attending the virtual convocation as thre guest of honour, the IIT Guwahati in a press statement said that Assam chief minister Sarbananda sonowal will also be the special guest of the convocation. Dr. Rajiv I. Modi, Chairman, Board of Governors, IIT Guwahati, and Prof. T.G. Sitharam, Director, IIT Guwahati, will address the gathering during the event.

SC notice on plea seeking to curb AIT

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday issued notice to the Centre on a plea by a doctor seeking to curb artificial insemination techniques (AIT) for the reproduction of animals which PIL petitioner said was full of pain and suffering to animals. Heading a three-judge bench Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde also comprising Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian said that the issue requires leading the evidence by the experts and can't be done by way of PIL. Initially CJJ Bobde suggested the PIL petitioner Dr. S. Venkatesh to go for civil remedy and bring forth expert evidence to determine the issue.

Infant's body lies in morgue for 6 days

Indore: After the recent discovery of a decomposed body lying neglected on a stretcher, another corpse, that of a five-month-old boy, was found lying in a cardboard box at the same government-run hospital here. The box containing the body of the infant — who had been found abandoned by roadside in April — allegedly lay in freezer at the morgue of the Maharaja Yashwantrao Hospital (MYH) for six days without autopsy. Autopsy was ordered only after a photograph of the body in a box went viral on social media. "We have issued a show-cause notice to the head of the pediatric department for delay in autopsy," hospital superintendent K. Panchoniya said on Friday. — PTI

PM: Farm Bills bring 'freedom', 'protection shield' to farmers

Opp. in collusion with middlemen misleading farmers, says Modi

New Delhi, Sept. 18: In a forceful defence of the farm sector reform Bills, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asserted that they have brought "freedom" to farmers and given them a "protection shield", as he accused the Opposition of standing with middlemen and "misleading" peasants by "lying" to them.

With Opposition parties dubbing the three Bills, passed by Lok Sabha and now to be tabled in Rajya Sabha, as "anti-farmers" and the BJP ally Shiromani Akali Dal quitting his government to protest them, Modi refuted their criticism, describing these proposed laws as "historic" and stating that they will unshackle farmers by allowing them to sell their produce anywhere at a better price.

'Will resign if necessary over Maratha quota'

Satara (Maharashtra), Sept. 18: BJP Rajya Sabha MP Udayanraje Bhosale said on Friday that he was ready to even resign over the Maratha reservation issue. Last week, the Supreme Court stayed the implementation of the Maharashtra law which gives reservations in jobs and education to the Maratha community, and referred petitions challenging it to a Constitution bench. "I have not done any politics over the issue (of Maratha quota). If I have to resign over this issue, I will resign," said Bhosale. He will resign if any other community faced injustice too, he added. "What is the use of remaining in a position (of power) if nothing happens," added Bhosale. — PTI

■ 3rd to quit ahead of MP bypolls Setback to BJP as leader joins Cong

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, SEPT. 18

Former BJP MLA Parul Sahu on Friday joined Congress ahead of crucial by-elections to 28 assembly seats in Madhya Pradesh.

She was the third BJP leader to quit the party and join Congress in the last fortnight. "It is homecoming for me", Ms Sahu who was inducted in Congress by former chief minister Kamal Nath here, told reporters.

Ms Sahu who hails from a traditional Congress family joined BJP before 2013 assembly elections.

Her father, Santosh Sahu, was a senior Congress leader. She was given ticket by BJP to fight assembly polls in Surkhi in 2013 and won the seat by defeating Govind Singh Rajput of Congress by a slender margin of 141 votes.

She was however denied a ticket by BJP in the 2018 assembly elections. She was most likely to be fielded in the seat by Congress in the upcoming by-elections.

PARMOD KUMAR NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

The Supreme Court on Friday said that while broadcasting an investigative story on the funding of civil service aspirants belonging to a particular community, a news channel can't target the community as a whole and those from the community aspiring to join the civil services being a part of some "deep rooted conspiracy" to infiltrate it.

"Let a message go to the media that a particular community cannot be targeted. We have to look after a nation of the future

Misinformation is now being spread that the government will not give MSP benefits to farmers and will no longer purchase wheat, rice and other grains from them.

— Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

Speaking at the virtual launch of several rail projects in Bihar, Modi chose to speak at length on these bills, which have sparked protests by farmers in states like Punjab and Haryana, and sought to assuage concerns of the farming community by assuring them the government procurement of their produce will continue and so will the minimum support price (MSP). "This misinformation is now being spread that the government will not give

MSP benefits to farmers. Manufactured claims are being made the government will no longer purchase wheat, rice and other grains. This is a blatant lie aimed at deceiving farmers," Modi said.

In the 21st century, these bills are the need of the country, he said, adding that farmers will no longer remain in shackles and sell his produce wherever they want.

Launching a blistering attack on the Congress without naming the party,

UP govt mulls ordinance against 'love jihad' soon

Lucknow, Sept. 18: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath has asked officials to formulate a strategy and bring an ordinance if required to prevent religious conversions in the name of love, an official said on Friday.

"It has been seen in the recent past that women have been made to convert in the name of love and marriage and later subjected to cruelty and even murder," the official said.

"Taking a serious note of such incidents, the CM has directed that a concrete strategy be made to control such incidents," he added.

"It has often been seen that this is being done in an organised manner," he claimed. "If required, an ordinance can be brought for it," he added.

The aim is to ensure that such crimes are checked



Yogi Adityanath

and effective action is taken against the culprits. All this is being taken into consideration, he added.

In Kanpur, the police had recently set up a special investigation team to look into reports of "love jihad". Last year, the Uttar Pradesh State Law Commission had submitted a report to Adityanath, suggesting a new law to check forcible religious conversions. "The report was submitted along with a draft leg-

islation, Uttar Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2019," law commission secretary Sapna Tripathi had said. The report was prepared after going through pre and post-independence laws in the country and neighbouring countries like Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Pakistan besides keeping in mind court judgments. "The commission is of the view that existing legal provisions are not enough to check religious conversions and on this serious matter, a new law is needed like in some other states," the report said.

The 268-page report included newspaper clippings regarding forcible conversions, international covenants on the right to religion, anti-conversion laws in neighbouring countries and India.

— PTI

Nath campaigns in Scindia bastion

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, SEPT. 18

Electioneering by traditional rivals, BJP and Congress, for the crucial by-elections to 28 assembly constituencies in Madhya Pradesh, expected to be held by end of October this year, on Friday gained momentum with former chief minister Kamal Nath launching campaign for the grand old party in Gwalior, considered traditional bastion of erstwhile Scindia royal family.

Mr Nath's two-day-tour to Gwalior, commenced on

Friday, is viewed with significance in the political circle here since 16 out of 28 assembly seats those are going to by-elections in coming days fall in Gwalior-Chambal region, considered stronghold of senior BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia.

All the 16 former Congress MLAs who along with six other party legislators resigned from assembly as well as the party in March this year to pull down the 15-month-old Kamal Nath government, belonged to Mr Scindia's camp. Mr Nath held a mega road show in Gwalior to



Kamal Nath

drum up support for his party in the ensuing by-elections in the 16 assembly seats in Gwalior-Chambal region. He was scheduled to interact with party cadres of Gwalior-Chambal in the city over two days to galvanise them for the crucial assembly by-elections in the region.

This was his first visit to the region after he was ousted from power in the state in March this year.

CBI returns to haunt BJP leaders

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, SEPT. 18

After going slow for nearly two years in its probe into the multi-crore chit fund scam, the CBI on Friday appeared in scene with raids conducted on the official and paternal residences of Odisha's ruling BJD leader and former minister Debi Prasad Mishra.

A team of CBI officers arrived at Mishra's residence early in the morn-

CHITFUND SCAM

ing and searched his house in connection with handing over Mahanadi Boat Club and Otri Guest House, two Odisha government properties, to Seashore Group, a ponzi firm which has allegedly duped ₹500 crore from small depositors on the promise of high returns on their investments. The two properties were handed over to the Seashore

Group in 2004 when Mishra was the state tourism minister.

"CBI has been in touch with me since 2013 and I've appeared before the agency whenever they have served notices to me. I have furnished all the papers to them and I'm committed to cooperate with the agency. After all, whatever decisions were taken (with regard to handing over Mahanadi Boat Club and Otri Guest House, were taken official-

"Mr Nath is going to prepare a poll strategy for the party to counter Mr Scindia's influence in Gwalior-Chambal region", Congress sources said.

"Congress plans to target Mr Scindia in Gwalior-Chambal by dubbing him as a betrayer who dumped Congress to embrace BJP for power", sources added.

Earlier admitting BJP leader Parul Sahu in Congress in the afternoon, Mr Nath took a jibe at chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan for laying foundations stones for various projects in election-bound assembly constituencies.

Several ponzi firms have duped nearly ₹10,000 crore from 20 lakh small depositors. Though the premier investigating agency took the chit fund investigation in May 2014, it has not been able to furnish final chargesheets against several ponzi firms, making it possible for the accused scamsters to get bail.

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Several ponzi firms have duped

Chinese agencies press Muivah to delay Naga talks

■ Continued from Page 1

June. It is significant that the Government of India had outright rejected the demand for a separate "flag and constitution" way back in October 2019. It is significant that apart from the civil society groups, all stakeholders in Nagaland, including NNPGs, had said their discussion with the Centre was concluded and the the "agreed position" has been signed.

The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR), which is leading the voice for reconciliation between NSCN (I-M) and the NNPGs, are also saying it is time for these two Naga political groups to meet and take forward the unfinished task of reconciliation.

NSCN (I-M) chairman Q. Tuccu, vice-president Tongmeth Wangnao and 13 others have, meanwhile, also reached New Delhi to join general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah in the ongoing informal talks, but the differences among the rank and file of the NSCN (I-M) was quite visible as Mr Tuccu and his team have been living at a separate location in New Delhi. However, the Government of India had provided accommodation for both the chairman and the general secretary at one place.

BJP hopes break with Akalis to help it in 2022 state polls

■ Continued from Page 1

over missing "swaroop" of the Guru Granth Sahib, many "Panthaks" have been left dismayed with the Akali Dal. On these bills, the SAD first failed to gauge the situation when it did not protest when the Modi government brought the ordinances in June, then it was forced to oppose them after the Congress and the AAP managed to turn it against the SAD, which had no option but to quit the Modi government to send a message to the farmers.

In an indication of its strategy for Punjab, during the recent membership drive, the BJP, despite SAD's objection, enrolled significant number of members in the Malwa region, considered as the Badals' stronghold. Also, the BJP was miffed over the Akali Dal's stand on the Citizenship Amendment Act, which the latter supported in Parliament but criticised publicly. The BJP's refusal to agree to the SAD's demands during the last Assembly polls and the SAD's U-turn after it, were also an indication regarding the Sikh votebank and its ties with SAD. Speculation is rife that the BJP has already started its groundwork in Punjab for the 2022 Assembly polls and is in touch with former Akali Dal leader Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa and some state leaders are also in touch with former BJP leader Navjot Singh Sidhu, who is currently in the Congress.

Harsimrat Kaur asks Centre to rethink farm bills

■ Continued from Page 1

vote in the Lok Sabha. The Congress and several other Opposition parties are also opposing the bills, while the Akalis are the only NDA member to come out against the bills that seek to replace the ordinances already promulgated by the government.

"I kept on protesting ever since these ordinances were circulated for comments in the Cabinet. I was acting like a bridge between farmers and the government to clear all doubts and fears of farmers. I kept on pleading that the government should not bring these bills until all apprehensions and fears of farmers are cleared," she said.

She said there was no point in bringing these bills and presenting them as being in farmers' interest while farmers themselves are apprehensive about these measures.

"I feel very saddened that my voice was not heard in the Cabinet and the government did not send it to a parliamentary select committee for consultations with all stakeholders, including farmers. If my voice was heard, farmers would not have come out on roads to protest," she said.

On Punjab chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh calling her resignation a "drama", she hit back at him and said: "He himself is the biggest drama and the biggest liar." She added: "Amarinder Singh and the Congress are doing double-speak. When these ordinances were planned, all CMs were consulted and he concurred. Also, the bills were part of the Congress' manifesto in the 2017 Assembly elections and the 2019 LS polls." — PTI

Army admits troops killed 3 in Shopian

Orders disciplinary action against its soldiers ■ Youth had come to Shopian to work in apple orchard

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, SEPT. 18

The Army on Friday admitted that three youth of Jammu and Kashmir's frontier Rajouri district, who had disappeared a day after their arrival in the Union Territory's Shopian district in July this year to work as labourers in a local apple orchard to earn livelihood, were killed by its troops during an "operation".

It said that "disciplinary action" in being initiated by it under the Army Act against the officers and soldiers involved in the operation as the inquiry

conducted by it "has brought out certain prima facie evidence indicating that, during the operation, powers vested under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1990 were exceeded and the Do's and Don'ts of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) as approved by the Hon'ble Supreme Court have been contravened".

It has said that the slain men's "involvement with terrorism or related activities is under investigation by the J&K police".

According to the families of the three labourers — Muhammad Imtiaz, Abrar Ahmed Khan and Abrar

THE INQUIRY conducted by it 'has brought out certain prima facie evidence indicating that, during the operation, powers vested under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1990 were exceeded', the Army said

Yusuf, the trio were killed by the troops in a fake encounter in Shopian's Amshipora area on July 18. A night before, the youth had informed their respective families over the phone that they had reached Shopian where they had been hired by a

local fruit grower to work in his apple orchard. After their killing, the Army had passed them off as "terrorists".

Earlier this month, the families accused both the Army and the J&K police of dilly dallying in the probes ordered by them separately into their complaint. In a letter to J&K's lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha, they sought his personal intervention into the matter. They also demanded that an impartial and fair inquiry be held, the DNA reports made public and, if it is established that their kin are the same youth who

were killed in the purported July 18 encounter at Amshipora, they be allowed to exhume their bodies so that the victims are given a decent burial by them.

Mr Sinha had while speaking to reporters on September 14 assured that justice would be done with the families of the slain youth. "The Army has ordered its own inquiry and the administration is doing its own probe. I want to assure that justice will be done," he had said.

J&K's DG police Dilbag Singh said on Thursday that the DNA reports in the case would be made

public soon.

The DNA samples of the parents and siblings of the missing youth were collected from Rajouri under the aegis of J&K police in August and subsequently sent for matching with the trio killed on July 18.

"The evidence collected by the inquiry has prima facie indicated that the three unidentified terrorists killed in Operation Amshipora were Muhammad Imtiaz, Abrar Ahmed Khan and Abrar Yusuf, who hailed from Rajouri. Their DNA report is awaited. Defence

spokesman Col. Rajesh Kalia said on Friday.

2 killed, 3 hurt in Trinamul factional feud in Bengal dist

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, SEPT. 18

A violent clash due to factional feud within the Trinamul Congress left a ruling party worker and a teenage boy dead and three other villagers injured in West Midnapore of West Bengal. The two victims were Mohammad Naseem and Sheikh Mazhar (14). Both had suffered fatal injuries when two groups of TMC workers hurled bombs at each other in a pitched battle to gain control of a village at Keshpur of the district.

Naseem was rushed to Midnapore Medical College and Hospital, where he was declared

BOTH THE victims suffered fatal injuries when two groups of TMC workers hurled bombs at each other to gain control of a village at Keshpur

brought dead. Three more injured, including a woman, have also been admitted there. Mazhar was declared brought dead at Keshpur Grameen Hospital. The clash broke out at Damodarachak on Thursday afternoon after the followers of a local TMC leader, Uttam Tripathi, beat another party worker, belonging to former TMC block president of Keshpur Sanjay

Pan, from the village, according to Naseem's family members.

On Thursday evening the clash turned violent as bombs were hurled freely till the police reached the village at night.

The villagers alleged that the tussle between Uttam and Sanjay had been going for a long time.

TMC district president of West Midnapore Ajit Maity, however, rejected any factional feud within the party while acknowledging that those who were involved belong to the party. He claimed that the clash took place over a family dispute. The police has arrested 12 persons in connection with the clash.

Covid comes as a boon for Odisha cannabis peddlers

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, SEPT. 18

Taking advantage of Covid-19 pandemic situation and subsequent lockdown and shutdown restrictions, a section of people in Odisha in connivance with their links in other states have got vigorously engaged in ganja (cannabis) peddling to earn quick bucks. Deployment of police personnel on Covid duty has provided them the much needed opportunity for unrestricted movement on highways and seamless transportation of the contraband.

In the past one week, the state excise department officials and police personnel have seized ganja worth about ₹1 crore and arrested half-a-dozen people. The seized ganja was being transported to different districts in Odisha and to other states also. Odisha cannabis is sold between ₹5 lakh and ₹8 lakh per quintal in domestic markets.

On Friday morning, the excise department officials intercepted a Mahindra Bolero vehicle at Bharatpur on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar and seized 93 kilograms of the

RISE IN ACTIVITY
IN THE past one week, the state excise department officials and cops have seized ganja worth about ₹1 crore and arrested half-a-dozen people
Odisha cannabis is sold between ₹5 lakh and ₹8 lakh per quintal in domestic markets

cannabis hidden in three specially-designed chambers placed under the front and rear seats. Two persons were arrested in connection with the transportation of the contraband. The market price of the seized ganja was estimated to be worth ₹5 lakh.

Minutes later, a mini-truck bearing Chhattisgarh registration number was intercepted by the excise department sleuths at Chandiput-Luhagudi in Gajapati district with seven quintals of ganja worth ₹35 lakh.

On September 8 and 11, the excise department officials had also seized ganja worth over ₹16 lakh from two separate places on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar city.

Rajnath, top officials meet over China row

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

A high-level meeting was held on Friday in which defence minister Rajnath Singh, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, national security adviser Ajit Doval and other high ranking military and security officials discussed the strategy to deal with the standoff with China.

From the last one week, China has been dilly-dallying to confirm a date for the corps commanders' meeting.

Now, the corps command-

ers' meeting between India and China is expected to be held in the next 2-3 days. The high-level meeting in the national capital, which went for two hours, discussed the agenda for the corps commanders' meeting.

According to sources, Indian ambassador to China Vikram Misri is also in Delhi for discussion on China.

India will press for disengagement and return of status-quo of April 2020 at eastern Ladakh during the corps commander meet.

China could push India

THE CORPS commanders' meeting between India and China is expected to be held in the next 2-3 days

to vacate the strategic heights it occupied on the Kailash range which overlook entry points of the Spangur gap in the Chushul sector during the pre-emptive action on August 29-31. This will be the sixth round of corps commanders' meeting between the two sides. A major general level meeting was also held on

August 8 at Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) to discuss disengagement at the strategic Depsang plains.

However, things have changed since the last corps commanders' meeting, with at least three instances of firing reported at the LAC for the first time in 45 years.

The situation in Ladakh is still tense and the army is on a high alert.

India is unlikely to move out its additional 40,000 to 50,000 troops it has brought in Ladakh after the military standoff with China started in May. This

is because in the next two months, the road network to Ladakh will get blocked and it will be difficult to bring back troops after that in case of any confrontation with China. In that period when roads to Ladakh are blocked, the only route available will be to bring troops through Air Force's transport aircraft. So in all possibility, the additional Indian troops in Ladakh will remain there for winters. The Indian Army is already stocking food supplies, winter clothes and tents on a war-footing.

ED attaches 3 hotels worth ₹100cr in PMC Bank scam

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday attached three hotels, worth ₹100 crore, in Delhi in connection with its money laundering probe into the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank fraud case.

The three hotels that have been provisionally attached are located in Kailash Colony, East of Kailash and Kalkaji areas in the national capital.

"The attached assets are owned by Libra Realtors Pvt Ltd, Deewan Realtors Pvt Ltd, Rakesh Kumar

Wadhawan, Romy Mehra, Libra Hotels Pvt Ltd and its directors," the agency said in a statement issued here on Friday. It said the "market value" of these three properties is about ₹100 crore.

The agency said its probe found that "proceeds of crime totalling ₹247 crore were obtained fraudulently by Libra Realtors Pvt Ltd, Deewan Realtors Pvt from PMC Bank in the guise of loans. "These loans are part of ₹6,117 crores owed by Housing Development Infrastructure Ltd (HDIL) group of companies to the PMC Bank," the ED claimed.



Cops lathicharge on protesting contractual police personnel who were demanding regularisation of jobs at Morabadi ground in Ranchi on Friday. — PTI

■ 2 Maha ministers test +ve ■ 1,174 fresh death reported

96,424 new Covid cases in India in 24 hrs, recovery rate at 78.9%

AGE CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI/ MUMBAI,
SEPT. 18

With 96,424 fresh detections, India on Friday recorded close to 52.15 lakh cases of novel coronavirus. The number of deaths in one day was 1,174, taking the total number of fatalities due to Covid-19 to 84,372, as per the Union health ministry figures. However, according to COVID19India.org, the total number of cases had crossed 52.50 lakh by Friday evening and deaths were close to 85,000.

Meanwhile, two Maharashtra ministers — Nitin Raut and Hasan Mushrif — on Friday said they

COVID WATCH
52.15 lakh
CASES ACROSS NATION
41.12 lakh
PEOPLE CURED SO FAR

have tested coronavirus positive. The leaders shared the information on their Twitter handles.

With this, the number of ministers in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, who tested positive for the infection has reached 11 so far.

The health ministry offi-

cials said India has recorded an "unprecedented high" of single day recoveries after 87,472 persons recovered and discharged in the past 24 hours. The recovery rate has reached 78.86 per cent as total recovered cases touched 41.12 lakh. India's case fatality rate (CFR) currently stands at 1.62 per cent.

"India has been consistently reporting a very high level of daily recoveries of more than 70,000 since the past 11 days.

Recovered cases are 4.04 times the number of active cases as recoveries outnumber the latter by 30,94,797," they said.

Officials said 90 per cent

of the new recoveries are reported from 16 States and UTs. Maharashtra (19,522) contributed 22.31% of the new recoveries while the States of Andhra Pradesh (12.24%), Karnataka (8.3%), Tamil Nadu (6.31%) and Chhattisgarh (6.0%) followed with 32.8% of the new recoveries.

In view of rising cases in the city, Delhi government has announced to continue closure of schools till October 5.

Meanwhile, the ministry of health and family welfare has decided to depute a high level Central team to Jammu after a high number of cases were reported from there.

Fashion designer Sharbari Dutta found dead at home

Body sent for post-mortem ■ Son under police scanner

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, SEPT. 18

Renowned fashion designer Sharbari Dutta, who earned accolades for her marvelous creations in Bollywood and Tollywood, was found dead with a leg injury and blood on her face at her home in south Kolkata under mysterious circumstances early Friday. She was the daughter of Bengali poet Ajit Dutta.

While her Facebook profile shows May 7, 1957, as her date of birth, reflecting her to be aged 63, the Kolkata police, however, found her age to be 78 after talking to her family members. Dutta's body was recovered by her son Amalin, also a fashion



designer, and daughter-in-law Kanaklata from the ground floor bathroom of their two-storeyed residence on Broad Street at around 12.30 am.

Amalin and Kanaklata, living at the first floor, said they went down to search for Dutta at the ground floor, where she used to stay, after getting calls from the members of a photoshoot team which failed to connect the fashion designer repeatedly throughout Thursday.

Dutta, who created "Shunya" fashion label, had plans to go out with the team on Friday to choose a location for a photoshoot. Though car-

diac arrest looked as the cause of her death in the initial findings of the doctors at Calcutta National Medical College and Hospital where the body was taken, blood stains on her face and an injury mark on her left ankle prompted them to send the body for a post-mortem.

The police also started a probe after finding Amalin was unaware of his aged mother's whereabouts for long hours despite his presence at the same house. Kanaklata told the police she last saw her mother-in-law on September 16 evening.

The mother-son relation was not reportedly well following a tiff about a family property at Ahmedpur in Birbhum.

THE ASIAN AGE

19 SEPTEMBER 2020

Does the govt wish grief upon farmers?

After a long time, politics at the national level was impacted by farmers as their months' long movement against three controversial farm bills the Lok Sabha passed with a voice vote on Thursday has led to the first big resignation from Narendra Modi's NDA 3.0 government in the person of Union food processing minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal. The pressure is now on Haryana deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala to pull the rug out from under the Manohar Lal Khattar government by exiting with his 10 MLAs. Not unexpectedly, *this* crisis has led to a belated awakening of the electronic media to the issue, one that directly affects the livelihoods of a maximum number of Indian citizens and is critical to the nation's food security, even though the ordinances which form the basis of the bills were passed as early as June and crop growers have been agitating since then.

It would seem ironical that the government has set out to kill the proverbial golden goose. Agriculture is the only sector that beat the pandemic as, in the April-June quarter, the GDP shrank, for the first time, by a massive 23.9 per cent. As such, in passing these bills, the government is also encroaching — and dismantling the constitutional ideal of cooperative federalism, the subject of agriculture being squarely on — the state list. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill is an assault on states' revenues — as states will no longer be allowed to exact market fee, cess or levies under the state APMC Act from farmers and traders for trading in a trading area defined by the new bill.

But the most insidious effects of the bill will be on the farmers themselves. The APMC market yard or the mandi, with all its existing problems and the presence of greedy commission agents and middlemen, has so far been serving as the mechanism of setting the minimum support price, MSP. Now that the majority of transactions will take place elsewhere and its need is obviated, there will be no benchmark. No trading licence will be required for traders. Thus farmers will be left open to unprecedented exploitation.

The Farmers (Empowerment & Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, opens the door to big business in agriculture. Food Producer Organisations, comprising a thousand odd farmers, are now being put on a par with big corporations to compete in the marketplace. It is unclear why FPOs are being over-regulated when the FPO movement itself is in a nascent stage. The arrival of corporate farming will at best mean less decision-making power for small farmers who form the majority of the farming community. At worst, it will be land-grab. The requirement of written agreements has been removed from the bill. Yet the farmer no longer has access to civil courts, only to a grievance disposal mechanism, likely to be rigged against them. The farmer's remuneration is no longer not tied to the MSP. It also raises the real fear of monopoly, coupled with hoarding by corporates which is being legalised by the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill.

The agriculture minister has gone on record trying to sell his bills with the hope of corporate-built infrastructure. Experience shows that investment only happens in ancillary areas like hospitality and food processing. Hence, the vision of aggregation of suppliers sold by the government is a flawed one. Aggregation has proven benefits when happening at the production side in the form of farmer cooperatives that these bills undoubtedly hurt.

Turning the farmer to a landless labourer, with no crop set aside for their family's own food security, dependent on the mercy of an artificial "market", while the corporates does easy business, nay profiteering, seems to be the singular sinister motive of these bills. The Opposition must build more pressure on the government so that it has no choice but to withdraw them.

IPL's here to entertain

The hoopla and razzmatazz of Indian Premier League (IPL) inaugurals featuring Bollywood stars, nautch girls and cheerleaders will be missing as IPL 2020 is slated to get off to a no-frills start today at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi. The fact that the IPL is being played at all this year is itself a tribute to the spirit of Indian cricket towards presenting to the people a shade of normalcy to life amid the pandemic. The IPL is not only about the money it lavishes on around 200 cricketers. It is an entertainment industry with a big big slice of television time to fill and the show must go on to keep a Rs 4,000 crore ecosystem ticking.

The wisdom of shifting the action to a bio-secure bubble in the UAE becomes more apparent as India grapples with a rising Covid-19 caseload close to one lakh fresh infections every day. Even those who have endured the crisis and the lockdown while personally suffering the ill-effects of the coronavirus may welcome the relief in this daily dose of cricket featuring their favourite teams and their Indian and international stars competing in the universally popular T20 format. Pro sport has already shown the way forward to life in the new normal and cricket has also thrown up thrilling contests in England.

There is no reason to believe the elaborate bio-bubble set up in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah will be any less secure. It is the responsibility of the millionaire stars of the game to follow the strict protocols, including not sharing water bottles and umpires not being allowed to be the friendly repository of the bowlers' caps, sunglasses, etc. Every detail has been fastidiously put down in the book of the new normal and the least expectation is there will be quality cricket even if the players have to learn to do without the adrenaline rush of cheering in-stadium spectators. A captive TV audience in millions of Indian households will be too happy to stay tuned.

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G. Babu Jayakumar



Why NEET wreaked havoc on Tamil Nadu youth alone

A spate of suicides in Tamil Nadu over the fear of NEET, the all-India medical entrance examination held on September 13, may be a matter of intrigue to many well-meaning people outside the state. In unsympathetic people, both within and outside the state, the suicides evoked gleeful ridicule that got expressed through insensitive sarcasm or trolls or memes on social media and elsewhere.

For many others it was an opportunity to blame politicians, who had been demanding the scrapping of the exam and also paying condolences to the families of the deceased students. But by no means can one accuse any politician of compelling a student to commit suicide. So the question: Why has NEET provoked so many suicides, starting from that of Anita in 2017. For those interested in statistics, there were four in 2018, six in 2019 and six in 2020, taking the total to 17.

To understand it, one has to take a

stroll down the lanes of history. First, medical education in Tamil Nadu was out of bounds for the masses who did not know Sanskrit. The rule was changed by the government run by the Justice Party, the precursor of the Dravidian Movement. Subsequently the ushering in of social justice, which imbued in subaltern communities a quest for education, enabled even first generation learners from impoverished homes to become doctors and also serve in their own communities in the remotest of rural areas, enabling the state to build a robust medical infrastructure that most states cannot aspire to achieve in the near future with or without NEET.

Since those doctors from poor homes did not aspire to go abroad or win the Nobel Prize through research or work for a corporate hospital, they worked in public health centres or set up cheap clinics in villages, inspiring local children, who always found in doctors a role model for emulation. Seeing

doctors as an embodiment of education, knowledge, empowerment and social respect, most children in rural areas grew up with dreams of becoming doctors. But it was common knowledge that to become a doctor one has to study well.

The state's education system facilitated the students who scored high marks in the final school examination to enter courses of their choice and that was how the state achieved an outstanding GER of 49.3 per cent. The best of the students necessarily made it to medical colleges, not just realising childhood dreams but also uplifting families and serving local communities, earning respect and often shedding caste prejudices. Seeing such success stories, more children dreamt of becoming doctors, which can emancipate them from many socio-economic oppressions.

With teachers, parents, relatives and the local community often turning cheerleaders of the high scorers in their race to storm Hippocrates' citadel, students came under pres-

sure to perform well. Yet, they know pretty well that the game was over if they scored less and looked elsewhere for alternative career options.

But when NEET came in with a bang, it suddenly shifted the goalposts for lakhs of such rural, poor, hardworking students, who only knew the game of studying well and entering college based on the marks they scored. Suddenly they were told to take an exam afresh in some centre in a faraway town, sitting in an unfamiliar ambience. And it was here they were made to realise their own cultural and economic backwardness.

For example, Vignesh, the boy from Elnanthakuzhi in Ariyalur district who jumped into a well and killed himself a few days before the examination, had to travel 10 km to the NEET hall ticket. He would have changed two buses to reach his examination centre, 110 km away from home, in Tiruchirappalli. He had seen his father selling prop-

erty to fund his coaching for NEET, for which he was to appear for a third time and could not bear the thought of failing again.

Most rural students who spend a year or more preparing exclusively for NEET often feel that it is the end of the road when they don't make it. Those who had seen their seniors making it just by studying well in school become too "tired" — to borrow the word used by Jothishree Durga in her suicide note — going through the processes of applying for NEET online from villages without any connectivity and the rest of the procedures. Repeated attempts at NEET also brings with it the anxiety that is, tragically, too much for poor, rural children to handle.

The realisation that NEET was to ensure that medical education was for children from elite, urban and privileged backgrounds has not sunk into the minds of children in rural hinterland. Once it does, they will not aspire for it. And of course will not think about suicide.

Subhani



A reign of obstinacy and self-centredness

Shobhaa De



A bhishek "Manu" Singhvi used a lovely phrase the other evening, as he responded to questions on a prime-time television show. The topic was the prompt go-ahead given to the construction of a brand new Parliament House building. He called it the 'Politics of Zidd'. To that, let me humbly add, it can also be called the "Politics of Ego" Never before in the history of India have we witnessed such a display of egotism. The new Parliament House will be the ultimate symbol of a government that only and exclusively thinks of its own grandeur and brand positioning — a monumental error is being made by men with monumental egos who have not bothered to consult their countrymen before sanctioning such a project. An announcement says the contract will be awarded to an infrastructure major after the mandatory scrutiny. This is hardly the point. Whosoever bags the contract (CPWD's estimated cost is ₹899 crores) will no doubt do a competent job and create a handsome house for our parliamentarians.

The more important question is this: does India need a swanky new Parliament House? For what? Beyond the redundancy of the project looms an even larger issue — and I am not going into the delicate debate about propriety. Why was no thought invested in ecological concerns? At a time when the whole world is thinking of what is good for the planet, now that we know our post-pandemic priorities a little better and are acutely aware of how arrogantly we have abused our precious ecosystems — should

this grand plan still be on? It involves stripping prime urban areas in central Delhi of tree cover and creating havoc with a whole host of other concerns. But here is an administration merrily going ahead and building on a precinct that is stunningly beautiful and aesthetically perfect the way it is. The way it has been for 85 years. People from all over the world come here to admire the architectural beauty of Rajpath. To think it is going to be marred by an ill-conceived proposal, hastily pushed through by those in an obvious hurry to create a different "legacy" for future generations.

What sort of a "legacy" is this? The young are far more engaged with global crises — environmental issues top their list. Delhi remains one of the worst polluted cities in the world. Adding to the terrible air over the capital will be the construction of this controversial building. A timeline of 24 months is in place — which must be a record of sorts. The timeline is not arbitrary. Nothing that the Narendra Modi government undertakes can be viewed in isolation. Take the design elements for one — there will be *shlokas* inscribed on the walls. Surprise! Surprise! *Shlokas*. Read the writing on the walls, folks. Oh yes, instead of the original tall spur atop the monument, it's

Whosoever bags the contract will no doubt do a competent job and create a handsome house for our parliamentarians. The more important question is this: does India need a swanky new Parliament House?

The timing to get this project up and running is incredibly insensitive. Forget the tanking of our economy during the pandemic — so many countries are dealing with Covid-driven economic crises.

now going to be a gigantic national emblem. No quarrel with that. Approvals for the Central Vista project? Ummmm... no problem, boss. Those will be given *phataphat*. Those who have any issues with the plan — well, too bad. Cribbing will get you nowhere.

The timing to get this project up and running is incredibly insensitive. Forget the tanking of our economy during the pandemic — so many countries are dealing with Covid-driven economic crises. But here in our own backyard, we have a Prime Minister admitting his government does not possess the data on the deaths of migrants — how many died on those roads, desperately attempting to reach their distant villages on foot. India is still reeling from Covid deaths, with experts telling us we have not peaked so far. Health remains one of our biggest concerns, with countless Covid centres falling short of oxygen cylinders and ICU beds. Can we really afford to spend on a new Parliament House during such dark and dire times?

For all the proclamations of austerity and simple living, what citizens have seen is the arrogant strut of the peacock. Nobody in the PM's circle lives modestly. Not even the PM himself. Crores of taxpayers' hard-earned money is spent on ensuring our elected representatives live life kingsize — with sprawling homes and lavish perks. Nobody grudges them their indulgences. Citizens are large-hearted enough to say, "Be comfortable — *khao, peeyo,*

jivo." But hello! Spare a thought for us, less privileged beings too. By digging up those beautiful lawns to build this House of Vanity is like rubbing our noses into the dirt thrown up by bulldozers uprooting magnificent trees and going into the bowels of what is public property — which rightfully belongs to all of us.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi celebrated a landmark birthday this week. He turned 70 — an excellent age for reflection and introspection. One wonders what his conscience tells him when he presides over such a redundant project, using resources India can barely afford to fritter away at this critical stage. Heritage and history need to be respected, even by those determined to rewrite both. The magnificence of Rajpath cannot be arbitrarily trifled with, based on the whims of politicians in power. Ironically, India lost one of its most valued cultural doyennes during the same week, on September 16. Kapila Vatsyayan was the grande dame of India's glorious cultural heritage. A formidable intellectual and a highly respected scholar who authored 20 books. She passed away at the age of 91. Her obituaries were tucked away into obscure corners of our dailies. The front page was reserved for more "important" news — like Tata Projects Ltd emerging as the lowest bidder for the new Parliament House building project, beating Larsen & Toubro to it by a whisker. Hurrah! Says something about shifting perspectives, doesn't it?

Mirza Ghalib said it all in the aftermath of 1857: "*Bazeechaye atfal hai duniya mere aagey.../ Hota hai shabe-roz tamashaa mere aagey...*"

Meanwhile, Happy 70th Birthday, Narendraji! Your birthday present will be delivered by July 2022. Mubarak!

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

OUR PROTECTORS

No praise is too high for the Indian Army on averting a Pulwama-style terror attack in Kashmir and seizing a huge haul of explosives from Hizbul Mujahideen militants. Three militants and a woman perished, while a CRPF officer sustained injuries in the encounter which took place barely 9 km from the site of last year's deadly Pulwama terror attack that left 40 CRPF personnel dead. With India locked in a confrontation with China along LAC, militants may try to exploit the situation and authorities must remain on their toes.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

FRIVOLOUS TALK

SHIV SENA LEADER Sanjay Raut said in Parliament that the Maharashtra government had managed to control the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in slum clusters like Dharavi, which has drawn appreciation from WHO. He then said that the recoveries didn't happen by eating "Bhabiji ka papad". Union minister and BJP leader Arjun Ram Meghwal had made a claim two months back that the papad brand had the capacity to develop antibodies against the coronavirus in the human body and later himself tested positive for the virus. While talking about the good work done by the Maharashtra government, Mr Raut had no need to get into non-serious papad talk.

M.C.Joshi
Lucknow

EMPEROR'S CLOTHES

NERO IS SO RELEVANT in the context of the government's new parliament project. The Roman king's extravagant expenditures on new buildings and gifts to lackeys are legendary. Benevolent Indian kings of yore built ponds, canals, inns and temples to provide lasting amenities and in the process created jobs and preserved skills. The parliament buildings of the UK and the US are way older and still going strong. Good that Tamil Nadu converted its new Assembly edifice to a hospital. Delhi is likely preparing for the next Covid outbreak with this ₹600 plus crores facility.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

FRANCE DEMANDS EU SANCTIONS AGAINST TURKEY

Nicosia (Cyprus), Sept. 18: France on Friday backed Cyprus' calls for the European Union to consider imposing tougher sanctions on Turkey if the Turkish government won't suspend its search for energy reserves in eastern Mediterranean waters where Cyprus and Greece claim exclusive economic rights.

French Minister for European Affairs Clement Baume said sanctions should be among the options the 27-member bloc considers employing if Turkey continues to "endanger the security and sovereignty of a member state." "We believe that the European Union must be ready to activate...all available tools and certainly to resort to sanctions, if developments don't proceed in a positive direction," Baume said after talks with Cypriot Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides in Nicosia.

POLISH PARLIAMENT PASSES ANIMAL RIGHTS LAW

Warsaw, Sept. 18: Poland's Parliament on Friday passed an animal rights law that had angered fur farmers and kosher meat producers and divided the country's right-wing governing alliance.

The junior partners in the three-party ruling coalition had refused to vote in favour, provoking the ire of Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the powerful leader of the Law and Justice (PiS) ruling party that put forward the legislation.

Kaczynski, who is known for his love of cats, has threatened to exclude his coalition partners from the government during a planned Cabinet shuffle or even call snap elections.

After a marathon session that began hours earlier on Thursday and with the support of the liberal opposition, the legislation passed the lower house of parliament with 356 votes in favour, 75 against and 18 abstentions. The measure, which still requires the approval of the senate, bans the breeding of animals for fur and stops exports of halal and kosher meat.

BELARUS BORDERS REMAIN OPEN DESPITE WAR TALK

Minsk, Sept. 18: Belarus' borders remained open on Friday after President Alexander Lukashenko announced they would be closed as he warned of a possible "war" with neighbouring countries he accuses of supporting a burgeoning opposition movement.

The border guard service said on its Telegram channel that "checks have been stepped up" and "tactical reinforcements have been deployed", but that "checkpoints are permitting people to enter and leave".

Lukashenko, a strongman who has ruled for 26 years, had told a women's forum on Thursday that "half" of the Belarusian army would be deployed to the borders with Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Ukraine. The frontiers themselves would be closed in view of the threat of a "hot war", he added. "I don't want our country to enter a war, and even less for Belarus, Poland and Lithuania to become the scene of military actions, where other people's problems would be sorted out," Lukashenko said.

EMISSIONS TO ADD 15 INCHES TO SEA RISE BY 2100: STUDY

Washington, Sept. 18: Greenland and Antarctica's ice sheets could together contribute more than 38 centimetres to global sea level rise by 2100, if greenhouse gas emissions continue, according to a study led by Nasa.

The findings are in line with projections in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) 2019 Special Report on Oceans and the Cryosphere or portions of Earth's surface where water is in solid form, Nasa said. Meltwater from ice sheets contribute about a third of the total global sea level rise, it said.

The IPCC report projected that Greenland would contribute 8 to 27 cm to global sea level rise between 2000-2100 and Antarctica could contribute 3 to 28 cm, according to the US space agency.

The findings, published in the journal The Cryosphere, come from the Ice Sheet Model Intercomparison Project (ISMIP6) led by Nasa's Goddard Space Flight Center.

China flies 18 military aircraft near Taiwan during US talks

Unusually large show of force in response to US envoy's visit to Taipei

Taipei, Sept. 18: The second high-level US envoy to visit Taiwan in two months began a day of closed-door meetings Friday as China conducted military drills near the Taiwan Strait after threatening retaliation.

China's military sent 18 planes including fighter jets over the Taiwan Strait in an unusually large show of force on Monday as a US envoy held a day of closed-door meetings on the self-governing island claimed by China.

Undersecretary of State Keith Krach, who handles the economic growth, energy and the environment portfolio, held talks with Taiwan's minister of economic affairs and the Cabinet's vice premier. He was due to meet with business leaders over lunch and dine with President Tsai Ing-wen later on Friday.

In response to Krach's visit, the Eastern Theater Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army held combat exercises near the Taiwan Strait, at least the second round of war games this month aimed at intimidating supporters of the island's independent political identity.

"This is a legitimate and necessary action taken in response to the current situation across the Taiwan Straits to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity," said China's defense ministry spokesman Ren Guoqiang. In a brief message on its microblog, the Eastern Theater Command said the exercises involved naval and air force units in the Taiwan Strait aimed at gauging their ability to carry out joint operations. China on Thursday con-



Taiwan's foreign minister Joseph Wu meets with US Undersecretary of State Keith Krach in Taipei, Taiwan on Friday.

demned Krach's visit and warned it could retaliate. It views Taiwan as part of its own territory and strongly opposes any type of formal interaction between other countries and the self-ruled island democracy.

Krach's trip follows a visit in August by US health secretary Alex Azar, the highest-level US Cabinet official to make the trip since the U.S. switched formal relations from Taiwan to China in 1979. It is one of a series of moves by the Trump administration to strengthen relations with Taiwan, including stepped-up arms sales and support for the island's participation in interna-

tional forums. Before Krach's arrival, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, had lunch Wednesday with Taiwan's top official in New York, in a meeting she called historic.

On Saturday, the last day of his visit, Krach will also attend a memorial service for former President Lee Teng-hui, who led the island's transition to democracy and died at age 97 in July. Tensions between Washington and Beijing have already reached high levels as the governments spar over the coronavirus pandemic, trade, technology, Hong Kong and the South China Sea.

The frequency of

Chinese exercises near Taiwan recalls the last major crisis between them in 1995-96, when China fired missiles near the island and held war games in a bid to intimidate voters in Taiwan's first direct presidential election.

Those actions were largely seen to have backfired. Taiwan said Chinese warplanes entered its airspace over two days last week during large-scale war games that it called a "serious provocation to Taiwan and a grave threat to regional peace and stability."

Such actions by the PLA threaten the entire region, it said, calling on the international community to respond. China has

increasingly relied on military threats and diplomatic isolation to pressure Taiwan.

That follows the apparent failure of its efforts to win over the island's 23 million people to the prospect of political unification under the "one country, two systems" framework in place in China, with a large majority of Taiwanese favoring maintaining the status quo of de facto independence. China cut contacts with Taiwan's government following Tsai's 2016 election.

She was reelected by a large margin this year while her Democratic Progressive Party maintained its majority in the legislature.

— AP

Restrictions in Europe, Israel in lockdown as Covid cases cross 3 cr

Madrid, Sept. 18: Large parts of Europe on Friday geared up for broad new restrictions to stop the Coronavirus and Israel enforced a second nationwide shutdown, as infections worldwide topped the 30-million mark.

Spain was set to unveil a raft of restrictions as officials in Madrid warned the capital had been overwhelmed by the virus and called for "decisive" action from central government. Santiago Usoz, a medic working at accident and emergency in Madrid's October 12 hospital, said there was a lack of both beds and staff. "Intensive care units are overwhelmed with Covid patients," he said.

Britain and France are both rolling out new measures in the face of surging caseloads, with UK officials warning that a national lockdown could be reimposed. Almost 9,50,000 people have now died from the virus since it first emerged in China late last year, Europe accounting for almost a quarter of those fatalities. Israel imposed a three-week nationwide shutdown from 2:00 pm (1100 GMT) on Friday hours before Rosh Hash-

S. Korea to fine church for spreading Covid-19

Seoul, Sept. 18: The metropolitan government in South Korea's capital Seoul said on Friday it would seek 4.6 billion won (\$4 million) in damages against a church for causing the spread of the coronavirus by disrupting tracing and testing efforts.

A fresh wave of infections erupted at a church whose members attended a large protest in downtown Seoul in mid-August, becoming the country's largest cluster in the greater capital area. The outbreak has driven triple-digit increases in daily Covid-19 cases for more than a month.

The Seoul city government said it will file a lawsuit against the Sarang Jeil Church and its leader, Rev. Jun Kwang-hoon, accusing them of disrupting coronavirus tests and providing

inaccurate lists of its members which it said aggravated the latest epidemic.

"The city is seeking to hold the church and the pastor responsible for contributing to the nationwide re-spread of Covid-19 by refusing and hindering epidemiological surveys or aiding and abetting such acts, as well as submitting false materials," it said in a statement.

Calls to the church seeking comment went unanswered. Jun, a harsh critic of the government, was re-imprisoned early this month for attending the Aug. 15 rally in violation of his bail in April, when he participated in an illegal political protest ahead the parliamentary election and was indicted on charges of breaking election laws.

— Agencies

ana, the Jewish new year. The measures, under which people will be limited to within 500 metres of

their home, will also hit other key religious holidays including Yom Kippur.

HASIDIC JEWISH PILGRIMS LEAVE UKRAINE BORDER

Kiev, Sept. 18: Hundreds of Hasidic Jewish pilgrims, who had massed along the Belarusian border attempting to enter Ukraine, began leaving on Friday after Kiev upheld an entry ban to guard against the Coronavirus.

At least 1,000 Orthodox Jewish believers were camped out this week in no-man's land between Ukrainian and Belarusian border crossings ahead of Jewish New Year celebrations.

Tens of thousands of Hasidic Jews travel to the central Ukrainian city of Uman every Jewish New Year to visit the tomb of Rabbi Nahman, the founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement.

The standoff between the pilgrims and armed Ukrainian security services sparked tensions at the Novi Yarylovychi border crossing and inflamed a diplomatic row between Minsk and Kiev.

— AFP

FBI chief warns Russia actively targeting Biden

Washington, Sept. 18: FBI Director Christopher Wray on Thursday warned that Russia is interfering in the 2020 US presidential elections with a steady stream of misinformation aimed at Democrat Joe Biden as well as sapping Americans' confidence in the election process.

Moscow is also attempting to undercut what it sees as an anti-Russian US establishment, Wray told the Democratic-led House of Representatives' Homeland Security committee.

He said his biggest concern is a "steady drumbeat of misinformation" that he said he feared could undermine confidence in the result of the 2020 election.

Wray's testimony follows an August 7 warning by the director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center that Russia, China and Iran were all trying to interfere in the November 3 election.

Wray said the FBI is increasingly worried about possible violent clashes between ideologically-motivated extremist groups before the November election. The FBI is keeping a close eye on groups who have faced

off in protests in cities such as Portland, Oregon, and Kenosha, Wisconsin.

In those places, anti-racism and anti-police groups have squared off with right-wing and white nationalist activists who are often armed.

Wray also told lawmakers that antifa is an ideology, not an organisation. Wray did not dispute that antifa activists were a serious concern, saying that antifa was a "real thing" and that the FBI had undertaken "any number of properly predicated investigations into what we would describe as violent anarchist extremists," including into individuals who identify with antifa.

Hours after the hearing, US President Donald Trump took to Twitter to chastise Wray for his statements on antifa and on Russian election interference. Referring to antifa, the President wrote: "And I look at them as a bunch of well funded Anarchists & Thugs who are protected because the Comey/Mueller inspired FBI is simply unable, or unwilling, to find their funding source, and allows them to get away with 'murder'. Law & Order!"

—Reuters/AFP/AP

US court turns down H1-B plea by Indians

Washington, Sept. 18: An Indian-American federal judge has turned down an appeal by 169 Indian citizens who had challenged the proclamation of President Donald Trump that barred foreign nationals on H-1B specialty occupation visa from entering the US till the end of the year.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

US District Judge Amit P. Mehta of US District Court

for the District of Columbia in its order on Wednesday said that Indian citizens, who are now trapped abroad during trips to India when borders closed, are unlikely to win their case contesting the travel ban proclamation of Trump.

The 169 Indian nationals in their lawsuit had sought an order directing the Secretary of State and the United States consulates "to process, adjudicate, and render final decisions on Plaintiffs' DS-160 visa applications. But requiring such swift processing would be an exercise in futility when the complainant would remain ineligible to enter the country until January 1, 2021, at the earliest," Mehta said.

— PTI

Amal quits over 'lamentable' plan

London, Sept. 18: Amal Clooney has become the highest profile lawyer to quit an official job over her opposition to the British government's suggestion that it could break international law in the event it fails to agree a trade deal with the European Union.

In a letter Friday to British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, the human rights lawyer said she is quitting her role as the UK's special envoy on media freedom over the government's lamentable suggestion.

She said she was dismayed to learn that the

government intends to pass legislation that would effectively override sections of the Brexit withdrawal agreement that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had himself negotiated.

Although the government has suggested that the violation of international law would be 'specific and limited', it is lamentable for the UK to be speaking of its intention to violate an international treaty signed by the Prime Minister less than a year ago," she said in her letter.

— AP

FILM | FESTIVAL

Documentary offers viewers a peak into her life, slamming leaders, attending climate strikes

Meet Greta, a real 'pain in the a*se' of world leaders

SUPARNA SHARMA
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

Greta Thunberg is 16 years old and many world leaders can't stand her. But young people, especially school-college kids, environmental activists and tree-huggers, those getting ready to inherit the earth, love her. For them she's a beacon of hope.

Director Nathan Grossman's film opens in the Atlantic Ocean. Greta and her father are on a racing yacht. It's August 2019, and she's on her way to address the UN Climate Action Summit. The trip on the choppy seas, which took 15 days as opposed to 8 hrs and 22 minutes of flying time, led to the now

international news channels. When Jair Bolsonaro calls her a "brat", and Donald Trump asks her to "work on her anger management problem", and then adds, "Chill Greta, Chill!"

Climate change deniers don't want to engage with her because, they say, "There is no proof of global warming. It's all a money making hoax..." Greta is being exploited by her parents, is propped up by vested interests."

But they can't ignore her or the growing protests against inaction. So they attack her on Twitter, and she gets so many death threats that her worried father has had to take



courses in emergency life-saving procedures.

Grossman's film opens in the Atlantic Ocean. Greta and her father are on a racing yacht. It's August 2019, and she's on her way to address the UN Climate Action Summit. The trip on the choppy seas, which took 15 days as opposed to 8 hrs and 22 minutes of flying time, led to the now

famous, "How dare you?" speech where statistics and solutions were bracketed in Greta's GIF-friendly fury.

The film then goes back to where it all began, on August 20, 2018, across the street from Sweden's Parliament.

That summer was particularly lethal. Sweden's hottest in 262 years.

Elections were on, and Greta sat on the footpath till September 9, with her red water bottle and a hand-written placard: "School strike for climate". Elderly, concerned ladies stopped to tell her to go back to school because that's how she'll make a real difference.

"But why would I need an education if there is no future, if there is no planet worth living?" They thought her silly, alarmist, misinformed.

But Greta didn't budge. And then someone asked her, "May I sit with you?" Few more joined. And a few more. And soon, the climate school strike, Fridays for Future, began to spread.

A year later, in

September 2019, between two Fridays — 20-27 — 7.6 million people marched across 1,600 cities in what is called the biggest climate strike in history. It began on that footpath in Sweden, with that girl who has Asperger syndrome.

I Am Greta travels with her to the EU Parliament, to UN Climate Change Conferences, to grand palaces and presidential houses. But it also gives us glimpses of her life in between attending climate strikes and scolding world leaders.

Greta doesn't like grown-ups much because they "say one thing and do something completely different". Even at meetings where they applaud her short speeches, they do nothing. "It feels like every-

one is in a role playing game... it's all just pretend... feels fake... Why am I even invited?" she asks.

What worries her most is that these meetings "make people think that we are making progress".

I Am Greta is not in activist mode. It doesn't give us proof of global warming, nor does it tell us how emissions are not really reducing. It simply challenges the rightwing's concerted attempts to dehumanise this incredible school kid by introducing us to Greta Thunberg, the girl in pigtales who writes her speeches herself, who cries on the choppy sea because she is missing home, her dogs. It watches her dancing alone on a train sometimes.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,845.82	-0.34
Nifty 50	11,504.95	-0.10
S&P 500*	3,305.47	-1.54
Dollar (₹)	73.45	0.27
Pound Sterling (₹)	95.39	-0.007
Euro (₹)	87.07	-0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	52,672.224	0.42
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	42.72	-0.58
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.014	-0.019
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.686	0.004

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Govt liabilities rise to ₹101.3 L cr in Q1: FinMin

Total liabilities of the government increased to Rs 101.3 lakh crore at end-June 2020 from Rs 94.6 lakh crore at end-March 2020, according to the latest data on public debt. The total debt of the government stood at Rs 88.18 lakh crore at end-June 2019. Public debt accounting for 91.1 per cent of outstanding liabilities. Nearly 28.6 per cent of the outstanding dated securities had a residual maturity of less than five years.

Fan-makers want GST lowered to 5% from 18%



Fan manufacturers sought lower GST rate at 5 per cent on fans, saying the existing 18 per cent tax is "adversely" impacting the industry. "The current GST rate standing at 18 per cent is adversely impacting the industry as well as the entire supply chain, from distributors to end-consumers," said Atul Jain, chairman, Indian Fan Manufacturers Association (Ifma). A lower GST slab would make the fans more accessible, Ifma said.

Forex reserves down by \$353 mn to \$541.66 bn

After touching a life-time high in the previous week, the country's foreign exchange reserves declined by \$353 million to \$541.66 billion in the week ended September 11, Reserve Bank data showed. In the previous week ended September 4, the reserves had increased by \$582 million to a record high of \$542.013 billion. Foreign currency assets decreased by \$841 million to \$497.521 billion.

Kia launches Sonet, prices start at ₹6.71 L

South Korean auto major Kia Motors launched its compact SUV Sonet in India, priced between Rs 6.71 lakh and Rs 11.99 lakh (ex-showroom), marking its foray into the highly competitive and fast-growing segment. The sub-four metre model comes in both petrol and diesel engine options. Kia Motors India said the Sonet will be available across 17 variants, including two petrol engines.

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■ Bid to stop China goods entry via trade bloc Govt tightens vigil over Asean route

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

In a move that will check Chinese products being routed through Asean countries, the government has decided to strictly enforce production of 'certificate of origin' for every imported item claiming free and preferential trade concessions. Further, the government said it will engage with the Asean countries to review gaps or imbalances in the free trade agreement (FTA). The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has made some changes in the declarations made by importers while claiming free trade and preferential trade duties. These changes will come into effect from September 21. Whenever such claims are made, documents pertaining to the certificate of origin of every item will have to be mandatorily uploaded on eSancti and the 'invoice reference number' should be declared in the supporting document table for the item. "If imported goods are transported directly from the country of origin and not through another country, then the certificate of origin code itself can be given in the transit country field. In case of transport through a different country then the country code of that country should be indicated in the transit country field. A self-declaration that the items qualify as originating goods for a prefer-



ential rate will have to be made by the importer in the 'bill of entry.' Further, the certificate of origin must be defaced before the out of charge (OOC) at the port of import. From September 21, marking defacement of each certificate uploaded for a bill of entry will be mandatory, without which OOC would not be allowed by the system. "With effect from 21 September 2020, businesses availing benefits of FTA would be required to comply with the revised bill of entry format declaring additional particulars in relation to FTA benefits, and will be required to upload the copy of certificate of origin on the customs portal. While the intent of the government is clearly to curb wrongful claim of concessional customs duty by routing the exports to India through preferential trade countries, practically, compliance even by genuine importers at short notice will be challenging," said Abhishek Jain,

tax partner, EY. According to K. Unnikrishnan, deputy director general, Federation of Indian Export Organisations, the government has made the rules stricter in order to check Chinese goods getting routed through FTA and PTA countries. "Import of some of the automotive parts from FTA countries with components coming from China as part of the global value chain may become tougher," he said. The commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal said India is engaging with the 10-member Asean to review the free trade agreement. In the India-Asean Economic Ministers Consultations held on August 29, officials will determine the scope of review. "Provisions are envisaged to periodically address any gaps, shortcomings and imbalance. India proposes to suitably use these provisions," Goyal said. The Asean-India Trade in Goods Agreement came into force on January 1, 2010.

Select high frequency indicators move up

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

Providing more hope of recovery, some of the high frequency indicators, including electricity consumption, digital payments, real estate purchases in select cities and railway freight volumes have moved closer to pre-Covid levels in the first half of September. E-way bills generated by businesses and transporters in August were also higher sequentially. Electricity consumption over the seven-day period ending September 16 showed the country consumed more power during the period compared to a similar period in the previous year, said a Kotak Institutional Equities' report. In digital payments, daily average UPI and IMPS transaction values recorded an all-time high in September. NETC-Fastag transactions are at pre-Covid levels. The e-waybills generated in August numbered 4.87 crore, valued at over Rs 13.85 lakh crore. The numbers stood at 4.76 crore and 4.27 crore in July and June, valued at Rs 13.66 lakh crore and Rs 12.40 lakh crore, respectively, GSTN data showed. Railway freight volume was up in September compared to the same period last year: Volumes also have returned to February 2020 levels. But container volumes in most ports declined in September.

Standing crops hit by heavy rains: Govt

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Heavy rains in some parts of the country have affected standing crops including paddy, pulses, oilseeds, spices, fruit and vegetables, Parliament was informed on Friday. "There have been extreme weather events in the form of heavy rains in some parts of the country which affected the standing crops," agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar said in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha. Tomar also shared the state-wise details of crops affected, as reported by the state governments. In Telangana, 1,43,388.38 hectares have been hit by the heavy rains. The crops affected include paddy, cotton, redgram, greengram, soybean, blackgram, jowar, groundnut, maize, sugarcane, banana, guava, apple, oil palm, turmeric,



chilly, papaya, drumstick, vegetables, flowers, and red chilli. As much as 52,551.99 hectares in Andhra Pradesh have been affected. The impacted crops include banana, vegetables, betelvine, onion, papaya, flowers, yam, chilli and tomato. Karnataka has reported 3,31,334.97 hectare area being affected. The impact-

ed crops include paddy, cotton, redgram, greengram, soybean, blackgram, jowar, groundnut, maize sugarcane, ragi, bajra, foxtail millet, cowpea, sesamum, sunflower and tobacco. In Kerala, 4,754.09 hectares have been affected, with damage to crops like coconut, cardamom, ginger, tuber crops, turmeric, cashew, rubber, pepper, tapioca, beet-

vine, vegetables, arecanut, banana, coffee, pineapple and paddy affected. Tamil Nadu has reported 787.26 hectares of affected area having crops like paddy, maize, gingelly, groundnut, sugarcane, jowar/sorghum, pulses/green gram and coconut. Assam has reported 1,90,176.73 hectares being impacted. Rice, maize, jute, pulses and vegetables have been affected. In Bihar, 9,22,038.82 hectares with paddy, maize, fruit and vegetables crops have been hit. In Maharashtra, the impacted area covers 1,70,899 hectares with crops like groundnut, tur, cotton, jowar, turmeric, maize, sugarcane, soybean and vegetables. Odisha has reported that 2,21,262 hectares (paddy and horticulture crops) have been affected. —PTI

Paytm back in Play after ousted by Google

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Google on Friday restored the Paytm app on its Play store after removing it for a few hours for violating its policy on sports betting activities.



The app was back on the Google Play store on Friday evening after the Softbank-backed Paytm removed the 'cashback' feature from a recently launched game on the application. "Update: And we're back!" Paytm said in a tweet. On Friday morning, Google removed the Paytm app—which facilitates use of wallet and payments bank services—from the Play store. However, users who had already downloaded the app could continue using the services. "The app was blocked for violation of Play policies—a clarification of our policy was released earlier today ahead of the IPL tournament," Google said in an e-mailed response, adding that only the app availability on Play store was impacted. Google, in a blog post earlier on Friday, said it does not allow apps facilitating sports betting and will remove such apps from the Play store. These policies are in place to protect users from potential harm, it added. "We don't allow online casinos or support any unregulated gambling apps that facilitate sports betting. This includes if an app leads consumers to an external website that allows them to participate in paid tournaments to win real money

or cash prizes, it is a violation of our policies," the blog post said. Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma said the company has already removed the scratch cards which offered the cashbacks, complying with Google's concerns. Stating that Google was not allowing it to acquire new customers by blocking Paytm's promotion, Sharma said India needs support for further growing the startup ecosystem. "Platforms like Google are dominating platforms and with power comes responsibility. I believe that they should be responsible for this country's growth and startup ecosystem... India's ecosystem needs support, not stifling of innovation," he told a news channel. A Paytm spokesperson said the company had recently launched the 'Paytm Cricket League' on its consumer app for users to engage in their passion of cricket and get cashbacks. "The game allows users to get player stickers after each transaction, collect them and get Paytm cashback. Cashback is legal in India and we strictly follow all rules and laws of the land.

"Unfortunately, Google believes this to be a violation of its policies and has unlisted the Paytm Android app from the Play store," the spokesperson said. The spokesperson added that the cashback feature has been removed and confirmed that the app has been restored on the Play store. Google, in its blog post, had said that when an app violates its policies, it notifies the developer of the violation and removes the application from Google Play until the developer brings it into compliance. "And in the case where there are repeated policy violations, we may take more serious action which may include terminating Google Play Developer accounts. "Our policies are applied and enforced on all developers consistently," said the blog post by Suzanne Frey, vice president-product, security and privacy, Android. There is often a surge in launches of such apps before major sporting tournaments like the IPL. The latest season of the Indian Premier League is scheduled to start from September 19 in the UAE. —PTI

IPOs of Angel Broking, Chemcon next week

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, SEPT. 18

Two initial public offerings worth over Rs 900 crore are scheduled to open next week. Angel Broking, a Mumbai-based retail equity broker, announced initial public offering of equity shares aggregating to Rs 600 crore in the price band of Rs 305 to Rs 306 per equity share of face value of Rs 10 each. The public issue opens on September 22 and closes on September 24. The IPO comprises a fresh issue aggregating up to Rs 300 crore and an offer for sale aggregating up to Rs 300 crore. The offer for sale consists of a bunch of promoters selling shareholders (Rs 180 crore) and

by private equity investor selling shareholder International Finance Corporation (Rs 120 crore). Vadodara-based Chemcon Speciality Chemicals is offering shares worth Rs 318 crore in the IPO that opens on September 21. Chemcon is a manufacturer of speciality chemicals such as hexamethyldisilazane (HMDS) and chloromethyl isopropyl carbonate (CMIC) which are predominantly used in the pharmaceutical industry. It manufactures inorganic bromides used as completion fluids in the oilfield industry. Chemcon has fixed a price band of Rs 338 to Rs 340 per share of Rs 10 face value. The public issue of Chemcon closes on September 23.

DR REDDY'S LAB RISES OVER 10%

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, SEPT. 18

Pharma stocks were in demand on positive news flow for Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Cipla and Lupin. Dr Reddy's Lab. shares gained 10.36 per cent on BSE to close at Rs 5,326.0 and touched 52 week high of Rs 5,497 in intra-day trading over settling the dispute with Bristol Myers Squibb. Cipla (7.29 per cent) and Lupin (4.58 per cent) gained after their competitor Ireland headquartered Perrigo Company announced a recall of albuterol sulfate inhalation aerosol from the US market over consumer complaints. Other stocks like Divi's Laboratories (4.24 per cent), Glenmark (3.31 per cent) and Natco Pharma (14.43 per cent) also rose.

Apple to launch first online store in India

SANKALP PHARTIYAL & AAKRITI BHALLA NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

Apple Inc will launch its first online store in India on September 23, the iPhone maker said on Friday, coinciding with the country's holiday season that brings some of the biggest sales for retailers every year. Apple sells its products in India through third-party vendors and e-commerce operators such as Amazon and Flipkart. The Cupertino, California-based tech giant's iPhones are coveted by tens of millions of Indians but their price keeps them out of the reach of many. Chinese companies led by Xiaomi Corp dominate in the world's second-biggest smartphone market, with Apple accounting for just 1 per cent of shipments. Through its online retail platform, Apple plans to offer assistance to customers in English and Hindi, while allowing



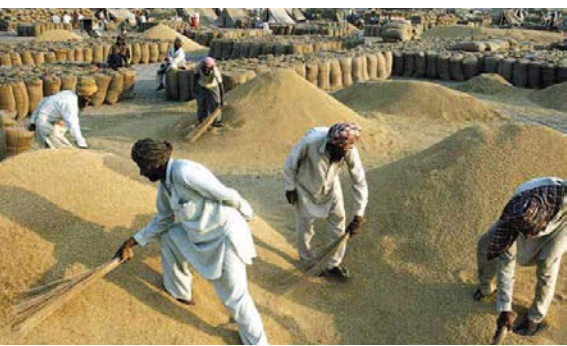
users to personalise some devices, including iPads, with engravings, it said. The website will also allow Mac customers to configure their laptops according to their needs. The opening of Apple's online store presents another challenge for bricks-and-mortar retailers whose business has suffered due to discounts by e-tailers, said Subhash Chandra L., managing director of Sangeetha Mobiles. "At least some of Apple's die-hard customers are likely to shift to buying from its online store," said Chandra whose chain operates more than 650 stores in southern and western India. —Reuters

SKODA UNVEILS RAPID AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION

Mumbai, Sept. 18: The new Skoda Rapid TSI Automatic Transmission is available at an ex-showroom price starting from Rs 9.49 lakh across the country. The most affordable automatic option in its segment, the new Skoda Rapid TSI Automatic Transmission with its class leading torque output delivers a 'fun to drive' experience like none another. With a six-speed torque converter, it offers exceptional power (110 PS) and fuel economy (16.24 kmpl). Mr. Zac Hollis, Brand Director-Skoda Auto India, said: "With the introduction of a six speed Automatic Transmission across the refreshed Rapid TSI range, the Czech marque has raised the benchmark within the segment. It is a reliable technology, provides a dynamic drive experience, and deems to be the best seller in its class." Introduced in 2011, the Rapid marked Skoda Auto's foray into the popular C segment in India.

What makes farm bills contentious

Three key agriculture bills, approved by the Lok Sabha, are facing staunch opposition from within the ruling coalition, with senior minister Harsmrit Kaur Badal resigning in protest and farmers hitting the street. Here is an explainer on what the new bills are all about: ■ The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020: This proposed legislation seeks to give freedom to farmers to sell their produce outside the notified APMC market yards (mandis). This is aimed at facilitating remunerative prices through competitive alternative trading channels. Farmers will not be charged any cess or levy for sale of their produce under this Act. ■ Benefits: It will widen choices for farmers, reduce marketing costs, and help them get better prices. It will also help farmers of regions with surplus produce to get better prices. ■ Opposition: States will lose revenue as they will not be able to collect 'mandi fees' if farmers sell their produce outside registered Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) markets. Also, commission



Explainer

agents stand to lose if the entire farm trade moves out of mandis. More importantly, farmers and opposition parties fear it may eventually lead to the end of the minimum support price (MSP)-based procurement system and may lead to exploitation by private companies. ■ The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020: This legislation seeks to give farmers the right to enter into a contract with agribusiness firms, processors, wholesalers, exporters, or large retailers for the sale of

future farming produce at a pre-agreed price. ■ Benefits: It seeks to transfer the risk of market unpredictability from farmers to sponsors. Besides giving them access to modern tech and better inputs, it also seeks to boost farmer income by reducing the cost of marketing. ■ Opposition: Farmer bodies and opposition parties say the law is framed to suit "big corporates who seek to dominate the Indian food and agriculture business". It will weaken the negotiating power of farmers. Also, big private companies, exporters, wholesalers, and processors may get an edge. ■ The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020: This proposed legisla-

tion seeks to remove commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onion, and potatoes from the list of essential commodities and will do away with the imposition of stock holding limits on such items except under 'extraordinary circumstances' like war, famine, extraordinary price rise and natural calamity. Benefits: It is aimed at attracting private investment/FDI into the farm sector as well as bringing price stability. ■ Opposition: Big companies will have the freedom to stock commodities, helping them dictate terms to farmers. ■ Government Stand: Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar has said the MSP mechanism for farmers will continue. Also, the proposed laws would not encroach upon the APMC Acts of the states. These bills are to ensure that farmers get better prices for their produce without being subject to the regulations of mandis, he has said, adding the Acts will increase competition and promote private investment which will help in the development of farm infrastructure and generate employment. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Hari goes down, stays in 5th place

Chennai: Indian Grandmaster P. Harikrishna maintained his joint fifth place in the Saint Louis Rapid and Blitz online chess tournament even as American Wesley So climbed to the top spot ahead of world champion Magnus Carlsen. Competing in the last three rounds of the Rapid event, Harikrishna started well with a win over American player Jeffery Xiong in 66 moves. After a draw against another US player Hikaru Nakamura, the India number was outlasted by So in 69 moves on Thursday. The win allowed So to take the lead after nine rounds of the Rapid competition with two days of Blitz events to come. Carlsen crashed to a 46-move defeat at the hands of Russian Alexander Grischuk. So is in sole lead with 13 points followed by Carlsen (12) and the two Russians Ian Nepomniachtchi and Alexander Grischuk on 10. After a bright start to his campaign with two victories on the opening day, Harikrishna could manage only one more win in his other six games. — PTI

Injured Osaka out of French Open

Paris: US Open champion Naomi Osaka has pulled out of the French Open because of an injured left hamstring. Osaka joins defending champion Ash Barty in skipping the French Open, which opens on September 27 in Paris. In another blow to the clay Grand Slam, tournament organisers announced a further reduction in crowd sizes, because of France's worsening Coronavirus epidemic. The new limit is 5,000 spectators per day, organisers said in a statement late Thursday. They'd previously been planning for 11,500 spectators, split among three sites at Roland Garros. It is important for the sporting, social and economic life of the country that a major event like Roland-Garros can be put on while respecting health imperatives, organizers said. Osaka hurt the hamstring last month at the Western & Southern Open, also in New York, and withdrew from that tournament's final because of it. — AP

Justin grabs lead at US Open golf

New York: Justin Thomas closed with a 25-foot birdie putt to seize a one-stroke lead after Thursday's first round of the 120th US Open, while three other major winners lurked within two shots. Third-ranked Thomas, the 2017 PGA Championship winner, fired a five-under par 65 at Winged Foot with a pack one back on 66 including Reed, the 2018 Masters winner who had a hole-in-one, 21-year-old American Matthew Wolff and Belgium's Thomas Pieters. "This is one of the better rounds I've had tee to green," Thomas said. Top-ranked Dustin Johnson and 15-time major winner Tiger Woods each opened on 73. Johnson, who won the US PGA Tour Championship two weeks ago, managed only two birdies against a double bogey and three bogeys. — Agencies

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Everton vs West Bromwich Albion from 7:30 pm; Leeds vs Fulham from 7:30 pm; Manchester United vs Crystal Palace from 10 pm; Arsenal vs West Ham United from 12:30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 2, HD

Spanish League: Villarreal vs Elbar from 7:30 pm; Celta Vigo vs Valencia from 12:30 am (Sunday) on LaLiga page on Facebook

Italian League: Fiorentina vs Torino from 9:30 pm; Verona vs Roma from 12:15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

TENNIS

Rome Masters: Matches in two sessions — from 3:30 pm and 9:30 pm on Sony Six, HD

UFC FIGHT NIGHT

Colby Covington vs Tyrone Woodley and other bouts from 5:30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

BASKETBALL

NBA Eastern Conference Finals (Game 3 of best-of-7): Boston Celtics vs Miami Heat from 6:30 am (Sunday) on Sony Six, HD

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CLASH OF TITANS

Dhoni fresh and determined as IPL begins today

Abu Dhabi, Sept. 18: His sabbatical from the game has done Mahendra Singh Dhoni a world of good, Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming said on Friday, asserting that the enigmatic skipper is "mentally engaged and determined" to encounter the challenges of a "tactically different" IPL.

Dhoni's CSK will take on Rohit Sharma's Mumbai Indians in the tournament opener on Saturday. Fleming, a former New Zealand captain, stressed that his team's experience of winning big matches will come in handy during the next 53 days.

Dhoni retired from international cricket last month after being on a break for over one year and when asked about the 39-year-old's preparedness for the IPL, Fleming said, "It has been no different. He's very fit and mentally, he's been very engaged and determined."

"In some ways the break can work for the experienced and older players that we have. MS is fresh and ready to go," Fleming said in a pre-tournament interview to CSK's official website.

The three-time champions are banking heavily on their 35-plus players, including Dhoni himself, Shane Watson, Dwayne Bravo, Kedar Jadhav, and Imran Tahir to name a few.

"...experienced players identify key times and that's why they've done so well in their careers. They can turn games, absorb pressure or just sum out the situation. That's what experience is about and that's why we value it so highly. And that's why we've been able to get over the line in so many close games because the key player has been one with a lot of experience," Fleming further said.

Starting against a quality side like MI is certainly



Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (left) and Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma in this file photo.

NUMBERS GAME

HEAD TO HEAD

OVERALL:

- Matches: 28
- Mumbai Indians won: 17
- Chennai Super Kings won: 11

MEETING IN 2019

- Mumbai Indians defeated Chennai Super Kings by 37 runs at Mumbai (League)
- Mumbai Indians beat Chennai Super Kings by 46 runs at Chennai (League)
- Mumbai Indians beat Chennai Super Kings by 6 wickets at Chennai (Qualifier 1)

- Mumbai Indian beat Chennai Super Kings by one run at Hyderabad (final)

FOR THE RECORD

- Rohit Sharma who scored 4898 runs at an average of 31.60 in 183 innings of 188 matches for Deccan Chargers and Mumbai Indians is the third highest scorer in IPL behind Virat Kohli (5,412 runs in 177 matches) and Suresh Raina (5,368 runs in 193 matches).
- Dwayne Bravo who claimed 147 wickets in 131 innings of 134 matches, needs just three wickets to become the fifth bowler to take 150 wickets in IPL.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

exciting for Fleming, who wants his men to have a crack at the defending champions after their agonising last-ball loss in the previous edition.

BRETT BETS ON CSK

Former Australian speedster Brett Lee has tipped three-time champions Chennai Super Kings to win the 13th IPL, saying the variety in their spin department gives them an

advantage in the UAE conditions.

"They (CSK) are up there. I have picked them to win and I think CSK have a good chance because of their spin attack," Lee said on Star Sports' show *Game Plan*.

"With Santner, Jadeja needs to step up and be the no.1 spinner and CSK have got great variety and none of the spinners are same, so they are at an

advantage for the conditions in the UAE as the tournament progresses," he added.

Mumbai Indian will miss the services of their bowling spearhead Lasith Malinga who opted out of the tournament citing personal reasons.

However, Lee said he has no doubts that Jasprit Bumrah will be able to fill in the shoes of the experienced seamer. — PTI

ICC has task to balance cricket against IPL burnout

New Delhi, Sept. 18: The ICC faces a serious challenge in striking a financially viable balance between the thriving T20 leagues and international cricket over the next decade, says renowned coach Andy Flower.

He also feels it is important for stars like Virat Kohli to keep "talking up" the five-day format.

Led by the BCCI-backed IPL, most ICC full members have their own T20 product and the rapid growth of franchise-based cricket has put more stress on the international cricket calendar and its

viability, leaving the big three — India, Australia and England — aside.

"It is a serious challenge for the ICC to make a fine balance between viable international cricket and the burgeoning franchise world. That is going to be interesting to watch over the coming decade. I still think there is huge interest, primarily in three nations (India, England, Australia), in Test cricket. We have had two good series in England without spectators, as a TV product, the five-day format offers a lot to the broadcaster," Flower said. — PTI

Manchester, Sept. 18: England head coach Chris Silverwood has no doubt that competing in a world class event like IPL will help his players prepare well for the T20 World Cup on Thursday from the United Kingdom ahead of the IPL which begins on Saturday.

Silverwood said the players need to be cautious against burn-out as they have to stay in the bio-bubble for another seven weeks.

"It's their decision really but we'll have to keep an eye on them," he said after England's three-wicket defeat in the third ODI at Manchester. "Obviously, the contracts are good for them but equally as well we're looking forward at a T20 World Cup. The more high-class T20 they can play will be a good thing for us. The one thing that I have encouraged is that they keep talking to us. We need to make sure that they don't burn out as well" he added.

The next T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held in India next year in October-November. — PTI



Chris Silverwood

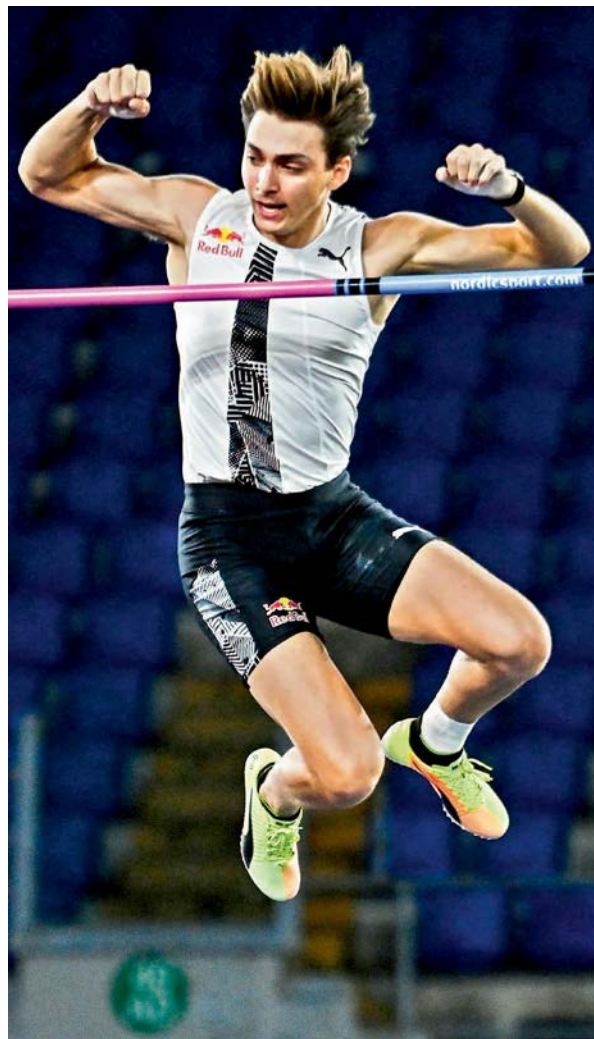
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Armand Duplantis of Sweden clears 6.15 metres to set a new men's pole vault world record during the IAAF Diamond League competition at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Thursday. — AFP

INTO THE CLOUDS!

Duplantis high over 26-yr-old Bubka bar

Rome, Sept. 18: Swedish pole vault star Armand Duplantis eclipsed Ukrainian legend Sergey Bubka's 26-year mark, setting a outdoor new pole vault world record of 6.15 metres (20 feet, 2 inches) at the Diamond League meeting in Rome on Thursday. Duplantis bettered the mark of 6.14m (20 feet, 1 1/2 inches) set by Bubka in Sestriere, Italy, in July 1994.

The 20-year-old succeeded on his second attempt in a competition he dominated in perfect warm and windless conditions, but without spectators to celebrate in an empty Stadio Olimpico.

Duplantis already holds the world indoor record of 6.18m (20 feet, 3 1/4 inches). "I think I'm still up in the clouds right now. It's a surreal, super crazy feeling," said the US-born athlete.

Ukrainian Bubka broke the world record on 17 occasions in the 1980s and 1990s, famously edging the mark up by one centimetre on no fewer than nine occasions between 1988 and 1994 so he could collect a bonus each time.

Duplantis was a child prodigy who broke age-group records on his way to joining the pole vaulting elite. He chose to compete internationally for Sweden, his mother's home country. He won the silver medal at last year's world championships.

Born and raised in Louisiana, Duplantis is a photogenic new star in a sport searching for star quality since the retirement of Jamaican sprint legend Usain Bolt in 2017.

His exuberant celebrations and looks straight out of a teenage romantic film mean he fits the bill.

Coached by his American father Greg, a former pole vaulter, Duplantis is a product of a track and field-crazy family which had their own vaulting apparatus in the garden.

His older brother Andreas vaulted for Sweden at various age-group championships, while another sibling Antoine dropped pole vault in favour of baseball.

Armand spent summers with his Swedish grandparents, keeping the link with his former heptathlete mother's home country.

He started pole vaulting, which requires the speed and strength of sprinter and the flexibility of a gymnast, when he was four years old.

He announced his talent to the world when he cleared 5.90m aged just 17 at the Texas Relays in Austin in 2017. He turned professional last year after one season on a scholarship at Louisiana State University. — AFP

● The 20-year-old Swede succeeded on his second attempt to clear 6.15 metres, bettering the world record of 6.14m set by pole vault legend Sergey Bubka in July 1994.

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Goran shines as Heat pip Celtics

Miami, Sept. 18: The Miami Heat turned it up in the second half, rallying again for a 106-101 victory over the Boston Celtics and a 2-0 lead in the NBA Eastern Conference finals.

Trailing by 17 in the second quarter and down 60-47 at halftime, Miami thrashed the Celtics 37-17 in the third quarter and held on for the victory.

Bam Adebayo scored 15 of his 21 points in the Heat's blistering third quarter.

The Celtics, who let a big lead slip in a 117-114 game one overtime defeat on Tuesday, regained the lead in the fourth quarter and were up 94-89 with 4:25 left to play.

But the Heat chipped

away with a hook shot from Adebayo and a steal and dunk by Jimmy Butler.

Goran Dragic followed up two free throws with a three-pointer over Boston big man Daniel Theis that put the Heat ahead 100-95 with 1:42 remaining and Miami powered to the finish line. Dragic finished with 25 points, and Duncan Robinson added 18, all on three-pointers.

Adebayo added 10 rebounds and four assists, Jimmy Butler had 14 points, four rebounds, three assists and four steals.

"We like to make it hard for ourselves," Butler said of the Miami "comeback kids." — AFP