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OBC BILL COMING UP, CONG SAYS WON'T OPPOSE

Last week of House session, no sign of thaw, Opp wants to be heard on Pegasus

Tharoor says time for no-trust motion; TMC puts out video of Opp in House

72 seconds out of 45 min: Lok Sabha TV coverage of Opp in House last sitting

MANOJ CG

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

AS THIS Monsoon session of Parliament enters its final week, there is little possibility of both the Houses functioning smoothly as Opposition parties Sunday made it clear they will continue to insist on a discussion on the Pegasus spyware issue — a demand that the Government is unlikely to accede to.

Senior Congress leader

Shashi Tharoor said the Opposition should now move a no-confidence motion against the Government. "Rather than just continuing disruptions, we should probably seriously consider other parliamentary manoeuvres... including a vote of no-confidence, because I think there is genuinely no confidence among the bulk of the Opposition parties in this Government," Tharoor told *The Indian Express*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

LIZ MATHEW & HARIKISHAN SHARMA

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

SCHEDULED TO end August 13, Parliament's monsoon session has been disrupted by the row over alleged surveillance through the use of the Pegasus spyware.

Accusing Lok Sabha TV of shutting it out, the Opposition, which has been seeking a discussion on the Pegasus issue and



Friday, 11.07 am. Oppn MPs in the well of the House

farm laws that triggered the farmer agitation, says its protests are only shown on screens inside the House, and not beamed across the country.

On Friday, when Lok Sabha last met, LSTV showed Opposition protests for all of 72 seconds — House proceedings lasted a total of 45 minutes over two sittings that day.

Opposition MPs, however, were not in their seats, except

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



DEPUTY CM ANNOUNCES RELAXATIONS

Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad: Shops can now be open till 8 pm, dine-in services till 10 pm on all days

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE PUNE, AUGUST 8

UNDER PRESSURE from criticism by traders and shop owners for lockdown-like restrictions, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar announced relaxations for Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad on Sunday. Pawar, who chaired the weekly Covid-19 review meeting at the city's Council Hall, said markets could now remain open on all days until 8 pm and restaurants could provide dine-in services until 10 pm. Pawar, however, issued a warning that if the Covid positivity rate breached 7 per cent, all relaxations would stand cancelled.

For Pune rural areas, there was no respite. Although, these

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

RELAXATIONS

- Shops can remain open on all days (except market holidays) till 8 pm. Owner and salespersons must be fully vaccinated
- Eateries can remain open for dine-in till 10 pm
- Indoor, outdoor sports allowed, except swimming and close contact sports
- Malls can remain open till 8 pm. Staff must be fully vaccinated and tested for Covid-19 every 15 days. Entry only for fully vaccinated visitors
- Gardens to remain open at regular timings.

Tokyo brings curtain down on Games held in the time of Covid: 'We did it'

EXPRESS AT OLYMPICS

MIHIR VASAVDA TOKYO, AUGUST 8

THE OLYMPICS bubble didn't burst. And the Games did happen.

The strangest Olympic Games ended the same way they began: in front of empty stands, in a state of emergency, and with hundreds filling the streets, imagining what it must feel like to be inside the giant cauldron that Tokyo's National Stadium is.

There was one slight difference, though.

Compared to the sombre, downcast opening, the closing ceremony was peppier, with a lot more razzmatazz, reaching a crescendo that is usually associated with Olympics ceremonies.

But then, the organisers had reasons to feel good. The Covid Games, after all, didn't turn out to be a super spreader event — not yet. There were only 430 cases related to the Olympics since the



A support staff of the women's hockey team (taking selfie) with athletes during the closing ceremony at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo on Sunday. From left, wrestlers Deepak Punia, Ravi Dahiya and Bajrang Punia, and hockey player Lalremsiami (middle). AP REPORTS P13, 14

start of July, with the positivity rate within the bio-bubble where 624,000 screening tests were conducted, at 0.02 per cent.

The relief was palpable in the voice of International Olympic

Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach, when he said: "We did it".

There weren't any grand remarks of these being the "most successful" Games. Bach, how-

ever, did call it the "most challenging".

It wasn't just the pandemic. The athletes had to deal with the brutal summer heat, sidestep the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Despite red flags, Rly university gave contract to firm of Board member

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

DESPITE RED flags raised by officials of potential conflict of interest and propriety, contracts worth Rs 6 crore were given to firms promoted by educationist Pramath Raj Sinha by the "Railway University" even as Sinha is a member of the Board of Management of the same university run by Indian Railways.

Sinha's company, 9dot9, of which he is founder and managing director, has been awarded a consultancy contract for the National Rail and Transportation Institute (NRTI), a deemed uni-



Conflict of interest cloud over Pramath Raj Sinha

versity of the government, worth Rs 65 lakh per month plus GST for nine months ending December 2021, according to records reviewed by *The Indian Express*.

This happened despite Railways officials flagging the potential conflict of interest in written deliberations and pointing towards possible circumvention of provisions of the General

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Better immune response from mixing Covaxin, Covishield, says ICMR study

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M & ANURADHA MASCARENHAS

NEW DELHI, PUNE, AUGUST 8

A GROUP of 18 people, who had "inadvertently received Covishield as the first jab and Covaxin as the second", showed better immunogenicity — the ability to generate an immune response — than those who received two doses of the same vaccine, according to a new study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INSIDE

45 CASES OF DELTA PLUS VARIANT IN MAHARASHTRA

PAGE 3

Houseboats to hotels, Kerala tourism feels the pinch after months of curbs

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

SHAJU PHILIP THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUGUST 8

LAST YEAR, the Covid slump pushed T Vinod out of his job as Operations Manager at a resort in Munnar, the popular hill station in Kerala. The 38-year-old, hailing from the upper reaches of Idukki, tried his hand at several small jobs to feed his family of three — from working in the construction sector to selling cloth masks — and shifted his son from a private school to a



At Kerala's Kovalam beach, an employee of a hotel, which has been closed down after pandemic, staring at sea. Express

government institution to cut costs.

Down south near the coast,

Devassia Varghese, who was a driver on a houseboat till last year, is now desperately looking

for work as a farm hand. The 56-year-old with a family of five in Chambakkulam village of Kuttanad has been without a job "for the last 14 months".

"Many of my colleagues in the houseboat sector are now going for inland fishing or other daily wage work," says Varghese. "Last week, I signed up for work under the rural jobs scheme (MNREGS)," says Vinod.

From the hill stations of Munnar and Wayanad to the backwaters of Alappuzha, the pandemic has shattered Kerala's tourism industry, which employs about 15 lakh people and contributes 11.5 per cent of the state's GDP.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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EXCLUSIVE



EXPLAINED: HOW APPLE WILL SCAN FOR CHILD EXPLOITATION IMAGES ON DEVICES, AND WHY IT'S RAISING EYEBROWS

Expected to go live in the United States initially, the features include use of new technology to limit the spread of CSAM online, especially via Apple platform.

TECH



REVIEW: ASUS CHROMEBOOK C223

An excellent budget notebook, with long battery life

HOLLYWOOD REWIND



'GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING'

Scarlett Johansson stuns in this coming-of-age period piece

EXPRESS AUDIO

Neeraj Chopra's historic Olympic gold

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

In today's episode of the '3 Things' podcast, we discuss javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra's career trajectory, his winning throw, and what the gold medal means for the future of athletics in India

FROM PAGE ONE

No sign of thaw

In 2010, the Winter session was washed out over protests by the BJP, then in the Opposition, demanding a JPC probe into the 2G spectrum license allocation. The party had stalled functioning of both the Houses after the CAG report on 2G allocation became public. This time, the difference is that the BJP Government has managed to introduce 12 new Bills, eight in Lok Sabha and four in Rajya Sabha. All these bills have been passed in the House in which they were introduced.

Overall, ten bills -- including The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2021 and The Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021 -- have been passed by both the Houses. Seven bills have been passed by one of the two Houses, and will come up for discussion this week. The key among them are The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 and The General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2021, which were passed by Lok Sabha last week. These bills will now come for discussion and passage in Rajya Sabha -- as also the important OBC Bill, which is the Constitutional 127th Amendment Bill to restore power to the states to identify backward classes.

On Sunday, the Trinamool Congress put out a three-minute video clip on what Opposition leaders have said on the Pegasus issue and the farmer's protests on the floor of the House during passage of the Bills. Sources said the idea behind the video put out by TMC Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien is to show how Opposition leaders used the words "farmers", "Pegasus" and "spyware" during discussions on various Bills in an attempt to voice these issues. "When the official channels are being denied, this is a new way to reach the masses," said O'Brien.

"PM @narendramodi seems to have lost his nerves. Why is he not keen on answering questions in Parliament? The opposition parties are ready for discussions in Parliament, but @BJP4India govt is stalling the proceedings so that the truth doesn't get to the people," Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said in a tweet to post the video, which is a compilation of mainly clips from RSTV. "You are not allowing the discussion we have been asking for in the past 14 days... You are passing that Bill now. If you have courage, begin the discussions on Pegasus now," Kharge is heard saying on the floor of the House in the video.

The compilation includes Opposition speakers such as Vandana Chavan (NCP), Manoj Jha (RJD), Deepinder Hooda (Congress), Sukhendu Shekar Roy (TMC), Priyanka Chaturvedi (Shiv Sena), Elamaram Kareem (CPM) -- and Lok Sabha MP Manish Tewari (Congress) among others. "We had demanded discussions on three important issues -- Covid management, farmer's issues and price rise," Congress leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury told *The Indian Express*. "The Government tried their best to scuttle any discussion on price rise. Then the issue of Pegasus came, it was a key issue of national security. We wanted a discussion but the Government has so far not agreed despite our repeated pleas. They are more interested in trying to divide the Opposition," he said. Referring to the OBC Bill, Chowdhury said: "Even now, the Government is trying to do that."

The Congress, however, does not plan to oppose the Bill and may even pause the protests to allow a discussion to prevent the Government from projecting it as a party that is opposing a key legislation related to OBCs.

"We have no opposition to the Bill. It is our issue, because we had warned the Government in 2018 that you are committing a mis-

take... taking away powers of the states. Now they are being forced to bring the Bill... but the Government is trying to be too clever by half... we will point it out. We will not stand in the way of passage of the Bill," Chowdhury said.

The Opposition parties made it clear that they will continue to demand a discussion on the Pegasus issue. "The Government does not want the words 'Pegasus', 'national security', 'real farm laws' and 'price rise' to be mentioned on the floor of the House. They are running scared. The Opposition is united in holding them accountable," O'Brien told *The Indian Express*.

Relaxations

areas will now see Level 3 restrictions instead of Level 4 curbs. "We are giving some relaxations in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. But I must state here that if the positivity rate crosses 7 per cent, all these will be rolled back," Pawar said. At present, Pune city has a weekly positivity of 3.3 per cent, while Pimpri-Chinchwad has reported 3.5 per cent weekly positivity.

Pawar said Sunday's decision was made after thorough discussion with public representatives and administrative officers. "We have seen protests by various bodies in the last few days, some of them violating rules. I must state here that we are not doing this (imposition of restrictions) out of spite. It was also reported that the state government was neglecting Pune. There's no truth in this. Since the MVA government came to power, we have been giving attention to the city," he said.

4 pm deadline for markets in Pune rural

Pawar said shops in Pune rural jurisdiction could remain open till 4 pm on all days. Similarly, restaurants could provide dine-in facility at 50 per cent capacity till 4 pm.

"There were demands that relaxations should be given to rural areas as well, at par with Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. However, the positivity rate in rural areas is 5.5 per cent - Ambegaon has 6 per cent, Daund as 7.2 per cent, Purandhar 6.1 per cent, and Shirur 7.1 per cent - we will have to go slow and be cautious. Once the positivity drops, we may take an appropriate decision," Pawar said.

Lok Sabha TV

during the first few minutes when Speaker Om Birla paid tribute to the victims of the 1945 Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings and congratulated India's wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya for winning a silver medal at the Tokyo Olympics. Members of the Congress, DMK, Left parties and TMC were in the well of the House, protesting during the proceedings which lasted from 11 am to 11.21 am.

When the House met again at noon, the government passed two key Bills -- The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to do away with the policy of retrospective taxation and The Central Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to provide for the establishment of a university in the Union Territory of Ladakh -- amidst slogan shouting by Opposition MPs.

The live telecast of the proceedings did not really reveal what exactly happened inside Lok Sabha. Sources in LSTV said the TV screens in the House are part of the CCTV system, while the camera feed used by the channels is different. "LSTV is responsible for only what is telecast. CCTVs or its cameras are not under our control," sources said.

Manoj K Arora, Editor-in-Chief cum Chief Executive of LSTV, said the channel follows rules laid down for it. "The LSTV transmission is as per the rules which say it should be a true reflection of what's happening inside the House," Arora told *The Indian*

Express.

The channel, sources said, is expected to provide an overall view, but when the Speaker or the Chair speaks or the Prime Minister speaks, it has to focus on them. The rules also say the focus should be on the member who is speaking, be it for question-answer, matters of public importance or participation in a debate.

On Friday, *The Indian Express* tracked proceedings, minute by minute, from the press gallery inside Lok Sabha and the telecast on LSTV. This is what really happened:

■ 11 am: Speaker Om Birla enters the House. He recalls the destruction when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed 76 years ago. He calls for a pledge to live in peace and harmony.

■ 11.02: Speaker congratulates wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya for winning a silver medal in the Tokyo Olympics. MPs join him by thumping the desk.

■ 11.03: Speaker starts Question Hour. Starts with a question relating to institutional deliveries by states during the pandemic. Union Ministers Bhupender Yadav, Pralhad Joshi, Smriti Irani are present. Opposition MPs leave their seats. Congress MP Manickam Tagore is the first to walk towards the treasury benches, shouting slogans, followed by TMC's Aparupa Poddar, Abu Taher Khan and Mahua Moitra, Congress's Jasbir Singh Gill, Benny Behanan, Hibi Eden, T N Prathapan and Dean Kuriaikose.

■ 11.04: Mahua Moitra raises a placard and the slogan of "Pegasus pe jaanich karo (investigate Pegasus)".

■ 11.05: DMK's T R Baalu, NC MP Hasnain Masoodi rise from their seats. Congress MPs Gaurav Gogoi and Ravneet Singh Bittu shout slogans against the government.

■ 11.06: Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya says his junior minister Dr Bharati Pawar is going to answer a question. Urges the Opposition to listen to "a tribal" woman minister. Opposition continues to protest.

■ 11.07: Pawar starts her reply. Opposition MPs try to block her. Prathapan holds a placard, seeking a SC-monitored probe into Pegasus, before her. DMK's Veeraswamy Kalanidhi holds another placard.

■ 11.12: Speaker takes up another question. More Opposition MPs join the protest in the well. SAD MP Harsimrat Kaur carries a placard, seeking justice for farmers, and a wheat flower bunch. BJP's Jamyang Tsering Namgyal has a question on environmental issues in the Himalayan region. Bhupender Yadav replies.

■ 11.13: Congress MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla leads sloganeering against the government.

■ 11: 14: Opposition MPs are standing around the desk of reporters in well.

■ 11.15: As Bhupender Yadav replies, Prathapan and Kalanidhi try to block him with placards. The minister's face is not visible on the screens inside.

■ 11.17: Hibi Eden takes the lead in slogan shouting, says the government is scared.

■ 11.18: Minister Jitender Singh replies to a question on exploration of ocean resources.

■ 11.19: Speaker calls for three questions.

■ 11.20: Sukhbir Singh Badal on his feet with a placard in support of farmers. Smriti Irani replies to BJP's Sarmistha Sethi's query on the national nutrition mission. Opposition intensifies slogan shouting.

■ 11.21: Speaker asks MPs to return to their seats and hold a discussion. Adjourns proceedings till noon.

■ Noon: BJP's Rajendra Agrawal takes the Chair. Mahua Moitra leads TMC MPs to the well of the House. Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury rises to say: "It has been three weeks... the House has not been running

properly. No work is done." At this, Ministers Pralhad Joshi and Arjun Ram Meghwal protest.

■ 12.01 pm: Chowdhury says: "I want to give a warning to the government... Mann ki Baat... What you are doing is not right. You cannot be intoxicated with power."

■ 12.02: Meghwal: "It's wrong. We are ready for discussion. We have listed Covid management to discuss."

■ 12.03: The Chair calls for tabling the papers as listed in the agenda. Meghwal tables the papers. Ministers table action taken reports and other statements.

■ 12.04: Gogoi leads the sloganeering. Opposition MPs surround the Secretary General's table and raise slogans. The Chair asks them to return to their seats.

■ 12.07: Opposition MPs raise slogans in Bangla: "Khela hobe, khela hobe." Congress MP Vishnu Pramod leads them.

■ 12.09: Opposition chants slogans in Tamil, seeking a debate.

■ 12.11: Meghwal presents the Business Advisory Committee report for next week.

■ 12.12: Mahua Moitra leads slogans against the government.

■ 12.13: Chair calls Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to move the Taxation Amendment Bill. She moves the Bill, and makes an opening remark.

■ 12.14: Mahua Moitra and Aparupa Poddar start booing. Other Opposition MPs join them. Some try to block Sitharaman's face from being visible on the screen. Posters are visible on screens inside the House.

■ 12.17: The Chair puts the Bill to voice vote. BJP MPs say aye. The Chair puts the Bill to vote, clause by clause, and it is passed.

■ 12.19: The Chair calls Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan to move the Central Universities (Amendment) Bill 2021.

■ 12.20: Pradhan moves the Bill for consideration and passage. He makes opening remarks. Opposition intensifies slogan shouting.

■ 12.24: Pradhan takes his seat. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury says: "We have raised a genuine demand to roll back the farmers' Bills." Meghwal says: "You are responsible for not having a debate." The Bill is put to vote and passed. Opposition MPs shout: "Jawab do, jawab do (give us a reply)". House adjourns for the day to meet again on Monday.

Rly university

Financial Rules (GFR) of the government which, specifically, deal with conflict of interest in consultancy contracts.

Sinha, the founding Dean of Indian School of Business, is among the founders and trustees of Ashoka University. He has been closely involved in setting up the RNT, a deemed to be university and loosely termed the "Railway University" in Vadodra. Sinha's 9dot9 consultancy is also the strategic partner of US lobby firm Albright Stonebridge Group, chaired by Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State.

Incidentally, this is the second contract given to Sinha's firms by the institute where he is part of the top management team.

Last year, Harappa Education, of which Sinha is also the Founder and Managing Director, got an assignment to impart training to Railway officials on management practices and Artificial Intelligence. Sources said that engagement is for around two years and payment is on the basis of participation of officials. So far, around Rs 40 lakh has been released, sources said. In the case of 9dot9, the Railway Board approved the contract on April 8 after officials put down in writing that it must comply with the "conflict of interest" provisions laid down in the GFR.

Significantly, in June, too, this was flagged again when the engagement of 9dot9 was to be formalized through paperwork involv-

ing RITES -- the Railway PSU engaged by Railway Board to execute the matter. The GFR provisions cited by officials specifically mandate that the consultant hired should strictly avoid conflicts with other assignments or his/its own corporate interests and acting without any consideration for future work.

The provisions say that it is a conflict of interest if the bidding firm or any of its affiliates are either involved in the consultancy contract to which procurement is linked. Records show that RITES informed the Railway Board that the decision to engage 9dot9 was arrived at after competitive bidding and due diligence.

Asked for his comment on the contracts, Sinha referred *The Indian Express* to Alka Arora Misra, interim Vice Chancellor of NRTI, and said she is "the best and most appropriate person to speak" on this. When contacted, Misra, who is also Railway Board Additional Member (Human Resources), conveyed through a Railway ministry spokesman that all contracts were awarded as per rules and due process.

CJI rebuke

Nandigam Suresh and former MLA Amanchi Krishna Mohan were also questioned in the case. "The CBI has arrested two more accused on 07.08.2021 in an ongoing investigation of a case relating to making derogatory posts on social media against judges and the judiciary," the agency said in a statement.

The accused, identified as Pattaru Aadarsh and Lavanuru Samba Siva Reddy, were produced before a court in Guntur on Sunday. The CBI said Dharm Reddy Konda Reddy and Pamula Sudheer were arrested on July 28, while Lingareddy Rajasekhara Reddy, who was residing in Kuwait, was arrested on July 9 when he landed in India.

On Friday, the Supreme Court had said police and CBI don't respond to complaints from judges. Heading a two-judge bench which took up the suo motu case registered by the Supreme Court in connection with the death of Dhanbad Uttam Additional Sessions Judge Uttam Anand, Chief Justice of India N V Ramana said "there are several cases in the country which involve gangsters and where high profile people are accused" and that judges are sometimes "threatened mentally also by sending messages on WhatsApp, SMS" or harassed through social media posts. Though CBI probes were ordered in some instances, he said the agency had "done nothing".

The CJ also flagged what he called a "new trend in this country" to malign the judiciary when adverse orders are passed. "It is a new trend in this country. If an adverse order is passed, then the judiciary is maligned. If judges file a complaint to police or CBI, they do not respond. Intelligence Bureau and CBI are not helping the judiciary at all," he said.

The case in Andhra Pradesh relates to alleged derogatory comments against the judiciary, accusing the judges of bias and incompetence, which began when the High Court set aside a government order making English the medium of instruction at all government schools. More such posts followed when the court set aside an order removing State Election Commissioner N Ramesh Kumar. Some of the posts also referred to the castes of judges.

On November 11 last year, the CBI registered a case against 16 people and took over the investigation of 12 FIRs from the CID, following the Andhra Pradesh HC's orders. The original FIRs were registered on complaints filed by the Registrar General of the Andhra Pradesh HC.

"It was alleged that the accused, by intentionally targeting the judiciary, made derogatory posts on social media platform against hon'ble judges and judi-

ary, following some court verdicts," the CBI said. "After registration of the case, CBI traced 13 of the 16 accused named in FIRs in the case on various digital platforms. Three of them were found to be abroad. CBI examined 11 of 13 accused, and arrested five of them. Evidence against remaining six accused persons is being evaluated for further necessary legal action," it said.

"It was also found that one accused was allegedly using a passport with a name different from his real identity. To investigate larger conspiracy, CBI has also examined certain persons including an MP, ex-MLA and continued investigation into the role of other persons who were not mentioned in the FIR," it said.

The CBI said it had taken action to get the objectionable posts removed from social media platforms and other public domains. "Investigation is continuing, including through the channels of MLAT, Interpol to collect evidence from abroad," it said.

—WITHENS INPUTS, HYDERABAD

Tokyo

thunderstorm warnings and, amidst all this, focus on what they were here for: be the best at what they do.

But the Tokyo Olympics went much beyond merely going faster, higher and stronger. They served another reminder that even during tense, highly competitive moments, there is space for spirit and solidarity.

Tai Tzu Ying was reduced to tears when PV Sindhu, in a touching gesture, consoled the player who beat her in the semifinal but went on to lose the gold medal match -- a feeling the Indian shutter can very well relate to.

The story of Gianmarco Tamberi of Italy and Qatar's Mutaz Barshim, who chose to share the high jump gold instead of forcing a playoff, is sure to go down as one of the Olympics stories.

These Games will also be remembered for the women taking centre stage.

Dutch runner Sifan Hassan completed her journey from a refugee to one of the greatest athletes of all time, becoming the first to win medals in 1500m, 5000m and 10,000m.

The USA's Allyson Felix lived up to the lofty expectations, becoming the most successful sprinter at the age of 35.

And, gymnast Simone Biles and tennis star Naomi Osaka didn't even have to be on the field of play to leave a mark, telling the rest of the sporting world that it is okay to say 'no' if you aren't up for the challenge psychologically.

Women's power was reflected in India's best-ever medals tally, too. Weightlifter Mirabai Chanu, Sindhu and boxer Lovlina Borgohain set the stage for a grand finish, before Neeraj Chopra became the country's first athletics gold medalist. India's tally of seven medals, which placed them 48th, is still glaringly low when one looks at the 113 medals, including 39 gold, won by table-toppers USA and second-placed China's tally of 88 (38 gold).

But it was Japan's march that really changed the mood around these Olympics. As the host nation's athletes raked in the medals -- 27 gold to finish third -- the public began to lap up the event. Barred from entering the venues, Tokyoites started lining up outside the stadiums to support their athletes.

Inside the empty arenas, the polite volunteers doubled up as cheerleaders. They were the only link to the local population for the thousands of athletes who were not allowed to step outside the Olympic Village and their venues. In the closing ceremony, the organisers tried to give the competitors a taste of the city that they never got to experience. They recreated the famous Yoyogi Park -- a massive green space in the

city's centre -- complete with fake grass and everyday scenes: dance troupes, joggers, freestyle footballers, yogis and picnickers.

And for the first time, a confident Tokyo was prepared to show what it really was. They showcased the Ainu culture, and set the feet tapping with a dose of Japanese song and dance before handing over the stage to Paris, which will host the next Olympics, for 10 minutes.

But it was again a reminder of these strange times that just as the organisers spoke about the "hope" these Games brought, the trailer for the Paris Olympics was remotely done due to the pandemic. So remote that they went as far as outer space, from where French astronaut Thomas Pesquet helped perform the national anthem on his saxophone from the International Space Station.

It was all very unusual, but then what isn't about these Games?

Paris tried to charm with a video of the city's romantic sights, packed rooftops, jets painting the skies around Eiffel Tower in the country's colours and a little bit of break dancing, which will make its debut as an Olympics sport in 2024. The scene finally cut back to Tokyo, where the flame was extinguished, and the athletes sauntered off the field to feel-good music.

Then, the volunteers, the real heroes of these Games, took centre stage. They posed for selfies, ran mock races on the track and shed a tear when the word 'Arigato' (Thank you) appeared on the big screen. The Games that few thought could take place, and the build-up for which went on forever, were finally closed.

Arigato Tokyo. Bonjour Paris.

ICMR study

In May, 18 villagers in Siddarthnagar, Uttar Pradesh, had received Covaxin as the second dose, six weeks after they got Covishield. The study compared their reaction to 40 recipients of two doses of Covishield and 40 recipients of two doses of Covaxin.

"We compared the safety and immunogenicity profile of them (the group of 18) against that of individuals receiving either Covishield or Covaxin. Lower and similar adverse events following immunisation in all three groups underlined the safety of the combination vaccine-regime," said the study which is yet to be peer-reviewed. "Immunogenicity profile against Alpha, Beta and Delta variants in the heterologous group was superior; IgG antibody and neutralising antibody response of the participants was also significantly higher compared to that in the homologous groups," it said.

"Overall, this study demonstrates that immunisation with a heterologous combination of an adenovirus vector platform-based vaccine followed by an inactivated whole virus vaccine is safe and elicits better immunogenicity than two doses of homologous vaccination, using the same vaccines," it said.

While Covishield is built on a viral vector vaccine platform and uses a weakened version of adenovirus, a common cold virus that causes infection in chimpanzees, Covaxin is built on an inactivated whole virus vaccine platform.

The study is the first scientific evidence emerging from India on superior immunogenicity profile demonstrated in mixed-vaccine doses. However, the researchers have underlined that to conclusively prove these preliminary findings, "multi-centre" randomised control trials need to be carried out. They have also flagged the study's limitations: the sample size of 18 participants is small; follow-up period is only 60-70 days after first dose; baseline serological and immunological data of participants is not available.

According to the study, the findings have an "important implication" for the Covid-19 vaccination programme wherein "het-

erologous immunisation will pave the way for induction of improved and better protection against the variant strains of SARS-CoV-2".

"This is the first report of heterologous immunisation with an adenovirus vector based and an inactivated whole virion vaccine in humans demonstrating safety and significantly improved immunogenicity... Immunogenicity profile studied against the variants of concerns, Alpha, Beta and Delta variants, demonstrates significantly higher titers in the heterologous group," it said.

The researchers have said such mixed regimens will help to "overcome the challenges of shortfall of particular vaccines" and "remove hesitancy around vaccines in people's mind that could have genesis in programmatic errors especially in settings where multiple Covid-19 vaccines are being used".

On safety, reactogenicity analysis showed that in the heterologous group, 11 per cent reported pain at the injection site; however, during the second dose, no such local adverse event was reported, it said.

The most commonly reported systemic adverse event was pyrexia (raised body temperature) and malaise (discomfort): 33.3 per cent reported this during the first dose, and 5.5 per cent during the second dose.

Kerala tourism

According to state Tourism officials, the total earnings from the sector in 2019 was Rs 45,010 crore. In 2020, it was only around Rs 11,000 crore -- mainly during the months of January to March, before the pandemic struck, and mid-November onward, when the first wave eased (see box).

Officials said domestic arrivals fell by 72.86 per cent in 2020 from 2019, and international by 71.36 per cent.

In the first three months of this year, before the third wave surged, the state logged a decline of 40.53 per cent in domestic and 95.65 per cent in international arrivals from the same period last year.

Kochi-based tourism consultant Sanjeev Kumar Nair says a large number of properties are up for sale. "Most of the properties have loan liability. Even though they are not operational, a skeletal staff has to be maintained for regular upkeep," says Nair.

According to All Kerala Houseboat Owners Association representative, Tony Pulickattil, there was "a short period of relief" in December-January after the first wave waned.

"Many of us spent Rs 5 lakh to Rs 8 lakh to re-launch since the houseboats needed repairs after lying idle. Then came the second wave, and with the third now looming large, we are wary of making any fresh investment. The high fuel prices have also made resumption of operations unviable. We cannot increase the boat rent, either, at this stage," says Pulickattil.

The backwaters in Alappuzha alone has about 1,000 houseboats, each employing three-five persons. "Now, the employees as well as investors have turned to other avenues, such as door delivery of fish and vegetables," says Pulickattil.

In Wayanad, resort operator P T Jamshith says a large number of properties are in crisis "without a paisa to resume business".

"Several resorts and homestays have been closed. Many are up for sale at half the rate of pre-Covid days. Those who have taken properties on lease have abandoned them. The only relief is that bikers are now checking in at off-road resorts," says Jamshith.

FULL REPORTSON
www.indianexpress.com



3 THE CITY



Three buses were gutted while some more buses at a nearby servicing centre also suffered damage. *Express*

Fire at chemical storage unit, 2 suffer serious burn injuries

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, AUGUST 8

TWO PERSONS sustained serious burn injuries in a major blaze that started a chemical storage facility located in a village near Pune city late on Saturday. Three buses were also gutted in the incident, while some other buses parked outside an adjoining vehicle servicing and painting centre also suffered some damage.

According to Pune fire brigade, the blaze started in the storage of a paint thinner at Kopare village located around 15 km from Pune, between 10.30 pm and 11 pm on Saturday. Five fire tenders from Pune fire brigade and three more from the fire department of PM-RDA were pressed into action.

Fire officer Gajanan Patrudkar said, "The facility where the fire started seems to be a storage facility of chemicals; mainly, highly inflammable paint thinners and some other substances too, like paint pigments, were kept in barrels. The cause behind the fire is yet to be ascertained. After receiving the call, fire tenders from Pune and PMRDA were rushed to the spot. By the time we reached, the fire

had intensified to a large extent because of the chemical storage."

Patrudkar said two persons, including the man who was running the facility, were injured and rushed to Sassoon General Hospital, and that their injuries were serious.

"The fire had spread to the vehicle servicing and painting centre and three buses parked outside the centre were gutted. Some more buses were also damaged. We had to undertake firefighting operations on both premises," Patrudkar added.

He said, "The storage facility had a tin shed, which made the fire extinguishing operation difficult. We used foam and also had to actually move some burning barrels of chemicals. We brought the fire under control around 1.30 am and then continued with the cooling operation to avoid any secondary fire. As of now, we do not know the exact nature of the storage facility and why so much paint thinner was being stored in one place, and that too without proper precautions." A police official said a probe will be conducted into the exact cause of the fire and whether negligence caused or aggravated the blaze.

Maharashtra has potential to become model-state for the world: CSIR chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, AUGUST 8

USE SCIENCE as an effective medium to find solutions for society and its well-being, Shekhar Mande, director general, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), has urged young scientists. Mande was delivering an address on "Contribution of Maharashtra in the field of science", a virtual talk organised as part of 'Maharashtra Diamond Jubilee Lecture Series' hosted by Maharashtra Information Centre Sunday. "...there is no doubt that Maharashtra will lead and has the potential to become a model state for the world. I urge all young scientists to use science and channelise their efforts for the well-being of society," Mande said.

During his address, the CSIR chief shared past and ongoing research at a number of scientific institutions, including IIT-Bombay, National Institute of Virology, National Centre for Cell Science, National Institute of Radio Astrophysics, Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Bhabha Atomic

Research Centre and others.

"Our state-run universities, too, have showcased top-class scientific works and have contributed immensely towards scientific progress," he said. He said not just science and research, Maharashtra had promoted education, particularly medical education.

Along with Pune, cities like Kolhapur, Nagpur, Mumbai and Aurangabad were homes to educational institutions and universities that have made great contributions, he said. He highlighted the state's progressive history by using mathematician Bhaskaracharya, Dr Anandibai Joshi, who was among the foremost medical practitioners of India, and social reformer Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak as examples. Mande said while Covid-19 had brought focus and greater need for carrying out studies of new viruses and diseases. He said it was in Pune where Imperial Bacteriological Laboratory (IBL) was established in 1889. It was from Pune that all regional centres of IBL, now known as ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute, were later branched to Bareilly, Palampur, Kolkata, Mukteshwar and Bengaluru.

Auto driver beaten up over 'non-payment of EMI', rickshaw panchayat seeks action against loan recovery agents and finance companies

MANOJ MORE
PUNE, AUGUST 8

AFTER AN autorickshaw driver was allegedly beaten up by loan recovery agents in Kharadi area, and a picture of him sprawled on the ground in a semi-conscious state went viral, autorickshaw drivers have approached Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and demanded strict action. They have particularly demanded action against loan recovery agents, including those of Bajaj Finance Ltd. The company has said it is looking into the matter.

The alleged incident has sparked off protests by autorickshaw drivers and owners. Earlier this week, the driver, identified as Kishore Pawar, was allegedly beaten up by loan recovery agents of Bajaj Finance Ltd, for alleged non-payment on his EMI.

Pawar, who was admitted to a hospital by fellow drivers, has lodged a complaint with Chandannagar police station. Inspector Sunil Jadhav said, "We have registered a non-cognizable offence against the recovery agents. Pawar has suffered some injuries but was discharged from hospital. However, two days back, Pawar complained to us that he was not feeling well and his condition has worsened due to the injury he suffered. We are investigating the matter," he said, adding that MNS workers met him and demanded strong action from the minister.

Baba Kamble, president of Maharashtra Rickshaw Panchayat, said Pawar was beaten up when he told the recovery agents that he did not have money to repay the loan. "He told them that due to Covid curbs, his earnings had dropped and, therefore, he was not in a

State identifies 45 cases of Delta Plus variant, three in Pune district

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, AUGUST 8

GENOMIC SURVEILLANCE by the state health department has identified 45 cases of Covid-19 caused by Delta Plus variant, across Maharashtra, with 13 in Jalgaon and 11 in Ratnagiri districts. Three cases have been detected in Pune, five in Thane and six in Mumbai. Remaining cases have been detected with one each in Sangli, Kolhapur, Sindhudurg, Palghar, Aurangabad, Kolhapur and Beed districts. Out of the 45 cases, 27 people infected with Delta Plus variant are male while the remaining are female. A total of 20 people infected by this variant are in the age group 19 to 45, 14 between the age group of 46 and 60, six children are aged below 18 and five are aged above 60.

State health minister Rajesh Tope said cases of Delta Plus variant had increased, but there was no need to worry. Tope said immediate measures, such as travel history of the person, vaccination status and focus on contact tracing and testing, were being taken.

"So far, we have information on 34 out of 45 cases infected with



At a crowded fish market in Ganesh Peth on Sunday. *Pavan Khengre*

Delta Plus variant and, barring one death, most are stable and have a mild form of the disease," state surveillance officer Dr Pradeep Awate told The Indian Express.

"At present, it does not seem a worrisome situation as there has not been an increase in the transmission rate," Dr Awate said.

He said surveillance, however, was critical, and that the Covid positivity rate was still high in

some pockets of Pune district. While two cases of Delta Plus variant were from Purandar tehsil and one from Chakan area in Pune district, there was not much transmission of the variant in the immediate locality, he added.

"Even as we relax restrictions and open up, we should be concerned about rural areas in Pune district as there is high positivity in some pockets and, hence, there

has to be aggressive testing," Dr Awate said.

Delta Plus variant, also known as B.1.617.2.1 or AY.1, contains a mutation in the spike protein that the virus uses to enter human cells; it is called K417N. So far, Delta Plus has been found in low numbers. Till August 4, there were 83 cases of the variant in the country.

While initially, to monitor variants of SARS-CoV-2 virus, genomic

IN NUMBERS

11
Covid-19 deaths in Pune on Sunday.

18,407
Death toll in district.

962
New cases on Sunday.

10,92,652
The total positive cases so far in the district.

Proportion of symptomatic Covid patients more in second wave, study finds

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, AUGUST 8

THE PROPORTION of symptomatic patients in Pune was far greater during the second wave than in the first, a new study from NIV has revealed. In the first wave, one in seven Covid-19 patients, or less than 15 per cent, showed symptoms. During the second wave, however, one in four cases, or 25 per cent, were symptomatic.

The numbers are based on samples from Pune tested at NIV from January last year till end of April, 2021. In this time, NIV had tested 3.08 lakh samples, of which 65,312 were found infected with the virus. NIV was just one of the several laboratories carrying out diagnostic Covid-19 tests in Pune. The total number of confirmed cases in Pune till April 30 this year was close to 8.5 lakh, making it the city with the highest caseload in the country, after New Delhi.

Of the 65,312 people found positive in testing carried out at NIV, 13,066 had symptoms, while the other 52,246 were asymptomatic. But interestingly, over 14 per cent of asymptomatic patients also needed hospitalization at a later stage, the analysis pointed out.

"Of the 13,066 positive symptomatic cases, 5,300 (40.5 per cent) were hospitalized as compared to 7,425 of the 52,246 (14.25 per cent) asymptomatic patients," it said.

Not all people with symptoms were found to be positive. Of the 3.08 lakh people tested, over 44,000 reported symptoms like fever, cough, headache, breathlessness, sore throat, body ache or nasal discharge. However, only 13,066 were found to be infected with the virus. Among the over 2.63 lakh people who did not show any symptoms, but were still tested, 52,246 were detected to be positive. The positivity rate amongst people with symptoms was much higher during the second wave than the first, the analysis showed. During the first wave, 27.1 per cent of people who had symptoms and were tested, turned out to be positive. This number rose to 59.1 per cent during the second wave.

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Date : 9.8.2021

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अ.क्र.	पदनाम	विषय	तासिका तत्वावर पदभरतीसाठी मान्य पदसंख्या
०१.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	वाणिज्य	२
०२.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	अर्थशास्त्र	२
०३.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	भूगोल	२
०४.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	मानसशास्त्र	१
०५.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	मराठी	३
०६.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	पदार्थविज्ञान	२
०७.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	रसायनशास्त्र	१०
०८.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	वनस्पतीशास्त्र	३
०९.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	संख्याशास्त्र	६
१०.	सहाय्यक प्राध्यापक	ग्राणीशास्त्र	४
	एकूण		३५

प्रा. डॉ. गजानन र. एकबोटे
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प्रा. शामकांत श्री. देशमुख
सचिव, प्रो. ए. सोसायटी, पुणे ५.

प्रा. डॉ. राजेंद्र झुंजारराव
प्राचार्य, मॉडर्न महाविद्यालय पुणे ५.



Fully vaccinated people can travel in Mumbai local trains from Aug 15: Uddhav

VISHWAS WAGHMODE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

PEOPLE WHO have been fully vaccinated and completed 14 days after receiving the second dose of an anti-Covid vaccine will be allowed to travel by Mumbai suburban local trains from August 15, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced Sunday.

Mumbai has fully vaccinated 19 lakh people, most of whom likely entirely dependent on public transportation.

Thackeray said a meeting would be held with the state Covid Task Force on Monday to discuss easing curbs for places of worship and providing more relaxation to the hotels, restaurants and malls.

“We are allowing the local trains to the general public from August 15. In the first phase, those who have taken both the doses of vaccines and have completed 14 days after taking the second dose, will be allowed to travel by the local trains. We have prepared a mobile application where fully vaccinated people can register to get a railway pass,” Thackeray said while addressing the state through social media Sunday.

The CM further said people will have to provide details of two doses of vaccines, completion of 14 days after the second dose and a QR code, which will help the railways to verify authenticity, to obtain the travel pass. People who have smartphones can download the pass from the mobile application. Those who don't have smartphones, the CM said, can get the pass through the BMC offices and Mumbai suburban

The CM said a meeting will be held with the state Covid Task Force on Monday to discuss easing curbs for places of worship and providing more relaxation to hotels, restaurants and malls

railways offices.

“At present, there are around 19 lakh people in Mumbai who have taken the two doses of (Covid) vaccines and have completed 14 days after the second dose. This number will go up daily till August 15. And once we become habituated to the pass system, then we will open up restaurants, malls and others in a phase-wise manner,” the CM added.

Referring to his recent meeting with the hotels and restaurants associations demanding more relaxations, Thackeray said, “The decision about (easing of curbs) for the hotels, restaurants, malls and places of worship will be taken after the discussions in a meeting with the state Covid Task Force tomorrow. That decision will be announced soon.” However, he said the announcement may take around 8-10 days.

On August 2, the Maharashtra government allowed malls, gymnasiums, yoga centres, salons, beauty parlours and spas to re-open with 50 per cent capacity, while shops and establishments were allowed to remain open till 8 pm on weekdays and till 3 pm on Saturday in 22 districts.

Restaurants have also been allowed to remain open with 50 per cent seating capacity till 4 pm on weekdays only. In Mumbai, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, however, has allowed shops and establishments to remain open till 10 pm on all days while all hotels and restaurants can remain open till 4 pm through the week.

Currently, the state government has not granted any relaxation to the places of worship in the state.

Citing Covid cases, Thackeray said precautions were needed in the districts of Pune, Ahmednagar, Solapur, Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri and Beed reporting a higher number of cases. “Even though we are implementing the oxygen self-reliant policy, there are limitations to the immediate oxygen production. Now, other states are seeing a rise in Covid cases. So, if there is an increase in the number of cases in the state, then we will have no option but to impose the lockdown,” he added.

Thackeray also urged the people to take a pledge to make a village, towns, district, and the state Covid-free from Independence Day.

The CM has also urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to relax the 50 per cent reservation ceiling to provide reservations to the Maratha community. “If the 50 per cent ceiling is not relaxed, then it is not possible to provide reservation. While the Centre has proposed to grant powers to the states to give reservation, it will have no meaning if the reservation ceiling is not relaxed,” he said.

In a conversation with VALLABH OZARKAR, Raigad District Collector NIDHI CHAUDHARI, who has been literally in the eye of the storm over the last year, said the district administration was planning to have Disaster Management Committees in every village and train local residents for rescue work, which will help to save lives during the “golden hour” that is critical to every rescue operation.

Within a year, the district has been hit by two cyclones and a major flood last month. What has been the impact of this on the administration of the district?

I can only say that these are very difficult times and handling two cyclones and a massive deluge during the pandemic was not easy. It takes a toll on the physical and emotional health of the entire team. We were working tirelessly day and night to tackle the pandemic, migrants' crisis during the first lockdown, the second Covid-19 wave and amid all this, the natural disasters have tested our mettle again and again.

Is there a combined assessment of the damage of the last three disasters in terms of lives lost, houses and infrastructure destroyed, and the financial cost of compensating and repairing all the damage?

Yes, we do detailed damage assessment exercises after natural disasters and submit our proposals to the government. For Nisarga Cyclone, we had disbursed a total of Rs 348 crore to those affected, including ex-gratia compensation, grants for damaged houses, loss of agriculture, fishing nets, death of poultry/animals, cattle shed, shops etc. Likewise, SDRF/CMRF compensation to an extent of Rs 23.56 crore was paid to citizens impacted by Tauktae Cyclone.

During the recent floods, the administration has immediately done a damage assessment and sent its demand to the state government. The government had released grants for the ex-gratia compensation, which was given to the families of the deceased according to the regulations. We are also giving free ration to all the affected people.

The loss of public infrastructure especially in schools, anganwadis, government buildings and electricity infrastructure were immense and we have attempted to rebuild the same.

Why is reaching assistance to the people at the mercy of natural disasters still so tough in these times of proliferation of technology-enabled rescues, social media apps, artificial intelligence, etc?

India is a vast country and most of its population still lives in villages, which are far away from the power generation centres. Access to modern technological tools in rescue and relief is most often post-disaster and not before a disaster. In disaster-affected rural areas, telecommunication facilities get adversely impacted. In the recent landslide at Taliye, which happened around 5 pm, we got the information but due to inclement weather, no helicopters could fly.

Our efforts of sending Navy, Coast Guard and NDRF team through boats also failed because of flooding in the Savitri river. The teams were stranded for 10 hours due to flooding and massive landslides on multiple locations. In such unprecedented floods and landslides, the administration couldn't reach in time.

Nevertheless, compare our response with the most technologically advanced nations like Germany and China, which had massive casualties due to floods in recent times. Somewhere, it is not just technology but compassion and empathy, which plays a more critical role in disaster handling.

As the government's top representative in the district, what lessons have you learnt from the last year?

I always believed in leading from the front and doing the right thing. I knew that my team will be as strong and committed as I am. One has to shed off all fears while handling disasters and try every possible opportunity to help people, provide relief and plan well even during chaotic times. It wouldn't have been possible for us to tackle large-scale evacuation during Cyclone Nisarga and Tauktae if the teams were afraid of contracting Covid.

Besides, I learnt that true character is tested during calamities and that people share and care when it is most needed. There are amazing people in the ground putting their lives at risk to save others. There are houses, which open their doors for sheltering evacuated people, there are women who cook for the en-



MONDAY INTERVIEW
NIDHI CHAUDHARI
RAIGAD DISTRICT COLLECTOR

tire community, there are doctors/nurses who go to remotest areas walking miles to treat people, there are talathi/police constables performing beyond the call of duty. Also, I learnt that natural disasters cannot be stopped or predicted but we can arm ourselves with knowledge and make attempts to save lives. For example, the district administration has sent detailed proposals for cyclone shelters, measures for landslide prevention, lightning arresters, desilting of rivers etc.

We are also planning to have Village Disaster Management Committees in every village and train local people on rescue work. This will certainly enable in saving lives during the golden hour of a rescue operation.

Even after being such a big district, Raigad still has no multi-speciality hospital. What are the plans for improving the health infrastructure and facilities?

This district indeed has weak health infrastructure and it was the biggest worry factor while handling Covid. We had brought a lot of private facilities onboard for the Covid management. To strengthen public health infrastructure land was granted for a medical college in Alibag. The district administration has also given land for 66 sub-centres/PHCs, which were approved in 2013 but could not be started due to land issues.

Additionally, the district administration is working on identifying suitable land for women's hospital, ayush hospital, trauma centre in Pen and Mangaon areas. During the pandemic, the administration attempted to improve public health facilities like SDH/RH and PHCs also. Necessary diagnostic facilities, testing facilities were

created but any sustainable and quality work on public health would require continuous efforts and adequate funding in the long run.

It was revealed that Taliye village was not on the list of the landslide-prone villages. When was the last geological survey done in the district and are you planning to do it now?

Yes. Since the 2005 floods and landslides in Raigad, the GSI survey has been conducted on different occasions. According to the recent GSI report of 2018, we have 103 landslide-prone villages, 9 in Class I, 11 in Class II and 83 in Class III category.

Taliye village was not on this list hence, it couldn't be imagined that such a massive landslide would occur here. Unfortunately, science has not advanced so much on the prediction of landslides.

We can only get surveys of GSI conducted on recurring intervals. In this regard, the district administration had intimidated GSI to send its team for a survey of Taliye and other recently landslide-affected villages. Accordingly, the survey was done. We have also requested them to do a survey of Mahad & Poladpur taluka.

What kind of relief and rehabilitation plan is there for all the families who are currently living in landslide-prone areas like in Mahad and Poladpur?

For landslide-affected people of Taliye, MHADA has come forward with a rehabilitation plan. It is paramount to find a suitable location, which is agreeable to affected people. In the case of Taliye, Kevanale and Sakhar Sutarwadi where houses got damaged, suitable government land is not available and therefore, private land is being identified. In the case of private lands, a detailed proposal of land acquisition is to be prepared by the sub-district officer, which will be submitted to the state government for approval of funds.

After the land identification, a layout with necessary amenities as per R&R Act is to be planned. Once rehabilitation layout is approved, work gets commenced following due process.

As an immediate relief, the district administration approached the affected citizens and suggested container-based accommodation to which they agreed principally. We are placing such 24 containers in Taliye and 4 each in Kevanale and Sakhar Sutarwadi. This is only a temporary measure and permanent rehabilitation will be done according to the R&R norms. The Chief Minister has directed the administration to make best efforts for a model rehabilitation in the landslide-affected areas and we are working on the same.

What are your preparations for the third wave? How many Covid care centres were affected due to the recent flood?

To tackle the third wave, we have planned three jumbo facilities through CSR. Around 200 beds with oxygen facilities were set up by JSW and Reliance each in Wadkhal and Nagothane. Likewise, CIDCO is building a large 680 beds oxygen-supported facility with adequate paediatric and general ICU in Kalamboli, which is nearing completion.

Additionally, the district has commissioned two PSA plants from government funds at Alibag and Panvel, while eight are in progress. Of the eight, two PSA plants at Karjat and Pen are sanctioned from the PM CARES Fund and are being monitored by NHAI while six other plants will come up at Chowk, Kashele, Uran, JNPT, SDH Panvel and MMA Mahad. These six plants are commissioned from CSR funds.

We have made adequate paediatric wards in all government medical facilities like RH/SDH/DH besides creating village-level isolation facilities. Raigad is a hub of LMO manufacturing in Maharashtra as JSW, Linde and INOX have their biggest LMO plants in Raigad. We have directed them to keep their buffer stock full and increase their capacities to the maximum. During the recent flood, seven Covid care facilities were disrupted. As of now, most of them are restored on priority by sending generators and necessary medicines and equipment.

How much disaster response force is with the district currently and how important is a permanent base camp of NDRF in Raigad and where?

We have a team of NGOs, which work during different natural disasters. Their mapping is complete and most often these local rescue NGOs are first responders. For example, as a precautionary measure, Mahesh Sanap and his team were sent to Mahad city before the flood and his team helped in rescuing several stranded people. Likewise, the Salunkhe rescue team was the first respondent in the Mahad building collapse incident in 2020. Last year, the administration submitted a proposal to SDMA for a permanent NDRF basecamp in Raigad district because of its high vulnerability to natural disasters. Our recent experience tells that arrival of NDRF from Pune or Mumbai to Mahad takes time and therefore having a permanent camp at a conspicuous location in Raigad district is of utmost need. This camp can cater to Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg as well. At present, the proposal was sent for Mahad but a final decision in this regard from NDRF is still awaited.

Aspire Home Finance Corporation Limited
Motilal Oswal Tower, Rahimullah Sayani Road, Opposite ST Depot, Prabhadevi, Mumbai-400025.
Email :- info@ahfcd.com CIN :- U65923MH2013PLC248741

POSSESSION NOTICE (FOR IMMOVABLE PROPERTY/IES)

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Aspire Home Finance Corporation Ltd. under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets & in compliance of Rule 8(1) of Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued demand notice/s on the date mentioned against each account calling upon the respective borrower/s to repay the amount as mentioned against each account within 60 days from the date of notice/s (date of receipt of the said notice/s).

The borrower/s having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower/s and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property/ies described herein below in exercise powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on the dates mentioned against each account.

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Sr. No.	Loan Agreement No./Name of the Borrower/Co Borrower/Grantor	Demand Notice date & Amount	Date of possession taken	Description of the Property/ies mortgaged
1.	LXPUN00314-150003601 Dastagirpasha Mohammaddisak Jamadar & Bibhisasha Dastagirpasha Jamadar	24-08-2017 for Rs. 3079037/-	05-08-2021	Property At s.no. 56, H. NO. 1A+6B/56, Village - Kharadi Dist. Pune Kharadi Pune Maharashtra 411014

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CHANGE OF DATE OF BIRTH

I Sadhana Nivas Godhade wife of Army No. 14445928A Rank- Ex. HAV Name Godhade Nivas Bajrang. Hereby declares that in my husband Army service record my date of Birth written as 28/06/1988 which is incorrect. My correct Date of Birth is 23/06/1988 vide Affi No. 117/2021 0090289116-2

PERSONAL

CHANGE OF NAME

I, 14445928A Rank-Ex. HAV Name Godhade Nivas Bajrang. In my Army service record my daughter's name written as Sanika which is incorrect. Her correct name is Sanika Nivas Godhade vide Affi. No. 118/2021 0090289116-4

I have changed my name from Gitanjali Dhupe to Gitanjali Matish Patil as per documents. 0070749106-2

I have changed my name from Munawwar to Munawwar Jakrul Shah by Adhaar card no 66172400471 0090289071-1

I Suman Kailash Makh wife of Army No. 15573736K Rank-HAV (Loc) Name Makh Kailash. Hereby declares that in my husband Army Service record my name written as Suman which is incorrect. My correct name is Suman Kailash Makh vide Affi. No. 122/2021 0090289116-6

I Shubhangi Jagadish Mane wife of Army No. 15573832Y Rank-HAV Name Jagadish Hanamantrav Mane. Hereby declares that in my husband Army Service record my name written as Suman which is incorrect. My correct name is Suman Kailash Makh vide Affi. No. 120/2021 0090289116-5

I Ashwini Arun Joshi, D/o Arun Ganesh Joshi R/o 21 Amar Society Erandwane Pune 411004 have changed my name to Disha Devesh Muley for all purposes. 0040579284-1

I Sadhana Nivas Godhade wife of Army No. 14445928A Rank- Ex. HAV Name Godhade Nivas Bajrang. Hereby declares that in my husband Army service record my name written as Sadhana which is incorrect. My correct name is Sadhana Nivas Godhade vide Affi No. 119/2021 0090289116-1

My old name Osmond Michael Raymond Louis I have changed to New name Osmond Louis. Vide Aadhar No: 562047361183. 0090289057-1

I, 14445928A Rank-Ex. HAV Name Godhade Nivas Bajrang. In my Army service record my son's name written as Raj which is incorrect. His correct name is Raj Nivas Godhade vide Affi. No. 116/2021 0090289116-3

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TENDER NOTICE

Bank of India invites Request for Proposal (RFP) for Procurement of Cyber Threat Intelligence Services.

Last date for submission of Request for Proposal: **30.08.2021 by 4.00 pm.**

Full details are available on the Bank's Corporate Website: **www.bankofindia.co.in** under "Tender" Section from **09.08.2021.**

Amendments / Corrigendum, if any, will be kept on website only.

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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH PUNE
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NIT No : 14/ISER/Pune/2021-22 Registrar

Maharashtra Fisheries Development Corporation Ltd, Mumbai
(A Govt. Of Maharashtra Undertaking)

Head Office Address : 3rd floor, N.K.M. International House, Behind LIC (Yogakshem) Bldg., Babubhai M. Chinal Marg, Mumbai-400 021
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E-TENDER NOTICE

(Tender No : MFDC/Tech/Chaskaman Reservoir/01/2021)

Maharashtra Fisheries Development Corporation Ltd, Mumbai inviting E-tender for leasing fishing rights on Chaskaman reservoir (1821Hectare) Taluka-Khed, District-Pune for the period of 5 years with effect from the year 2021-22 to 2025-26. Fisheries Co-operative Societies/ Fishermen/ Private Entrepreneurs/ Companies/ Individuals are eligible for submitting the tender documents.

- 1) Tender sale /Download from Dt. 10/08/2021 to Dt. 03/09/2021
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- 6) EICHR VECV PRO6025 MH03CP1610 YOM – 2017
- 7) TATA 4018CBTT NL01AD2813 YOM – 2019
- 8) TATA LPT1109FB MH04JK6608 YOM – 2018
- 9) SANY EXCAVATOR 250C SR NO. 18SEY014356601 YOM – 2018
- 10) TELCON ROCK BREAKER B140 SR NO. 504540 YOM – 2018
- 11) TATA SFC407FBPI MH04KF0972 YOM – 2019
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5 GOVT & POLITICS



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



TWEETING STORM

A DAY after the Twitter account of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was temporarily locked over a photograph he posted with the family of the nine-year-old Dalit rape victim, several of his party leaders Sunday tweeted the same photograph and a photograph posted by the National Commission of Scheduled Castes of its members meeting the victim's family members. They called it a double standard by Twitter and asked how fearful it is of the Narendra Modi government that it is singling out Rahul's account when government bodies did the same thing. The party also fielded four women spokespersons – Supriya Shrinete, Ragini Nayak, Alka Lamba and Amrita Dhawan – to target the government and question the silence of the women ministers in the government on the issue.

THE NUDGE

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT employees are not participating well enough in the government's campaign to set a record of maximum people singing the national anthem ahead of Independence Day. People are supposed to participate by uploading individual videos of themselves singing the anthem on Rashtragaan.in and get a certificate of participation. The Culture Ministry has now sent out a communication to all ministries that the participation by employees is "below expectation" and that a mechanism of accountability needs to be devised so officials upload their videos and WhatsApp their certificates to a person of responsibility in their respective departments.

PANIPAT PRIDE

NEERAJ CHOPRA'S Olympics achievement has found an admirer in another "Panipat boy" – US acting envoy Atul Keshap. Soon after Chopra won the gold in javelin throw, Keshap tweeted a video clip of Chopra on the podium with the national anthem playing in the background. The accompanying message said: "Olympic GOLD for India! From Roosevelt House in New Delhi, this Panipat boy bursts with joy and pride for a sporting hero from Panipat, Neeraj Chopra!" Keshap's grandparents used to live in Panipat, and he used to visit them with his NRI father in his teens in the 70s till the early 80s.

Hopeful of IT panel taking up Pegasus issue, says Tharoor

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

ALTHOUGH THE Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology could not take up a discussion on the Pegasus snooping issue at its last meeting after BJP members on the panel blocked proceedings of the meeting citing lack of quorum, panel chairman Shashi Tharoor on Sunday said he was hopeful that the committee will take up the issue going forward. The last meeting on July 28 also saw, what Tharoor calls, "last minute refusal" by representatives of three ministries to attend it. Tharoor wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, asking him to take "serious cognizance" of the matter and called the officials' conduct "unprecedented", "breach of parliamentary privilege" and "contempt of the House".

Talking to *The Indian Express*, Tharoor said the IT committee had been conducting discussions on citizens' data privacy and security for the past two years. He said cyber security topics had also featured in its agenda under the previous

chairman, BJP's Anurag Thakur. "The Pegasus issue therefore clearly falls under the purview of the IT committee and within these subjects on its agenda. So, it is only expected that members of the IT committee will ask questions about it when these topics arise. It is no secret that the committee's meeting on its established agenda was disrupted by BJP members who did not want Pegasus to be discussed," he said.

Arguing that accountability to Parliament is a cornerstone of India's democracy, Tharoor said "but it is increasingly being tossed aside in the current regime's headlong rush to autocracy". "Despite this disappointing approach I am hopeful that we will be able to take up the question going forward. And I would say that though we will take it up to the extent that the committee is able to act, I have proposed from the start that what we really need is a Supreme Court monitored inquiry headed by a serving judge or a recently retired judge to conduct a fair, impartial and thorough investigation of the Pegasus issue," Tharoor said.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

CJI: Threat to human rights is highest in police stations

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

POINTING OUT that custodial torture and other police atrocities are problems that still prevail in society, Chief Justice of India N V Ramana Sunday said the "threat to human rights and bodily integrity are the highest in police stations".

He flagged the issues of human rights and dignity, saying these are "sacrosanct".

"The threat to human rights and bodily integrity are the highest in police stations. Custodial torture and other police atrocities are problems that still prevail in our society. In spite of constitutional declarations and guarantees, the lack of effective legal representation at the police stations is a huge detriment to arrested/detained persons," the CJI said, addressing an event organised by National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). "The decisions taken in these



CJI N V Ramana

early hours will later determine the ability of the accused to defend himself. Going by the recent reports even the privileged are not spared third-degree treatment," he said.

"To keep police excesses in check, dissemination of information about the constitutional right to legal aid and availability of free legal aid services is necessary. The installation of display boards and outdoor hoardings in every police station/prison is a step in this direction," CJI Ramana said, as he called upon NALSA to carry out nationwide

sensitisation of police officers.

He said the concept of free legal aid to the needy has its roots in the freedom movement. "Those days, the legal luminaries rendered pro-bono services to freedom fighters, who were targeted by the colonial rulers. This spirit of service found reflection in the Constitution, with those very same legal luminaries serving as members of the Constituent Assembly."

Stressing the need to work on access to justice for all, irrespective of their socio-economic status, CJI Ramana said this is imperative to ensure that we remain a society governed by rule of law.

"If we want to remain a society governed by the rule of law, it is imperative for us to bridge the gap of accessibility to justice between the highly privileged and the most vulnerable. For all times to come, we must remember that, the realities of socio-economic diversity which prevail in our nation, cannot ever be a reason for denial of rights," he said.

At Mahan Dal meet, Akhilesh reaches out to non-Yadav OBCs

ASAD REHMAN
LUCKNOW, AUGUST 8

AS PART of his strategy to bring together smaller parties, especially non-Yadav OBCs, ahead of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections next year, Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday addressed party workers of Mahan Dal, an OBC-based party headed by Keshav Dev Maurya, in Lucknow.

Presiding the Mahan Dal meeting as its chief guest, Akhilesh lashed out at BJP, accusing it of wedging a divide in the backward class community by pitting Yadavs against other OBCs.

"The BJP says Yadavs are taking all the resources. Sometimes they say that we have snatched away what was yours. This narrative becomes more visible when elections approach... The BJP is just doing politics. You and I are Backwards. We follow the footsteps of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar... Samajwadi Party is a party of the Backwards and demands the rights for all its people," Akhilesh Yadav said, adding that if Mahan Dal and SP workers would work together in the election, the alliance could win



Akhilesh Yadav said if Mahan Dal and SP workers work together in the election, the alliance could win 400 seats in UP. Express

400 seats in UP. The UP Assembly has 403 seats.

Once again reiterating the demand for a caste-based census, Yadav accused both the BJP and the Congress of refusing to do so. "First the Congress refused to do a caste census, then the BJP. The BJP will never do a caste-based census because they know who are demographically more. I assure all our people that when we will form the government, we will do a caste census," he said.

The Mahan Dal enjoys support from Backward communi-

ties like Mauryas, Khushwahs, Sakhyas and Sainis.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Mahan Dal chief Keshav Dev Maurya said his party's only aim is to remove the BJP from power. "All communities are suffering – the Backwards, the Dalits, and the Muslims," he said.

Asked if they have reached a seat-sharing arrangement with the SP, Maurya said, "Yes, we have. But it is too early to disclose it..." "Our slogan is *Mahan Dal ne thahna hain, Samajwadi Party sarkar banana hain* (Mahan Dal has decided to make Samajwadi Party government)."

BJP ally Apna Dal calls for caste-based census

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

AHEAD OF Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections next year, BJP ally Apna Dal (S) on Sunday demanded a separate Union ministry for the welfare of OBCs and a caste-based census across the country to ascertain the exact population of the community.

Apna Dal (S) is the second ally of the BJP after JD (U) to have raised the demand for a caste-based census.

"Caste-based census is the need of the hour to ascertain the exact population of each segment, especially the OBC," working president of Apna Dal (S)

Ashish Patel told PTI.

He said the population of SCs and STs have been calculated in all censuses post-Independence but not of OBCs.

"As a result, there is no proper estimate of the OBC population. Therefore, I request the government that the next census should be caste-based to ascertain the exact population of each segment, especially the OBCs. This would ensure that the share of a particular caste segment is based on their population," said Ashish Patel, husband of Union minister Anupriya Patel.

He said the party also demands a separate ministry for welfare of OBCs.

SBSB's Rajbhar rules out alliance with BJP

Lucknow: Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSB) president Om Prakash Rajbhar on Sunday ruled out an alliance with the BJP for next year's Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, saying his "doors are open to all parties except the BJP".

Praising the Akhilesh Yadav-led SP, he said people feel "only SP can challenge BJP" and claimed that the BJP would not win even one seat in eastern UP if the SP joined hands with the coalition of small parties that the SBSB is a part of. "...There is no way I am going with the BJP. My main goal is to remove the BJP from power and have a government led by us," he said. **ENS**

PM to chair UNSC debate on maritime security, cooperation

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will chair a high-level open debate on the topic "Enhancing Maritime Security – A Case for International Cooperation" on Monday via video conferencing.

The Ministry of External Affairs on Sunday said the meeting is expected to be attended by several heads of state and governments of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) member states, along with high-level briefers from the UN system and key regional organisations.

"Modi would be the first Indian Prime Minister to preside over a UN Security Council Open Debate," the MEA said in a statement.

The open debate will focus on ways to effectively counter maritime crime and insecurity, and strengthen coordination in the maritime domain. Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to attend the session, sources said.

The UN Security Council has discussed and passed resolutions on different aspects of maritime security and maritime crime, the MEA said. However, this will be the first time that maritime security will be discussed in a holistic manner as an exclusive agenda item in such a high level open debate.

"Given that no country alone can address the diverse aspects of maritime security, it is important to consider this subject in a



PM Narendra Modi

holistic manner in the United Nations Security Council. A comprehensive approach to maritime security should protect and support legitimate maritime activities, while countering traditional and non-traditional threats in the maritime domain," it said.

In 2015, Modi had put forward the vision of SAGAR – an acronym for "Security and Growth for all in the Region" – which focuses on cooperative measures for sustainable use of the oceans, and provides a framework for a safe, secure, and stable maritime domain in the region.

This initiative was further elaborated in 2019 at the East Asia Summit through the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), with a focus on seven pillars of maritime security, including Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport, the MEA said.

Karnataka minister: BJP is strong, workers told to hit back if touched

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, AUGUST 8

IN A provocative statement, senior BJP leader and a minister in the Karnataka government, K S Eshwarappa, said on Sunday that if a "BJP worker is touched", the "instruction is to hit back with the same stick" and to "take away two, if even one is taken".

Speaking at a meeting of party workers in Shimoga, Eshwarappa, state minister for rural development and panchayat raj, said the BJP has "become very strong" and its workers are now capable of giving back in equal measure when provoked or attacked by rivals.

"In the past, they would murder our activists. Those days, our elders in the Sangh would say stay calm at all costs. We had to be calm, irrespective of the situation and how much we were attacked. We did not have the strength," he said.

"Today, the BJP has grown the world over, and if a BJP worker is touched anywhere in any corner, the instruction is to hit back with the same stick. In the past, the decision was to stay calm at all costs. Now, the decision is to take away two, if even one is taken. We have become very strong. Nobody will come to trouble us," Eshwarappa said.

Reacting to his remarks, Congress and SDPI leaders have called for his resignation. State Congress working president Saleem Ahmed said Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai should sack him immediately. "Eshwarappa is not worthy of



KS Eshwarappa

being an MLA, let alone a minister, on account of his provocative statements. The Speaker must expel him from the Legislature, the CM must drop him from the Cabinet, and the Governor should intervene and ensure peace and stability in the state," said SDPI spokesperson Afzar Kodipet. Eshwarappa, a veteran BJP leader who helped build the party in Karnataka along with former CM B S Yediyurappa, is known to frequently make provocative statements on communal lines.

A few days ago, he said the BJP would have a "nationalist leader" as the CM the next time it comes to power since compromises had to be made this time to accommodate many newcomers in the party.

The statement was an oblique reference to the fact that Bommai is not an original member of the Sangh Parivar or the BJP, but shifted from the JD(U) in 2008.

While Eshwarappa did not make provocative statements when Yediyurappa was CM, there is apprehension that BJP may use such remarks by key leaders in the new regime under Bommai to stir up sentiments in the run-up to the 2023 Assembly polls.

In MP lawmakers' booklet of words to avoid: anyway, sasur

IRAM SIDDIQUE
BHOPAL, AUGUST 8

LAWMAKERS INSIDE the Madhya Pradesh Assembly would do well to tread carefully while mentioning the word 'post-man'. Or *anyay* (injustice). Or, for that matter, ventilator, habitual, *bechara* (poor person), *halla* (noise), *bhedbhav* (discrimination), *yaar* (friend), and *bandhuwa mazdoor* (bonded labourer).

These words are among the hundreds of words and phrases expunged from the Madhya Pradesh House between 1954 and 2021 – and they have now found their way into an official advisory booklet for MLAs.

Released by the Madhya

Pradesh Assembly on Sunday – a day before its Monsoon Session begins – it is meant to help MLAs exercise restraint in speech during heated arguments.

According to Speaker Girish Gautam, the words by themselves do not seem unparliamentary – but the context makes them so.

The booklet, compiled by Assembly officials, begins by flagging the word *sasur* (father-in-law) that was expunged on September 23, 1954. It moves on to *tanasha* (dictator) that was removed on March 31, 1967; *galat* (wrong) that was expunged on July 4, 1980; and *dikkat* (difficulty) that was removed on February 26, 2021.

Among the phrases that



MP Speaker Girish Gautam with CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Leader of Opposition Kamal Nath at all-party meeting ahead of the monsoon session of the Assembly, in Bhopal. PTI

MLAs are expected to avoid are the colourful '*budget mein khoda pahad, nikla chuhiya*' (much ado

about nothing), '*bhains ke aage been bajana*' (casting pearls before swine), '*Aapko bhagwan ki*

kasam hai' (swearing on God), '*Lage raho munna bhai*', and '*ghadiyali aansu mat bahaiye*' (crocodile tears).

Gautam told *The Indian Express*: "There are two booklets, one of them handed to the MLAs, that have details of the context in which these words were said that led to them being expunged. It is up to us to maintain the sanctity of the institution."

The Speaker said this was a small step to ensure public representatives don't use such words and phrases inside the Vidhan Sabha. He also said a two-day training programme was being planned which would groom MLAs on how to conduct themselves in the House.

"Leaders like Kamal Nath and

Shivraj Singh Chouhan have been members of multiple Lok Sabhas and Vidhan Sabhas. They understand the functioning owing to their experience. But not all MLAs are so well-versed, there are many first-timers," said Gautam.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who was present during the launch, welcomed the initiative. He pointed out that once a group of students who had come to observe the working of Vidhan Sabha had described it as a "fish market".

At the event, Leader of Opposition Kamal Nath questioned the need for the booklet. "Why had such a need risen at all that a book on unparliamentary words and sentences had to be released?" he asked.



Bengaluru crackdown on drugs: Steep rise in cases filed, arrests

JOHNSON T A
BENGALURU, AUGUST 8

THE DEATH of a 27-year-old Congolese national in the custody of the Bengaluru police after being arrested for alleged trafficking of party drugs comes amidst a crackdown on drug traffickers in the city over the last two years — resulting in a nearly 10-fold rise in registered drug cases, from 285 in 2018 to 2,766 in 2020. 2021 has already seen 2,550 cases being registered.

The wide net cast by police authorities has seen the busting of celebrity drug networks serviced by foreign suppliers, who are believed to bring in drugs via various means, such as parcels to post offices, purchases on the dark net, and from cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

The number of foreigners arrested on drug trafficking charges has also seen a corresponding jump — from 82 in 2018-19 to 184 in 2020-21. In the seven months of the current year, 100-odd foreigners have been arrested. The quantity of MDMA seized in the city has in-

creased from 876 grams in 2018-19 to 2.571 kg in 2020 and 7.777 kg in 2021, police data show.

Lauding the police efforts, former chief minister B S Yediyurappa had said last year, “This is the first time in the country that strong action is being taken against drug usage.”

Sources involved with the operations say police have managed to tap into the drug supply and consumer network — a tightly bound unit, with suppliers selling only to known purchasers — “through systematic arrests”. The leads from a drug haul in November 2018, of 1.5 kg of heroin and 1,930 Ecstasy tablets worth an estimated Rs 1.5 crore, for example, led police last year to two actresses and other known names, as well as Loom Pepper, a Senegalese national and allegedly a major drug supplier.

Officers say police call records and WhatsApp data have helped police zero in on users and suppliers. “The network operates on mobile phones and messaging services,” said a source.

Police claim to have zeroed in on Congolese national Joel Shindani Malu alias Jon, 27, who

died in police custody on August 2, through an informant. His custodial death, resulting in protests, was not the first such incident. In May 2021, a Nigerian national, Peter Ofor, had been found dead near a lake after he was reportedly picked up by police on drug trafficking charges. In 2017, another Nigerian, Ifeanyi Madu, had died reportedly when he fell off a scooter while being pursued by the narcotics wing of the Bengaluru Crime Branch.

“There are rival gangs among foreign drug suppliers. Many times seizures occur due to tip-offs provided to police on account of the rivalries,” an officer said.

A senior officer admitted that police have been known to use high-handed measures, particularly against African nationals, many of whom are found to be overstaying after expiry of their visas. In fact, filing of cases ends up allowing them to remain in the country after release on bail, on account of pending trials. In 2019, the Karnataka High Court had ordered that illegal foreigners awaiting trial in the state be lodged in detention centres and not be released after bail.

TERROR FUNDING CASE

NIA searches 56 locations in J&K linked to Jamaat-e-Islami

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JAMMU, SRINAGAR AUGUST 8

THE NATIONAL Investigation Agency Sunday searched 56 locations allegedly linked to the banned Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) in Jammu and Kashmir as a part of its probe into a terror funding case.

The searches, conducted along with the Jammu and Kashmir Police, began early in the day and were going on till the evening. They were carried out in Kashmir’s Srinagar, Budgam, Ganderbal, Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipora, Anantnag, Shopian, Pulwama and Kulgam districts and Jammu’s Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar and Rajouri districts.

Jel was banned by the government on February 28, 2019 — shortly after the Pulwama attack. Sources said NIA registered the terror funding case on February

5 under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

An NIA statement said: “The members of the organisation have been collecting funds domestically and abroad through donations particularly in the form of Zakat, Mowda and Bait-ul-Mal purportedly to further charity and other welfare activities but these funds are instead being used for violent and secessionist activities.”

It said these funds were channelled to banned groups such as Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and others.

“Jel has also been motivating impressionable youth of Kashmir and recruiting new members (Rukuns) in J&K to participate in disruptive secessionist activities,” It said.

NIA said the raid locations include the premises of office bearers of Jel, its members, as well as offices of trusts purportedly run by the organisation.

“During the searches today, various incriminating documents and electronic devices were seized from the premises of the suspects,” it said.

The houses raided by the central agency include that of former chief Sheikh Ghulam Hassan at Kulgam and former senior leader Gazi Moin in Srinagar. It also searched the premises of the affiliated Falah-e-Aam Trust that runs schools in the Valley, said sources.

The Ministry of Home Affairs had banned Jamaat-e-Islami for five years following a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In the aftermath of the Pulwama attack, that left 40 CRPF personnel dead, police and paramilitary forces had launched a crackdown against the organisation on the night of February 22, 2019, raiding the houses of dozens of members and detaining more than 250.

TRACKING THE SECOND SURGE

525 DAYS SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN
NEW CASES: 34,629
ACTIVE CASES: 4,02,683
TOTAL VACCINATION: 50,68,10,492

DAILY DEATHS 447 | TOTAL DEATHS 4,28,309 | WEEKLY CFR 1.32% | OVERALL CFR 1.36%



TESTS TODAY: 18,06,290 | TOTAL TESTS: 48,18,45,475
WEEKLY POSITIVITY: 2.24% | OVERALL POSITIVITY: 6.63%

STATES REPORTING MOST CASES

STATE	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	WEEKLY POSITIVITY	TOTAL VACCINATION
■ Kerala	18,607	1,77,012	12.52%	2,17,82,466
■ Maharashtra	5,508	71,510	3.12%	4,66,87,572
■ Andhra Pradesh	2,050	19,949	2.54%	2,36,21,506
■ Tamil Nadu	1,956	20,407	1.26%	2,51,39,694
■ Karnataka	1,598	23,956	1.11%	3,27,70,543

STATES REPORTING MOST DEATHS

STATE	TODAY'S DEATHS	TOTAL DEATHS	WEEKLY CFR	OVERALL CFR
■ Maharashtra	153	1,36,336	2.53%	2.19%
■ Kerala	93	17,826	0.82%	0.54%
■ Odisha	69	6,488	3.04%	0.67%
■ Tamil Nadu	28	34,317	1.64%	1.35%
■ Karnataka	20	36,793	1.94%	1.27%

Note: Data as on Aug 8; vaccination numbers as of Aug 7. Deaths include those caused by comorbidities.

Khattar meets Dahiya kin, promises school, end to water issues in village

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 8

HARYANA CHIEF Minister Manohar Lal Khattar Sunday met the family of Olympic silver medalist Ravi Dahiya in the wrestler's home village of Nahri. The family and residents made a number of requests — fixing a drainage problem, setting up a school, and ensuring clean drinking water — which the CM said would be resolved on priority.

“The chief minister, while congratulating the parents of the wrestler, also resolved several issues of the area on the spot... Ravi Dahiya's father Rakesh, uncle Mukesh Dahiya, members of the gram panchayat and former sarpanch of Nahri village were

present along with other representatives. The family of the wrestler and village representatives invited the chief minister to visit Nahri, which was promptly accepted by him...,” a spokesperson said.

The village representatives presented a demand letter to Khattar, listing grievances. “The chief minister immediately took up the grievances and asked the officers concerned to resolve them on priority basis. Among the key issues was the problem of water drainage in the area. The chief minister spoke to the deputy commissioner, Sonapat, and asked him to resolve the matter immediately. The representatives urged the CM to open a Model Sanskriti School in the demand letter, which was accepted by him on the spot...” the spokesperson said.

Case against Assam portal for ‘fake news’ on boxer hoardings

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, AUGUST 8

POLICE HAVE registered a case against a Guwahati-based news portal after the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), Assam alleged that the website aired “fake news” — related to hoardings that featured Olympian boxer Lovlina Borgohain — to “malign the the image of the Minister of Information and Public Relations, Pijush Hazarika and the department in public eye”.

In a complaint to Dispur Police Station in Guwahati on Friday, the director of DIPR requested that “appropriate legal action against the web portal” be taken under law for “dissemination of com-

pletely false and fabricated information designed to malign the images of innocent persons”.

The police registered a case under Sections 294A/500/505 (2) of the IPC and Section 45A of the IT Act on Friday. “The complaint came to us on August 6. We registered the case and now we are investigating it,” said an officer in Dispur Police Station.

The now-deleted news clip, posted on the Facebook page of Assamese news website *The CrossCurrent* Friday afternoon, reportedly questioned the use of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's photos on multiple hoardings put up in Guwahati in the run-up to the Olympics — one congratulating Borgohain and the other commemorating the death an-



One of the hoardings on boxer Lovlina Borgohain that had been put up in Guwahati. CM Himanta Biswa Sarma has expressed his disapproval over it.

niversary of Assam's first chief minister Gopinath Bordoloi. The hoardings had large im-

ages of Sarma. In the Borgohain hoarding, the boxer's photograph was not featured at all; it had two accompanying lines that said “Congratulations and best wishes to Lovlina Borgohain for qualifying for Tokyo Olympic 2020” and “You are the pride of Assam”. In the Bordoloi hoarding, the former chief minister's face was relegated to the periphery, with Sarma's occupying most of the space. Neither carried the name of the department which sanctioned it.

Borgohain's hoarding kicked up a storm on social media, with many users criticising the government for not featuring her photo and instead using Sarma's. Another set of hoardings congratulating Borgohain featured Assam Sports Minister Bimal Bora's pic-

ture. Sarma himself tweeted on Thursday about the Bordoloi hoarding, saying he did not endorse it. “I do not endorse this kind of branding at all. Instruction has been issued not to use my picture from now onwards without prior approval of my office,” he tweeted.

On Friday, *The CrossCurrent* shared a four-minute clip in Assamese titled “Was Pijush Hazarika admonished for trying to flatter Himanta Biswa Sarma?”

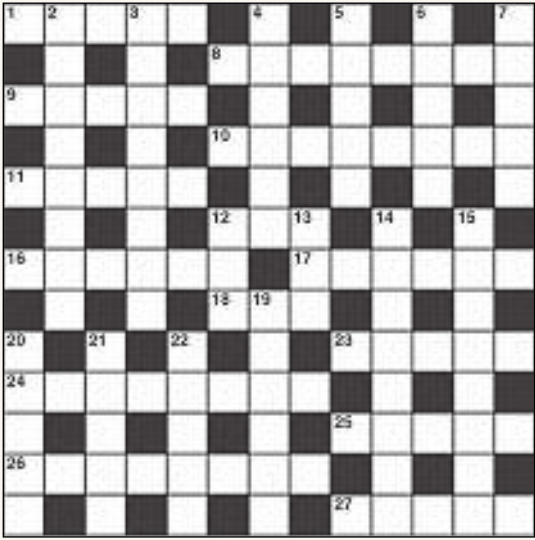
While the video is not available online now, Gautam Gogoi, the website's news editor, said the clip asked who was behind these hoardings. “Usually the DIPR makes such hoardings. So we just raised questions asking if they installed it, and if they had not, who approved it? We also asked if

Pijush Hazarika's need to impress Himanta Biswa Sarma had backfired... since the latter said he did not approve of the hoarding.”

Hazarika told *The Indian Express* that he was not “personally involved” in the case against the website. “The complaint has been filed by the DIPR and I am not involved in it. They [the news portal] had aired a news clip regarding two hoardings — however, neither I nor the DIPR had anything to do with the hoardings,” he said.

Gogoi alleged they were “being targeted” for “raising basic questions”. *The CrossCurrent* was launched in 2018. “We have done a lot of news reports before too... questioning the government. That is probably why they picked us out,” he said.

CROSSWORD 4503



- ACROSS**
1 Robust half of a famous comedy duo (5)
8 Lift to reveal switch (8)
9 Gently water the flowers (5)
10 Brief notes jazz fans sent back to the censor in Rome (8)
11 Close studies on the East (5)
12 Travel to a port in India (3)
16 Very little time (6)
17 Unpretentious old medicine (6)
18 Comfortable place to sit and have a drink (3)
23 Ensure one has a nap standing up (5)
24 Repaired and put back in stock (8)
25 Custom made clothing (5)
26 and 22 Down: Highly capricious bounders (8,5)
27 Refuse to commit oneself about the garden perhaps (5)
- DOWN**
2 Kind of order that should be kept in a fridge? (5,3)
3 Stretches toward us perhaps (5,3)
4 Drunk gets bottle opener before a game (6)
5 Create a vacancy possibly (5)
6 It holds the pieces returned (5)
7 Evidence of spiritual strength (5)
12 Set to give a leg up (3)
13 Cleopatra's preparations for death included it (3)
14 The strength of the current? (8)
15 Rousing game (8)
19 He has compiled a vocabulary (6)
20 Seagoing vagabond (5)
21 Is to prosecute in spring (5)
22 See 26 Across

Solutions Crossword 4502: Across: 1 Touchstone, 6 Plus, 10 Bacon, 11 Gun turret, 12 Oriental, 13 Troll, 15 Exactly, 17 Slashed, 19 Panacea, 21 Outflow, 22 Night, 24 Creditor, 27 Tolerates, 28 Emend, 29 Maps, 30 Occasional. Down: 1 Toby, 2 Uncertain, 3 Hence, 4 Tightly, 5 Nonplus, 7 Largo, 8 Settle down, 9 Subtract, 14 Peeping Tom, 16 Taciturn, 18 Halloween, 20 Ascetic, 21 Open sea, 23 Galop, 25 Iceni, 26 Idiot.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



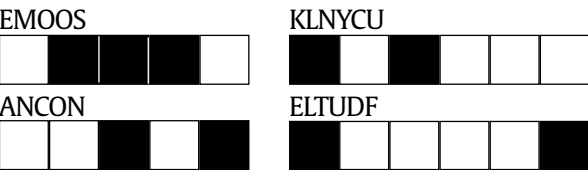
MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

One that ___ good and evil is an enemy to good. - Edmund Burke (9)

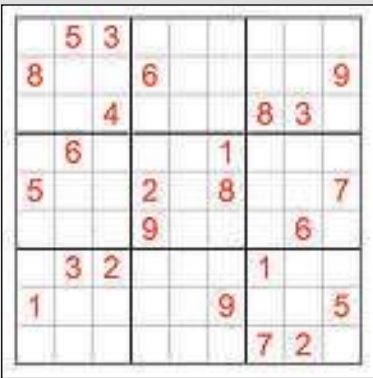


SOLUTION: MOOSE, CANON, CLINICKY, FLUTED
Answer: One that commends good and evil is an enemy to good. - Edmund Burke

SUDOKU 4558

Difficulty Level 5s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4557



7

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

MIRABAI CHANU, OLYMPICS SILVER MEDALLIST; COACH VIJAY SHARMA

“*Khushi ke maare neend nahin aati. We waited so many years for this... I feel one day I’ll also have a record lift*”

Chanu talks about putting the heartbreak of Rio behind, missing her mother, and retaining composure in the face of pressure; coach Vijay Kumar explains the determination and discipline which lie at the heart of his 26-year-old ward’s success. The session was moderated by Senior Assistant Editor Shivani Naik

SHIVANI NAIK: Which was more stressful — the snatch of 87 kg or the clean & jerk of 115 kg?

Mirabai: The last snatch was the most tense because technique-wise, I fell a little short. I gave my best and tried, but I fell a bit short.

SHIVANI NAIK: Coach Sharma, what was going through your mind at the time?

Vijay Sharma: Definitely during each lift, the blood pressure shoots up, but after the first lift you can relax a little. This time, I was feeling a lot more pressure thinking about Rio. Even though we had some great performances after that, psychologically, there is always the feeling that this is the Olympics, hope nothing goes wrong. That was the idea behind the 84, 87 kg starts, to take it safe and secure a medal. When the snatch finished, we relaxed a little thinking, ‘Yes, we are in the competition now. *Kar lenge* (We’ll do it)’.

NIHAL KOSHIE: Mira, after the Rio Olympics, did you discuss your future with your mother? How big an influence is she?

Mirabai: She has been my pillar. She likes sports, and the family has dreamt of me becoming a sportswoman one day. In earlier days, there were problems with getting a good diet. My mother tried, she went all out. She told me, ‘Don’t look back, whatever comes, we are there to support you’. She once said I can’t feed you properly but I will try my best to take you to the top. If I had a bad day, or didn’t have a good day, she would come to know from my voice. She knows when I’m sad or not feeling well. I would lie many times but she would come to know. She used to motivate me regularly, that ‘If today is your bad day, keep working hard, tomorrow will be your good day’.

NIHAL KOSHIE: How crucial was her support after Rio?

Mirabai: Just after my competition got over in Rio, I called my mother and couldn’t control my weeping. I told her I could not win a medal despite training so much. I knew somewhere she was also disheartened. She told me, ‘When you come back, we will talk about it’. I asked her what more I needed to do. I even thought maybe I should give up weightlifting. Later, I asked her if I should do so. She said winning and losing are part of sports, that whatever happened has happened, it’s past now, that I should try to plan my future, think of how much more hard work I can do. Later, I realised that I can do a lot, I can plan something. ‘Whatever happened has happened’... it was great motivation from my mother.

SHIVANI NAIK: What did your coach tell you post Rio?

Mirabai: After Rio, I was clueless. I had done all the hard work but failed. I didn’t know what to change. I used to ask him what more I needed to do. Where was I going wrong? Coach made me understand, he changed my style of training, he changed my technique. After I changed my technique, my coach said, I can go ahead in my game and in the next Olympics I will surely win a medal. He motivated me a lot.

DEVENDRA PANDEY: Coach Sharma, one year after the Rio Games, Mirabai became the world champion. What changed in that one year?

Vijay Sharma: The Rio 2016 setback was a very bad time for us. But two months later, we were back in proper training. Mira took a couple of months to mentally and physically regain her form. Her mother’s role in that period was instrumental. I too was there for her at that time. We discussed training — what to do, what not to do, how to go about it, what all was there to achieve. But all of it was possible because of how determined Mira is — if she wants to achieve something, she will absolutely achieve it.

DEVENDRA PANDEY: What was the thinking behind the entry list total weight of 210 kg (at the Olympics)?

Vijay Sharma: There are some psychological aspects to the game that a coach must consider. Mira had a problem physically before the event and the declaration of weight was tactical.

SRIRAM VEERA: Mira developed menstrual cramps the day before the event. How did you guys handle it?

Vijay Sharma: It’s a coach’s duty to keep tab of everything, from small to big. That is why bonding is so important. We



WHY
MIRABAI CHANU,
VIJAY SHARMA

Never before Tokyo has India enjoyed such a confident start to the Olympics, with Mirabai Chanu winning silver in 49-kg weightlifting, with a total lift of 202 kg, on Day 1. Thus, helped by her coach of seven years, Vijay Sharma, the Manipuri superstar erased the memories of Rio, where she had struggled to make a single lift

need to know what’s happening in her body and we can speak about these things only when the relationship is completely open and we trust each other.

With Mira, let’s put it this way: if not A to Z, I know A to W at least of her! We share a lot. This time in the US, we met a gynaecologist as we have had problems with this in the past. We asked that gynaecologist what to do if it crops up. We also did Zoom chat with a doctor Mira had been in touch with from before. So we had our bases covered as this can happen to a woman any time.

We also carried precautionary medicines to Tokyo. The thing is, you can’t be sure 100% with these things. And that’s what happened. We missed the 117-kg lift — she had done 119 kg just a few days ago. So if that (menstrual cramps) hadn’t set in, she might perhaps have done even better. But this is part of the game, you have to be ready for anything. But yes, it does affect performance.

SHIVANI NAIK: How much would you say Mirabai has evolved since she started to train with you, and how much of a learning experience has this been for you as well?

Vijay Sharma: Mirabai came into the national camp after she had won a medal in the junior championships. At that time, I was in charge of the men’s team but training used to happen together. She has been with me since the 2014 Commonwealth Games. When she won a silver then, she had lifted clean & jerk weight of 98 kg. Slowly from there, we

worked hard, and today she can lift 119 kg in the same category. It has been a long and tough journey but Mirabai has put in honest work and discipline, the result of which is her being here, at this position.

DEVENDRA PANDEY: Coach Sharma, it’s all about the medal now, but how tough were the last few years with this single-minded pursuit?

Vijay Sharma: The bond between a coach and the athlete is significant. Luckily, my bond with Mira gradually became as strong as a father-daughter’s. That is why we bounced back after every injury, every problem, and gave this result.

This was a pursuit of five years. 2019 and 2020 were absolutely crucial for us. At the Kolkata nationals (in February 2020, where Mirabai won gold), we performed brilliantly and there was regular improvement. And suddenly, we got to know that the Olympics had been postponed. We were distraught. But again, it’s the resolve. In our hearts we knew that we have to do this, it will be delayed now, but we will perform. We didn’t go back home during the lockdown. The thought process then was whatever happens, happens for the best. We didn’t spare any opportunity. In rooms, corridors, whenever we got any opportunity, we trained.

SANDEEP DWIVEDI: Mira, the pandemic time must have been a setback for you guys. How much did it impact your training and how much of a difference does no crowds make?

Mirabai: Everyone likes crowds, they bring a different energy.

SANDEEP DWIVEDI: What is the thinking like after each lift? When does the thought of a medal kick in?

Mirabai: I was not thinking about a medal, every player has a different way of thinking. We have six lifts, first three and later three. My first goal was to clear the first three lifts. If I think about the medal after one lift, things will be over for me. I was thinking about giving my best performance.

SANDEEP DWIVEDI: Do you ever get angry in real life, because there is hardly any tension on your face?

Mirabai: Sometimes I do get angry (*laughs*). It happens sometimes.

SANDEEP DWIVEDI: Do you meditate or read to bring that calmness?

Mirabai: I have been like this since childhood. The mind needs to be relaxed as a relaxed mind always helps.

SRIRAM VEERA: What was going through your mind between lifts?

Mirabai: You do feel the pressure as everyone is watching you, there is pressure to do well. I recall the time I spent during training, I keep calm, I tell myself that the way I pull through during my training, I will do the same here. The situation then feels normal.

SHIVANI NAIK: Coach Sharma, how is Mirabai different from the other lifters you have trained?

Vijay Sharma: *Talented bachche bahut hain* (There are many talented children). But the two things that separate Mira from these other weightlifters are her discipline and her self-determination. *Aaj bhi cycle pe training karne aati hai hostel se*

(Even today she comes for training on a cycle from the hostel). In the last five years, she hasn’t been home for even 10 days, she has missed her own sister’s wedding and she has done nothing but eat, sleep and train. These things are very tough for other talented weightlifters.

NIHAL KOSHIE: Mira has had many issues in the past. There was the mystery back issue and problems with her shoulder. In a power sport like weightlifting, how challenging is it to make a comeback after injury?

We didn’t go home during the lockdown... In rooms, corridors, any opportunity, we trained... In 5 years, Mira home for not even 10 days, missed her sister’s wedding

Mirabai: I used to think about home every day. There was not a day when I didn’t miss my mother and my family. I have not been home for the past few years now. At the same time I would tell myself that I was in the US so that I could win a medal for my country. I had to keep my emotions aside and focus on my training.

SHIVANI NAIK: How does a coach balance between training and injury management in weightlifting?

Vijay Sharma: When you are regularly watching a student, even a small difference during their lifts should tell you that there is fatigue, the body isn’t working properly today. Then, depending on the communication with the athlete, you will immediately know if there is a problem and you have to change the training.

SRIRAM VEERA: The stereotype is that weightlifting is an aggressive sport and lifters work themselves into almost a frenzy before lifts. Mira is calm, composed...

Vijay Sharma: It’s up to the DNA of every wrestler. You can be quiet and calm and perform really well. Some need to get really hyper, they shout loudly, to perform. It differs from person to person. It depends on your nature and we tailor the training according to it.

SHIVANI NAIK: Mira, how do you typically react when you hear, say, that Chinese lifter Zhizhi Hou (the eventual champion), has lifted a record 96 kg? Does it add to the pressure?

Mirabai: There was no pressure. She had a good snatch and I will just try to match it someday. I feel one day I will also lift 96 kg so I need to continue my hard work and keep training.

SRIRAM VEERA: Coach Sharma, in these tense and emotional times of preparation, have there been any lighter incidents that stick in the mind?

Vijay Sharma: Our federation’s secretary general Sahadev Yadav ji, who was in daily touch with us and took care of all the details, had met a sports psychologist who said, ‘Keep Mira laughing, don’t allow her to get stressed, just light-hearted stuff daily’. Twice daily, for 5–10 minutes, we would keep her laughing. Just to not let her get too serious.

SHIVANI NAIK: Mira, how good was returning home after long?

Mirabai: I’m very happy, the way I was welcomed. Everyone here is happy, be it my family, my friends. I got plenty of gifts. I am just happy.

NIHAL KOSHIE: Mira, after winning at Tokyo, whom did you call first?

Mirabai: I did speak to my mother, she told me there were celebrations back home. Lot of well-wishers had come by. We couldn’t speak much, but I saw it on TV later. I wanted to talk more to her, but couldn’t.

SHIVANI NAIK: How did you celebrate the medal back at the Athletes Village?

Mirabai: Due to the pandemic, I couldn’t celebrate after I won because there were too many restrictions. I didn’t enjoy it much either. I spoke to Sir and he said it was a dream which everyone had seen together for the last five years. We worked so hard to get this. Finally, the day had come. We sat in the evening and recalled those past five years.

SRIRAM VEERA: We have read that two years ago, when you couldn’t sleep well, you used to reverse count from 100 to 1. Is the problem solved?

Mirabai: It has been solved. There is no issue now.

SRIRAM VEERA: So after winning a medal now, do you get good sleep?

Mirabai: (*Laughs*) *Khushi ke maare neend nahin aati* (Now I can’t sleep out of sheer happiness). We waited so many years for only this day.

SHIVANI NAIK: Do you miss training now? And what will be the challenges ahead of the Paris Olympics?

Mirabai: Yeah, I miss it a lot. I want to go back to training!

Three years is less time. I have to start again. Time is running fast. There will be qualification rounds and later the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games. I have very little time actually.

Illustration: Suvajit Dey

A coach must keep tab of all... what’s on in her body. We can speak of things like menstrual cramps only due to trust. If not A to Z, I know A to W of her!





WORDLY WISE
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE OLYMPIC
GAMES IS NOT WINNING BUT TAKING PART.
— PIERRE DE COUBERTIN

The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE RISING FLAME

Tokyo 2021 busts many myths about Indian sports, points to the country's emergence as a sporting nation

AUGUST 7, 2021, Tokyo would be as much of a watershed moment for Indian Olympics sports lore as June 25, 1983, Lord's was for cricket. In its magnitude and potential influence, Neeraj Chopra's Olympic gold-medal-winning feat has only one parallel in the country's sporting heritage, the World Cup victory 38 years ago, a moment that changed India's sporting sensibilities. In a similar way, Chopra's accomplishment could alter perceptions of how Indians perceive athletes. This is a myth-busting gold medal, a testimony that Indian, or even Asian, athletes can not only match their European adversaries but also beat them, provided they get access to world-class facilities, top-draw coaching and unfettered support of the sporting fraternity. The unscientific assumption about Indians having inferior athletic DNA, something that undermines their medal-winning chances on the global stage, was hurled out the window and it landed 87.58 metres far. Chopra's gold would not only draw a clear route-map to global success but also banish the inferiority complex that Indian athletes carry to elite events. Athletics now has the momentum to jump in the sand pit of global competition and wrestle with the best.

Though India improved the London count by just one medal, the significance of that one medal cannot be overstated enough. Each of the medals they won was a statement of India's incremental rise as a sporting nation. It is foolhardy to expect India to match the US or China overnight, but the trajectory of the graph is constantly moving upwards. That those medals came in various streams is a further reason for optimism. In badminton and wrestling, it's time India is considered among the powerhouses; in weightlifting, there is a generational talent in Mirabai Chanu; in boxing, there is finally someone to look beyond Mary Kom. The revival of men's hockey would not have been better timed, the often-ignored women's hockey too blazed in promise. Shooting was an aberration — expect many of those who left in tears to bounce back stronger and hungrier. Overall, the Tokyo Games could leave a long-lasting influence on Indian sports.

The Olympics itself would be remembered as a metaphor of hope in the Covid-altered world. There were fears that the event would emerge as a super-spreader of the virus, it would see a stoppage and the competition wouldn't be top-notch. It has answered negatively to each of those doubts. With no runaway leader on the medals tally — just one gold separated the US and China — this was the most closely fought Games in recent times. Tokyo showed that with coaches seamlessly crossing borders and sporting knowhow spreading, the Olympic world was flattening. Top German coaches sitting in Chopra's corner as he left his Dresden-born arch-rival, Johannes Vetter, far behind was a frame that best captured the levelling of the playing field.

STANDING WITH KABUL

UNSC meet exposes duplicity of Taliban and Pakistan, who talk peace and pursue war at the same time

A SPECIAL MEETING of the United Nations Security Council on Afghanistan convened under India's presidency last Friday, did not produce a new international consensus on arresting the tragedy triggered by Taliban's military offensive with the full support of the Pakistan army. On Afghanistan, there is no unanimity among the five permanent members, which is critical for any consequential decisions by the world body. An ambitious China seeking to extend its regional footprint, and an opportunistic Russia that tags behind Beijing seem to support Pakistan's game plan to reinstall the Taliban in Kabul. Given its special ties to the Pakistan army, London tends to be wobbly on the Taliban. The US, which spent much blood and treasure in rebuilding Afghanistan after ousting the Taliban from power in 2001, has ceded much ground by deciding to withdraw all its troops in Afghanistan by the end of this month. In Europe (represented by France which has a permanent seat in the UNSC) too there is a decline in political support for a continued Western military intervention in Afghanistan.

Although the UNSC discussion may not have moved the political needle on Afghanistan, it has laid bare the depth of the crisis there and the duplicity of the Taliban and Pakistan that talk peace and pursue war at the same time. Addressing the UNSC, the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, pointed to the "dangerous turning point," in the nation. "Ahead lies", she added, "either a genuine peace negotiation or a tragically intertwined set of crises: An increasingly brutal conflict combined with an acute humanitarian situation and multiplying human rights abuses." That the Taliban could not have mounted the massive military operations on its own was the burden of the presentation by the Afghan envoy to the United Nations, Ghulam M Isaczai. He told the Council that more than 10,000 foreign fighters are in the country, including from a number of UN designated terror organisations, participating in the Taliban's military offensive. He also pointed to long-standing Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan and Rawalpindi's massive logistical support for the Taliban's current military offensive in Afghanistan.

Although the world was optimistic about the peace talks in Doha ending the prolonged conflict in Afghanistan, the Taliban and Pakistan have merely used them to delay negotiations on devising a new political order in Afghanistan while stepping up their violent campaign to overthrow the legitimate government in Kabul. India must continue to stand with the people of Afghanistan, whose dreams for a peaceful future are being shattered. Delhi must continue to mobilise international opinion in all global forums as well as work with its close partners to mount pressure on Pakistan and the Taliban to stop fighting and start talking peace with Kabul.

FREEZE FRAME



E P UNNY



SANJOY HAZARIKA

THE INITIAL STEPS have been taken in calming the roiling waters on the Assam-Mizoram border confrontation. First, the FIRs and cases which were filed against each other's leaders — involving both Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and K Vanlalvena, Mizo National Front (MNF) MP — have been withdrawn. Cases against officials from both states have been dropped. While these should not have been initiated in the first place, stepping back in this manner is a good way to reduce the political and emotive temperatures, which were soaring on both sides.

A sharp war of words and aggressive social media posts on either side did not help. Indeed, an outsider may be excused, if after listening to, watching or reading the passionate, angry and even, in some cases, inflammatory remarks by either side, for being perplexed by these declarations — were they, s/he may well have wondered, by citizens of neighbouring states or opposing nations. Some have added fuel to the fire by casting aspersions on the citizenry of their brethren on the disputed border or referring inappropriately to a part of their own state. These need be seen in the background of the extensive suffering faced by the region as a result of misunderstanding and ill will.

Second, the Assam chief minister's decision to send two ministerial emissaries from Assam to Aizawl is a good gesture to open dialogue and appears to have paid off initially. Both states have agreed to the deployment of neutral Central forces at the disputed stretches of the interstate border. Atul Bora, one of the ministers sent to Aizawl is from the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in the BJP-led coalition, and also party president. The significance of an AGP leader in the peace mission should not be underestimated. The AGP led a regional coalition in the 1980s and 1990s in the Northeast that emerged as an anti-Congress front. The MNF had been part of this process and has had good relations with the AGP from that time.

Part of the confidence-building measures

Goodwill amongst Assam, Mizoram, all Northeast states, holds key to Act East Policy

Mending fences

Communities at the border, stakeholders such as business leaders and transporters as well as civil society need to be involved in conversations and dialogue for sustainable settlements. Political leaders must set the pace and provide the platform. However, since both sides use different yardsticks of history and geography to negotiate, it is difficult to visualise a situation where either side will emerge as a clear winner. There will have to be give and take, count net gains against losses.

has been the welcome withdrawal of the Assam government's travel advisory which asked people not to travel to Mizoram and urged people from the state working or staying there to "exercise utmost caution".

There is a third element that has become a seemingly endemic part of political confrontation between states. These are the blockades that have closed roads and highways in Assam leading to Mizoram — and in the past few days to Tripura. This has happened repeatedly in confrontations between different states in the region such as Nagaland and Manipur and last year between Assam and Mizoram.

These crackling tensions go far beyond interstate border disputes and have regional, national and international repercussions. For one, they have adverse economic impacts which are felt most sharply at the local level, leading to a rise in prices and shortage of commodities. This is a time when Covid-19 cases continue to rise in all the states of the region, including Mizoram and Assam, and essential supplies cannot be blocked by public agitations.

The economic fallout of such actions are felt down the entire supply chain, from producer to transporter and receiving customers/markets. National highways are the direct responsibility of the Centre and it must ensure that these economic veins remain clear for passenger and freight traffic.

In addition, images, especially of violence and confrontation, go "viral" without delay. They move from mobile to mobile, over social platforms, one group to the other, leaping across boundaries of state and nation. Among those who look at them are potential investors and policymakers, not just in Delhi but other state and national capitals. The adverse impacts of these can be considerable.

For decades, we must remember, the public image of the Northeast was shaped by conflict and confrontation, bands and violence. It had been shedding that image slowly and steadily, facing many hurdles, ag-

itations and risks. Sustainable peace continues to be elusive although flawed insurgencies have failed and fallen. There are new challenges such as border divides and sharpening sectarian tensions. Economic growth is visible as are continuing concerns. Lakhs of young people from the region, despite discrimination and pressures, have moved and made their lives in other parts of the country, engaging with the idea of India, before, during and after the waves of the pandemic.

That is why communities at the border, stakeholders such as business leaders and transporters as well as civil society need to be involved in conversations and dialogue for sustainable settlements. Political leaders must set the pace and provide the platform. However, since both sides use different yardsticks of history and geography to negotiate, it is difficult to visualise a situation where either side will emerge as a clear winner. There will have to be give and take, count net gains against losses. That is the practical side which politicians are best equipped to deliver. Herein lies the importance of the concept of a Development Corridor on the border that would have to be agreed to by both sides and guaranteed by the Centre. This could build on the natural advantages of the bordering states — vegetable, meat and fruit processing, handicrafts and designer handlooms to name just five — and create jobs, livelihoods and better incomes for people on the border and beyond, building an equitable supply chain.

A fundamental point needs to be underscored: The visionary Act East Policy and its predecessor Look East Policy rest on the pillars of peace and trust, not just better roads and physical infrastructure. They depend on good relationships between neighbours which enable economic cooperation, transport and trade not just cultural and social collaboration.

The writer is director, Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Millia Islamia

ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY

Prompt action against errant personnel is a must to stop custodial torture



M P NATHANAEL

THE DEATH OF a fruit stall owner, 47-year-old A Murugesan, allegedly as a result of a brutal thrashing by a special sub-inspector of Tamil Nadu police in Vazhapadi in Salem district on June 22, has revived memories of Bennis and his father Jayaraj who died in custody last year in June in Thoothukudi. While two other policemen stood watching the gory scene, Murugesan's friends pleaded for him to be spared but to no avail.

An army man Resham Singh was brutally tortured while his mother and two sisters in Pilibhit, UP, were humiliated on May 3, drawing the Allahabad High Court's ire. Two sub-inspectors and six constables were booked, and the station house officer sent to lines. Singh's medical report confirmed injuries due to brutal torture.

On May 21, an 18-year-old vegetable vendor Faisal Hussain was allegedly beaten to death in Bangararmau police station in UP's Unnao district for violation of Covid-19 directives. Though the market in the town was open, Hussain was beaten up and taken to a police station from where he was shifted to a hospital. He was declared dead on arrival. The post-mortem report attributed his death to head injuries. Two police constables and a home guard have been charged with murder.

Custodial deaths in police stations, even in jails, seem to be commonplace these days. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, while speaking at the inauguration of the Centre of Excellence for Research and Analysis of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances of the

It's up to senior officers to ensure that prompt actions are initiated against policemen who resort to brutal torture. When erring personnel are promptly punished, the message goes out loud and clear to other rogue policemen that the law will catch up with them. In the case of custodial deaths, those guilty should be tried for murder.

National Forensic Sciences University in Ahmedabad on July 12, said that the police in our country are accused of either "No Action" or "Extreme Action". He has hit the nail right on the head. Victims of crime shudder at the thought of having to visit a police station. More so if one happens to be from a marginalised section of society.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 100 cases of custodial deaths were reported in 2017, 42 of which were in police custody. Thirty-three policemen were arrested while 27 were charge-sheeted. Forty-eight police personnel were charge-sheeted and three convicted in cases of human rights violation. Overall, 2,005 cases were registered against police personnel, 1,000 of whom were charge-sheeted. With 456 cases, Maharashtra topped the list, while Gujarat and Rajasthan followed with 191 and 169 cases, respectively; 128 personnel were convicted.

According to the NCRB's 2019 figures, 85 cases of custodial deaths were reported in the year with Tamil Nadu registering the highest number of cases followed by Gujarat, Punjab and Rajasthan and Odisha. No policeman was convicted, though 14 personnel of Gujarat were arrested, and charge-sheeted. For six custodial deaths in Rajasthan, three magisterial inquiries and two judicial inquiries were initiated against erring policemen.

In a written reply in the Lok Sabha, the former Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy stated that 1,697 custodial

deaths were registered between April 2019 and March 2020, of which 1,584 deaths were in judicial custody while the rest (113) were in police custody. Uttar Pradesh topped the list with 400 custodial deaths followed by Madhya Pradesh (143). This meant that about five custodial deaths took place every day in our country. But on August 3, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai stated in the Lok Sabha that 348 custodial deaths and 1,189 cases of torture by police were reported across the country in the last three years.

While several policemen do get convicted, there are good reasons to believe that many go scot free — by manipulating records, intimidating complainants or political patronage. It's up to senior officers to ensure that prompt actions are initiated against policemen who resort to brutal torture. When erring personnel are promptly punished, the message goes out loud and clear to other rogue policemen that the law will catch up with them. In the case of custodial deaths, those guilty should be tried for murder.

Police personnel who remain spectators when people in custody are being tortured are also complicit in the crime. Sub divisional police officers and superintendents of police should be held accountable for the impropriety committed by those under their supervision.

The writer is a retired Inspector General of Police, CRPF

AUGUST 9, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

CABINET RESHUFFLE

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi carried out a minor reshuffle of her cabinet on August 8. Narayan Dutt Tiwari has been shifted from the Planning Ministry to the Industries Ministries. S B Chavan has been moved from the Education Ministry to planning. The Minister of State for Industry, Charanjit Chanaana, who has been looking after the industry ever since Indira Gandhi returned to power will continue in his position with Tiwari heading the ministry. Tiwari will continue to hold the temporary charge of the labour portfolio. The PM is yet to announce the name of the new education minister. She has asked Shiela Kaul, minister of state for education and culture, to take temporary charge of the ministry.

Mrs Gandhi is said to be looking for talent outside the parliamentary party but the search is yet to bear fruit.

AMU EXPULSIONS

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR of the Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, Saiyid Hamid, has rusticated Irfanullah Khan, president of the dissolved union of the university and convener of the Students Action Committee for a period of five years. Fifteen other students were also rusticated for a period ranging from two to five years for what the university called, "acts of indiscipline". Nine student leaders were expelled last month for a period of one to three years.

DACOITS STRIKE IN UP

NINE POLICE PERSONNEL and three villagers lost their lives in an encounter with dacoits in Uttar Pradesh's Etah district. The dacoits, who are reported to have numbered approximately 45, were from the gangs of Chabiram Yadav, Poti Yadav and Anar Singh Yadav.

LOANS WRITTEN OFF

THE UNION GOVERNMENT has taken a decision not to recover about Rs 1,412 crore given to states as assistance between 1977-78 and 1978-79 for coping with natural calamities. It has proposed to treat this amount as an additional assistance for these years.



9 THE IDEAS PAGE

Engineering a crisis

Constant tampering of curricula without giving students knowledge of the basics, a deficit in industry-instruction link continue to be the bane of country’s technical education



SS MANTHA AND ASHOK THAKUR

ENGINEERING IS AN applied science and therefore its pursuit preconditions a sound knowledge of its civil, mechanical and electrical branches, these being its building blocks. Offshoots like metallurgy and chemical engineering have sprung up from mechanical engineering and a host of other branches like electronics, communications, computer science and IT grew from the electrical branch of engineering. A common thread that bound these specialisations was a sound engineering base rooted in materials, applied physics and thermodynamics. Private entrepreneurs took the lead to meet the growing demand of the country in technical education in the mid-Eighties, but with little idea of the subject. As a result, the faculty of these institutions drove the agenda of their management – and sometimes their own. When the management’s agenda entered academic bodies of various universities, the first casualty was the curriculum. Important courses such as those mentioned above were the first to be jettisoned since they were both tough to teach for the teachers and tough to pass for the students. Subjects like materials, applied physics and thermodynamics became dispensable. Several universities merrily revised their curriculum at the expense of these courses. This softening of subjects coupled with unfettered expansion in the early and mid-2000s, though it ensured that everyone who aspired to technical education could find a seat commensurate with his/her abilities, resulted in real dilution of the overall standards in the country. At its peak in 2014-15, AICTE-approved institutes had almost 35 lakh seats, mainly due to the increased employment opportunities in the country. However, a series of reports by this paper in December 2017 revealed no takers for at least 51 per cent of the 15.5 lakh seats in 3,291 undergraduate engineering colleges in 2016-17. These reports laid bare the regulatory gaps, poor infrastructure, lack of qualified faculty and the non-existent industry linkage that contributed to the abysmal employability of graduates from most of these institutes. Some consolidation is bound to happen in every expanding system, but that also calls for intelligent interventions to connect with the available employment opportunities if the fruits of expansion are to be enjoyed. Since 2015-16, at least 50 colleges have closed each year and this year, AICTE approved the closure of 63 institutes. However, 54 new colleges were approved for the academic year, 2021-22 in backward districts. Similar statistics rule every year. Did anyone also study the available employment opportunities in those districts before approving them? When political and economic reasons override the establishment of new entities, why discuss declining standards? Several such decisions only contributed to the cumulative deterioration of standards overall. Not a single industry body, be it CII, FICCI or ASSOCHAM has managed to effectively



CR Sasikumar

inform the education planners on the growth in different employment sectors. Nor has the government taken any tangible steps to set up an independent body to advise AICTE on this vital aspect. In the absence of any credible information on demand side numbers, investments made by institutions will only be based on perception. Yesterday, it was IT and its applications that propelled a growth in IT and Computer Science courses. Today, it is automation. Be it RPA, AI, ML, blockchain, hard robotics or IOT, the thrust is on complete automation. What happens when these areas get saturated? Several jobs have already disappeared with the base of the pyramid having shrunk considerably. Lack of adequate number of teachers, lack of quality in those available, inability of the management to make adequate investments in a dynamic environment, lack of employment opportunities, shelf life of skills coming down with every technology-related intervention and a constant experimentation with curriculum have all been the bane of quality in technical education. Rather than being reactive, institutions must proactively define the practicing elements of education. The corrective measures for these shortfalls are technology intensive, are experiential, and need investments in teaching. Colleges are unwilling or not in a position to make those investments resulting in serious decline in quality. Not all experiments are worth doing though. A constant fiddling with the curriculum, reducing total credits, giving multiple choices in the name of flexibility, dispensing with mathematics and physics at the qualification level, teaching in local languages may all be good arguments, but one must assess their utility and their effect on technical education in the long run. An IT-heavy curriculum in every specialisation is not called for.

Not a single industry body, be it CII, FICCI or ASSOCHAM has managed to effectively inform the education planners on the growth in different employment sectors. Nor has the government taken any tangible steps to set up an independent body to advise AICTE on this vital aspect. In the absence of any credible information on demand side numbers, investments made by institutions will only be based on perception. Yesterday, it was IT and its applications that propelled a growth in IT and Computer Science courses. Today, it is automation.

Reducing total credits has not only reduced the rigour of engineering education, but also meant loss in jobs for several faculty streams. National pride may be non-negotiable, but then will teaching in Marathi or Tamil increase employment opportunities besides causing several pedagogy and copyright-related issues? Is there a national report available on this? Over a period of time, such experiments tend to reduce interest levels in technical education itself. The ultimate measure of performance is embedded in quality assurance. Various rating and ranking agencies insist that programme and course outcomes are paramount for quality. The larger question, however, is if these can be measured in the spirit in which they are written and if the gap in performance can be used to improve the system akin to a closed loop control system? What if the guaranteed outcomes are not realised? Can the stakeholders sue the administrators on reneging on promises? The need of the hour is to create a truly autonomous quality assurance body at an arms-length from the government, manned by eminent persons both from industry as well as academia. The education paradigm is staring at a large shift, due to the pressures of a large growing and young population, the exponentially increasing cost of education and the need to reach the unreached with quality, which is being fast forwarded by Covid-19. That being said, Steve Jobs’ words of 2005 ring true – “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future.” Will we be able to connect ours?

Mantha is Former Chairman AICTE and Thakur Former Secretary GoI, MHRD

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“There have been times when it seemed Olympic sport would go the way of other sports, and be more about cynicism than grace, contracts than courage. Even in the absence of crowds, however, there have been plenty of moments in these Games that have shown the original flame still flickers.” — OBSERVER

The job gap

Decline in unemployment rate is based on a statistical approach that masks the deterioration in quality of employment on the ground



RADHICKA KAPOOR

A QUICK LOOK at the recently released Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reveals a decline in the unemployment rate from 5.8 per cent in 2018-19 to 4.8 per cent in 2019-20. This fall in the unemployment rate from the 45 year high of 61 per cent as reported in the first PLFS (2017-18) is indeed a respite. However, these statistics need to be interpreted with caution. They are based on the “usual status” approach wherein the activity status of a person is captured for a reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. Those who are reported as unemployed by this approach are those who are chronically unemployed. In developing countries, where casual and intermittent work and part-time and temporary jobs are widespread, employment estimates based on this approach tend to include the under-employed workforce. Consequently, unemployment rates derived from the usual status approach give a misleading picture of the extent of labour underutilisation and the employment challenge faced by the economy. In PLFS (2019-20), we observe that the unemployment rate based on the weekly status (which corresponds to the activity status of a person for a reference week) is not only higher than the usual status measure, but has also remained unchanged at 8.8 per cent compared to 2018-19. The divergence in these statistics only reinforces the need for anchoring the policy discourse in India on weekly status measures and not the usual status measures. Significantly, even beyond the issue of using the weekly status measures, the lower unemployment rate (based on usual status approach) appears to be a consequence of economic distress and lack of gainful employment opportunities which have pushed jobseekers into low productivity and low paying work, thereby intensifying the challenge of under-employment. To begin with, an examination of the composition of the workforce by employment type shows that the share of self-employment in total employment has increased to 53.5 per cent, up from 52.1 per cent as reported in the previous two PLFS rounds (2017-18 and 2018-19). Self-employed workers comprise three broad categories – own-account workers (those who run their enterprise without hiring any labour); employers (those who run their enterprise by hiring labour) and unpaid family workers/helpers in household enterprises. The third group comprises those who are engaged in their household enterprises, working full or part time, but do not receive any regular salary or wages in return for the work performed. It is this latter category, considered as poor quality employment, that has witnessed an increase in its share in total employment from 13.3 per cent (2018-19) to 15.9 per cent (2019-20) and contributed to the falling unemployment rate. The increase in this category of workers is reflective of rising underemployment. As the number of members working

in household enterprises rises, each worker simply works for less time than before and a large section of the workforce is underemployed. The share of the other two categories of self-employed workers, that is, own account workers and employers has declined. The share of regular salaried workers, which had been steadily rising in India until the PLFS 2018-19 and is considered as a more stable and secure form of employment, is now showing a decline. Significantly, even amongst regular salaried workers, those who are not eligible for any social security benefits has increased from 51.9 per cent to 54.2 per cent suggesting that formalisation would have been adversely impacted. Interestingly a sectoral breakdown of the workforce shows that the share of the workforce engaged in agriculture has risen to 45.6 per cent (2019-20) from 42.5 per cent (2018-19). This increase is significant as it is the first time that the share of agriculture in total employment (in percentage terms) has increased since the NSS surveys started. This is indicative of a stalled structural transformation process, one which had picked up pace after 2004-05 with both the share and absolute numbers of workers engaged in agriculture declining with a concomitant rise in the non-agricultural sector. However, as non-agricultural sectors have failed to create jobs at a rapid pace in recent times, many jobseekers have been pushed back into the agricultural sector resulting in its emergence as an “employer of last resort”. Two trends that point to a deterioration in quality of employment merit attention vis-à-vis the sectoral composition. First, in the non-agriculture sector, the share of those engaged in informal enterprises increased from 68.4 per cent in 2018-19 to 69.5 per cent in 2019-20. Second, within the agricultural sector, much of the increase is coming through the category of unpaid family helpers. Their share in agricultural employment has increased (from 25.7 per cent to 29.7 per cent), while that of own account workers and employers has declined (48.4 per cent to 44.5 per cent) between the two rounds. Significantly, the share of rural women engaged in agriculture has increased substantially from 71.1 per cent (2018-19) to 75.7 per cent (2019-20) and these women are increasingly being employed in the category of unpaid family workers. It is worth noting that India has been witnessing a rapid decline in female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) since 2004-05. This trend has been partly attributed to the withdrawal of women from the workforce as a consequence of an “income effect” – an increase in their family’s income. The PLFS 2019-20, however, shows a sharp increase in the female LFPR by 5.5 percentage points. Much of this is driven by the increased LFPR of rural women. This rise coupled with their increasing engagement as unpaid family workers (and not better forms of employment such as regular salaried work) appears to mark a reversal of the trend of reduction in distress participation of women in the workforce. These metrics suggest that the decline in unemployment rate based on the usual status approach masks a deterioration in the quality of employment and rising underemployment, challenges which are only likely to have intensified post Covid.

The writer is a senior visiting fellow at ICRIER



ASOKE MUKERJI

Securing the Indian Ocean

UNSC debate seeks to address maritime security peacefully, holistically

INDIA’S DECISION TO convene an open debate of the UN Security Council (UNSC) on enhancing maritime security, to be chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 9, reflects India’s international evolution as a maritime nation. The objective of the debate is to highlight effective international maritime cooperation to respond holistically to natural and manmade threats to maritime security. The fallout of the 2004 tsunami, which took a heavy toll on human and natural resources, led to the creation of an Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System by the UN in 2005. Early warnings through an international network seek to prevent a recurrence of such devastation. Faced with the increased threat from piracy originating off the coast of Somalia since 2007 to shipping in the western Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy participated robustly as part of a UNSC mandated 60-country Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia. With a coastline of over 7,500 km, India has a natural interest in enhancing maritime security. The Indian Ocean region transports 75 per cent of the world’s maritime trade and 50 per cent of daily global oil consumption. India’s Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) policy, unveiled by PM Modi during a visit to Mauritius in March 2015, proposes an integrated regional framework to meet such an

objective in the Indian Ocean. The five pillars of SAGAR are: One, India’s role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). Two, active engagement with friendly countries in the IOR. India would continue to enhance the maritime security capacities and economic resilience of these countries. Three, developing a network to take effective collective action for advancing peace and security in the region. Four, a more integrated and cooperative focus on the future of the IOR, which would enhance the prospects for the sustainable development of all countries in the region. Five, the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the IOR would be on those “who live in this region”. India would continue its engagement with other nations having strong interests and stakes in this region through dialogue, visits, exercises, capacity building and economic partnership. Sustaining international cooperation to enhance maritime security requires two supportive frameworks in the policy and operational areas. An effective legal policy framework must underpin a rule-of-law based approach to securing the maritime domain. The open debate will focus on the application of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), bringing to the fore new challenges to peace and security including from non-state actors such as terrorists, pirates and criminal gangs engaged in drug trafficking.

The discussion can become the catalyst for reviewing the operational effectiveness of the UNCLOS, especially regarding the enforcement of its provisions on freedom of navigation, the sustainable exploitation of maritime resources, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. India’s credentials in presiding over this discussion are enhanced by the fact that in July 2014, it accepted an UNCLOS tribunal award on the maritime boundary arbitration between India and Bangladesh, contributing a new impulse to effective international economic cooperation among the littoral states of the Bay of Bengal (BIMSTEC). Securing the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) that traverse the oceans is of central importance to enhancing maritime security. The debate must focus on ensuring equal and unrestricted access to SLOCs by states while resolving differences through peaceful means. In the Indian Ocean, three major SLOCs that play a crucial role in the energy security and economic prosperity of states include the SLOC connecting the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean through the Bab al-Mandab (that transports the bulk of Asia’s international trade with its major trading partners in Europe and America), the SLOC connecting the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Hormuz (transporting the bulk of energy exports to major import destinations like India, ASEAN, and East Asia), and

the SLOC connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through the Straits of Malacca (integral to the smooth flow of trade with ASEAN, East Asia, Russia’s Far East and the US). Sharing data on threats to commercial shipping is an important component of enhancing maritime security. India’s initiative to establish an International Fusion Centre (IFC) for the Indian Ocean region in Gurugram in 2018, jointly administered by the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard, serves the objective of generating Maritime Domain Awareness on safety and security issues. It is projected that 40 international liaison officers from partner countries will eventually be located at the IFC. The debate would illustrate the increasing role of the private sector in the maritime domain, whether it is in shipping, sustainable development through the Blue Economy, or using the maritime domain to provide the critical submarine fibre-optic cables supporting the Digital Economy. The ability of the UNSC to respond to the debate by endorsing a multiple stakeholder approach to enhancing maritime security would be a significant outcome, setting a paradigm for upholding “multi-dimensional” security in the 21st century.

The writer is a former ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in New York

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IMAGE DENTED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Better late’, (IE, August 7). There’s a saying that it is only the bad laws that receive unanimous support. This is true for the retrospective tax law. In its near-decade of existence, the law didn’t just attract a bad rep for doing business in India but also for the hypocrisy of the political structure which, despite criticising the law back in 2014, made no efforts to rectify it. As per the ministry statement, the deal was not in consultation with Cairn, which leaves it as a wild card.

Udit Sarkar, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Better late’ (IE, August 7) The government’s move to refund dues to Cairn is a correct one, even though it waited for an arbitration push to do so. Junking an unfair amendment of 2012 after nearly a decade exposes Centre’s indecisiveness. This episode should be a case in point on how to avoid being caught napping by being proactive in resolving all pending, contentious matters. Else, investor friendly-promises shall remain as dubious as the sudden rise in our rankings in the ease of doing business.

Raja Bandopadhyaya, Vadodara

SHAMEFUL ATTACK

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘Casteist abuse shameful, says women hockey team skipper’ (IE, August 7). It is disheartening that in our country, people

IDEAS ONLINE

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● REVIVING RUSSIA’S ROLE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: RAJ KUMAR SHARMA

www.indianexpress.com

cannot come to terms following the drubbing of our team. Our women’s hockey team has accomplished a exceptional feat and it is our moral duty to embolden and motivate them.

Aanya Singhal, Noida

GREAT GAMES

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘87.58m, a billion hearts, first athletics medal: Neeraj Chopra makes history’ (IE, August 8). India’s campaign at the Tokyo Olympics ended on a high on Saturday with Neeraj Chopra winning India’s first-ever Gold medal in Athletics. The previous best medal haul came at the 2012 London Olympics.

SS Paul, Nadia





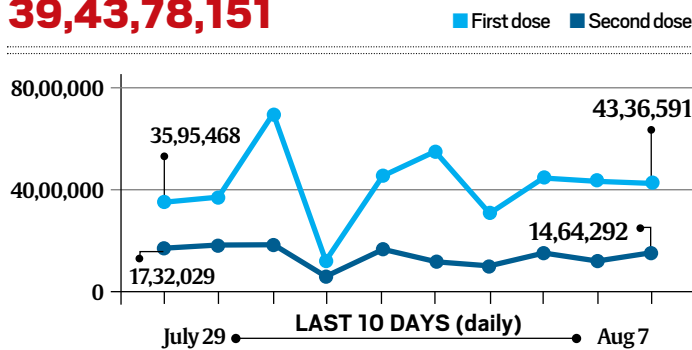
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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

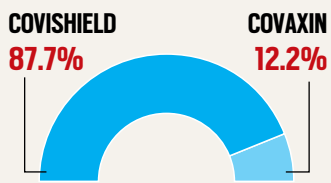
CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

TOTAL VACCINATED IN INDIA (at least one dose)
39,43,78,151



TOTAL DOSES
50,68,10,492

(Sputnik V's 5,70,957 doses not represented in pie)

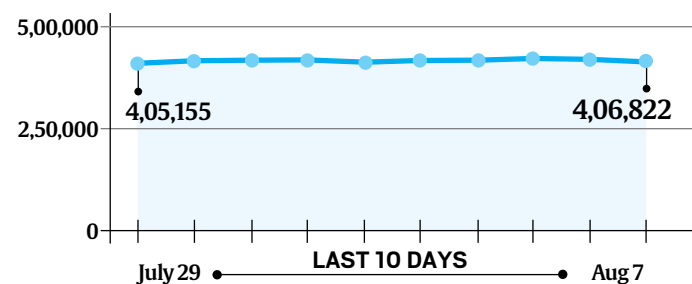


DOSES ON AUG 07 **58,00,883**

AUG 06: 56,82,014 (1ST DOSE: 44,10,510; 2ND:12,71,504)

INDIA ACTIVE CASES

4,06,822



Note: The August 7 figures in these graphs are based on the government updates on August 8

INDIA TOTAL CASES **3,19,34,455**

Source: Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, updated at 11 pm on August 8

Device that detects SARS-CoV-2 in saliva sample in one hour

ENGINEERS AT MIT and Harvard University have designed a small tabletop device that can detect SARS-CoV-2 from a saliva sample in about an hour. In a new study in *Science Advances*, they showed it is as accurate as PCR tests, MIT said in a press statement. It said the device can also be used to detect specific viral mutations linked to some of the variants now circulating.

The new diagnostic, which relies on CRISPR technology, can be assembled for about \$15, but those costs could come down significantly if the devices were produced at large scale, the researchers say. It is based on SHERLOCK, a CRISPR-based tool.

First, a pre-processing step disables enzymes called salivary nucleases, which destroy nucleic acids such as RNA. Once the sample goes into the device, the nucleases are inactivated by heat and two chemical reagents.

Then, viral RNA is extracted and concentrated by passing the saliva through a membrane. This RNA sample is then exposed to freeze-dried CRISPR/Cas components. The reaction amplifies the RNA sample and then detects the target RNA sequence, if present.

The researchers designed the device, which they call minimally instrumented SHERLOCK (miSHERLOCK), so that it can have up to four modules that each look for a different target RNA sequence. The original module detects any strain of SARS-CoV-2. Other modules are specific to mutations including B.1.1.7, P.1, and B.1.351.

The Delta variant was not yet widespread when the researchers performed this study, but they say it should be straightforward to design a new module to detect that variant.

Source: MIT



PAPER CLIP

NEW RESEARCH

EXPERT EXPLAINS

VIRANDER S CHAUHAN

From The Indian Express panel of specialists, exclusive insight

SARS-CoV-2 continues to play havoc in different parts of the world with several of its more virulent forms, particularly the Delta variant, now driving new waves of infections.

Vaccines developed against the virus are the most effective scientific intervention to control the pandemic. Developed at an amazing pace, as many as 19 vaccines have already been approved for immunisation in some part of the world or the other.

Glaring disparities

These vaccines are the result of intense scientific collaborations among scientists in academia and industry, and early huge funding from many governments. Unfortunately, the initial collaborative efforts did not translate into equitable access, and the trajectory of access has largely replicated the classical paradigm of developed and the underdeveloped parts of the world. Glaring disparities and differences in vaccine types, their availability and distribution have emerged in vaccination programmes across the globe.

The initiative COVAX, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), has struggled to procure and distribute vaccines to low- and middle-income countries.

While the western and resource-rich countries have mostly relied on the novel platforms of mRNA based vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, and viral vector vaccines of AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, the low- and middle-income countries find themselves relying mostly on vaccines developed in China and Russia.

As of now, around 4.1 billion shots of various vaccines have been rolled out worldwide, with China (1.61 billion), India (455 million) and USA (344 million) accounting for more than half of these. Many developed countries have vaccinated more than half their populations. On the other hand, resource-compromised countries have barely started their vaccination programmes.

The gap between supply and demand of vaccines needs to be filled quickly. Clearly, we need more vaccines, but where will they come from?

Vaccines in development

Among the 19 vaccines approved for use, a large number have been developed and approved in China, and more recently a few in



Queue for vaccination in Jaipur last week. India has administered over 50 crore doses, and hopes to procure 135 crore vaccines by December. Rohit Jain Paras

developing countries such as Cuba, Iran, Turkey and Kazakhstan. In addition, more than 30 vaccines are in large efficacy trials with a few already waiting for emergency use approval. More than 90 vaccine candidates have entered phase I/II trials. Therefore more than 120 vaccines, including many in the developing world, are under development.

Given the fact that so far only five vaccines have been abandoned following clinical trials, many of these vaccine candidates are destined to reach the regulatory stages in various countries. Although currently there is a huge shortage in supply, the space for introducing new vaccines cannot be unlimited, and only the best may be able to compete with the existing ones.

Also, manufacturers of currently in-use vaccines have announced major increases in production at multiple locations. For example, Pfizer has recently announced production of its vaccine in South Africa, specifically for use in African countries. The most cost-effective vaccine of AstraZeneca, which is approved in more than a hundred countries, is already being manufactured in many countries.

There will be additional challenges for the new vaccines. The current first-generation vaccines were tested against the original strain of the virus, but phase III trials of the new vaccines will have to deal with multiple, highly infectious variants.

Further, organising large phase III trials in itself will become more complex, particularly in locations where a large proportion of adult populations are vaccinated and/or infection rates have significantly declined.

Ethically too, phase III trials with placebo control groups may not be justifiable any more, given that efficacious vaccines are already in use.

Hopes & challenges

The next generation of Covid vaccines could address the issues of stability at higher temperatures for easy transportation and storage, a real concern in poor countries.

Large-scale immunisation through the injection route has always been complex and at least partly contributes to vaccine hesitancy. To avoid the needle and deliver vaccines through nasal or oral routes will also be an attractive target. Several non-injectable Covid vaccines are under development, including in India.

Perhaps the most exciting development in the new vaccine arena is the recent phase III trial results of the protein-based vaccine of Novavax, which has shown an efficacy of 91.4%. Importantly, these trials were conducted at a time when several virus variants had already emerged. However, the US regulator is yet to approve its emergency use.

Another protein-based vaccine being developed by Biological E in India, in collaboration with Baylor College of Medicine, US, has shown excellent safety and efficacy results in human trials conducted so far. Such protein-based vaccines will undoubtedly be major game-changers since they are not only safe, time tested, and highly efficacious, but also easy to produce, stable at higher temperatures, and generally very cost-effective.

But the lower-than-expected efficacy of

47% emerging from a large pivotal trial of the mRNA vaccine from CureVac, Germany, has seriously dampened hopes of its role in vaccination programmes in the European Union and elsewhere. The disappointing results underscore the risks and challenges for new vaccines, which will have to demonstrate efficacy against viral variants now prevalent all over the world.

Yet, new vaccines are being introduced at regular intervals. China has approved six vaccines and vaccinated a staggering 20 million people per day for more than a week in mid-June this year. Recently China has started vaccination of all minors using its own vaccines. There have been concerns about the efficacy of these vaccines in some Asian countries, including Indonesia and Thailand.

India, now & later

With 500 million (50 crore) vaccines already administered so far, India set its own record of vaccinating nearly 9 million people in a day on 21 June 2021. India's vaccination programme so far has been mainly driven by Covishield of AstraZeneca/Serum Institute of India and Covaxin of Bharat Biotech accounting for over 87% and 12% of all vaccinations respectively. Sputnik V from Russia, which was approved in April 2021, is yet to make any sizeable contribution to the vaccination programme.

According to revised estimates, the vaccination programme in India hopes to procure 135 crore vaccines by December 2021. The overall average supply of all vaccines has hovered around 4 million per day for the last two months. Clearly, the supply will need to be more than twice the present rate.

It is hoped that both Covishield and Covaxin production will be scaled up, with Covaxin to be produced at multiple locations. Likewise, Sputnik V supply through imports, or through its production in India, is expected to fill the gap.

Manufacturing and approvals of protein-based vaccines of Novavax and Biological E will be crucial to the supply chain in India. Novavax has demonstrated safety and high efficacy of its vaccine and may seek approval for its use in India before it is approved elsewhere.

The DNA based vaccine developed by Zydus Cadila, which requires three shots for full vaccination, is also expected to be rolled out in the coming months. Biological E was also slated to manufacture the single-shot vaccine of Johnson & Johnson, which, however, is yet to be approved for use in India.

If all falls into place, India should be able to produce more than 1-2 billion doses of Covid vaccines by 2022. India is well known for its ability to produce high quality vaccines at affordable cost and it should hope to occupy its rightful position of the largest producer of vaccines, especially for developing countries.

When a silver disappoints but a bronze thrills

ATIKH RASHID
PUNE, AUGUST 8

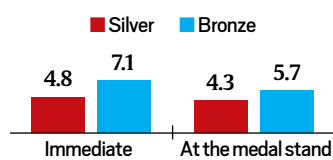
INAN interview almost 70 years after he won a silver medal at the Stockholm Olympics of 1912, American runner Abel Kiviat described the 1,500m race as a "nightmare". "That race was the biggest disappointment of my life. I never saw Jackson," said Kiviat, who died in 1991. He was referring to Britain's Arnold Jackson, who had defeated him by just 0.1 seconds.

In the 2020 Olympics just ended, Indian wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya voiced similar disappointment after winning silver in the 57 kg freestyle category. "I had come here with only one target, a gold medal. This (silver medal) is okay, but it's not gold," he told reporters.

Their emotions, on scale

In a 1995 paper in *The Journal of Personality*

MEAN HAPPINESS RATINGS



In a 1995 study, bronze winners fared better than silver winners on a happiness scale. Medvec et al

and *Social Psychology*, psychologists Victoria Medvec, Thomas Gilovich and Scott F. Madey examined why silver medalists may be feeling the way they do. They concluded that silver medalists fare poorly on a happiness scale because of the human tendency to indulge in

'counterfactual thinking' — to think of alternative circumstances to real-life events.

Bronze medalists score better than the silver medalists who had outperformed them. "We were interested in whether the effects of different counterfactual comparisons are sufficiently strong to cause people who are objectively worse off to sometimes feel better than those in a superior state," Medvec and his colleagues wrote in the paper.

The researchers collated video footage from the 1992 Olympics and edited them in three master tapes, showing the medalists' reaction immediately after the results, while receiving the medals, and during interviews they gave about their performance.

In one part of the study, university students unaware of the results were asked to rate, on a 10-point "agony to ecstasy" scale, the immediate reactions of 41 athletes, and their reactions on the medal stand (see

graphic). In a second part, the participants reviewed television interviews of 22 silver and bronze medalists and rate their expressed feelings on a 10-point scale.

"To the silver medalist, the most vivid counterfactual thoughts are often focused on nearly winning the gold," the researchers explained. "... For the bronze medalist, in contrast, the most compelling counterfactual alternative is often coming in fourth place and being in the showers instead of on the medal stand."

Similar findings

Three other researchers, who repeated the experiment in the 2016 Olympics, reconfirmed that counterfactual thoughts were higher among silver medalists than bronze winners. They found, however, that the differences in the expressed emotions were trivial or negligible.

How Apple will scan for child exploitation images on its devices

NANDAGOPAL RAJAN
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

APPLE HAS announced that software updates later this year will bring new features that will "help protect children from predators who use communication tools to recruit and exploit them, and limit the spread of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)".

Expected to go live in the US initially, the features include use of new technology to limit the spread of CSAM online, especially via the Apple platform. There will be on-device protection for children from sending or receiving sensitive content, with mechanisms to alert parents if the user is below age 13. Apple will also intervene when Siri or Search is used to look up CSAM-related topics.

What is the tech Apple is using?

In a blog post, Apple said it will use cryp-

tography applications via iOS and iPadOS to match known CSAM images stored on iCloud Photo. The technology will match images on a user's iCloud with these known images, provided by child safety organisations. And this is done without actually seeing the image, and only by looking for what is like a fingerprint match. If there are matches crossing a threshold, Apple will "report these instances to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)".

Apple clarified that its technology keeps user privacy in mind, and hence the database is transformed into "an unreadable set of hashes that is securely stored on users' devices". The technology will determine a match without revealing the result.

At this point, the device creates a "cryptographic safety voucher" with the match result and additional encrypted data, and saves it to iClouds with the image. Threshold

secret sharing technology ensures that these vouchers cannot be interpreted by Apple unless the iCloud Photos account crosses a threshold of known CSAM content. This threshold, the blog claimed, has been put in place to "provide an extremely high level of accuracy and ensures less than a one in one trillion chance per year of incorrectly flagging a given account". So a single image is unlikely to trigger an alert.

But if the threshold is exceeded, Apple can interpret the contents of the safety vouchers and manually review each report for a match, disable the user's account, and send a report to NCMEC. Apple said users will be able to appeal if they think they have been wrongly flagged.

How do the other features work?

Apple's new communication safety for Messages will blur a sensitive image and warn a child about the nature of the con-

tent. If enabled from the backend, the child could also be told that their parents have been alerted about the message they have viewed. The same will apply if the child decides to send a sensitive message. Apple said Messages will use "on-device machine learning to analyse image attachments and determine if a photo is sexually explicit" and that Apple will not get access to the messages. The feature will come as an update on accounts set up as families in iCloud for latest operating system versions.

Also, with the update, when a user tries to look up potential CSAM topics, Siri and Search will explain why this could be harmful and problematic. Users will also get guidance on how to file a report on child exploitation if they ask for it.

Why is Apple doing this, and what are the concerns being raised?
Big tech companies have for years been

under pressure to crack down on the use of their platforms for exploitation of children. Many reports have over the years underlined how enough was not being done to stop technology from making CSAM content available more widely.

However, Apple's announcement has been met with criticism, with many underlining how this is exactly the kind of surveillance technology many governments would want to have and love to misuse.

Also, cryptography experts like Matthew Green of Johns Hopkins University have expressed fears that the system could be used to frame innocent people by sending them images intended to trigger the matches for CSAM. "Researchers have been able to do this pretty easily," he told NPR, adding that it is possible to fool such algorithms.

But *The New York Times* quoted Apple's chief privacy officer Erik Neuenschwander as

saying these features will not mean anything different for regular users. "If you're storing a collection of CSAM material, yes, this is bad for you," he told the publication.

Do other big tech companies have similar technologies?

Yes. Microsoft, Google and Facebook have been alerting law enforcement agencies about CSAM images. Apple has been lagging behind because any such technology would have gone against its much-touted commitment to user privacy. As a result, in 2020, when Facebook reported 20.3 million CSAM violations to the NCMEC, Apple could report only 265 cases, *The New York Times* reported.

It is only now that it has been able to find the technology sweet spot to do this without impacting regular users, or at least spooking them. However, as the initial backlash has shown, it is still a tightrope walk.



ECONOMY

FIRMS LIKELY TO STRUCTURE ASSETS ACCORDINGLY WHILE DOING DEALS HEREON

Retro tax repeal: Sovereign right to tax intact post-2012, but mist clears for cos

AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

THE GOVERNMENT'S recent move to bury the controversial policy of retrospective taxation will provide relief to companies that undertook indirect transfer of assets before May 28, 2012, but the country still continues to retain its sovereign right to taxation under Section 9(1)(i) of the Income-tax Act. With the removal of the retrospective feature, however, a clear and predictable taxation law and intent has been presented to the companies, which are expected to structure their assets accordingly while doing deals hereon.

Experts said this removal of the

retrospective aspect now also provides clarity for deals between companies of countries where these are not covered under any tax treaty benefits.

"... Any indirect transfer of assets where underlying assets are in India, the tax is payable in India and accordingly they will arrange their assets. That is tax planning as far as the future is concerned. And for the future, the amendment in the law is now settled, and you arrange the assets in a manner that tax liability is reduced to the minimum," said V Lakshmi Kumar, managing partner, Lakshmi-kumar & Sridharan Attorneys.

The immediate beneficiaries would only be those who did their transactions before 2012 and from

EXPLAINED
Why was this tax brought in

THE GOVERNMENT had, in 2012, retrospectively amended the Income-tax Act. This was in response to a Supreme Court verdict, which had held that Vodafone cannot be taxed for a 2007 transaction that involved its purchase of a 67 per cent stake in Hutchison Whampoa.

them the government will not collect the tax. And if collected, they

will refund it, he added.

The government has proposed amendments to the Income-tax Act and Finance Act, 2012 to effectively state that no tax demand shall be raised for any indirect transfer of Indian assets if the transaction was undertaken before May 28, 2012.

Section 9(1)(i) of the Income-tax Act states that any income accruing or arising outside India due to a business connection in India is deemed to accrue or arise in India and shall be taxable in case of all assesses irrespective of their residential status. Companies are now expected to withdraw their litigation claims for deals prior to 2012, experts said.

"They are not saying that the

law was wrong. They are just saying the retrospectivity in the law is wrong which they are taking back. There is not much future planning shift which can happen, it is only the past which has been corrected. For the future, there is no new law in place... the companies don't have a reason to continue with the arbitration (for cases before 2012) because they have been given a winning deal. Whatever they were saying, the government has now agreed to it. They stand to gain by withdrawing the litigation and then there will be a refund of any taxes that have been already paid or refunded in respect of any demands that have been adjusted," Neha Malhotra, tax partner, Nangia & Co said.

SECTOR WATCH INSURANCE

Covid health claims of ₹10,703 cr pending before insurers despite HC, Irdai directive

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

WITH INSURANCE claims going through the roof amid the Covid pandemic, insurance companies are sitting on almost one-third of the claims submitted by patients since the pandemic hit the country in the beginning of 2020-21.

Over 3.06 lakh Covid claims for Rs 10,703 crore are pending before insurance companies as of August 6, indicating the pressure being faced by insurers despite Delhi High Court and Irdai, directing insurance firms to complete the settlement of Covid claims in an hour after discharge.

Health insurance companies have received a total of 23.06 lakh claims worth Rs 29,341 crore as on August 6, 2021, according to figures compiled by General Insurance Council. However, insurance firms have settled only Rs 17,813 crore involving 18.99 claims so far.

Of the total claims, 13.19 lakh claims worth Rs 14,783 crore came between April 1 and August 6, 2021 during 2021-22 while 9.86 lakh claims for Rs 14,560 crore were reported during the financial year ended March 2021.

According to insurers, the sharp rise in Covid claims has hit them substantially. "Yes, health claims have gone up a lot. While the number of claims went up, the average cost of a covid claim is twice the size of non-covid claims. Thus, the hit has been substantial," said Kamesh Goyal, chairman, Digit Insurance.

The big rise in claims even

As per insurers, the sharp rise in Covid claims has hit them substantially

forced some insurance companies to stop issuing health policies for some periods. Many companies were even forced to go slow on issuing term policies as death claims also shot up. "I'm sitting on a 400 per cent loss in Covid claims," said the regional manager of a public sector insurer.

The General Insurance Council, the representative body of 34 general insurers in the country, has laid down a basic framework for seeking the cooperation from hospitals to implement the directives. It has asked hospitals to submit all the patient discharge documents in one go without having to be reminded of the missing documents like cashless treatment approval reference, copy of the case sheet, prescriptions, diagnostic reports, bills, discharge summary, Covid positive and the subsequent Covid negative reports.

According to the Council, when the patient's progress is good and discharge is planned for the next day, hospitals should inform the insurance company or TPA of the impending discharge the soonest and submit the available documents and bills pertaining to the last 24 hours could be submitted at the discharge time so that the insurance company or TPA could also start working on the discharge simultaneously," it had said.

Power consumption up 9.3% in August first week

The country's power consumption grew 9.3 per cent in the first week of August to 28.08 billion units after easing of lockdown curbs, as per Power Ministry data

During August 1-7 in 2020, the power consumption was 25.69 BU. It was 25.18 BU during August 1 to 7 in 2019

restrictions for boosting economic activities

Recovery in power demand and consumption in the first week of August 2021 is consistent and would further improve as many states have eased lockdown

Power demand as well as consumption would see improvement due to higher demand in coming days but the only fear is another wave of pandemic

PEAK POWER DEMAND

met or the highest supply in a day stood at 188.59GW in the first week of August, which is 14 per cent higher than 165.42 GW in the same period last year



April 2021 saw year-on-year growth of nearly 38.5 per cent. The second wave started in the middle of April and affected the recovery in commercial and industrial power demand as states started imposing restrictions

Source: Power Ministry/PTI

Task cut out for DoT to convince FinMin on telecom relief package

AASHISH ARYAN & SUNNY VERMA

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

THE DEPARTMENT of Telecommunications (DoT) may find it difficult to convince the Finance Ministry to give the go ahead for telecom sector-specific relief as the latter has expressed apprehensions about the bailout options laid out by the department, sources told *The Indian Express*.

Among the relief package options chosen by the DoT are a possibility of extending the moratorium on spectrum payment obligations by another couple of years or allowing the telcos to encash, for some years, the bank guarantees the companies have submitted before asking them to re-submit these, the sources said.

"The discussions are still on. A sector-specific relief will be difficult because the government has received requests from other sectors such as the food and beverages, hotels industry as well for relief," a senior government official said. The discussions for relief to the telecom sector have gained pace after Kumar Mangalam Birla, former non-executive chairman and direc-

ON THE TABLE

■ Among the relief package options are a possibility of extending moratorium on spectrum payment obligations by couple of years or allowing telcos to encash, for some years, the bank guarantees the firms have submitted before asking them to re-submit these, sources said

tor of Vodafone Idea (Vi), wrote to the Central government in June offering to "hand over" his 27 per cent stake in the company to any public sector, government, or domestic financial entity or to any other firm that the government may think fit, to keep Vi going.

The June letter, however, was not the first time that Birla had raised the request for a package from the government. In December 2019, he had, following the Supreme Court judgment on adjusted gross revenue, said that Vodafone Idea would have to "shut shop" if there was no relief forthcoming from the government.

Following his comment, the majority stakeholder in Vi, Vodafone Group's chief executive officer Nick Read too had ruled out any further equity infusion in the debt-laden telecom joint venture it runs in India.

For some time now, Vi has been unsuccessfully scouting the globe, trying to either raise funds of up to Rs 25,000 crore or bring in a strategic partner. In his June 7 letter, Birla made a mention of the company's efforts to raise the funds and said that all the non-Chinese investors they had talked to so far had asked to be assured that the Indian government wanted to "have a three-player telecom market".

"To actively participate in this fundraising, potential foreign investors (mostly non-Chinese and we are yet to approach any Chinese investors) want to see clear government intent to have a three-player telecom market (consistent with its public stance) through positive actions on long-standing requests such as clarity on AGR (adjusted gross revenue) liability, adequate moratorium on spectrum payments, and most importantly, a floor pricing regime above cost of service," Birla wrote.

New chemistry cell battery tech set to diversify, disrupt sectors: From electricity storage to EVs

ANIL SASI

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

WITH AT least three energy storage-linked projects of scale being planned in India, new advanced chemistry cell battery technologies, which could potentially enable battery storage ecosystems to diversify away from the established lithium-ion formula and scale up the viability threshold, offer an array of potential options to policymakers. The suitability of some of these frontier battery technologies are likely to be evaluated based on the end-use application of the battery storage projects in the works — electricity storage for the grid or their use in electric vehicles (EVs).

While policymakers in the NITI Aayog and the Power Ministry maintain that the established lithium-ion ecosystem is likely to continue to be the mainstay for the projects that are on the verge of being rolled out, there is now a fresh impetus to examine these new technological breakthroughs from an improved viability and end-use perspective while drafting new project proposals.

The new technologies include a novel rechargeable iron-air battery developed by a US-based startup for electricity grid storage that promises to deliver power at less than a tenth of the cost of lithium-ion batteries, alongside solid-state batteries that use alternatives to the aqueous electrolyte solutions — an innovation that could lower the risk of fires, sharply increase energy density and potentially take only 10 minutes to charge a battery — that are being explored by mobility.

The government has already commenced work on a blueprint for a project of around 4,000-megawatt hour of grid-scale battery storage system at the regional load dispatch centres (RLDCs) that control the country's power grid, primarily to balance the vagaries of renewable generation. Apart from this, Reliance Industries Ltd has recently announced plans to set up an Energy Storage Giga factory while state-owned NTPC Ltd has floated a global tender for grid-scale battery storage project.

The Union Power Ministry's large grid-scale battery storage project is being envisaged as an intervention mechanism aimed at counterbalancing any sharp fluctuation in grid frequency because of renewables, with part of the envisaged capacity set to be reserved

FRESH IMPETUS

■ There is now a fresh impetus to examine these new technological breakthroughs from an improved viability and end-use perspective while drafting new project proposals

as an ancillary for the grid controllers, and part to be made available to the project developer to be leveraged on a commercial basis by storing energy during off peak hours and drawing from it during peak hours. Mega battery storages are expected to add to the stability of India's electricity grids. Posoco, India's electricity grid operator, manages the grid through the National Load Despatch Centre and a combination of five RLDCs and 33 state load despatch centres. The storage is planned at the RLDC-level to manage growing share of renewables in the country's electricity generation mix.

There are also other wings of the government that are active in this area. The Department of Science and Technology has launched a "Materials for Energy Storage" and "Materials for Energy Conservation and Storage Platform" programme, and set up centres on batteries and supercapacitors with Indian Institute of Technology Bombay and Indian Institute of Science, respectively, for developing energy materials for efficient electrochemical energy storage devices. This is in addition to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy supporting a broad-based Research and Development Programme on energy storage.

One of the new breakthrough technologies globally, announced in July, is by US company Form Energy Inc.: a rechargeable iron-air battery capable of delivering electricity for 100 hours at a claimed system cost competitive with conventional power plants and at less than 1/10th the cost of lithium-ion. "We conducted a review of available technologies and have reinvented the iron-air battery to optimise it for multi-day energy storage for the electric grid," according to Mateo Jaramillo, Form Energy's CEO and co-founder. "With this tech, we are tackling the biggest barrier to deep decarbonisation: making renewable energy available when and where it's needed, even during

multiple days of extreme weather or grid outages." The battery leverages the concept of 'reversible rusting' — the battery uses oxygen from the air and converts iron metal to rust while discharging, and while charging, the application of an electrical current transforms rust back to iron and the battery releases oxygen back into the air. But the problem pertains to the battery's size and weight, which makes its application impractical in EVs. In case of grid storage, though, it works well as it's about the size of a small refrigerator.

The other really promising technology involves solid-state batteries that use alternatives to aqueous electrolyte solutions — an innovation that could lower the risk of fires, sharply increase energy density and potentially take only 10 minutes to charge an EV, cutting the recharging time by two-thirds. Despite the improvements in lithium-ion batteries over the last decade, long charging times and weak energy density are still barriers.

Some of the alternatives being fostered globally to achieve more optimal options include:

■ Toyota's solid state battery: The Japanese automaker is attempting to wrest back the lead from the Chinese, who are current Li-ion battery pack leaders. It plans to be the first company to sell an EV equipped with a solid-state battery and will unveil a prototype this year. Nissan, too, is in the fray.

■ Apple battery tech: Apple has said it's moving forward with self-driving car technology and will target 2024 to produce a passenger vehicle.

■ QuantumScape's solid-state battery: Earlier efforts to create a solid-state separator (electrolyte) capable of working with lithium metal had to compromise on its other aspects like cycle life, operating temperature, cathode loading, among others. QuantumScape seems to have circumvented this, and its use of a solid state separator technology eliminates the side reaction between the liquid electrolyte and the carbon in conventional lithium-ion cells' anode.

■ Tesla's new tabless battery: A tab is part of the battery that forms a connection between the cell and what it is powering. Tesla will produce its new batteries in-house, which CEO Elon Musk predicts will help dramatically reduce costs and help sell EVs for the same price as petrol-powered ones.

Full report on www.indianexpress.com

INTERVIEW WITH FOUNDER AND CEO OF EMCURE PHARMACEUTICALS

'On track to deliver 60 mn doses of our mRNA vaccine by yr-end'



Satish Mehta

be surprises and we don't know what the Delta variant would do.

Genova has been given the target to supply vaccines by the year-end. What stage are you on your mRNA vaccine?

The government has given us a target of 60 million doses by the end of the year. We are on track and committed to delivering it. Right now we are in Phase 1. We are very satisfied with the primary outcome of safety. As we speak, secondary outcome of efficacy or immunogenicity is also being reviewed and studied by drug safety and monitoring board — an independent body. Post that, we will submit our data with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation and apply for phases 2 and 3. That's when the regulatory bodies would comment and guide us in terms of next steps.

We are on track but there are different types of challenges. First and foremost is that the product has to be shown safe through the clinical trial process. Simultaneously, the supply chain aspects are daunting because gaining access to some of the key raw materials (particularly for the mRNA vaccines) is a big challenge.

So we are taking efforts to plan for manufacturing and securing raw material supply. We are repurposing some of our own capacities within the company for fulfilling the requirement of the vaccine.

By when do you think you would you be able to do second and third phase trials?

We don't have a timeline for that and it is very difficult for me to say that as of now. We can focus on the processes and do them diligently, then we have to work closely with government agencies. I am very optimistic. The government is handholding and supporting us quite a lot.

How do you see your vaccine and demand for it?

We are very bullish on our mRNA vaccine because within 45-50 days the concept can also be developed for the new variant including Delta variant. Unlike other vaccines (that we have), which has Adenovirus or attenuated live virus, this has a dynamic platform where you can come out with a new vaccine. It is important because I think this cat-and-mouse game would go on for 2-3 years.

While mRNA is undoubtedly the best vaccine that we have, Pfizer and Moderna are supplying to the regulated markets. The rest of the world (EMs) would be happy to take mRNA and we see them as a market. While Moderna and Pfizer are required to be kept at very low temperatures, the vaccine that we have developed is stable between 2 and 8 degrees, and that makes the job lot easier.

Full interview on www.indianexpress.com

BRIEFLY

Sebi probed 94 new cases

New Delhi: As many as 94 fresh cases pertaining to flouting of securities norms were taken up for investigation by Sebi in 2020-21, marking a fall of 42 per cent from the preceding financial year, as per the regulator's latest annual report. **PTI**

US board diversity

New York: The US Securities and Exchange Commission approved a proposal from Nasdaq that requires its listed companies to have diverse boards or explain why they do not. The proposal requires that companies have two diverse directors, including one who identifies as female and another as an underrepresented minority or LGBTIQ+. **REUTERS**

Rankings must be transparent; digital dominance a concern: CCI Chairman

KARUNJITSINGH

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

ONLINE PLATFORMS must make ranking systems transparent and treat all sellers in a non-discriminatory manner, CCI Chairman Ashok Kumar Gupta told *The Indian Express* in an interview.

Gupta said instances of digital players abusing their market power had become a concern for the competition regulator. The CCI has ordered investigations into the conduct of major online platforms including Flipkart, Amazon and MakeMyTrip. The CCI is also conducting investigations into Google's conduct in the smart tv, mobile operating system and on-line payment platform spaces.

"Of late, instances of digital players abusing their dominance or market power by adopting anti-competitive means, have been brought to the attention of the



CCI Chairman Ashok Kumar Gupta, via @CCI_India Twitter

Commission. That is a concern," said Gupta, adding while the Commission did not think it was always necessary for there to be multiple players in a market segment, dominant players should not abuse their market power. The Commission is currently investigating allegations against Google: that the tech giant requires original equipment manufacturers in the smartphone and smart TV space to sign agreements

which prevent such manufacturers from making forked versions of Android operating system and require they include the entire suite of Google apps on their devices if they want to pre-install the Google Play Store on their devices.

Gupta also highlighted key issues of opaque ranking systems, exclusive selling arrangements and deep discounting.

"In search rankings, you have to be transparent and your algorithm has to be unbiased. You cannot just rank businesses in your own opaque ways, which nobody knows," said Gupta, noting that it was important that platforms charge commissions to sellers in a non-discriminatory manner.

"When people don't have effective alternatives, you become like an essential facility, you acquire the characteristics of a public good," he said. CCI officials have previously said a large number of sellers are becoming increasingly

dependent on online platforms.

"Prima facie we have also seen that the ecosystem of exclusive agreements, deep discounting, and preferred sellers put together by online platforms commanding market power are also raising competition concerns," he said.

Gupta added differential treatment in terms of commissions charged to sellers were also a cause of concern. The National Restaurants Association of India has approached the CCI, alleging Swiggy and Zomato have misused their market power by unilaterally raising commissions charged to restaurants and masking consumer data from restaurants.

"Our endeavour is that people should be able to shift lock, stock and barrel from one platform to another seamlessly. One hindrance in that is the absence of data portability. If you want to shift from one platform to another, you may lose your data," Gupta said.



12 The World/SPORT

TOPOF THE WORLD



Ochre markings painted on stalagmites. *Reuters*

SPAIN

Cave paintings show Neanderthals were artists

NEANDERTHALS MAY have been closer to our species of prehistoric modern human than previously believed after cave paintings found in Spain proved they had a fondness for creating art, one of the authors of a new scientific report said. Red ochre pigment found on stalagmites in the Caves of Ardales, near Malaga in southern Spain, were created by Neanderthals about 65,000 years ago, making them possibly the first artists on earth, according to the study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* journal. **REUTERS**

PAKISTAN

2 cops killed in blast near luxury hotel in Quetta

AT LEAST two policemen were killed and eight others injured on Sunday when a powerful blast targeted their vehicle near a luxury hotel in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's Balochistan province, officials said. "The initial probe showed that the bomb was fitted with a motorbike," a Balochistan government spokesperson said, adding that the blast targeted the police mobile van at Tanzeem Square near Serena Hotel in Quetta. **PTI**

Taliban seize key Afghan city of Kunduz

Sar-e-Pul, another provincial capital, also captured; insurgent group pushes into Taliqan city

CHRISTINA GOLDBAUM, NAJIM RAHIM, SHARIF HASSAN & THOMAS GIBBONS-NEFF
KABUL, AUGUST 8

THE TALIBAN seized the city of Kunduz in northern Afghanistan on Sunday, officials said. It is the first major city to be overtaken by the insurgents since they began their sweeping military offensive in May, and it happened just weeks before US forces were set to complete a total withdrawal from Afghanistan.

It was also the third provincial capital to be overtaken by Taliban in three days, and a major blow to the Afghan government.

Kunduz, the capital of a province of the same name, is a significant military and political prize. With a population of 374,000, it is a vital commercial city near the border with Tajikistan.

"All security forces fled to the airport, and the situation is critical," said Sayed Jawad Hussaini, the deputy police chief of a district in Kunduz city.

Clashes between government forces and Taliban fighters were continuing in a small town south of the city, where the local army headquarters and the airport are situated, security officials said.

Security forces, who had retreated to the town earlier in the morning, began an operation to flush Taliban fighters out of the city on Sunday evening, accord-



In Kunduz on Sunday after fighting between Taliban and Afghan security forces. *AP*

ing to security officials.

In the two preceding days, the Taliban had taken two other provincial capitals: Sheberghan, the capital of Jowzjan Province in the north, and Zaranj, the capital of Nimruz Province on the Afghanistan-Iran border. As Kunduz was collapsing on Sunday morning, the Taliban also seized Sar-e-Pul, the capital of another northern province of the same name, officials said.

"Taliban are walking in the streets of the city. Local residents are terrified," said Sayed Asadullah Danish, a member of the Sar-e-Pul provincial council. Provincial officials had taken shelter in an army base on the outskirts of the city, where clashes were continuing,

he added.

After sweeping through the country's rural areas, the insurgents' military campaign has shifted to brutal urban combat in recent weeks.

Taliban fighters pushed into another northern provincial capital on Sunday, local and military officials said. The fighters had been contained at the gates of Taliqan, the capital of Takhar Province, since June. But as the Kunduz city centre fell, the insurgents moved toward Taliqan, threatening to topple a fifth provincial capital in three days.

"The situation is chaotic, and the front lines are not clear now," said Mohammed Omar, a district governor in Takhar who is leading militia fighters in Taliqan. **NYT**

EXPLAINED Kunduz a major win for Taliban

TALIBAN IN recent days have stepped up their efforts to seize provincial capitals, and on Sunday, they pushed into three, including the strategically important Kunduz city. It represents a significant victory for the group as it is the first major city they have captured since foreign troops announced their departure. The city is also important because it serves as a gateway to the mineral-rich northern provinces and Central Asia.

Rocked by sexual assault allegation, Alibaba launches investigation

REUTERS
SHANGHAI, AUGUST 8

CHINESE E-COMMERCE giant Alibaba said on Sunday it has suspended several staff following an employee's allegations on the company's intranet that she was sexually assaulted by her boss and a client.

The woman's account, published via an eleven-page PDF that went on to circulate widely online, prompted a social media storm on China's Twitter-like microblogging website Weibo. Police in the city of Jinan said on Sunday morning that they were investigating the incident.

"Alibaba Group has a zero-tolerance policy against sexual mis-

conduct, and ensuring a safe workplace for all our employees is Alibaba's top priority," a spokesperson said in a statement.

"We have suspended relevant parties suspected of violating our policies and values, and have established a special internal task force to investigate the issue and support the ongoing police investigation."

Late on Saturday, a female Alibaba staffer's account of an incident she said took place while on a business trip went viral on Chinese social media.

The woman alleged that her boss coerced her into going on a business trip with him to meet one of her team's clients in the city of Jinan, about 900 km from Alibaba's headquarters in Hangzhou.

According to the woman, on the evening of July 27, the client kissed her. After consuming alcohol, she woke up in a hotel room the following day with her clothes removed and no memory of what happened the evening before. CCTV footage she obtained from the hotel showed that her boss entered the room four times over the course of the evening, she added.



The day-five washout at Trent Bridge means both India and England log four World Test Championship points each from the first Test. *AP*

Day 5 washed out, but Kohli finds 'template'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NOTTINGHAM, AUGUST 8

THIS TEAM will be "our template" going ahead, Indian captain Virat Kohli said after the rain-marred opener against England ended in a draw on Sunday, meaning they will stick to the 4-1 pace-spin combination in the remainder of five-Test series. So it will be a toss-up between Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin in the upcoming four matches, with the former preferred for the first Test in which India was deprived of a victory owing to persistent rain that washed out the fifth day.

"We were expecting rain on days three and four but it chose to come on day five. It would have been enjoyable to play and watch, but it's a shame," Kohli said after the match. "This is exactly what we wanted to do; start strong. On day five we knew we had our chances. We certainly felt like we were on top of the game."

India needed to score 157 runs on the final day but the rain did not allow a single ball to be bowled.

"Getting that lead was crucial, but it's a shame we couldn't finish day five. Getting to fifty overnight

was important. We just didn't want to play for survival. Our intent kept us ahead. It's hard work of three odd weeks for our bowlers with the bat."

"Most likely this will be our template in this series, but adaptability has been our strength. The conditions and the pace on the wicket needs to be seen, but this team will be our template. England and India have always been a blockbuster, and looking forward to the next Test."

As part of the new World Test Championship cycle, both India and England logged home four points each. Only 250 plus overs out of a maximum 450 were possible due to the weather. India, chasing a target of 209, were well-placed at 52 for one in 14 overs at the end of fourth day. Though India had their nose ahead, English skipper Joe Root said rain marred "what would have been a very interesting final day".

"Great Test match to play in and watch as well. Sets up the series really well and hopefully we can take it into the next games. We certainly believed we could win. We knew we would have opportunities if we took our catches and kept our fields. It's a shame it ended this way," Root said.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MADRID, AUGUST 8

LIONEL MESSI began crying before he even started speaking. The "most difficult" moment of his career had arrived and he wasn't ready for it.

It was time to say goodbye to Barcelona after more than two decades with the Catalan club.

"I don't know if I'll be able to speak," he said while trying to compose himself during his farewell news conference at the Camp Nou Stadium on Sunday. "It still hasn't sunk in that I'm leaving this club, that my life will be changing completely. It will be a difficult change for me and especially for my family. But we have to accept it and move on."

Messi struggled to control his emotions and cried profusely as he stepped up to the podium at the Camp Nou. "This is very hard for me after so many years, after being here my entire life," he said. "I wasn't prepared."

Messi said that, unlike last year when he asked to leave, he had his mind set on staying with Barcelona and did everything possible to make it happen, including reducing his salary by 50%. He said he was surprised to hear he wouldn't be able to stay because of the club's debt and the Spanish league's financial fair-play regulations. "In these last few days I was thinking about what I would say today, but to be honest I couldn't come up with anything. I was blocked, like I still am right now," Messi said. "I was convinced that we would remain with the club, which is our home."

Messi's family and some of his teammates were at the Camp Nou for the emotional farewell. He was applauded several times by those in the audience.

The 34-year-old Messi avoided speaking specifically about his future, saying he received offers from several clubs after the announcement that he would leave the Catalan club. When asked about Paris Saint-Germain, considered the frontrunner to sign him, Messi admitted it was "a possibility."

"At this moment I don't have a



Lionel Messi avoided speaking about his future, saying he has offers from several clubs. *Reuters*

deal with any club," he said.

PSG has been in talks over the weekend with Messi's team trying to finalize a deal.

Sports daily L'Equipe reported on its website Sunday that Messi was to fly to Paris later Sunday to put the finishing touches on the deal with a view to having a medical exam on Monday morning. An email from The Associated Press to PSG seeking to confirm the report was not immediately answered.

Messi said he hopes to return to Barcelona in some capacity one day and that he wished he could have said goodbye to fans in a match with a capacity crowd chanting his name. He said it was sad to leave after not being able to play in front of fans for nearly a year and a half.

He said his best moment was his first-team debut in 2004, because "that's when it all started." He said he has "no regrets," but believed he was part of a generation that should have won more Champions League titles.

In these last few days I was thinking about what I would say today, but to be honest I couldn't come up with anything. I was blocked, like I still am right now. I was convinced that we would remain with the club, which is our home."

LIONEL MESSI

He said it will be "strange" to see Barcelona without Messi, "but with time people will get used to it." He said the club still has good players and can continue to succeed without him.

Barcelona announced Thursday it could not keep its greatest player because it wasn't able to fit a new contract within the Spanish league's financial fair-play regulations. The club's salary cap has been significantly slashed because of its huge debt. President Joan Laporta blamed the club's

struggles on the coronavirus pandemic and particularly on the previous administration led by Josep Bartomeu.

Messi asked to leave at the end of the 2019-20 season but had his request denied by Bartomeu, with whom he had clashed. "I wanted to leave then, but not now," he said. "I didn't expect it, so it's sad to have to say goodbye."

Messi spent nearly two decades with Barcelona after arriving from Argentina as a 13-year-old to play in its youth squads. He made his first-team debut as a 17-year-old, then played 17 seasons with the main squad. He helped the club win the Champions League four times, the Spanish league 10 times, the Copa del Rey seven times and the Spanish Super Cup eight times. Messi leaves as Barcelona's all-time leading scorer with 672 goals. He played in 778 matches with the club, also a record. He is also the overall top scorer in the Spanish league with 474 goals from 520 matches.



PROTESTS AGAINST FRENCH VACCINE PASS: At a protest against Covid-19 vaccine passports, in Paris on Saturday. Thousands of people marched in Paris and other French cities to protest against the special pass and what they see as restrictions of personal freedoms. *AP*

Britain eases travel restrictions for India

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, AUGUST 8

THE UK on Sunday eased travel restrictions for India by moving the country from its "red" to "amber" list, which means fully vaccinated Indian passengers will no longer be subjected to a compulsory 10-day hotel quarantine on their arrival in Britain.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has confirmed that all arrivals from India who have been vaccinated in India, which is on the amber list as at 4 am local time on Sunday, are re-

quired to isolate at home or their designated location mentioned on the compulsory locator form.

While the requirement for a compulsory 10-day self-isolation in a government-approved facility at an additional cost of £1,750 per head will no longer apply, only those vaccinated in the UK or EU would qualify for an exemption of the home quarantine requirement. "We recognise there are a large variety of Covid-19 vaccines being administered worldwide and work is ongoing to determine which non-UK vaccines and certification solutions to recognise," a DHSC source said. **PTI**

Iran sees highest daily virus case, death counts

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEHRAN, AUGUST 8

IRAN, GRAPPLING with its most severe surge of the coronavirus to date, reported more new infections and deaths across the country on Sunday than any other single day since the pandemic began.

Health authorities logged over 39,600 new cases and 542 deaths from the virus. The fatality count shatters the previous record set

during Iran's deadliest coronavirus surge that gripped the country last November, signalling the current wave will likely only get worse. The new all-time highs push Iran's total number of infections over 4.1 million and death toll over 94,000 — the highest in the Middle East.

The crush of new cases have overwhelmed hospitals. The country has never seen so many Covid patients in critical condition, with 6,462 more severe cases reported Sunday.

What Messi's exit means for Barcelona

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
AUGUST 8

LIONEL MESSI broke down at his final press conference as a Barcelona player. Since making his senior debut at Camp Nou in 2003, Messi has played 778 games for the Catalan club, scoring 672 goals. He claimed he wanted to stay at the club and had even accepted a 50 percent salary cut to sign a new contract. But as it turned out, Barcelona couldn't even afford a cut-price Messi.

Why is Messi's Barcelona exit a football tragedy?

Messi has spent over two decades at Barcelona, and is the most decorated player in the club. Even his children are Argentine-Catalan. There were several brinkmanship attempts when things didn't go well on the pitch, including a call to leave the club ahead of the 2020-21 season. He shared an acrimonious relationship with erstwhile club president Josep Bartomeu. But when Joan Laporta replaced Bartomeu, Messi committed his future to Barcelona.

By July 1 he was a free agent, with a new contract being formalised. "... at the last minute, it couldn't happen. This year I wanted to stay and I couldn't. Last year I didn't want to stay, and I said it," Messi said.

What did Barcelona say on Messi's exit?

On August 5, Barcelona confirmed that Messi "will not continue" with the club. A day later, Laporta said: "Leo wanted to stay and the club wanted him to stay, but with the LaLiga rules it has not been possible." The club wanted to extend the 34-year-old's contract by two years, but LaLiga's Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules prevented it. As per the rules, Barcelona's wage-to-turnover percentage has to be 70 percent.

Why can't Barca afford Messi?

Barcelona couldn't have resigned the six-time Ballon d'Or winner even if he had played for free. As Laporta explained, with Messi on board, the club's wage-to-turnover percentage was 110 percent. And without him, it would have been 95 percent — well above the FFP cut-off mark. As per the latest financial report, the club's debt exceeded £1 billion, which includes money owed for Philippe Coutinho and Frenkie de Jong. The wage bill for their first-team squad is around £235 million a year.

"Before anything, I want to explain that we have received a terrible inheritance from the previous board," Laporta said. "There's no room to manoeuvre and the (FFP) rules mark the limits... we had to accept an agreement that mortgaged the Club's TV rights for half a century and FC Barcelona is above everything else."

Is this the end of Messi at Barcelona?

A tearful goodbye suggests so. Messi has been the Spanish league's most lucrative player in terms of commercial deals and TV rights, and according to some pundits, this could well be a pressure tactic from Barca to force LaLiga to water down its FFP rules. Interestingly, Real Madrid also released a statement, attacking LaLiga, on the heels of Barcelona confirming Messi's exit.

Is Messi going to PSG?

Messi remained coy on his next move. But he has reportedly spoken with PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino and the club is making arrangements for an Eiffel Tower unveiling of Messi. PSG are one of the very few clubs that can afford the Argentine. Also, owned by Qatari investors, Messi's arrival could unlock huge commercial possibilities ahead of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.



Men behind the medals: Seven foreigners, 1 Indian

The podium has place for only the athletes who perform in front of the world. But there's always guiding hands and wise counsel that show the right path to a medal. The seven medals India won at Tokyo too owe a lot to the coaches who worked behind the scenes to ensure their wards succeeded on the biggest stage.

UWE HOHN
(HEAD COACH) &
DR KLAUS BARTONIETZ
(BIOMECHANICAL EXPERT)
COUNTRY: GERMANY
ATHLETE: NEERAJ CHOPRA
EVENT: JAVELIN THROW
MEDAL: GOLD



THE JAVELIN thrower's body is like a bow and the javelin an arrow. This is Dr Bartoniets's philosophy and it worked like a charm for Chopra. Bartoniets has immense knowledge about the intricacies of the event and is credited with making Chopra stronger, yet more elastic, in his movements. He was part of the core team which developed javelin-specific work-out machines German throwers swear by.

UWE HOHN, the only man to throw the spear over 100 metres, coached Chopra when he won the Commonwealth and Asian Games gold medals in 2018. He roped in Bartoniets for his expertise in early 2019. Both Germans had worked with the Chinese national team earlier.

VIJAY SHARMA
(CHIEF NATIONAL COACH)
COUNTRY: INDIA
ATHLETE: MIRABAI CHANU
DISCIPLINE: WEIGHTLIFTING 49KG
MEDAL: SILVER



MIRABAI CHANU came under the guidance of Sharma, a former national champion, in 2014, the same year he took charge of the men's team for the Commonwealth Games. Sharma's own career as a weightlifter was curtailed because of a wrist injury. He has been a constant during the highs and lows faced by Chanu. After she failed to produce one legal lift in the clean and jerk at the 2016 Rio Olympic, it was Sharma, along with her mother, who coaxed her out of thoughts about retirement. Sharma joined the national camp in 2012 after UP, the state he coached, became national champions.



GRAHAM REID
COUNTRY: AUSTRALIA
TEAM: MEN'S HOCKEY
MEDAL: BRONZE

KAMAL MALIKOV
COUNTRY: RUSSIA
ATHLETE: RAVI DAHIYA
EVENT: 57KG FREESTYLE WRESTLING
MEDAL: SILVER

BROUGHT IN to prepare Sushil Kumar for Tokyo Olympics' qualification, Malikov was meant to be a fitness trainer, a sparring partner and observer for India's two-time medallist. But once that was no longer feasible, Malikov was employed from April 2021 under the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) to help Dahiya. For the Indian wrestler, Malikov was able to procure prime sparring partners in Vladikavkaz (Russia). The 23-year old's defeat in the gold medal match at the Poland Open would prompt the 34-year-old coach and student to work harder at improving reaction times and the speed of counters. Dahiya is a product of wrestling coach Satpal Singh and the set-up at Delhi's Chhatrasal Stadium.

THE STINT with the Indian team was a shot at redemption for Reid, who was at the helm with Australia when they crashed out of the Rio Olympics in the quarterfinals with a 4-0 thrashing against the Netherlands. He has changed the team's psyche, making them less prone to

SHAKO BENTINIDIS
COUNTRY: GEORGIA
ATHLETE: BAJRANG PUNIA
EVENT: 65KG FREESTYLE WRESTLING
MEDAL: BRONZE



BAJRANG'S RISE to become one of the top wrestlers in the 65kg category occurred after Bentineidis took over the reins of the 26-year-old. An animated coach, Bentineidis has facilitated sparring partners for Bajrang from the United States and Russia. The wrestler from Haryana, thus, travelled across the world looking for wrestlers who can attack him with speed. The goal – to improve his leg defence, an aspect that continues to be a weakness, and his reaction times. While still not perfect, the influence of Bentineidis has led to improvements in Bajrang's arsenal and an Olympic bronze medal to boot.

making costly errors at inopportune moments. After the loss to Belgium in the semifinal, it was Reid's job to pick the team up for the bronze-medal playoff against Germany, and India gave one of their most rousing performances in a long time. Earlier in the tournament,

RAFFAELE BERGAMASCO
(HIGH PERFORMANCE DIRECTOR)
COUNTRY: ITALY
ATHLETE: LOVLINA BORGHOAIN
EVENT: WOMEN'S WELTERWEIGHT BOXING
MEDAL: BRONZE



SON OF an Olympian, Bergamasco was a five-time national champion and took part in the Beijing, London and Rio Olympics as a coach. After guiding the Italian women's team from 2001 to 2007, he took over their senior and junior men's sides and contributed to six Olympic medals. He was let go after a barren run in Rio, and found his way to India in 2017, orchestrating the country's best ever medal haul at Youth Boxing Championships (five gold, two bronze) that November. A month later, he was promoted to high performance director for senior women.

after the 7-1 hammering against Australia, Reid ensured the team didn't panic and fought on level terms with all teams. He has toughened the team and history will record that he was in charge when India climbed the Olympic podium in hockey after a gap of 41 years.

PARK TAE-SANG
COUNTRY: SOUTH KOREA
ATHLETE: PV SINDHU
EVENT: WOMEN'S SINGLES BADMINTON
MEDAL: BRONZE



SINDHU'S GAME was based on strength and impressive hand speed, and she often overpowers opponents. But she needed more variety and dimensions to win consistently against the best players in the world. Enter Korean coach Park, who had chiselled into shape players like Sung Ji-Hyun, whose on-court movement had the smoothness of a swan in still water. Park not only gave Sindhu assurance in her stride, but importantly, worked long quality hours on her defence - always a target owing to her rangy frame. He would also inject confidence in Sindhu's game at the net. Where she would earlier swat at the shuttle and lift copiously to move the battle away from the forecourt, in Tokyo Sindhu expertly engaged with Akane Yamaguchi and didn't shy away from the dribbles. The smash-tap forced opponents to dig deep, and that mostly worked in the Indian's favour. Park was also animated - something Sindhu draws great energy from.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Sporting world flattens

Reading the medal tally: Tightest race ever between Top 2, record gold-winning nations, more countries on podium

TUSHAR BHADURI, SHAHID JUDGE & GAURAV BHATT
AUGUST 8

IN A final day swoop at Tokyo 2020, the United States earned the bragging rights of Tokyo 2020 by moving ahead of China on the medal table. The three golds that they clinched on Sunday just put their noses in front at the finish line, 39-38. The one in women's basketball may have been on expected lines, but the women's volleyball team winning their first ever gold drew them level, and Jennifer Valente's cycling gold proved to be the clincher. The one-medal gap between the top two is the closest ever. Before Tokyo, it was at Athens 2004 that the USA with 36 gold and China with 32 gold were involved in a tight race.

The other interesting aspect of the tally was the emergence of first-time medal winners. In what is the largest list of medal-winning countries at any Games, 93 different nations earned a podium finish. The number of gold-winning nations at an edition – 63 – also broke the record of 59 set at Rio 2016.

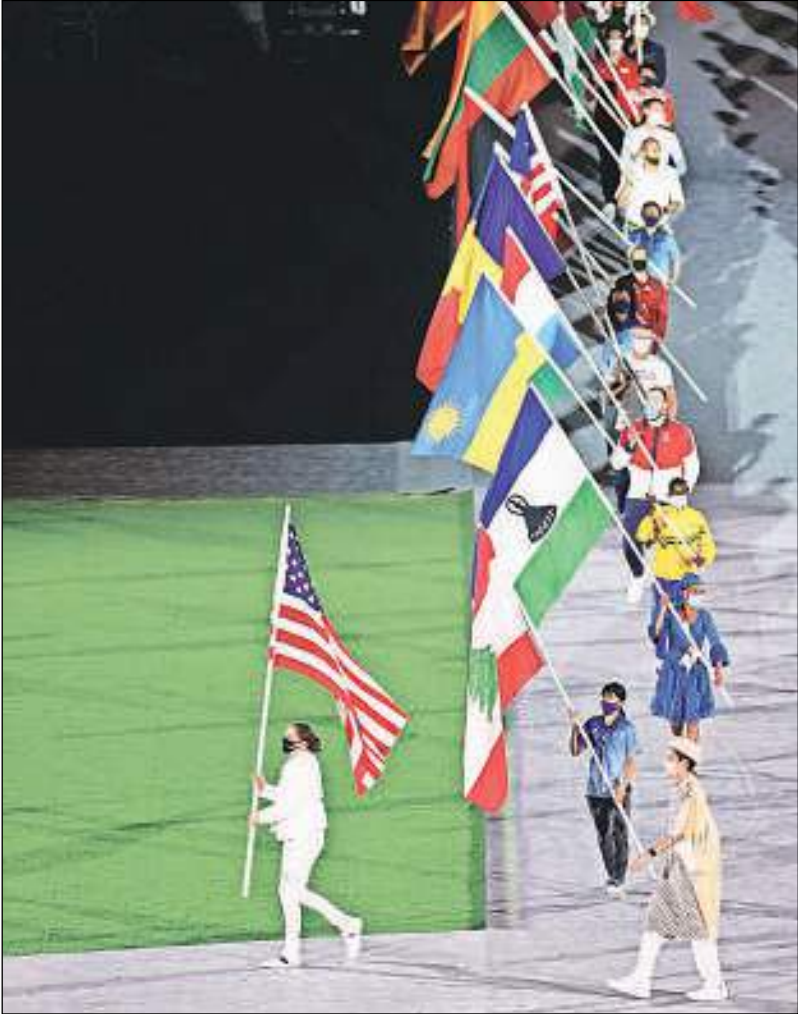
Just like in Rio, where Jordan, Kosovo and Fiji medalled for the first time, the Tokyo Games ended with three new countries joining the medal table - San Marino, Turkmenistan and Burkina Faso. The newest on the list of gold-winning nations are Qatar, Bermuda and the Philippines.

The final tally seemed unlikely with just a few days left when China had a significant lead in the gold medal count. Over the last several editions, the top position on the gold medal table has been the preserve of the USA or China. In fact, the last Games where a third nation topped the standings was Barcelona 1992, with the 'Unified Team' of the erstwhile Soviet Union states securing the most gold medals.

Fluctuating fortunes

The US's gold medal count of 39 this time is down from the 46 golds they won at Rio 2016 and London 2012 each. China, which dominated on home turf in Beijing 2008 with 48 gold, won 26 gold in Rio 2016, just one behind Great Britain who finished second. In Tokyo though, the Chinese have equalled the gold medal haul they achieved in London 2012.

The American haul this term dropped in



The one gold medal gap between the top two countries is the closest ever. Before Tokyo Olympics, it was at Athens 2004 that the USA with 36 gold and China with 32 gold were involved in such a tight and frenetic race. AP

their traditional strongholds like swimming (16 in Rio, 11 in Tokyo), athletics (13 in 2016 and seven now) and gymnastics (four and two). The retirement of Michael Phelps and the withdrawal of Simone Biles affected the tally. But the Americans still managed to gain new strides in other events - wrestling, shooting, golf, fencing, and the new 3x3 basketball and surfing events.

China meanwhile improved their already impressive performance in weightlifting (seven gold medals this time compared to five in Rio) while matching the seven they won in diving from five years ago. Shooting was a successful event, as they clinched four gold, compared to the solitary gold Zhang Mengxue won in the 10m air pistol event in Rio. They also tripled their gold medal in

MEDAL TALLY				
COUNTRY	G	S	B	TOTAL
1. USA	39	41	33	112
2. China	38	32	18	88
3. Japan	27	14	17	58
4. Great Britain	22	21	22	65
5. ROC	20	28	23	71
6. Australia	17	07	22	46
7. Netherlands	10	12	14	36
8. France	10	12	11	33
9. Germany	10	11	16	37
10. Italy	10	10	20	40
48. India	01	02	04	07

*G- Gold, S- Silver, B- Bronze

swimming to three, but couldn't defend their women's volleyball title.

New horizons

The Americans won gold in Tokyo in several events not always considered their strengths. Lee Keifer won an individual foil gold in fencing, Nevin Harrison won in canoeing while Anastasija Zolotic triumphed in taekwondo's featherweight class.

For China, gymnastics was a big success with four gold medals (including trampoline), while in Rio they failed to win a single gold medal. They also secured top spots on the podium in sports like canoeing, fencing, rowing, sailing and cycling.

India's new high

With their best-ever tally (one gold, two silver, four bronze), India finished 48th on the table – their highest position since the 1980 Moscow Olympics which was boycotted by 66 countries because of the Soviet-Afghan War. India finished 23rd in Russia, having won just the men's hockey gold. In fact, the 48th position in Tokyo is India's best finish at any Olympics where they won more than two medals (they were ranked 26th with a gold and bronze at Helsinki 1952).

Golden sunrise in Japan

Japan finished third – their best – in the overall medal table for the third time (after Rome 1960 and Tokyo 1964). The 58 medals

they won – 27 gold, 14 silver and 17 bronze – in 2021 make this their most successful edition. A stellar performance in judo helped the hosts in the overall ranking. In London, Japan won one gold medal in the sport and three in Rio. Over the 15 events in judo this past fortnight, they won nine gold, two silver and a bronze.

The Japanese also dominated the new skateboarding event, winning three of the four gold medals on offer. They also maximised the return of baseball and softball to the Games' line-up, taking both gold medals.

Different name, similar haul

Since the end of the Cold War, this was the sixth Olympic Games where 'Russia' competed as a country. But they could not use their name, flag or anthem based on International Olympic Committee (IOC) sanctions due to the country's infamous doping scandal in 2014. Instead the contingent went by the name Russian Olympic Committee (ROC). This was also the second smallest contingent from the country, 333 compared to the 282 that travelled to Rio.

In terms of total number of medals won in Tokyo, the 71 (20 gold, 28 silver and 23 bronze) put ROC third on the leaderboard. But they were fifth based on gold medals – the official standard – behind the USA, China, Japan and Great Britain.

This was a better performance from the ROC compared to the 19 golds each in London and Rio. The gold medal in the women's team gymnastics event – their first ever as Russia – made the difference.

The Olympic 'Ashes'

A rivalry that transcends sports, Great Britain again pipped the Australians in the gold medal tally, 22 to 17 to finish fourth and sixth respectively in the overall tally, though the latter had a much better showing this time – they won just eight golds in Rio. The Australians, courtesy Arianne Titmus' double gold over USA's Katie Ledecky, won nine golds in swimming compared to the three from Rio. Meanwhile the Brits continued dominating the cycling event like only the Brits can, winning six gold, four silver and two bronze medals just as they did five years ago.

IRISH HERO

SRIRAM VEERA
AUGUST 8

A HORSE carriage from a neighbour, the bunting from a recent funeral of a loved figure is all over her street, helium balloons from a resident, gifts from the local 'lolly-pop lady', a song recorded by neighbour – the neighbourhood in Dublin's north inner-city is waiting proudly for the return of the gold-winning Irish boxer Kellie Harrington.

When she won the semi-final bout of women's boxing lightweight event to enter the final, she plunged for the most philosophical line of our times from Lion King: "Like I said, Hakuna Matata, it means no worries." A role model for the inner-city kids, Harrington is openly lesbian, a part-time cleaner in a psychiatric hospital and someone who loves her job and the jabs.

It's a long cry from her teens when she feared she might end up in prison. "That's (prison) was a great possibility. Thankfully I didn't. There's no doubt it was the boxing

(that turned my life around). I just needed something and boxing was cheap, cheerful and there's a boxing club on every second corner in the inner city," she said in 2019. "I could never have gone to sailing or GAA or horse riding. One, my family wouldn't have had the money and two, they're not in the area. "It's nearly like a tradition in the inner city. Everyone has a family member who's boxed. For me, that was my option. Growing up, you would always see people walking around with their (kit)bags or out jogging. Ever since then I haven't looked back."

Boxing gave her gold and also a partner. She met Mandy Loughlin, who doesn't box anymore but is a coach. "She's not competitive anymore. But that's how we ended up meeting. It's a small world."

Putting smiles on people gives her the greatest joy. Like her cleaning job at the hospital, which she has held for 10 years. She used to be in the catering department before shifted to cleaning. Some patients saw it as a demotion. "Ah Jesus, Kellie" and I'll say, "What's wrong with you?" "And she'll



Ireland's Kellie Anne Harrington after her bout with Brazil's Beatriz Ferreira in the lightweight 60-kg boxing gold medal match in Tokyo. AP

say, 'I'm so sorry you got demoted'. "I'm on the deck laughing, I'm like, 'Don't worry about it, someone has to do it, it's a tough job but someone has to do it,' she told reporters in '18. "It's a rewarding job for me. The job itself is not so great but it's the interaction. They're vulnerable people and I just like being able to go in and put a smile on their face basically."

The Irish Times has this lovely snippet from a meeting with the parents Yvonne, the mother, and Christy Harrington, the father. Here is the mother about the strange events after her daughter's win. "Two lads arrived from a newspaper and they wanted to photograph us sprinkling around holy water from Lourdes," laughed Christy." They said no. "Then he wanted Christy to water the plants with it," said the mother Yvonne. "I think it's because I say I go out into the garden and pray when Kellie is on – as any mother would. But I'm not hugely religious: if you do a good turn for someone, that's my belief!"

The father compared the thrill of watch-

ing her daughter to the famous bouts of Mohammad Ali and Jo Frazier. "I was confident watching her. You know by Kellie when she is getting into the ring when she is focused, focused, you just know she is going to give everything. It was like when we were kids, you got up to watch Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, except that was our Kellie."

There is a famous Dublin landmark near home with an Indian connection.

The Five Lamps, at the intersection of five streets that includes Harrington's Portland Row is in honour of a general who served in India. It's claimed that the lamps symbolise five battles fought by the British in India in the 19th century. The website Dublin Live also posits that it represents the "five lamps lit for luck during the Hindu festival". Whatever be its origins, it's about to turn golden in the night to celebrate the best boxer of their neighbourhood and the world.

On the fight day, the neighbourhood congregated in masks in a common area with a big screen hoisted on a pole from a



TOKYO
MOOD
CLOSING CEREMONY

Athletes from the United States walk into the Olympic Stadium for the closing ceremony.

Japan's flag bearer, one to watch out for in Paris

THEY ACED the debuting sports in Tokyo, and Japan have seemingly thrown down for Paris 2024 as well. One of the flag bearers for the hosts at the closing ceremony was **Ramu 'Ram' Kawai**, the 2018 youth Olympics breaking champion. As per the qualification process, the Kanagawa-born B-girl first floored the judges with a one-minute, unedited video of her performance, then won the continental qualifier in Taipei City before wind milling and head spinning her way to gold in Buenos Aires.



Last December, breaking — the competitive form of breakdancing — was confirmed as part of the final line-up for the Paris Games. And Kawai, a member of one of the most famous breaking crews in the world 'Floorioz', is earmarked to become the first female Olympic breaking champion.

In Tokyo, Japan won 12 medals across the four debuting sports (skateboarding, surfing, climbing and karate); two more if you count the returning baseball and softball.

Vignettes of Tokyo for those who missed out

Just after a stunning light show, a Sunday afternoon park in Tokyo was recreated to the accompaniment of orchestral music. Just to give a representation of what Japanese people are up to in a park on Sunday. An idea germinated to give the athletes unable to get out of the village due to covid restrictions. If they and the fans (not allowed this Olympics) had stepped out to the streets, this is what they would have witnessed.

Sombre to peppy: Contrasting ceremonies

In contrast to the sombre, almost brooding, ruminative theme is the opening ceremony, the end was immensely peppy. Orchestral bands and DJ Matsunaga, a winner of works DJ championship, strutted his stuff on the turntable. Before the Greece flag went up in honor of where it all began.

Eiffel Tower misses out because of bad weather

The plan was to use Eiffel tower in Paris as the largest flag pole in the closing ceremony shots but due to bad weather they had to drop the plan. They did a successful rehearsal of it in June.

SRIRAM VEERA, GAURAV BHATT



CURTAIN FALLS: The word Arigato, thank you in Japanese, appears on a giant screen during the closing ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics on Sunday.

Gold for sound artists

Thousands of high-tech microphones captured every thud, swish, grunt and relayed it to millions

EXPRESS AT OLYMPICS

MIHIR VASAVDA
TOKYO, AUGUST 8



VIKTORIA LISTUNOVA walks up to the uneven bars. Pauses. Mutters some words. Takes a deep breath.

Latches onto the bar and twirls on it. Completes her routine, bows and walks back in an empty, silent arena. Watching it from the stands, it felt a little hollow.

But then, you watch it on the TV, and the experience transforms: when the Russian gymnast walks onto the platform, you can hear her soft, small steps. When she pauses at the edge, you can hear the words she mutters and feel the tension when she deeply inhales; and when her hands slap the wood while she performs, you can hear every thud and the flexing of the bar.

The surreal Tokyo Olympics took place in these two parallel worlds: one, inside the stadiums, where it was mostly deathly silence, and the other on the television, where the sights and sounds felt more intimate than ever before; where it almost didn't matter that the athletes were performing in front of empty stands. When it was announced that the Games would be held without spectators, owing to the pandemic, the grand feat that the Olympics is was instantly reduced to a made-for-TV event.

For Nuno Duarte and his team, this meant the challenge to make sure the emotions of the venue and the feelings of the athletes reached every living room across the world got even more thrilling.

Duarte, the senior manager, audio, of the Olympic Broadcasting Services, puts the channels of information into two brackets: moving images that we see, and the sound we hear. The latter, many think just happens. But Duarte, who has won Emmys for the sound design of the London and Rio Olympics, explains his biggest challenge: making the sport accessible to even those



Nuno Duarte, senior manager (audio) of the Olympic Broadcasting Services, at the International Broadcasting Centre in Tokyo.

who do not understand it through the sound of it. "It's the perception of emotions," Duarte tells The Indian Express.

"For example, the famous movie of (Steven) Spielberg, Shark... if you see that movie without sound, you don't have emotion or suspense. (But) Once you put the sound, all emotions change. It's the same in sport."

To generate the same emotions without the fans in the stadiums, who are an integral part of it, was a challenge. In Tokyo, the organisers tried to recreate a semblance of that atmosphere by playing fake crowd noises at some of the venues.

For Duarte, a purist, this wasn't an option for the Games' broadcast even though it practically became a norm for all matches that were held without fans.

The OBS, instead, decided to transmit what actually was happening in the stadium. "If we do synthetic or fake crowd, we are not showing what's going on in the heart of the athletes and competition," he says.

It is here, his secret 'weapons' made a difference: 3,600 microphones of 32 different models. "It's important to use correct microphones," he says, holding up his latest toy,

which shaped like a spike-protein, hung on the roof of the venues and is so small that, from a distance, it can be hard to spot it at a venue. That mic, a prototype that is being used for the first time at the Olympics, captures the ambient sounds at almost all venues, which helps in creating the 'immersive sound' experience that Duarte is excited about for these Games.

Discreet placements

The other mics are placed discreetly, so they don't get in an athlete's face but still capture all the sounds. They are hung on the nets, submerged in sands and underwater, on the cars and underneath the carpets.

In archery, for instance, mics are placed not just near the shooting line, but they are also hidden under the carpet leading up to the target to capture the 'whoosh' of the arrow when it pierces through the air. In the pool, when the swimmers touch the wall, a production official leans over and dips a camera that has a mic attached to it so as to get the sound of what goes on underwater.

On the golf course, another production assistant walks the entire course with the golfers with a boom mic, not getting too close

to them but close enough to capture all the drama. The toughest, perhaps, is rowing where most of the action takes place in the bay, and it's not always possible to get the mic close to the rowers to capture the sound of the paddle hitting the water.

"Here, if the mics fail, then we use artificial sounds. But that's just a backup option in case something goes wrong," Duarte says. "You need to see a sport like music. All sports have a sound, and we have to capture it. The best way to capture is mics. The international federations understood the importance of the sound of the sport. So, they also allow this to get near to the athletes, to get their sound. If you have the sound, you understand the sport better."

He gives the example of skiing, where some former players told him they were able to gauge if the snow was hard or soft just by listening to the sound of the pole swooshing through it. "That way, they know if the athlete will be faster or slower than the previous one."

The mics are most essential in capturing the sound on sight. From there, it travels to an OB van that's at the venue. There, the engineers make the mix, which is then sent to the International Broadcasting Centre (IBC).

The IBC is where all the action is in terms of the broadcast of the Games. It's located inside a funnel-shaped building by the Tokyo bay and in a tiny corner office, a supervisor, with control to audio from all venues, completes the final checks.

The sound is then synced with the video and then, it is transported through the fibre cables under the sea to all TV stations that have the rights to broadcast the Olympics before it is finally relayed to millions of homes. "That's a simple way of putting it," Duarte says. "All this happens in milliseconds to get it on air."

Sometimes, the broadcasters add fake crowd noise to their production. Like it has happened in Tokyo, in some cases. Duarte, a purist, scoffs at the mere thought of it. For him, an ideal sound of sport is basic. "The one where I close my eyes, I can feel emotions of the venue and feel of the athletes."

Many watching the Tokyo Olympics from home might have had the best seat in the house.

Kipchoge is marathon king again

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SAPPORO, AUGUST 8

ELIJAH KIPCHOGE just decided it was time to sprint away. Simple as that. He never really even looked back. Except near the finish, simply to see if anyone was there. Of course, no one was even close.

Kipchoge pulled away late and pretty much went for a stroll in the park — Odori Park — as the 36-year-old Kenyan defended his Olympic marathon title Sunday.

Immediately after his finish, he held up two fingers to acknowledge his back-to-back marathon titles.

Clearly, though, he's No. 1. "King," one of his fellow racers said as he walked by.

Kipchoge finished in 2 hours, 8 minutes, 38 seconds on a breezy and humid day along the streets of Sapporo. It was 80 seconds ahead of runner-up Abdi Nageeye of the Netherlands. Bashir Abdi of Belgium earned bronze to close out the track and field portion of the Tokyo Games.

This was a running clinic put on by Kipchoge, who even fist-bumped a fellow racer. Kipchoge becomes the third athlete to win multiple gold medals in the men's marathon, joining Abebe Bikila (1960, 1964) and Waldemar Cierpinski (1976, 1980).

About his reaction before making his move: "That smile is the happiness," Kipchoge said. "They say to enjoy this world is to be happy." About that late surge: "I wanted to test my fitness. I wanted to test how I'm feeling. I was feeling right."

About his legacy: "I want to be the inspiration for the next generation."

The temperature was around 77 degrees Fahrenheit (25 degrees Celsius) at the start and climbing to 84 degrees (29 degrees). The men's race stayed at the same time after the women's race was moved up an hour the day before to avoid the heat. It was humid, though, at around 81% as the runners wound their way through Sapporo, about 500 miles north of Tokyo. The race was moved to escape the extreme heat.

BY INVITATION

'He may be an Olympic champion but I still dread sharing a room with Neeraj'

TEJASWIN SHANKAR

THIS MORNING when I was asleep, I got a video call from Wayne Lombard, a dear friend and scientific advisor of the Indian women's hockey team. I picked up Wayne Bhai's call and saw a smiling Neeraj with a medal around his neck.

I was still half-asleep and for a moment thought it was a dream. I quickly went to the bathroom and washed my face and applied some talcum powder. "Bhai tu soh raha tha na?" (You were sleeping?), Neeraj asked me. "Of course, you'll find most people asleep at six in the morning," I replied.

But I was touched. I am not an emotional person but had tears in my eyes which I tried best to hide with a little help of the powder. Neeraj took me through his throws. I was only concerned if he was okay because after the fourth throw, he seemed to be in some discomfort. I was relieved when he told me

he was fine.

He is very different from us. Imagine he has won India's first-ever athletics medal but he's telling me that he's feeling bad for (Johannes) Vetter. He's one of those persons who can never say no to you if you're his friend. I remember him telling me once that a lot of people had borrowed money from him and that he's not even cared to make a note or a list. I honestly feel he's too nice for his own good.

Inspirational

The moment Neeraj sealed the gold, I had a rush of adrenaline and, believe it or not, I went down on the floor and did 20 push-ups. I was so pumped up that Paris 2024 was already running in my mind.

In 2016 after his Junior World Championship gold medal, I was taking a walk with Neeraj at the JSW facilities in Bellary. I asked him what he's done with all the prize money or if he's secured a govern-



Tokyo Olympics gold medallist Neeraj Chopra and high jumper Tejaswin Shankar during the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast.

He's one of those persons who can never say no to you if you're his friend. I remember him telling me once that a lot of people had borrowed money from him and that he's not even cared to make a note or a list.

ment job. He didn't seem interested in the conversation at all and was extending his arm and doing this weird throw action. I asked him, "What are you doing? Why aren't you responding?" He replied, "You know, I can easily add another two metres if I get my block (the extension of his left leg at the point of release) right. I realised that day that money and recognition don't matter to him. He had his eyes set on just improving himself. From that day, he became a person I

looked up to.

But I think he owes me something. After his World junior medal, his Instagram got flooded with messages, especially from women. Although he wasn't interested in any of them, for courtesy's sake, he asked me to reply to them. He told me what he wanted me to write in Hindi and I would do the rest.

We even shared a room for 15 days in Bangalore. Honestly, he may be an Olympic champion now but I still dread sharing a room with him. He's a bit disorganised. If you enter his room, you'll find his clothes drying on the bed or his socks in the middle of the room. I didn't say anything to him because sharing a room with Neeraj was a huge thing for me. We bonded over fried rice and matka kuli for the next fortnight. The only boys' talk we had was about video games. He was crazy about Mini Militia then and now he's into PubG. I'll ask him if he has a girlfriend when I meet him next time.

We spoke before the qualification round

and he just said how I knew for sure that my brother would win the gold. After the fourth round, I was on my feet shivering in nervous excitement. I have not seen PT Usha ma'am or (GS) Randhawa sir but I have seen Neeraj and I am blessed to be born in this generation.

I met Neeraj for the first time in a dope-testing room in Hyderabad back in 2015 and had no idea who he was. I was like, who is this guy with hair. We spoke and later exchanged numbers. Our real bonding happened during the 2016 South Asian Games. We both were among the youngest athletes and I was feeling a bit out of place as I didn't have any friends. I spoke to Neeraj and he told me that I belong here and like other athletes, I too have met the qualification standard to be there. That's where our friendship began and it didn't take long for it to blossom into brotherhood.

(TEJASWIN SHANKAR IS THE NATIONAL RECORD HOLDER IN MEN'S HIGH JUMP. HE SPOKE TO ANDREW AMSAN)