



GST revenue surges past Rs 1 lakh cr in economy uptick

ENSE ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

THE GROSS Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections in July (for sales in June) rebounded over the Rs 1-lakh-crore mark to Rs 1,16,393 crore, data released by the Finance Ministry on Sunday showed.

GST collections in July have increased 33 per cent from the corresponding period last year and 25.4 per cent over the previous month, indicating a pickup in economic activity after a series of localised lockdowns in May during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

GST collections had dropped to a 10-month low of Rs 92,849 crore in June (for sales in May) after topping the Rs 1-lakh-crore mark for eight months. In July 2020, the GST revenue was

recorded at Rs 87,422 crore.

The GST revenue for June 2021 is the second-highest in this fiscal after the Rs 1.41 lakh crore collection in April, which is for sales in March of the previous fiscal, but gets accounted in the new fiscal year.

Experts said GST revenues are expected to pick up in the coming months, even though a possible third wave of the pandemic remains a risk.

The Finance Ministry in its statement said the fall in GST revenue in June was predominantly related to the situation in May, when most states and Union Territories were under complete or partial lockdown.

"With the easing out of Covid restrictions, GST collection for July 2021 has again crossed Rs 1 lakh crore, which clearly indicates that the economy is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INSIDE**RECORD 87.8 LAKH DOSES SATURDAY, JULY TARGET MET****PUNJAB SCHOOLS TO REOPEN FOR ALL CLASSES TODAY**

PAGES 6, 5

Hint of thaw: IT Ministry to meet social media firms after House session

AASHISH ARYAN
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

IN WHAT APPEARS to be early signs of a thaw in relations after an extended public slugfest, senior executives from social media intermediaries such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google, are scheduled to meet officials from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) no sooner the Monsoon session of Parliament ends on August 13.

According to sources in the know of the development, social media intermediaries are likely to highlight a lack of an SOP (standard operating procedure) on the newly enacted Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media

Ethics Code, better known as the IT Rules of 2021.

The intermediaries are also likely to list out the operational issues they faced since May 26, with respect to the new rules. They also plan to seek greater clarity on certain aspects such as monthly reports.

The meetings come after multiple exchanges of notices and letters between the IT ministry and the intermediaries will be the first official interaction between the new IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav and senior executives of the social media companies.

The spat began in January when Twitter refused to fully comply with the IT ministry

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



P V Sindhu on the podium after receiving the badminton women's singles bronze medal in Tokyo on Sunday. PTI

BIG WINS IN HOCKEY, BADMINTON

Super Sindhu Sunday

Wins bronze, is first Indian woman to win 2 solo medals

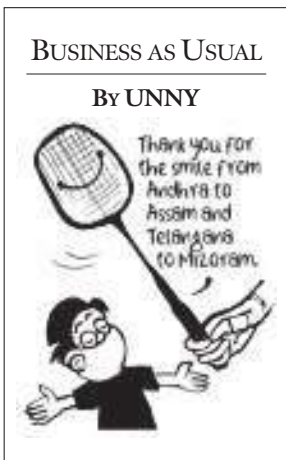
**MIHIR VASAVDA**
TOKYO, AUGUST 1

IN THE end, it felt strangely straightforward.

Playing an opponent who was fast, fit and tricky, PV Sindhu rose to the occasion like she usually does to turn her bronze medal playoff, which was expected to be a humdinger, into a no-contest.

Sindhu became only the second Indian athlete after wrestler Sushil Kumar — and the first woman from the country — to win two individual Olympic medals, dispatching China's He Bingjiao 21-13, 21-15 to win the bronze medal at the Tokyo Games.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**MEANWHILE****ITALY'S LAMONT MARCELL JACOBS WINS 100M GOLD****TEJASWIN SHANKAR ON TOKYO HIGH-JUMP DRAMA**

PAGE 13

Men's hockey team in semis, closest to medal in 41 years



India's Gurjant Singh celebrates after scoring against Great Britain. Dilpreet Singh and Hardik Singh scored the other two goals to seal the 3-1 win for India. Reuters

MIHIR VASAVDA
TOKYO, AUGUST 1

THE LAST 15 minutes weren't just to enjoy. They were to endure.

India were up by two goals against Britain in their Olympics quarterfinals. But if history has taught us anything about India's hockey stars, it's that they have

been serial heartbreakers — raising expectations only to sink them. But then, these young men in Tokyo have no regard for history.

They play with the kind of freedom and flair that youth often entails. They run as if they have guzzled a gallon of fuel before stepping on the pitch.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NE CMs dial down tensions, Mizoram to withdraw FIR against Sarma

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, AUGUST 1

FOR THE FIRST time since the clashes along the Assam-Mizoram border almost a week ago, Chief Ministers of the two states on Sunday sought to dial down the tensions between their people and security personnel.

In what can be seen as a first step towards de-escalation, the Mizoram government said it would withdraw the FIR filed against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on July 30.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah too had a telephonic discussion with Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and Mizoram CM Zoramthanga towards a peaceful resolution of the border differences. After the talks, Zoramthanga said in a tweet: "...in order to prevent any possible escalation of the situation, I request the people of Mizoram to avoid posting sensitive messages and make judicious use of their social media platform."

The Mizoram CM said in the talks with Shah and Sarma, the three "agreed to resolve the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Amit Shah spoke to Sarma and Zoramthanga

EXPLAINED

Dialogue the only way ahead

THE FIRST signs of de-escalation of tension have come right from the CMs of the two states. Inter-state border issues can be resolved only through meaningful dialogue, as pointed out by the Home Minister in his discussions with Himanta Sarma and Zoramthanga.

RS Pegasus ruckus: TMC lines up Opp MPs in defence of suspended Sen

RAVISH TIWARI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

AT LEAST a dozen non-TMC Opposition MPs in the Rajya Sabha are said to have offered to depose against Union Minister Hardeep Puri in defence of TMC MP Shantanu Sen who was suspended from the House for tearing up Union Minister Ashwani Vaishnav's statement on the Pegasus issue.

On that day, July 22, there was a heated exchange between Sen and Puri after which the TMC MP alleged that he was

summoned by the Union Minister in a "bad manner".

Amid the commotion, soon after Sen tore Vaishnav's statement, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Hariwansh, who was presiding over the House, said: "Yeh asansadiya parampara kripya hum log na karein... yeh kaunsi lok-tantrik prakriya hai (Let us not indulge in such unparliamentary traditions, please... what democratic process is this)?"

The next day, after Sen was suspended, Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu described the ruckus as a "clear

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Probe finds calls between Sena leader, woman who died of suicide

MOHAMED THAYER
MUMBAI, AUGUST 1

PUNE POLICE investigating the suicide of 22-year-old Pooja Chavan are learned to have found the recordings of "several calls" between her and a man purported to be former Maharashtra minister Sanjay Rathod in the "four-five days" before her death.

Among the recordings of these conversations in Pooja's mobile phone is one that lasted 90 minutes, sources said.

Pooja jumped off a building in Pune early on February 7.

**Sanjay Rathod resigned as minister on Feb 28**

Rathod, the three-time Shiv Sena MLA from Digras in Yavatmal district, resigned as Maharashtra forest minister on February 28.

"Prima facie based on the evidence retrieved from the phone, the person talking to her (Pooja) appears to be Rathod. She had recorded all their conversations. The conversations took place in the Banjara language so we are

getting a translation done," a police source told *The Indian Express*.

Pooja was from the same tribal Banjara community to which Rathod belongs. Pooja belonged to Beed and was reportedly living in Pune, where she had enrolled in an educational course. Soon after Pooja's death, there were allegations that she was in a relationship with the MLA.

Sources said that Pooja's mobile phone, which contains the recordings of her purported conversations with Rathod, had been sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) in Pune for

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Police survey Dantewada villages: 'Do Naxals hold meetings? Do they stay here? Yes or No?'

PAGE 1 ANCHOR**GARGI VERMA**
RAIPUR, AUGUST 1

POLICE IN Dantewada have begun a periodic survey to ascertain the nature and level of the Maoist presence in villages of the district.

The first 'Panchayatwar Naxal Samvedanshikta ka Survey' (Panchayat-wise Naxal Sensitivity Survey) was carried out in January this year, and again in July. Dantewada Police plan to get all 149 gram panchayats in the district to fill out the survey twice every year.

Some of the questions in the survey are: "Do armed Naxals hold meetings in your village?"

Do armed Naxals stay in the village? Does the village have basic facilities of electricity, water, road, or school?"

There are also questions on whether a Naxal incident had been recorded in the area during the past year, and whether the village panchayat representatives lived in the village.

The survey is the brainchild of Police Abhishek Pallava, and is intended to collect data on the basis of which gram panchayats can be classified into green, yellow, and red zones — green denoting a Naxal-free area, yellow being a Naxal-sensitive area, and red being a Naxal hyper-sensitive area.

"We make claims of Naxal dominance decreasing in the villages, but there is no data to back it. We are trying to get this survey



The site of a Naxal attack in Dantewada in 2019. File

done every six months, to ensure that we have an understanding of the area," Pallava said.

Respondents — the sarpanch, teacher, anganwadi worker, or other government functionaries

apart from villagers — are expected to answer the questions in "Yes" or "No".

If all the questions related to Maoists are answered with a "No", the village is declared a 'green' village. If even one of the questions is answered with a "Yes", the village becomes a 'yellow' village. For a village to be marked 'red', villagers and government functionaries must respond to Questions 1, 4, and 5 in the survey — which ask whether a Naxal incident had been recorded in the village over the past year, and whether armed Naxals visited and/or stayed in the village — with a "Yes".

"In green areas, we get around 15-20 people to fill in the survey. Villages where fewer people are willing to be

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THE 'MEXICAN-HINDUS': THE RISE, AND FALL, OF A UNIQUE HYBRID COMMUNITY

As county clerks perceived similarities in complexion as indicators of belonging to the same race, it allowed Punjabi men to circumvent anti-miscegenation laws and begin their family life in America

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ENTERTAINMENT



STREAMING IN AUGUST

We list all the movies and web series which would start streaming in August

EXPRESS AUDIO

Cast and craft behind rise of India women's hockey team

Mihir Vasavda and Gaurav Bhatt break down the India women's hockey team's historic progress into the Tokyo Olympics quarterfinals, the reasons behind the improved showing.

Muslim Women Rights Day: Naqvi says decline in triple talaq cases

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

MUSLIM WOMEN Rights Day, initiated by Ministry of Minority Affairs to mark the enactment of the law against triple talaq, was observed by different organisations across the country on Sunday.

In Delhi, Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani and Labour Minister Bhupender Yadav attended an event to mark the occasion and interacted with several Muslim women, who had faced triple talaq.

In her address, Irani said the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Ministry of Women and Child Development and Labour Ministry will unitedly work to encourage entrepreneurship among Muslim women.

Yadav said the government has been working to ensure dignity and empowerment of women from every section of society. The government has ensured dignity of Muslim women by bringing the law against triple talaq, he said.

Naqvi said the law against triple talaq has proved to be a big reform to ensure Constitutional rights of Muslim women. "There is a significant decline in triple talaq cases across the country after the law came into effect," said Naqvi, referring to the law that was enacted two years ago.

Meanwhile, a citizens' group issued a statement, signed by 650 activists, academics and students among others, in condemnation of the government's declaration of August 1 as Muslim Women Rights Day.

Addressed to Naqvi, it said, "This government that has worked to ceaselessly one by one decimate the constitutional rights of Muslims in India, now has the temerity to declare Muslim Women Rights Day on August 1. This, to celebrate its passage of its purportedly anti-triple talaq law... that claimed to protect Muslim women's rights, but in reality, had a more sinister purpose—to show Muslim men their place in a new India. To tell them that they can be criminalized even in civil matters."

Among the signatories are leading rights activists Farah Naqvi, Saeeda Hamid, Aruna Roy, Ayesha Kidwai, Mohini Giri, Teesta Setalvad, Subhashini Ali, Kavita Krishnan, Annie Raja, Shabnam Hashmi, Nivedita Menon and Nandini Sunder.

Police: Stopped from selling infant son, man kills him

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

A 33-YEAR-OLD man killed his one-year-old son in Amroha after he allegedly could not sell him, said police.

According to police, the man allegedly beat his son to death after his wife objected to selling him for money. An FIR for murder has been filed against him.

"We received information that a child had died. A complaint was filed by the family alleging that the father wanted some money and decided to sell his son for Rs 3 lakh. After his wife objected, he beat the child in rage. The one-year-old died of fatal injuries," a local police officer said.

The family alleged that the father was angry as he could not sell his son, said police. The accused had allegedly told his wife that if he was unable to sell the child, he would not spare him. The couple got married three years ago and were living in Amroha for the last two years.

FROM PAGE ONE

Sena leader

retrieval of its data.

A second purported piece of evidence too was sent to the lab—CCTV footage from the premises of Yavatmal Medical College hospital, captured before dawn on February 6, approximately 24 hours before Pooja killed herself in Pune.

According to the sources, the footage contains purported images of Pooja with Arun Rathod, a close aide of Sanjay Rathod's. Arun and another aide of Sanjay Rathod's, Vilas Chavan, stayed with Pooja in the rented apartment in Heaven Park in Pune's Mohammed Wadi, where she died.

Police are learnt to have received the FSL reports on Pooja's phone and the CCTV footage from the medical college in Yavatmal last month. But they are yet to ask the lab to test the voice in the recordings against the former minister's voice samples. Police have also received confirmation that the CCTV footage is genuine, the sources said.

Reached for a comment on Sunday evening, Sanjay Rathod told *The Indian Express* that he would not like to say anything at this stage.

Pooja, who initially sought a career in modelling, was popular on social media, in particular on the video-sharing platform TikTok. Her videos had a large following among girls in the Banjara community, and especially in her hometown Beed. TikTok is among the China-linked apps that were banned by India in June last year following the tensions in Ladakh.

Following Pooja's death, the Yavatmal hospital had issued a statement saying one "Pooja Arun Rathod" had been admitted there at 4.34 am on February 6, and had undergone an abortion.

The opposition had alleged at the time that this woman was none other than Pooja Chavan, who had jumped off the Pune building early the following day. Her name had been mentioned as "Pooja Arun Rathod" in the hospital records because she had been accompanied to the hospital by Arun Rathod, the opposition had said.

Pune Police had detained and questioned Arun Rathod after Pooja's suicide, and had also examined his phone. They had filed an accidental death report (ADR) in the matter.

Due to her popularity, Pooja was known to Pankaja Munde, the BJP leader from Beed. Following her death, Munde had tweeted demanding an investigation.

Maharashtra Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnis and his BJP colleague Chitra Vagh had gone on the offensive against the Maha Vikas Aghadi government, and demanded an FIR against Sanjay Rathod.

Fadnis had written to the state DGP alleging that the Pune Police were investigating the case only superficially. Fadnis had sent 12 audio clips to the DGP, most of which were believed to contain purported phone conversations between Sanjay Rathod and Arun Rathod, and one between Sanjay Rathod and Pooja.

Most of the purported conversations between Sanjay Rathod and Arun, which were leaked, were about a woman who had agreed to undergo "treatment", but was apparently suicidal. In one of the leaked conversations, a male voice could be heard telling another that he was under enormous stress, and unless "she understands", he might have no option "but to give my life".

Some of the leaked conversations appeared to have taken place after Pooja's death on February 8. In one conversation that appears to have taken place perhaps minutes or hours after her death, one of the men is heard telling the other: "Do you have her mobile... get her mobile quickly." When the other man says the door

is locked, the first man says, "Break open the door. Take the help of Vilas and quickly get the mobile phone."

Sources said the Pune Police have not sent either these audio files or Arun Rathod's phone to FSL to confirm the identities of the individuals heard in the conversations.

Asked if the voice samples had been sent for testing, Pune Police Commissioner Amitabh Gupta said, "I cannot give you details of an ongoing investigation. Whatever was needed to aid the investigation has been done."

Sanjay Rathod said: "I do not want to comment on anything at this stage. The police are conducting their investigation in the matter, and I will only speak once their probe is complete."

Earlier this month, police recorded the statements of Pooja's parents. They have said that they have no complaints against anyone.

GST revenue

recovering at a fast pace. The robust GST revenues are likely to continue in the coming months too," the Ministry said.

Deloitte India Senior Director M S Mani said the sharp increase in collections for June indicates the resumption of economic activities, and will raise expectations of better collections in the coming months.

"The improvement in GST collections both on domestic transactions and imports, accompanied by the fact that major producing states have shown significant increases, would indicate that the economic activities have resumed across the country," he said.

Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, and Punjab were some of the major states that recorded over 25 per cent growth in gross GST revenue in June. Gross GST revenue includes revenues for both states and the Centre, and is an indicator of economic activity in the region.

GST revenues are expected to rise going forward if economic activities are not hampered by a major surge in coronavirus infections. "Collections in July have seen a sharp uptick as compared to June on the back of economic revival due to the unlocking of businesses in June. If the country is able to resist the third wave, GST collections should increase from hereon," Rajat Bose, Partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co said.

The gross GST revenue collected in the month of July 2021 is Rs 1,16,393 crore of which central GST is Rs 22,197 crore, state GST is Rs 28,541 crore, Integrated GST is Rs 57,864 crore (including Rs 27,900 crore collected on import of goods), and cess is Rs 7,790 crore (including Rs 815 crore collected on imports), the Ministry said.

Hint of thaw

orders asking the platform to limit access to certain content in India. Over the next five months, appointment of executives in the role of a chief compliance officer, a resident grievance officer and a nodal contact person or the requirement of tracking the first originator of a message on instant messaging platforms, kept the ministry and intermediaries on either side of a public spat.

Things, however, seem to have calmed down since Vaishnav took charge, ministry officials said, indicating that the fresh mandate now was to find solutions towards ensuring compliance rather than sending "angry notices".

Sources said that though some of the intermediaries are yet to fully comply with the guidelines mentioned in the IT Rules, there are no warnings to comply immediately or face action.

"The intent of the government was to ensure that these intermediaries remained accountable to Indian law and systems, to the users in India. We have gone through a big pandemic period



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THE 'MEXICAN-HINDUS': THE RISE, AND FALL, OF A UNIQUE HYBRID COMMUNITY

As county clerks perceived similarities in complexion as indicators of belonging to the same race, it allowed Punjabi men to circumvent anti-miscegenation laws and begin their family life in America

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PV Sindhu gets bronze

She also ensured India's third medal of this Olympics — after the silver for weightlifter Mirabai Chanu and the assured bronze for boxer Lovlina Borgohain.

Sindhu didn't immediately realise all of this, though. As a backhand tap landed beyond her rival's reach to seal the match, the Indian ace looked blankly at her coach, Park Tae San. It was only after the coach erupted in joy that the shuttler, too, let out a roar. "It still hasn't sunk in," Sindhu said, her voice quivering.

The glitter of bronze might not match the shiny silver she won in Rio, but Sindhu's second medal is significant for multiple reasons.

It comes in what is universally regarded as the golden era for women's badminton, with contenders from half-a-dozen countries capable of winning on their day. Sindhu, a big-tournament player, experienced that herself on Saturday when, after dispatching home favourite Akane Yamaguchi

with disdain, she was handed the same treatment by Chinese Taipei's Tai Tzu Ying in the semifinal.

That loss had left Sindhu reeling. "I didn't know if I should be sad that I lost a chance to play the final, or be happy that I have another shot at a medal," she said.

But then, coach Park reminded her of the joy of standing on the podium, never mind the colour of the medal, and the heartbreak of finishing fourth. It didn't help, however, that she had to wait the entire day on Sunday to play her medal match, which started at 8.30 pm Tokyo time.

"I woke up, did my stretches, had breakfast and came back to my room. But constantly, I was just thinking about the match. You have to let go of everything and be calm but that did not happen for me today," she said.

The 40-minute bus journey from the Olympic village to the Musashino Forest Sports Plaza was spent in anxiety. But the

minute she stepped on the court, she had her beast-mode on, not showing any signs that the semifinal defeat still hurt her. And the 26-year-old went on to raise the bar with a near-perfect performance, which was the only way to beat a tricky, left-handed opponent who had slayed giants en-route to the bronze medal playoff.

He Bingjiao had been ruthless with her lightning-quick jump smashes, never letting a rival off the hook once she'd taken the lead. She started the same way this time, using her incredible speed to put Sindhu under pressure, not allowing her to control the rallies.

But mid-way through the opening game, Sindhu found her stride and began to pin her rival to the rear court backhand, forcing her to go for lofty overhead shots and not giving any opportunity or space for those deadly smashes.

The Chinese challenger tried to counter Sindhu with fierce body smashes but, as she had shown against Yamaguchi

in the quarters, the Indian found ways to negotiate what was once her weaker link.

Dodging the shuttle by swaying sharply, Sindhu has shown time and again through this campaign the ability to not just defend the shot but convert it into an instant counterattack by finding sharp angles on her return — as she did at 17-11 in the opening game to deflate He's confidence.

Sindhu wrapped up the first game without any fuss. The Chinese tried to engage her in longer rallies in the second, but Sindhu remained patient. The scores remained neck-and-neck until the mid-game break, like it was in the first game as well. But then, Sindhu ran away with the match with delightful around-the-head cross-court drops.

Then came that final roar. This medal was significant, she said, also because of all the expectations. "I would say this medal was tougher than the one I won in Rio," Sindhu said. "But if I can do it, anyone can."

Men's hockey team in semis

They score late goals. They don't concede at the last minute. They win matches. And they qualify for the Olympic semifinals — a feeling that generations of hockey players and fans have never experienced.

India defeated Britain 3-1 at the Oi Hockey Stadium Sunday to come closest to an Olympic medal in 41 years and made it to the last four for the first time since the sport moved from grass to artificial surface.

India will play world champions Belgium on Tuesday for a place in the final, hoping to win the first medal since the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

On Sunday, goals from 20-year-old Dilpreet Singh, 26-year-old Gurjant Singh and 22-year-old Hardik Singh ensured India reached their first

Olympic semifinal since the 1972 Games, when they won a bronze — the 1980 Olympics did not have a semifinal because of large-scale boycotts.

India's feat is remarkable for a couple of more reasons. It comes at a time when world hockey is perhaps at one of its highest levels. And it follows a demoralising 7-1 defeat to Australia in a group stage match before the team recovered and finished second in their pool.

Coach Graham Reid's side made a confident start, taking a 2-0 lead at half-time. Britain staged a late fightback after their star player Sam Ward scored in the 45th minute. The goal spurred on the Brits, who parked themselves in the Indian half in the last quarter. And India's troubles compounded

after captain Manpreet Singh was controversially shown a yellow card, leading to a five-minute suspension with a little more than six minutes to go.

The storyline at that point seemed painfully familiar: a key player is shown the card, and India concede late goals to lose the match. But for once, an Indian team did not collapse under pressure, which was immense in those last 10 minutes.

When Manpreet was serving his suspension, goalkeeper P R Sreejesh stepped up to pull off one massive save after another to keep India alive. Sreejesh's defence held the line and the midfield, at every opportunity they got, pushed forward to take the game to Britain.

Three minutes from time,

Hardik sprinted past a couple of British defenders to score the goal that put the result beyond doubt. Soon after the final hooter sounded, some players collapsed on the field while others, like defender Harmanpreet Singh, broke down.

"Sometimes in these situations, you have to bite and scratch and fight. I'm very proud of the way they did," coach Reid said. "This is a very special group," the Australian said.

There was a tinge of symbolism, too, at India beating Britain to achieve this historic feat. It was, after all, a loss to Britain in 2008 that resulted in India failing to qualify for an Olympics for the first, and so far the only, time. Sunday's win will go some way in healing that wound.

state, and in individual districts," the IGP said.

Deepak Baij, the Congress Lok Sabha MP from Bastar, said he was not aware of the findings of the police survey. "I have come to know about the survey through the media. I will be able to comment once the survey is completed," Baij said.

Congress leader Chavindra Karma, son of the late Mahendra Karma who was killed in the 2013 Naxal attack in Darbha, said the police were overreaching. "How are the police, who are claiming that Maoism has reduced, carrying out such a survey? Why isn't the revenue department or another department looking into gathering this information?" he asked.

Chavindra's sister Tulika Karma, also a Congress leader, said: "It is very important to find out who is conducting the survey and how much knowledge of the area they have. It is good to know where the Maoist presence is less, but a competent authority which is independent, needs to carry out the survey."

NE CMs

Mizoram-Assam border issue amicably through meaningful dialogue".

Two hours later, Assam CM Sarma said what happened along the border was "unacceptable to the people of both the states". "Our main focus is on keeping the spirit of North-East alive... Honble CM @ZoramthangaCM had promised to call me post his quarantine. Border disputes can

only be resolved through discussion," he said in a tweet.

Since the border clashes which killed six Assam police personnel, there had been an impasse, with both states stationing their forces at the border, along with the CAPF — neither ready to back down.

Two Union government functionaries in Delhi told the PTI that the Centre wanted a peaceful resolution to the dispute and Home Minister Shah was in regular touch with the two CMs. "Both the state governments are cooperating and the central government is assured that there will be no more border flare-ups," one of them said.

The two functionaries also said there was no formal request from either Assam or Mizoram for a probe by a neutral agency, and the Centre too did not plan to order such an inquiry by CBI.

Sarma told reporters he had always wanted peace from the Assam side. "We have never tried to encroach on any land... in fact, last year when the border issue had surfaced (during the Sarbananda Sonowal-led government), I had only fixed it by way of discussion," he said. These things were "not good", he said, especially when his government's main aim was "development".

"Assam government is ready to talk to the Mizoram government at any point of time — be in Aizawl, Silchar or Guwahati," Sarma said. "I was in touch with Mr Zoramthanga three-four days back. I called him no less than 20 times. He said he will talk to me once his quarantine is over... I am certain, he will definitely call me back," he said.

Zoramthanga is currently in quarantine after his PSO tested positive for Covid-19. His test results are expected Monday.

On July 30, Mizoram had disclosed that it had filed an FIR against Sarma, and six other top officials of Assam in connection with the violence on July 26.

While Sarma was not summoned by the Mizoram Police, the other six officers were. Assam, too, had sent summons to six officials of Mizoram's Kolasib district and gone after the state's lone Rajya Sabha member in Delhi, in connection with a media interview he had given.

News agency PTI quoted Mizoram Chief Secretary Lalnunmawia Chuango saying that Chief Minister Zoramthanga had not approved the inclusion of Sarma's name in the FIR. "I will hold discussion with the police officer who filed the FIR, and if there is no legal fit, we would like to remove the name of Assam chief minister from the FIR," he said.

When contacted, David H Lalthangliana, Deputy Secretary, Home Department, Mizoram, told *The Indian Express*, "The Chief Secretary has said we will take steps to remove his name. Since it is a Sunday today, what the Chief Secretary has told the reporters will materialise tomorrow, after he holds discussions with the police officers, and does the necessary formalities. Since it's a police matter, it will have to be taken up by the police authorities," he said.

Lalthangliana said while he was not personally privy to what transpired in the call between the two Chief Ministers and the Shah, he had heard that "a step has been taken by both CMs to calm down the tense situation at the border, as well as the various accusations and counter-accusations playing out on social media."

A senior officer from Mizoram said the removal of Sarma's name from the FIR was a first "gesture of peace from Mizoram side." "It is a positive step and confidence building measure that has been taken by us. It's a give and take situation. We have given something... now we hope Assam will also take a positive step," he said.

Chandigarh

CHANDIGARH

1 electric bus arrives, 19 more to come next month

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

FROM OCTOBER, Chandigarh will see a fleet of 40 electric buses running on city roads.

One electric bus has already arrived in the city and the remaining 19 in the first phase will arrive in September-end. This one bus will be operated on trial.

These are all non-polluting buses which are going to be operated by a private firm. Once charged, the bus can cover a distance of 130 kilometres. It will take around two hours and a half to charge the bus.

It was in the month of September 2020 that the Centre had sanctioned as many as 80 electric buses for Chandigarh. This was under phase II of Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India scheme. Chandigarh had floated tenders for 40 buses in phase I.

For the last over five years, UT has been trying to get these electric buses. Trials have taken place earlier as well. Two UT officers had gone to China to see the buses. The six-day trip by Transport Secretary Ajay Singla and Transport Director Uma Shankar Gupta was undertaken. The duo spent three days in Shanghai and then three days in Shenzhen.

It was said that Shangai has about 6,000 buses that have been running for the last 15-odd years and Shenzhen has about 17,000 buses.

It was in August 2017 that the trial of electric buses for 15 days was held in Chandigarh. The trial was jointly carried out by the Chandigarh Transport Undertaking (CTU) and the State Transport Department. During the trial, weight of about 1,750 kg was loaded in the buses and an 11-member team was constituted to prepare a report prepared regarding its pros and cons.

Three booked for 'making' fake bank cheques

Mohali: The Handesra police on Sunday booked three persons for allegedly preparing fake bank cheques.

Those booked were identified as Sunil, Pardeep and Ankit Sethi. Police officers said that the accused were preparing fake bank cheques and were duping the people.

Police files a case. **ENS**

UT police personnel plants, distributes 7,000 saplings

NIKITASHAHI
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

FROM PLANTING saplings wherever he finds space to helping street animals, UT Police constable Aman Deep Singh Pannu has hardly missed any opportunity to serve nature and street animals.

A native of Thurana village in Hissar district, Constable Aman Deep Singh is posted at PO and Summon Staff of Chandigarh Police. Doing his bit to help conserve and contribute towards nature, Singh has planted and distributed almost 7,000 saplings in the last five years.

"Between 2016 to 2018, I used to do things at my level, I made children aware and helped them with studies and future preparations. After 2018, I started getting involved in the betterment of the environmental sector and started making people aware about it. During leaves, I used to visit my village where I set up artificial nests every year birds, to help the fauna of the area. I have now also started placing artificial nests in Chandigarh," said Singh.

Apart from opening a cow house and an open shed for animals in his villages, Singh also organizes regular awareness camps and veterinary camps for farmers and animal keepers where medicines are provided free of cost.

"I have observed birds and stray animals roaming around the city in search of water. So, where I felt that animals and birds keep coming and going frequently, I have arranged plastic water drums and bowls

UT: Nine shops gutted in fire

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

AS MANY as nine furniture shops were damaged in fire that broke out at a market in Sarangpur on Saturday night. Though no casualty was reported, shopkeepers faced damages worth Rs 1.5 crore in the incident.

According to the information received, shop owner Mukim Khan said that he went home after closing the shop on Saturday night as usual. However, he received a call around 3 o'clock in the morning, informing him about the huge fire in the market. By the time he reached the spot, his shop had been damaged.

It was at 1.55 am that the fire department received a call regarding the fire break out. By the time, the fire tenders reached the spot, all the nine shops were gutted.

The fire was brought in control after two hours by as many as 11 fire and police vehicles. The exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained. However, preliminary investigations point towards short-circuiting.

Tricity reports 4 new Covid cases, 80 active

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, PANCHKULA, MOHALI, AUGUST 1

THE TRICITY reported four new coronavirus cases on Sunday. No virus-related death was reported here. There are 80 active cases here now.

Mohali: 2 new cases
Two Covid positive cases were reported in the district on Sunday, taking the total number of cases to 68,451, with 44 active cases. No virus-related deaths were reported. As many as 1,057 people

WORLD LUNG CANCER DAY

'Exposure to air pollution, particularly of biomass fuel, kerosene, can damage lungs'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

IN OBSERVANCE of World Lung Cancer Day, doctors at Fortis Hospital Mohali, led by Dr Digambar Behera, Director, Pulmonary Medicine, sensitised the public around the causes of lung cancer, the possible symptoms and importance of early detection and treatment, Sunday.

Dr Behera said, "One of the main causes of lung cancer is tobacco use which can harm the lung tissue and affect the person's ability to inhale oxygen. Tobacco



At the furniture market at Sarangpur, Chandigarh, Saturday night. Kamleshwar Singh

The market, with mostly marble shops, had only nine furniture shops, all of which were damaged in the fire.

Several incidents of fire have taken place in furniture

markets across the city.

At the furniture market on the road separating sectors 53 and 54, over 10 fire incidents have taken place in the last 14 years.

The fire department officials have said in the past that the presence of certain chemicals in furniture shops make them more prone to fire accidents, as they flare up the blaze more.

PU study on using handwriting to establish writer's gender published in Australian journal

Chandigarh: A paper on devising a method to estimate the gender of a writer from the database of handwriting features, authored by Dr Vishal Sharma and his team from Institute of Forensic Science and Criminology, Panjab University, has been published in the Australian Journal of Forensic Sciences.

The study, which was conducted in collaboration with Regional Forensic Science Laboratory, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, Forensic Science Laboratory, New Delhi, and FSL, Madhuban, Karnal, Haryana, focuses on the identification of individual characteristics in handwriting for the purpose of estimating the gender of a writer.

A total of 150 individuals including 75 men and 75 women participated in the study and the relevant features were extracted from their handwriting. These characteristics were collectively studied and their potential of gender estimation was explored by utilising statistical methods of chi-square test, logistic regression and likelihood ratios. Dr Vishal Sharma, Chairman of Institute of Forensic Science and Criminology, said, "This study can help forensic investigators to ascertain the gender of handwritten notes seized in various matters."

JAGDEEP SINGH DEEP
MOHALI, AUGUST 1

THE STRAY cattle and illegal fruit vendors have become a menace for commuters on Kharar highway. The vendors have encroached upon the area along the flyover making life miserable for the people going to Kharar or Chandigarh.

Desumajra village and Balongi have become two vulnerable points on the flyover where maximum cases of accident have been reported. On Friday, Kharar resident Abhishek

New appointments an attempt to make Congress-mukt Chandigarh: Chhabra

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

CHINKS IN the Chandigarh Congress came to the fore when senior leader and former city unit president Pradeep Chhabra opened a front against some Congress leaders as he said that the committee that was constituted on Saturday is an indication of making "Congress-mukt Chandigarh" and that from now on "every day he will come out with new revelations".

In an open letter, he wrote, "Dear Congressmen, those companions who were made office-bearers in the committee constituted by Congress today, many congratulations to them for getting the new responsibility. Chandigarh Congress leadership today started a new innings for 'Congress-mukt Chandigarh'."

He asked "when such a long list was made, why were the colleagues working for 30-30 years sidelined and why the loyalists of Congress were not made office-bearers?"

Chhabra specified that "this has happened for the first time

that not a single vice-president or general secretary was made from Manimajra. Why were women not given 30% space?"

The party runs not dictatorially but with humility".

The former city Congress chief said, "Why not many capable colleagues got a place according to their merit? The choice is on the head. Many colleagues were also put in more than one committee. We do not mind, but if some more friends were included along with it, the party would have been stronger."

Chhabra said, "After today I will come out every day with new revelations. I will fight for the right, I am with you people. I was a Congressman, I am a Congressman."

On Saturday, the Congress made appointments to various committees. Vice-presidents, secretaries were appointed and other committees were constituted.

Those included in executive committee were Pawan Kumar Bansal (ex-president CTC), Subhash Chawla (president, CTC), H S Lucky, Deipa Asdhir Dubey,

Chaman Lal Sharma, Ram Charan Gupta, Sheela Devi, Krishan Lal, Devinder Singh Babla, Shashi Shankar Tiwari, Kamlesh, Bhajinder Kaur, Pawan Sharma, Harphool Kalyan, Gurbax Rawat, Bhupinder Singh Badheri, D D Jindal, Rana Karamveer Singh and Jatinder Batia. However, Chhabra was nowhere in it.

Those who were made vice-presidents included Pawan Sharma, Bhupinder Singh Badheri, Devinder Singh Babla, Hafiz Anwar-Ul-Haq, Harphool Kalyan, Jatinder Bhatia, Jagjit Singh Kang (Gora Kang) and Jagir Singh.

Vikram Chopra was made the treasurer.

Those who were made general secretaries were Harmohinder Singh Lucky, Meenakshi Choudhary, Shashi Shankar Tiwari, Gurbax Rawat, Vinod Sharma, Gurpreet Singh Gabbi, Harmail Kesri, Love Kumar and Acche Lal Gaur.

Ram Charan Gupta, Jagdish Sharma, Yadvinder Mehta, Ajay Sharma and 20 others were made secretaries.

Several organisational secretaries were made too.

Illegal fruit vendors, stray cattle: New traffic bottlenecks on Kharar highway



Fruit vendors on the highway near Desumajra at Kharar, Mohali, on Sunday, Jasbir Malhi

had been hit by stray cattle while he was coming towards Kharar from Balongi side.

"I was coming to Kharar when stray cattle hit me. My Scooty was totally damaged. I barely managed to escape. The stray cow had hit me while I was taking the turn towards Kharar from Balongi," Abhishek told The Indian Express.

Amit Kumar, a Sunny Enclave resident, said that the illegal fruit vendors had become a menace and they create traffic chaos.

"At Desumajra point, you cannot go without a traffic jam.

It is the same situation as it used to be three years ago," Amit said. "What has changed?"

He added that the district traffic police and the Municipal Council must think about it and take immediate action against illegal encroachments.

SP (Traffic and Security) Gurjot Kaler said that they had been working on the issue and taking strict action against the violators. "If there are encroachments, we shall take action against them. There is an issue and we are looking into it," he said.

The dump that continues to grow

Both the Jaypee group and the MC Chandigarh have failed to process all the garbage produced by the city, as a result of which the dump continues to grow

WHAT A Waste - 3

HINA ROHTAKI
CHANDIGARH, JULY 31

BETWEEN elections for the Lok Sabha or the Municipal Corporation, all political parties promise a resolution to the problem called Dadumajra dump.

In the 2019 LS election, it was announced that the project of legacy mining will help clear 5 lakh metric tonnes of waste, thereby clearing the dump. During inauguration, officers said that soon children will be playing games on waste land.

Little did the happy residents know that they were being fooled. The MC had not taken into account over 4.5 lakh metric tonnes of waste after 2008 in this 'mega project'. It was spending 35 crore to clear 5 lakh metric tonnes that was dumped before 2005.

The project to clear this waste was approved under the Smart City Mission at the 11th meeting of the board of directors of Chandigarh Smart City Limited under the chairmanship of UT Adviser Manoj Kumar Parida in 2019.

It took almost five years for the civic body to just get rid of Jaypee group for not processing the waste. Jaypee group suspended the garbage processing operations in 2016 following which the Corporation wanted to fire it. But the company took



At the dumping ground in Chandigarh. file

the civic body to court for not honouring its contract.

It was in 2008 that the Jaypee group set up the waste processing plant at Dadumajra. Questions over inadequate processing of waste began to be raised after BJP came to power in 2014.

Soon the dumping ground became a battleground for political parties with BJP and Congress blaming each other for the dump.

GARBAGE RISES, PROCESSING DECREASES

Not many are aware that even when Jaypee group, was operating the processing plant, most of the waste was not getting processed.

According to data shared by the Medical Officer of Health in response to an RTI application by a Chandigarh resident, ever since the plant was set up, only a fraction of the waste was processed.

For instance, in 2018, the Jaypee group could process

only 32 per cent of the 16, 882 metric tonnes of waste it collected in 2018.

In 2017, it processed 37 per cent of the waste generated by the city, while in 2016 (June to December) it processed only 22 percent of the waste (20467 metric tonnes).

Ever since the MC has taken up the plant, processing has only declined.

Eighty percent of the waste remained unprocessed in 2020 and 2021 and the rest of it was dumped.

In 2020 (excluding July), Only 13.36 percent of waste was processed in 2020 (excluding July) while this year only 16.09 percent of waste was processed until June.

These days, the city generates 550-600 metric tonnes of waste every day. At a meeting of the municipal corporation in July, the joint commissioner admitted that even if they operate the plant 14 hours a day,

4 REGION



People come out of a helicopter after being airlifted following a cloudburst in Udaipur area of Lahaul-Spiti, in Manali, Sunday. *PTI*

Helicopter reaches HP's Lahaul to rescue remaining 66 people stranded in Udaipur

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SHIMLA, AUGUST 1

A HELICOPTER on Sunday reached Himachal Pradesh's tribal district Lahaul-Spiti to res-

cue the remaining 66 people stranded there for six days, a state disaster management official said.

State disaster management director Sudesh Kumar Mokhta said that the helicopter reached

Lahaul Sunday morning and will be rescuing the 66 people stranded at various places in Udaipur.

Of them, 37 are stranded at Jahlama, 15 at Shansha and 14 at Fooda, he added. The helicopter was allowed to fly as weather was favourable on Sunday.

Earlier, it could not fly due to bad weather for two days, Mokhta added. So, 178 stranded people were rescued through a zipline or ropeway as a helicopter could not fly for evacuation due to bad weather, he added. They were stranded at Udaipur in the tribal district after a cloudburst over Tojing Nullah on Tuesday, he added.

ONE DEAD AS CAR FALLS INTO DRAIN

A man died and another man was injured after their car fell into a drain in Lahaul-Spiti, a state disaster management official said.

The deceased has been identified as Tashi Dorje, a resident of Sagnam in Pin Valley of Spiti, he said. According to the official, an Alto car with two passengers fell into Ropsang nullah nearby Shooling village at 7 am. While Dorje died on the spot, the other passenger Urgain Pasang was airlifted to Kullu for treatment.

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR
AMRITSAR, AUGUST 1

A DEPUTY superintendent of police has been given a year-long extension in his tenure by the Punjab government, leading to many eyebrows being raised in the police and political circles.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), Bathinda, Gurjit Singh Romana, officially retired on Sunday (July 31). But a notification, issued on July 26, by the Punjab home ministry, stated that Romana will continue as the DSP of Bathinda till July 31, 2022. Ironically, the notification by the Punjab government goes against the state's own policy of not giving service extensions for its employees that was implemented last year.

Well-known and well-liked among the ranks of Punjab's rul-



Bathinda DSP Gurjit Singh Romana officially retired on Sunday (July 31)

ing Congress party, Romana had hit the headlines in 2017 after being indicted in departmental inquiries for releasing an accused in a drugs case. He had allegedly withdrawn an FIR lodged against one Gobind

‘Don’t demolish history’: Sikh groups protest against SGPC’s plans to renovate 90-year-old inn

KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR
AMRITSAR, AUGUST 1

SIKH BODIES are protesting against the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee's (SGPC) alleged plans to demolish a large portion of a 90-year-old inn, as part of a renovation project. The latter however has defended itself stating that it was merely reconstructing the interior, and will keep the outer structure intact.

The SGPC has decided to convert 232 rooms of the Guru Ramdas Sarai (inn) into 800 rooms. Sources said it has been attempting to demolish the inn since 2014. However, back in 2019, a team of Guru Nanak Dev Engineering College, Ludhiana, had inspected the building and found that the brick work and structure was in good shape.

SGPC president Bibi Jagir Kaur said, "In view of the increase in the sangat (devotees) visiting Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib, it has been decided to set up new sarais (inns), but sadly some people are deliberately creating obstructions."

She further said, "A plan has been prepared for the reconstruction of Sri Guru Ramdas Niwas as the sangat was not ready to stay here despite having 232 rooms and 18 halls. At present, only 125 rooms and three halls of this sarai are in use and the rest are uninhabitable. The SGPC has planned to develop 800 rooms here while keeping the outer appearance intact as per the present structure."

However, Sikh activist Baldev Singh Wadala, who is holding a protest against the move, said, "All over the world, old buildings are kept as heritage structures, and to

tell history. It is only SGPC that is bent upon demolishing all the old buildings related to Sikh history."

He added: "Guru Ramdas inn is also closely related to SGPC's own history. SGPC is 100 years old and had constructed this inn when it was still young. The building was witness to the Partition and gave shelter to people who had come from newly-formed Pakistan. Then the same people played a big role in providing funds for the development of the building. This building is also witness to Punjabi Suba Morcha and how activists used to live here during the agitation. But the biggest part of history is of 1984, when the building saw merciless killing of Sikhs who were stuck here during Operation Blue Star."

"Every room and pillar of the inn is witness to what happened in 1984... devotees were attacked there... There is a big conspiracy behind demolishing this building," alleged Wadala.

Kaur, however, said, "Renovation will be done without destroying its originality and no one should create confusion among the sangat. Some people are trying to stop the reconstruction by mentioning that it was related to 1984, but that has a connection with entire surroundings of Sri Harmandir Sahib."

This is not the first time activists and SGPC have had differences over heritage structures. In mid-July, a clash had broken out between a group of construction volunteers and Sikh activists near the Akal Takht secretariat outside the Golden Temple in Amritsar, while the former were trying to fill concrete into underground tunnel-like structures discovered during excavation work.

FARMERS NOT TO OPPOSE HARYANA BJP'S TIRANGA YATRA

‘A ploy to cause confrontation with farmers, won’t let them defame our movement’

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

FOR THE first time in eight months, farmers who have been vociferously protesting the three contentious farm laws passed by the Parliament last year, have decided not to oppose an event that is being organised by the BJP in Haryana — the Tiranga Yatra.

The 15-day-long Tiranga Yatra started from a small town in Bhiwani district on Sunday and according to the BJP will aim at creating a passion for patriotism among youths.

The Tiranga Yatra — mainly on tractors and being led by state Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister, JP Dalal — covered a distance of 40km on Sunday after it was flagged off by state BJP president, Om Prakash Dhankar, from Bahal town for its final destination, Loharu.

"The honour of the Tricolour is supreme for us. The sacrifice of those who embraced martyrdom for the country cannot be forgotten," said Dalal. Echoing similar



BJP's 'Tiranga Yatra' started from Bahal and concluded in Loharu, Bhiwani, Sunday. *Manoj Dhaka*

sentiments, Dhankar said that the BJP, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has made the slogan of 'Jai Jawan-Jai Kisan' meaningful again.

Various farmer outfits said they had decided against opposing the yatra, terming the event as a "ploy of the BJP aimed at defaming the agitation if the same is op-

posed by farmers and leads to confrontation."

In a video appeal, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader, Rakesh Tikait, while holding a Tricolour in his hands, urged farmers not to oppose the Tiranga Yatra of the BJP in Haryana.

Tikait said: "The Tricolour is the honour of the country. If you

records by giving them undue extensions. Such officers will be used by the government in the upcoming Assembly elections by the ruling party in 2022."

She added, "If there is a no extension policy in place by the state, then how was Romana exclusively asked to carry on for one more year? This government has no merit and works only in a manner that suits itself."

Gupta, who was first arrested in April, 2017, was released within 10 days of lodging the FIR at Bathinda's Nehianwala police station after a court granted him bail.

Sources later said that no action was taken against Romana after the internal report submitted concluded that Gupta's re-

lease was a mistake on the part of Romana and not a deliberate attempt.

After the inquiry indicted him, Romana was transferred to 6th IRB, Ladda Kothi, in Sangrur, for some time.

However, he soon returned as the DSP in Bathinda after the probe against him concluded.

Contacted, newly-appointed working president of Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee, Pawan Goyal, said, "I am not aware of the facts of the case. The Opposition is just hurling baseless allegations. Chief Minister, Captain Amarinder Singh, will look into the matter and if there was anything wrong in giving the DSP an extension.

Punjab's Finance Minister, Manpreet Singh Badal, didn't answer repeated calls for a comment on the developments.

PROBE ORDERED

NHAI's LED screen in Khanna flashes message in support of Kejriwal, derogatory term for Capt

DIVYA GOYAL GOPAL
LUDHIANA, AUGUST 1

AN LED screen on the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) triggered controversy on Saturday after flashing messages in support of Aam Aadmi Party's Arvind Kejriwal, while flashing a derogatory word that was allegedly directed towards Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh.

The LED screen, installed on the Amritsar-Delhi highway, near Libra village in Khanna, late on Saturday night flashed a message reading 'Chaunda e Punjab Kejriwal di sarkar' (Punjab wants Arvind Kejriwal-led government), followed by a derogatory word allegedly referring to the CM.

Commuters travelling on the highway on Saturday night were quick to notice the message.

While the Punjab Congress accused AAP of "playing dirty politics", the latter distanced itself from the messages and said that the matter ought to be probed, while adding that Congress itself might have got the messages flashed in order to defame AAP.

Meanwhile, police said that according to NHAI authorities, their system (from which messages are typed and displayed



The LED screen, installed on the Amritsar-Delhi highway, near Libra village in Khanna.

Police said that according to NHAI authorities, their system was 'hacked'

on the LED screen) was "hacked", leading to the goof-up. Police said that as per the NHAI authorities, the messages on the board are controlled from their head office in Ambala and the system there was hacked.

Inspector Sarabjit Singh, SHO Sadar Khanna police station, said a complaint has been

received from NHAI. "We have received a complaint from the NHAI and an FIR is being registered against unknown people. The matter will be investigated."

Speaking to The Indian Express, Leader of Opposition in Vidhan Sabha Harpal Singh Cheema said that his party had nothing to do with the messages. "Someone has done this mischief to defame AAP and [Arvind] Kejriwal. We have nothing to do with it. It won't be a surprise if it comes out that Congress itself got the messages displayed to defame AAP and Kejriwal. We believe in publicising our work, not derogatory messages or abuses against someone. The AAP doesn't believe in dirty politics."

However, Congress' Khanna MLA Gurkirat Kotti said "no one other than the AAP could stoop to such a low level" and the party's role needs to be investigated. "...Whosoever has done this, has no ethics at all. The suspects must be arrested at the earliest," said MLA.

Khanna SSP, Gusharandeep Singh Grewal, said an FIR was being registered.

Police sources said that the FIR was being registered under charges of defamation and other sections of the Information Technology Act.

TAMIL NADU ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
(A Government of Tamil Nadu Undertaking)
4th Floor, LLA Building, No.735, Anna Salai, Chennai - 600002
Email: edit.tnridc@tn.gov.in Phone No: 28520000

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
Environmental and Social External Monitoring Consultancy for Chennai Peripheral Ring Road Section II & III
REOI Notice No.05/CPRR/E&S/2021-2022 dated: 02.08.2021

The Executive Director invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from the qualified experienced consulting firms with all supporting documents substantiating qualification to perform the service experience in similar assessments for **Environmental and Social External Monitoring Consultancy for Chennai Peripheral Ring Road Section II and III** so as to reach the office of Executive Director, TNRIDC, Chennai for no later than **4.00 pm (office clock) on 20.08.2021**.

The detailed request for Expression of Interest is available at www.ckicp.tnhighways.gov.in

Place: Chennai
Date: 02.08.2021

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TNRIDC

DIPR/646/DISPLAY/2021

REVENUE DEPARTMENT
Office of The Special Officer & Competent Authority (IMA),
3rd Floor, Podium Block, V.V.Tower, Bengaluru-01

No.SPLOCA/IMA/REC(AUCT)/5/2021 Dated:31-07-2021

E-Auction Advertisement

The Furniture, Electronic items and other movable items stored at different location and valued at **Rs. 1,56,62,328/-** and Vehicles valued at **Rs. 1,82,64,850/-** that were seized in the IMA Scam case are being auctioned through the MSTC Portal. Interested bidders who fulfill all the conditions can participate in E-Auction published on the website : <http://mstcindia.co.in>

E-Auction Time Table
(1) E-Auction Notification Date : **02-08-2021** (2) Last date to submit EMD Upto **12-08-2021 12.00 PM** (3) Physical Inspection of Movable items and Time of Auction **10-08-2021 to 12-08-2021**

Special Note : During Physical inspection of movable items and Time of Auction i.e. from **10-08-2021 to 12-08-2021** Helpdesk will be opened at No. 05, IMA Jewels Lady Curzon Road, Shivajinagara, Bengaluru to facilitate the bidders for registration in E-auction platform, Inspection of Movable items and Vehicles, submission of bids in the e-auction platform and a bank counter for receipt of cash.

For further details contact : Office of The Special Officer & Competent Authority (IMA), 3rd Floor, Podium Block, V.V. Tower, Bengaluru. Helpline No : 080-46885959, 080-26565353, 080-29566556, 080-29604558, 8660519889

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DIPR/DOURO. No. 1013/2021-22

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5 REGION

Nitish meets Chautala, calls it courtesy visit

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, AUGUST 1

BIHAR CHIEF Minister and JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar met former Haryana chief minister and INLD president Om Prakash Chautala in Gurgaon on Sunday, and called it a courtesy meet given their long-standing political ties.

Chautala had earlier spoken about his idea of exploring a third front option on the birth anniversary of his father and former deputy PM Choudhary Devi Lal on September 25.

Nitish, who met Chautala after six years, reportedly reiterated JD(U)'s ties with NDA. The meeting assumes significance in the backdrop of the JD(U) expressing its differences with the BJP on the issues of caste census and population control policy.

JD(U) national spokesperson K C Tyagi told The Indian Express: "Nitish shared a great political bond with Chautala's father Choudhary Devi Lal. Both come from a strong socialist background. It was more of a courtesy meeting than any attempt at political overtures."

“Nitish Kumar shared a great political bond with Chautala's father Choudhary Devi Lal. Both come from a strong socialist background. It was more of a courtesy meeting than any attempt at political overtures.”

— K C TYAGI
JD(U) NATIONAL
SPOKESPERSON

Chautala, however, reiterated that he would continue to meet like-minded leaders to explore options of a third front.

At a previous press conference, he had said, "People are in utter distress due to which it is extremely important to topple the current regime. I will try my best that a third front is constituted. INLD will contact all opposition parties at the national and state levels to constitute a third front."

Tyagi, however, said JD(U) had been working to extend the party base beyond Bihar. "UP

elections are coming up. Our leaders have been talking to the BJP for a possible tie-up. Party leaders will soon start touring UP," he said.

Asked if Nitish was trying to open avenues for himself by meeting Chautala, Tyagi said: "It was a meeting of two socialist leaders. We cannot stop people from interpreting in a manner they want."

The JD(U) will hold its national council meet in Patna in last week of August and endorse election of its new national president Rajiv Ranjan Singh a.k.a Lalan Singh.



Former Haryana CM O P Chautala meets Bihar CM Nitish Kumar in Gurgaon on Sunday.

PUNJAB SCHOOLS REOPEN FOR ALL CLASSES TODAY

Schools must ensure cleanliness, follow Covid rules, do random testing: Singla



At DAV Public School in BRS Nagar, Ludhiana. Gurmeet Singh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUDHIANA, AUGUST 1

PUNJAB SCHOOL Education Minister Vijay Inder Singla on Sunday directed education department officials and school managements to ensure proper cleaning of classrooms and adherence to all Covid safety norms as per Centre and state government guidelines as all schools reopen Monday.

Singla said that in view of the present Covid situation and after a nod from the chief minister, the state had decided to reopen schools for all classes from August 2 onwards.

The minister also directed the district education officers to ensure that both doses of the Covid vaccine had been administered to teaching and non-teaching staff before allowing them to conduct in-person classes, and asked the

officers to also ensure availability of vaccine for school staff on a priority basis in liaison with respective district administrations. He said random testing will also be conducted in schools with a 1:100 ratio for students, and the secretary of school education will be reviewing the situation on a weekly basis.

Singla said detailed guidelines have been issued and they will soon be circulated to all schools. Schools will be conducting in-person classes from pre-primary to senior secondary level. Timings will remain the same (8 am to 2 pm) and parents will have to provide written consent before sending their children.

The guidelines issued by the state government on Sunday read, "If the strength of students is large in the school and social distancing norms are not maintainable, in that case, school head/management may take a

decision whether to hold classes in two shifts or call students on alternate days, at their own level. There must be at least 6 feet distance between students in the revised seating plan. It is advisable to mark the seating that students will occupy." Virtual classes will continue as usual for students who are not able to attend in-person classes.

Singla said that the reopening of schools would play an important role in the assessment of the learning of the students during the pandemic as the teachers were able to contact students through virtual classes only.

He said that after the assessment of all students, teachers would focus on the areas which would require more attention. He said that the reopening of schools will also provide a chance for teachers to teach the practical subjects in a better way, by conducting practical classes.

Leadership program for govt school heads

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JALANDHAR, AUGUST 1

TO TRAIN principals, heads and lecturers of Punjab government schools on "leadership and motivation", the Bharti Institute of Public Policy, under the Indian School of Business (ISB), in collaboration with the state department of school education, started a programme for the first batch of 500+ educationists on Sunday.

The course 'Learning and motivation for effective school man-

agement' aims to help participants inculcate effective educational and adaptive leadership qualities and apprise them of their critical role as informed motivators and communicators.

The course will be available via a "user-friendly" Learning Management System (LMS) interface containing 12 asynchronous modules. This course was officially launched by Punjab Education Minister Vijay Inder Singla at a virtual event on July 16.

The LMS will be available for

access to more than 10,000 principals, heads and teachers of the department of school education, in the first phase.

The modules will also highlight the importance of concepts like "team building, group dynamics, and change management while reflecting on one's personality, strengths, and weaknesses; and improve interpersonal relationships and emotional intelligence".

Bharti Institute organised an hour-long online session for the first batch of participants.

Haryana govt transfers 26 IAS officers, three DCs among them

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

THE HARYANA government on Sunday issued posting and transfer orders of 26 IAS officers with immediate effect, in which three Deputy Commissioners and a Divisional Commissioner were shunted.

Pankaj Yadav, a 2001 batch IAS officer has been posted as the Commissioner of Rohtak Division, while a 2009 batch IAS officer, Pradeep Godara, has been posted as Deputy Commissioner of Charkhi Dadri. Palwal Deputy Commissioner (DC), Naresh Kumar, has been posted as the new Jind DC, with Krishna Kumar being named to replace him at Palwal. T. Satyaprakash has been posted as Managing Director,

Haryana Vidyut Prasaran Nigam Ltd and CEO (designate) of Drone Imaging and Information Systems of Haryana Ltd (DRIISHYA).

PC Meena has been posted as Managing Director, Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitaran Nigam Ltd and Resident Commissioner, Haryana Bhawan, New Delhi, while Balkar Singh has been posted as Secretary, Home-I Department. Anita Yadav has been posted as Additional Chief Executive Officer, Faridabad Metropolitan Development Authority. Ashok Kumar Meena has been posted as Special Secretary, Haryana, Personnel, Training, Vigilance and Parliamentary Affairs Departments, Director Training (Ex-officio) and Inquiry Officer, Vigilance, Haryana.

Dusmanta Kumar Behera has

been posted as Director Urban Local Bodies Department and Mission Director, State Urban Livelihood Mission and State Urban Development Authority, Haryana. Ravi Prakash Gupta has been posted as Special Secretary Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Department, while Sharandeep Kaur Brar has been posted as Director of Skill Development and Industrial Training and Employment Departments and Director of Citizen Resources Information Department.

Amarjit Singh Mann will be Director of Haryana Tourism Department. Ram Sarup Verma has been posted as Director, Environment and Special Secretary, Revenue Disaster Management Department.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

'GOVT SCHOOL NOT PAYING CESS FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKS'

1 & half yrs after activist's letter, construction workers' welfare board admits: 'need guidelines'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

ONE AND a half years after labour rights activist and director of Centre for Social Change and Equity Vijay Walia raised the issue that government schools were not paying cess against construction works -- as mandated under The Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Welfare Cess Act, 1996 -- the Punjab BOCW Welfare Board has in its reply admitted that "it is a serious issue" and that "the department needs to issue requisite guidelines" for collection of the same.

Schools undertaking construction activities are supposed to pay 1 per cent cess.

Walia said he had flagged the issue for the first time in a letter on January 14, 2020, seeking redressal of a number of things, including "non-deposit of the cess by government schools and non-collection of the same by officials of labour department".

He then filed an RTI application and approached the State Information Commission (SIC) to find out what action was taken by the Punjab BOCW Welfare Board.

Citing a March 2018 order, Walia said that the Supreme Court had noted: "It is a matter of common knowledge that there is tremendous amount of construction activity going on all over the country and there is no reason why establishments involved in the construction activity, both formal as well as non-formal, should not pay the cess, especially when they are using the services of construction workers."

Additional Chief Secretary (Labour) Vijay Kumar Janjua said, "We had issued instructions in this regard earlier also. We will take up the matter with education department afresh and also direct officials to collect the pending cess from schools."

In March 2016, as per an official document, the Punjab education department had directed all district education officers (secondary education) and block education officers to deposit the cess as mandated under the Act.

Kejriwal discusses poll strategy with Punjab MLAs, tells them to support farmers' agitation

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

AAP NATIONAL convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had a lengthy discussion with the Punjab MLAs on the way forward for the 2022 Assembly polls.

The party supremo gave directions to the MLAs to fully support the ongoing farmers' agitation against the farm laws.

The meeting with the AAP MLAs took place in New Delhi with the party's state president and MP Bhagwant Mann, along with Leader of Opposition (LoP) Harpal Singh Cheema, at the Chief Minister's residence and lasted about three hours.

According to a statement issued by the party, Kejriwal discussed the 2022 elections and also sought detailed suggestions for strengthening the farmers' movement. Giving directions to all the MLAs, Kejriwal said the party's flag and agenda should be put aside and the farmers' movement should be supported at all levels. "He said today the 'annadatas' of the country were forced to fight for their land and existence, but the Narendra Modi-led government was not giving up its stubborn stance, which was reprehensible."

He reiterated that the Union government should immediately repeal the anti-agriculture black laws and should not introduce the Electricity Amendment Bill, 2021, in Parliament," said a statement released by the AAP.

Kejriwal is learnt to have advised the Punjab MLAs and the entire leadership to focus on the next elections and put in their best effort for winning the polls. The MLAs were advised to go from door to door to tell the people what development-oriented policies the AAP can use to get Punjab and the people out of the crisis and how to make Punjab a prosperous state again. Also, Kejriwal gave many examples of Delhi's development model to the Punjab leadership.

Kejriwal reportedly told the MLAs that every child of Punjab was well aware of the mafia rule of the Badals-BJP and the Congress and that people were eager to oust these parties.



MLAs were advised to go from door to door to tell the people what development-oriented policies AAP can use to get Punjab and the people out of the crisis. Kejriwal gave many examples of Delhi's development model to the Punjab leadership

During the meeting, Kejriwal sought information from all the MLAs about the booth-level activities of their constituencies. Bhagwant Mann gave a presentation on the political, economic and social situation in Punjab.

Sources said many AAP MLAs

urged the Delhi CM to announce the name of the party's Punjab CM candidate as soon as possible. They impressed upon the national convener that with Navjot Singh Sidhu's appointment as state Congress president, it was clear that he would be the ruling party's CM candidate. Kejriwal is learnt to have assured the MLAs that the name of the candidate will be announced soon.

On the occasion, party's Punjab affairs incharge Jarnail Singh, co-incharge Raghav Chadha, Deputy Leader of Opposition Saravjit Kaur Manu, MLAs Kulraj Singh Sandhu, Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer, Budh Ram, Aman Arora, Baljinder Kaur, Jai Kishan Singh Rodi, Manjit Singh Bilaspur, Rupinder Kaur Ruby, Kulwant Singh Pandori, Master Baldev Singh Jaito and Amarjit Singh Sandoa were present.



Citizens turn unused park space into a playground, launch plantation drive

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

AFTER TURNING a park space, which was largely lying unused with garbage in a corner of it, into a playground in Sector 7 of Chandigarh, local children and citizens have now launched a plantation campaign here.

They have planted Ashoka and herbs in the sides of the playground.

For years, the park space was barely being used, except for weddings on rare occasions. The people used to throw garbage in boxes lying in a corner. It was in October 2018 that the local residents with the help of municipal authorities con-

For years, the park space was barely being used, except for weddings on rare occasions

verted it into a playground.

"We have now even engaged a coach to train the children of our locality," said Mahipal Singh, a law officer of Haryana.

The coach Sanjeev Dogra, who is head of Dogra Warriors Kids Fitness Academy, said, "Now, dozens of children from the locality come here for fitness. We have arranged badminton and yoga classes for them."



LUDIANA'S '1.5 MILLIONTH JAB'

Ludhiana district on Sunday administered its 1.5 millionth jab. The district, which is leading the state with the highest coverage in its Covid inoculation drive which began

January 16, has administered 5 lakh jabs in just 43 days, despite being short of supply, according to a press note issued Sunday.

Gurmeet Singh

7

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

TEJASHWI YADAV, LEADER OF OPPOSITION, BIHAR ASSEMBLY

“Can’t have Opp without Cong... TMC, SP, NCP must come together, let go of egos... It’s late, we must work on a strategy”

Yadav feels Bengal polls showed that people believe in secularism, says it is up to Chirag Paswan to come clear on his ideology for any alliance, calls Modi govt reshuffle a bid to cover up failings, and elaborates on why Lalu remains relevant. The session was moderated by Special Correspondent Dipankar Ghose

DIPANKAR GHOSE: You helmed a very intense campaign during the Bihar elections last year. After the polls, you emerged as the single largest party but couldn't form the government. In hindsight, would you have done anything differently?

It was a very important election and for the first time my father (Lalu Prasad) was not physically present with us. The entire responsibility was on my shoulders. We were competing against 'the world's largest party' (the BJP). Many smaller alliances were created to cut into our votes. All the Central ministers landed in Bihar, apart from members of the Bihar government, Nitish Kumar... Central agencies such as the CBI, ED, Income Tax department were also unleashed. So our fight was very important.

A year before the elections, we decided to raise the issue of unemployment because Bihar has turned into a centre of unemployment. The state has a large young population, many of whom migrate out of the state. We even started an unemployment yatra, but then the pandemic struck and we had to cancel everything. Also, it was the first election being held in the pandemic. We were clueless about how things would unfold. We told the Election Commission that if the situation is bad, they can delay the polls as well. So while we contested the polls, we didn't get much time to prepare.

We have often seen that the BJP tries to communalise the atmosphere during elections; they create divisions. Bihar was one election where we forced them to speak on issues. We got a lot of support in our rallies, and our vote share also shows that. If you raise ground issues, people support you. The Chief Minister would mock us and say how will we give 10 lakh jobs, and then his own ally promised 19 lakh jobs.

In terms of resources, we fell short in front of the BJP. If we had one helicopter, they had 30. Since the elections were happening in only one state then, they had put their entire might into it. The mandate of the people was with the Mahagathbandhan, but you can say that the decision of the EC was in favour of the NDA... This also shows that we are not just a 'M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) party', as is often believed, but that we are an 'A-Z party'.

DIPANKAR GHOSE: After the results, you said you would go to court. Why did you decide against it later?

About 12 of our candidates have gone to the high court with evidence. For example, in Munger, when the voting ended, the EC announced the total number of votes cast. But then on the day of the results, more votes were counted. How is that possible? In Hilsa constituency, our candidate Shakti Singh called me up at 5.30 pm and said that he had won the seat with 550 votes. At midnight he was told he had lost by 12 votes. All this evidence will be placed in court.

MANOJ C G: Was giving the Congress 70 seats a mistake?

When the Mahagathbandhan was made, our national president had said that like-minded parties need to come together. That is how Nitish Kumar also joined us in 2015... The Congress has been our oldest ally, whether it is at the Centre or state. We are like-minded parties. This time we also worked on bringing the Left parties on board. We wanted to build a broader alliance and give people an option.

Every party wants to fight on more seats. When you are fighting as part of an alliance, whether it is the Congress or RJD, it is all one. People voted for our agenda. Our effort was to focus on winnability. If a party is strong in an area, it should fight from that seat. If you have to keep the alliance intact, you have to make some small sacrifices, and being the largest party in Bihar, we did that and brought everyone together.

DIPANKAR GHOSE: When you say that you are an 'A-Z party', is there a conscious attempt to break away from the politics of caste?

You have to see the reality... In the '90s, there was a need for social justice. People wouldn't even go to polling booths. Booths were looted and votes were cast. The effort was to bring the oppressed sections, the back-benchers of society into the mainstream. There was a need to ensure equality. That was the reality then. Laluji also said this on our foundation day.

Now, we need economic justice. Today there are many platforms for people to raise their demands and be heard. Poverty, inflation are big problems. In Bihar, in 27 districts, the price of petrol has crossed Rs 100. Bihar grows a lot of maize, sugarcane, bananas, but there are no food processing units for this produce. There are not enough factories and industries in the state which can



WHY
TEJASHWI YADAV

Amid overtures by NCP chief Sharad Pawar and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, speculation about a third front has gained momentum again. Tejashwi Yadav, who proved his political mettle in the recent Bihar polls by spearheading a high-voltage campaign against the BJP-JD(U) in the absence of father Lalu Prasad, has been emphatic in his call for a Congress-led joint Opposition to take on the BJP. The 31-year-old has also served as deputy CM of Bihar

create jobs. No work has been done for it by the government. The condition of farmers is worse than labourers. Nitish Kumar had dissolved the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis in 2006. This increased migration. Even now, Bihar has to deal with both floods and droughts and the government has not found any solutions. That is why economic justice is very important now and so we are raising it.

...I can also say that Nitish Kumar is very casteist. The party whip, the national president of the party, they are all from his caste. So people can run their propaganda... But we are seeing the reality and raising issues.

SANTOSH SINGH: How do you see Chirag Paswan's role in Bihar politics in the future?

I have always wanted to see more youth participation in policy-making and decision-making. We have always had good relations with Chirag Paswan, and even my father had good relations with the late Ram Vilas Paswan. They worked together in UPA-1. Through the media also we have always said that Chirag Paswan needs to be more clear in his ideology. He has to decide (on any possible alliance in the future).

SANTOSH SINGH: Your alliance with the CPI (M-L) helped you reach out to Dalit voters. Are you looking at broadening your vote base further by bringing in other parties into the Grand Alliance?

If an alliance gets broader, you get more votes. If you compare the 2019 general election vote share to the state polls last year, there was a big difference. By allying with parties that are in touch with ground realities, we have benefited, and we have also benefited them. The CPI (M-L) won 12 seats this time, compared to three last time. Alliance is not just about votes and coming to power, we have to ally with like-minded parties, whose ideology matches ours. The RJD is the only party that has never compromised on its ideology, on its commit-

ments, despite what Laluji had to face. Many parties joined the NDA, BJP at some stage, but not the RJD. We have always fought against communal forces who want to sell the country...

SANTOSH SINGH: What if Nitish Kumar becomes like-minded tomorrow?

You cannot trust him. We gave him one chance, and he did what he is known for. During the Union Cabinet expansion, he again did a U-turn. His words hold no value. We don't have a machine to detect that if he joins us, he will not do a U-turn again.

SANTOSH SINGH: You are criticised for not hitting the streets as often as your father did...

You see my yatras, I have covered 18,000 km by road. Now, for the past year-and-a-half, we have been facing the pandemic. We asked for permission to visit families of affected people, but didn't get it. You must have seen pictures of Laluji and I sitting with villagers, talking to farmers... Show me a recent picture of the CM doing any such thing or talking to the youth. He gets lathicharge done on them. The walls of the CM's residence are getting higher, his security is increasing. During his yatras, he just gets off the helicopter, sees the project and returns. I meet common people every day. The CM only meets bureaucrats for analysis meetings. And what is the result of that? Healthcare, education, everything is in a shambles in Patna. We have been raising issues. This is the first time that people in power are looking to find out what the Opposition leader is doing.

If we had not raised our voice, migrant workers would not have been allowed to return to Bihar (during the first phase of the pandemic), trains would not have run, and lakhs of people would have died on the streets. It is because of us that Nitish Kumar has come down to 43 seats. Bihar has a strong Opposition. When I hit the streets to demand the 19 lakh jobs they promised to the youth, I was charged under Section 307, attempt to murder! I face at least 25 such cases... As CM, if you are trying to find me, then why are you sitting on that chair, make me sit on it. I will do your work.

RAVISH TIWARI: The political scenario now is highly polarised. As a young

politician, how do you intend to tackle it in the future?

This politics of polarisation has increased a lot since 2014. If anyone speaks against the ruling party, they face heat from the CBI, ED and Income Tax departments. And those who compromise and join the BJP, all their sins are washed. I remember the time my mother was chief minister. Atal Bihar Vajpayee would call her and inform her that I am making so and so the governor... There were etiquettes in politics. Then too there were different parties with opposing views, but you also had to honour the post that you held. Earlier, people from different parties could meet, discuss issues. But now even if you are seen with someone (who opposes the ruling party) you may face an inquiry. If you write too much in a newspaper, you will lose your job. So why is this fear being created? If you look at news channels, one can easily figure out the political leanings of the news anchors. This is very dangerous. That is why Laluji had said in 2014, that we need to decide on whether the country will stay together or fall apart.

Look at the constitutional institutions... If you look at the design of the RSS and the communal forces, even when they go out of power, the hatred that they have created in the society will take a long time to dissipate. That's a bigger concern.

But they are being slowly exposed. They harped on *achche din*, and now look at the prices of petrol, diesel, onion... They only work on creating distractions, and not on working for the country. Whether it is LIC, BSNL, Air India, Railways, SAIL, what is left? You are making black laws for the farmers, but you don't have time to meet them. You can meet Priyanka Chopra and other celebrities, but you can't meet farmers. We have never seen such a thing... It's the same for the CM here. There is a dictatorial attitude, everything is centralised. We have to come together for the country.

RAVISH TIWARI: Have you tried to figure out what works in favour of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi?

People need an option... The Congress is a pan-India party. The Opposition cannot come together without the Congress. The Congress has to become the foundation of any such Opposition. Also, it is quite late now and we should start making a strategy on how we will reach out to the people. There is no dearth of issues, people are facing problems and they want this government to fall. People are admitting that they voted for the wrong party. So it is our responsibility to present an alternative to the country. Everyone has to come together, keep aside their egos and differences to save the country. If you remove the regional parties, there are at least 200 seats where the Congress and BJP are in a direct contest. But in areas where the regional parties are strong, they should be put in the driving seat. The time has come for this... Now, what steps are taken, that remains to be seen.

The BJP-RSS has one agenda, a Hindu nation... (Our) strategy should be based on real issues. In Bihar polls, we stuck to unemployment, peace

towards his ideology. He does what he says, we should learn from him. He never compromised on his views and ideology for gaining power. Laluji is a mass leader. The way he communicates with people... he is linked to the poor, villages. Even the agriculture minister today will not know what crops grow in the country. In fact, I would say that Laluji should have been in

Parliament now. It feels empty without him.

DIPANKAR GHOSE: Has the BJP forced Opposition parties to rethink stand on communal politics? What will your strategy be for 2024?

The BJP-RSS has one agenda, they want a Hindu nation. They have a tried and tested formula of communalism. But the strategy should be based on real issues. We have to raise those issues. In Bihar polls too they tried to do it, but we stuck to issues such as unemployment. We talk about peace, and where there is peace there is prosperity. We need to talk in that direction. But there must have been some shortcomings in our communication... The way the BJP, RSS do their publicity of religious and other issues... We have to find a solution for it...

Also, it should not be claimed that some party only talks of Muslims (referring to Sonia Gandhi's 2018 comment that the BJP had managed to convince people that the Congress was a Muslim party). Both Hindus and Muslims can be communal... It cannot be that only Hindus are communal and Muslims aren't.

...When L K Advaniji's Rath Yatra was stopped (in Bihar by Lalu Prasad in 1990), the (Ram Mandir) site was disputed. After the court's decision, things became clear. We had said that we will go with the court order... We need to seriously think of a solution... Even in the media, we don't have discussions on economy, GDP, development. They have debates on Hindu-Muslim, *mandir-masjid*, Dawood, Pakistan. You have to bring the real issues to the forefront. But their publicity machinery is huge... They have so much money. Their office in Delhi is worth thousands of crores. During demonetisation, they bought land in all districts of the country. The solution is only to raise people's issues. People have seen that Modi ji has done nothing for the past seven years, and he has made his ministers scapegoats after he got flak for his lack of work.

DIPANKAR GHOSE: How do you read the Bengal election results? Also, are you in touch with Opposition leaders such as Mamata Banerjee and Akhilesh Yadav?

The people of Bengal have given a good message to the country. It shows that people believe in secularism. They voted for it, and for Mamata Banerjee's work. The BJP's efforts failed there. Regional party leaders such as Mamata Banerjee, Akhilesh Yadav, Sharad Pawar, we meet from time-to-time. Everyone is concerned about the country. Very soon there will be a strategy in place. I have always said that we should all come together and ensure that our campaign reaches the people. We should go to every state together and tell people what promises the government has not fulfilled, what the issues are... If we have not been able to convince people so far, it means there are some mistakes, and we are not being seen as 'one'. So we need to let go of our egos and differences, who gets what post, we must forget that. If the country survives, we will get posts. If they (the BJP) stay for some more time, there will be no country...

RAVISH TIWARI: Is the internal crisis within the Congress impeding the consolidation of the Opposition?

The Congress has to deal with it and come out stronger. They have to concentrate on those 200 seats... There is no point in delaying the problems. Now I don't know if they (the Centre) use Covid-19 as an excuse to stop us from hitting the ground... We have to make a back-up plan for that too.

LALMANI VERMA: What is your suggestion for the Opposition in UP?

I have said what should happen. Thereafter, it is up to individual regional parties. I cannot force anyone. I cannot tie someone up. Who agrees, who comes together, who doesn't, is their decision. But there is one thing. When in the future, history is read, people will not forgive us.

DIPANKAR GHOSE: Do you see Nitish government completing its term?

No one can predict what happens in politics. No other state has seen four governments in four years other than Bihar... Nitishji said last year that this will be his last election, but no one trusts him. People of Bihar want this government to fall. Let's see.

Illustration: Suvajit Dey

ANANT GOENKA: Based on the Cabinet reshuffle, do you think the Prime Minister is giving any signals to Nitish Kumar about the alliance in Bihar?

It doesn't matter if he was giving a signal or not, but it showed that Modi ji has failed. It was an attempt to do another image makeover and fool the people, that something will happen! Modi ji has been all about distractions. At a time when petrol prices are at an all-time high, businesses are suffering and the economy is facing a slump, the reshuffle was just to show people that something is being done.

ABHISHEK ANGAD: What were your interactions like with you father when he was at the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences in Ranchi?

We would meet him on Saturdays. He was shifted to RIMS from Birsa Munda jail and his health report was released every week. He has been a kidney and heart patient. As a son, I was quite worried because RIMS neither has facilities for kidney treatment nor for heart treatment. That is why we raised questions since it was happening under the (former) BJP government (in Jharkhand)... When I met him, I would update him about what is happening outside, the political developments... We would talk about his health, family, Bihar...

VANDITA MISHRA: What role will Lalu Prasad play in this new RJD that you are now steering forward?

Laluji has had a long political career. He ensured social justice. As railway minister, he managed a profit of Rs 90,000 crore for the sector. In every budget, he reduced fares. He gave Bihar four factories, and even now there isn't a fifth one. He launched the Garib Rath. From Harvard University to INSEAD, Singapore, all honoured him for his efforts to pull the Railways out of debt. He was known as a management guru. He has done a lot of work. We should not forget it. The youth of today will see how dedicated he is



The Indian **EXPRESS**

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

WALKING NEP TALK

A year later, the national education policy remains a guide to the future, but there are challenges

IT'S BEEN A year since the National Education Policy 2020 laid out a map for a long-overdue re-imagining of Indian education. Twelve months is too short a time to evaluate a policy which proposes vital shifts in education — from creating a system in which “children not only learn, but more importantly learn how to learn”, to one in which “pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, inquiry-driven, flexible” and in which there is “no hard separation between arts and sciences”. The Covid-19 pandemic has indeed slowed down the implementation of this transition, but some proposals are poised to see light of day this academic year, including an academic credit bank for undergraduate students. In his speech marking a year of NEP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also announced that 14 engineering colleges across eight states will teach undergraduate programmes in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali and Marathi from the new academic year. This has the potential to open up technical education to the vast majority of students for whom English remains a handicap. But it is important not to understate the challenge: The government will need to put in significant resources and work in creating such a knowledge ecosystem.

The tension between NEP's ambition and facts on the ground is evident on other counts too. The call for greater autonomy to higher educational institutions is undercut by the fact that several universities continue to function without vice-chancellors. Last fortnight, the Centre appointed VCs to 12 universities after a delay of months — 10 central universities, including Delhi University and JNU, remain without full-time heads. The NEP asks for the highest priority to literacy and numeracy but the government has slashed the school education budget by almost Rs 5,000 crore; higher education has suffered a Rs 1,000 crore cut. Without financial resources and committed people to take ownership of institutions and policy, it will be hard to walk the talk. While the PM hailed the transition to online learning, the pandemic's unkindest cut has been in deepening the inequality in access to education. Covid might have accelerated at least one aspect of change. The cancellation of the Class XII board examinations and subsequent challenges for institutes of higher education is a vindication of NEP's prescription — it is time to let go of the old normal in examinations and university enrolment.

The NEP forcefully lends its weight to the idea of institutional autonomy. But critical thinking cannot be decreed into existence. It needs an enabling eco-system, which is sadly missing. The most recent instance of a Madhya Pradesh police superintendent, acting on the complaints of ABVP, forcing a university to exit a webinar because it disapproved of some of the speakers is an illustration of the shrinking of the campus as a space for ideas and creativity. As the Centre and other stakeholders embark on NEP's implementation, the promise — and the challenges — are both evident.

THE KERALA CHALLENGE

State government must strategise vaccine delivery to most affected districts. Centre should ramp up vaccine supplies

AFTER FALLING APPRECIABLY for most of May and June, India's Covid graph plateaued last month. Kerala has been one of the notable outliers in the country's second wave recovery. The state added more than 20,000 cases every day on five days last week — about half the country's caseload — and its positivity rate is more than six times the national average. The BJP has ascribed the spike to the relaxation of curbs during Eid, while the Kerala government has blamed the rising caseload on vaccine shortage. Though there is truth to both these claims, it's also apparent that Kerala's situation is a complicated one, and resolving it will need the Centre and state government to put their heads together — a blame game is the last thing the state needs at this critical juncture. It's, therefore, welcome that the Centre has dispatched a team of experts to study the situation in the state's worst affected areas.

The nationwide serosurvey results indicate that less than 45 per cent of Kerala's population has been exposed to the virus — way below the national average of 68 per cent. It seems that the state's initial success in curbing the spread of the infection is now working against it: A majority of its population lacks antibodies against the more infectious variants driving the second wave. Kerala has done well to keep its case fatality rate low — at 0.87 per cent, it's the lowest amongst the states that reported the most fatalities last week. But with the state's RO figure — number of people to whom an infected person can transmit the disease — going past the danger threshold of 1, the state has lost about 100 people to Covid every day in the past 10 days. The Kerala government has attempted to strike a balance between lives and livelihoods with a weekly lockdown policy and by restricting the working hours at business centres. But with people crowding markets during the limited hours at their disposal, such restrictions could end up becoming counterproductive.

The serosurvey results offer more clues to solving the Kerala conundrum. Though the state's vaccine coverage is much above the national figure, the survey indicates that a far larger section of its population will need vaccine-produced antibodies in the next few weeks to check the second wave. With vaccines continuing to be scarce, the state government will need to strategise their rollout — giving special attention to districts with high infection incidence. The expert team's insights could prove invaluable in this respect, as well as in fine-tuning other containment measures. At the same time, the Centre must not waver from its commitment to increase vaccine supply from August onwards.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



VIKRAM SINGH MEHTA

THE SPREAD AND speed of the destruction caused by climate change in recent weeks present our new Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas with a policy dilemma, if not a moral one: How to redefine the supply-side priorities of his Ministry in the face of the imperatives of atmanirbharta with the starkest evidence yet of the consequences of continued dependence on fossil fuels. This article offers five suggestions to help crack the conundrum.

The events of the past month have caught even the most alarmist of climate scientists by surprise. In China, 1.2 million people were displaced in the province of Henan by what was reported as a “once in a 1,000-year down-pour”. In Russia, the Siberian city of Yakutsk, better known for its subzero winter temperatures faced the “worst-ever air pollution” because of smoke from 200 nearby wildfires. In Europe, flash floods killed approximately 200 people in Germany and Belgium. And in North America, city after city was scorched by unprecedentedly high temperatures.

These events brought into sharp relief the reality that there was no ducking the consequential implications of the “fossil fuels as usual” scenario. This reality offers, however, cold comfort to the Minister of Petroleum. This is because the Indian economy is dependent on fossil fuels and there is no discernible end in sight to this dependence. Further, India imports approximately 85 per cent of its crude oil requirements and is exposed to the volatility of the international oil market. There is good reason, therefore, for the Minister to rank the harnessing of India's indigenous petroleum resources by intensifying exploration as a top policy priority.

My first suggestion is that he should review this ranking and that the government should scale back its emphasis on domestic exploration. I make this suggestion because I believe the resources earmarked for exploration can be deployed more productively elsewhere. A review of the public sector's exploration and production (EP) track record suggests that whilst India may well be sitting on substantial hydrocarbon reserves, as is

Quickening pace of climate change means new petroleum minister must become progenitor of energy transition

Pre-Covid, we imported approximately 4.5 million barrels of oil, of which 50 per cent or so came from the Middle East, predominantly Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. This region faces deep political and social fault lines and there is no knowing when our supply lines might get ruptured. We would therefore be well-advised to build contingency safeguards.

claimed by our petroleum scientists, these reserves are not easy to locate and, even when located, difficult to develop and produce on a commercial basis. There have been few substantive commercial discoveries in recent years, in large part because the bulk of the reserves are in complex geological structures and harsh terrain (Himalayan foothills or deep waters offshore). They are difficult to find but even when found, the costs incurred are often so high that except in market conditions of high prices, the discovery is not commercially viable. The government has often compounded this economic challenge by placing administrative limits on marketing by companies and their pricing freedom. The fundamental point is that EP in India is a high-risk activity, and this risk is even greater today because of the longer-term structural softness of the petroleum market. There is good reason to question the expending of public resources on wildcat exploration.

Flowing from this contrarian thought, my second suggestion is that ONGC allocate increasing resources to improving the productivity of its producing fields. Years ago, when I was part of the petroleum industry, the average oil recovery rate in India was around 28 per cent. That is, for every 100 molecules discovered, only 28 were monetised. This number did not compare well with the global average of around 45 per cent for fields of comparable geology. The recovery rate may be better today but if there is still a wide gap, the application of enhanced oil recovery (EOR) technology offers a relatively low-risk avenue for increasing domestic production. ONGC might have to shed a part of its equity in its ageing crown jewel, Mumbai High, to get the best technology service partner.

The consequential increment in production from EOR will not materially reduce our vulnerability to unexpected supply disruptions. Pre-Covid, we imported approximately 4.5 million barrels of oil, of which 50 per cent or so came from the Middle East, predominantly Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. This region faces deep political and social fault lines and there is no knowing when our supply lines

might get ruptured. We would, therefore, be well-advised to build contingency safeguards. We hold currently strategic reserves equivalent to 12 days of imports. The government has approved plans to increase this buffer to 25 days. By comparison, China, the EU, South Korea and Japan hold between 70-100 days of reserves. We do not need to create such a large buffer, but I would suggest we increase it to around 35 days equivalent. This should be done by constructing a cavern in Jamnagar, the entrepôt that receives approximately 60 per cent of our crude oil imports and is well connected through tanks and pipelines to the hinterland refineries.

My fourth suggestion is to restructure and reorganise the public sector petroleum companies. In the first instance, the upstream assets should be consolidated under ONGC (the upstream assets of BPCL, IOC, HPCL, and GAIL should pass onto ONGC) and GAIL should be unbundled into a public utility gas pipeline company (its non-pipeline assets should be allocated to the upstream company and/or one of the downstream entities). Thereafter, these companies should be encouraged to look beyond hydrocarbons to build an “energy” enterprise. I believe this restructuring will help cut back the “avoidable” costs of intra public sector competition, reduce the inefficiencies of “sub-scale” operations and provide a focused platform for balancing the shorter-term need to provide secure and affordable hydrocarbons with the medium and longer-term imperative of developing clean energy.

My final thought: The petroleum minister should not, in the current context, see his responsibility through the siloed prism of oil and natural gas. He should broaden the aperture and become the progenitor of the energy transition. The dilemma referred to in the opening sentence will be easier to resolve if he develops his priorities within the framework of clean energy and in collaboration with his cabinet colleagues.

The writer is chairman, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)



MANJU MENON AND KANCHI KOHLI

ON JULY 23, the Supreme Court heard five petitions on the evictions of Khori Gaon, a large informal workers' settlement at the foothills of the Aravallis on the Delhi-Haryana border. Four petitions arose after the SC ordered the petitioner in the lead case, the Municipal Corporation of Faridabad (MCF), to evict the basti in the middle of the pandemic in 2020. Following these orders, nearly a lakh people have been pushed into the throes of suffering as most of them have lost their only home in this world.

This judicial action has also been extended to “all unauthorised structures” in Haryana. This is demonstrative of the return to an era of green imperialism, wherein using “rule of law”, well-maintained forests around the country are routinely handed over for capitalist profiteering through private mines, dams and real estate development while the landless poor are displaced from public lands in the name of restoring ecologies.

The razing of Khori Gaon is a jarring example of forest conservation models that frame forests versus people. While our environmental institutions keep reestablishing this framing, projects done by ecologists and social activists have tried to break down the hard boundaries between these constituencies. The Forest Rights Act was enacted to restore the dignity and place-based rights of Adivasi communities and forest workers. Policies for the relocation of people even from protected areas and tiger reserves now eschew forced evictions and encourage voluntary rehabilitation.

THE GREEN WARRANT

SC order on Khori Gaon basti is example of coercive environmentalism

The Forest Rights Act was enacted to restore the dignity and place-based rights of Adivasi communities and forest workers. Policies for the relocation of people even from protected areas and tiger reserves now eschew forced evictions and encourage voluntary rehabilitation. Yet, this middle ground of humane approaches to conservation keeps getting hijacked by top-down, coercive models the state is used to.

Yet, this middle ground of humane approaches to conservation keeps getting hijacked by top-down, coercive models the state is used to.

Through the MCF's case, the Haryana state government and judiciary are aiming to create a tabula rasa by violently erasing a large settlement and restoring forest cover in the Aravallis using the colonial Punjab Land Presentation Act of 1900. The MCF has the ignominious success of vacating 150 acres of urban land with the most dense habitation of affordable homes of the working poor. The basti residents have been repeatedly vilified as “forest encroachers” even though most of them have some documentation to show that they were sold small plots of land. But no government agency has bothered to check the documents and trace under whose patronage an entire settlement of nearly 10,000 houses came up on public land. Such an investigation would probably point in politically inconvenient directions. This might explain the hurry to tear down the whole basti.

Environmentalists and housing rights activists are agast that the orders of the highest court have been instrumentalised to unleash the worst form of violence against a community that already has its back to the wall due to the pandemic. The Municipal Corporation shut off electricity and water tankers to the basti in the middle of the summer. When the residents protested, many were beaten and arrested. The demolitions started the day the monsoons arrived in these parts and now

many of them are homeless and sick.

The SC has expanded this case to cover all forest violations in Haryana. That is a long list because forest land under the PLPA covers 25 per cent of Haryana. It includes lands that are public and privately owned in rural and urban areas. The SC's aim is ostensibly to treat all encroachers as equals. But they are all clearly not equal by class, by opportunity, by location or by nature of the violation. Ishita Chatterjee's scholarly work on Khori Gaon shows that this basti should be seen as restorer of quarry land, because the residents turned these areas that were mined till the SC's mining ban in 2002, into liveable habitats by using individual and community labour. This is no mean feat when governments around the world struggle to reuse mined areas after the earth has been polluted and exhausted of all its productivity.

Poor and migrant workers in cities have little choice but to make homes on public land because the state simply will not provide for them. The state governments that are ever willing to extract their labour loathe to spend on their housing and welfare. The people of Khori Gaon are acutely aware that they are unwanted by the political and bureaucratic establishment that gave them voter IDs, Aadhaar cards, ration cards and other identification. But it has come as a jolt to them that the Supreme Court of India has abandoned them.

The authors are with the Centre for Policy Research.

AUGUST 2, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

FLOOD WOES

FLOODS IN THE major rivers of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar had by the night of August 1 engulfed 37 districts in the two states, while in Assam the deluge compelled the authorities to seek the help of the army in Dibrugarh subdivision for relief and rescue work. According to official reports, about 9.3 million people were in distress in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar caused by heavy rains and floods which have destroyed crops, flattened or washed away houses and breached roads. The Army was called out to assist the civil authorities in Telpani area of the Dibrugarh subdivision. The surging waters of the Buridihing washed away 200 metres of the embankment on July 31.



JAIPUR DOC AWARDED

A 54-YEAR-OLD DOCTOR from Jaipur who has spent the past five years developing artificial legs for thousands of amputees has been selected to receive the 1981 Ramon Magsaysay award. The award established in honour of the third president of the Philippines cited Dr Pramod Karan Sethi for “applying his surgical genius” which enabled the crippled and limbless from Rajasthan to resume near-normal lives. The artificial leg Dr Sethi and his associates have devised is called Jaipur foot. “When a formerly legless man with his new Jaipur feet and limbs bicycles off to his village, he is a new man with an opportunity to become a productive member of the community,” the citation noted.

CONG (U) ACCOUNT'S

THE RESERVE BANK of India has instructed all the banks in the country to freeze the accounts of Congress (U) following instructions from the Union government. A circular to this effect issued by the Agriculture and Credit Department of the RBI was sent to all state, central and primary cooperative banks on July 25. The circular stated: “The Election Commission has derecognised the Congress U and declared the Indian National Congress (I) as the real Congress. This decision of the Election Commission may please be taken note of with a view to ensuring that the deposits of the Indian National Congress are not allowed to be withdrawn or operated upon by the party which has been derecognised.”



Chandigarh



9 THE IDEAS PAGE

Renewing the tryst with destiny

India has done well to reduce poverty. Policy must now aim at improving education, enhancing skills, rather than giving freebies



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI

IN ANOTHER TWO weeks, India will be celebrating its 75th Independence Day. Year-long celebrations are likely to follow. This is also an occasion to reflect on how India's "tryst with destiny" has played out over these years. India started its journey as a newborn nation with deep wounds of Partition. Independent India's population was roughly 340 million, with more than 70 per cent extremely poor, and only 12 per cent literate.

Winston Churchill had famously warned: "If Independence is granted to India, power will go to the hands of rascals, rogues, free-booters, all Indian leaders will be of low calibre and men of straw. They will have sweet tongues and silly hearts. They will fight amongst themselves for power and India will be lost in political squabbles. A day would come when even air and water would be taxed in India".

Partition made things grim. But Jawaharlal Nehru said in the Constituent Assembly on August 14, 1947, "At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment, we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and still to the larger cause of humanity....The service of India means, the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity".

It is against these predicaments and pledges that we need to assess how far we have travelled. One can find both Churchill and Nehru to be right in varying degrees. But here let me focus on the basic necessities -- poverty, illiteracy and food.

From more than 70 per cent poor in 1947, the head-count ratio (HCR) of poverty in India dropped to 21.9 per cent in 2011, as per the erstwhile Planning Commission's estimates based on the Tendulkar poverty line. The drop in HCR during 2004-11 was almost three times faster than during 1993 to 2004, and much faster than during the socialist era of 1947-91. But many Leftists disputed the poverty line, and the government had to set up a committee under C Rangarajan, which estimated HCR poverty at 29.5 percent in 2011. It is ironic that after 2011, we have no official estimates of poverty. But the World Bank estimated India's HCR to be between 8.1 and 11.3 per cent in 2017, as per the international definition of per capita income of \$1.9 per day (at 2011 PPP). Using the same definition, the World Poverty Clock estimates India's poverty



CR Sasikumar

at just 6 per cent in 2021. One can quibble with this definition as well as the estimates. But the irrefutable fact is that HCR has been going down, and this accelerated after 2004, when GDP growth touched 8.4 per cent per annum during the first seven years of the Manmohan Singh government.

Could India have done better? Of course, yes. If India had invested in better quality education for the masses, especially for the girl child, the results would have been much better. While India is proud of its IITs, IIMs and AIIMS, and its overall literacy rates going up from 12 per cent in 1947 to about 77 per cent now -- with Kerala at the top and Bihar at the bottom -- the quality of education for large sections of the poor remains poor. Year after year, Pratham's ASER reports indicate that a large number of children in the eighth grade do not fulfil the learning requirements of the fifth or sixth grades. Without quality education, their incomes remain low and many remain stuck in the poverty trap. The pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide between rural and urban schoolchildren. So, a lot has to be done on this front.

What about basic food security? There has been tremendous success in this respect, with the country moving from a "ship to mouth" situation in the mid-1960s to become the largest exporter of rice (17.7 MMT) in 2020-21, amounting to 38.5 per cent of the global rice trade. This has been achieved through the use of modern technology, improved seeds, irrigation, fertilisers, and, of course, the right incentives for farmers. But it has come at a huge cost of groundwater depletion. Future poli-

India's public grain management system of procurement, stocking and distributing is, perhaps, the biggest food programme in the world. But it is also an expensive, inefficient and corrupt system, and is crying for reforms. Look at the following facts: In 2020-21, as per the provisional estimates of the Controller General of Accounts, food subsidy amounted to 31 per cent of the total revenue of the Union government. Instead of spending money on education and skills, giving free rice and wheat is definitely not the right way to go forward.

cies need to focus on greater sustainability.

The question that bothers us is that if India has been so successful in reducing poverty and improving food availability, why does it have to give almost free food (rice and wheat) to more than 800 million people under the National Food security Act (2013)? However, malnutrition amongst children still runs high. This surely does not square with the facts above. India's public grain management system of procurement, stocking and distributing is, perhaps, the biggest food programme in the world. But it is also an expensive, inefficient and corrupt system, and is crying for reforms. Look at the following facts: In 2020-21, as per the provisional estimates of the Controller General of Accounts, food subsidy amounted to 31 per cent of the total revenue of the Union government. Giving free rice and wheat, instead of improving the quality of education and enhancing skills, is definitely not the right way to go forward.

Our work at ICRIER on food policy shows that a rational policy of gradually moving towards cash transfers to targeted beneficiaries, limiting grain stocks, can easily save Rs 50,000 crore every year from the food subsidy bill. This can be achieved without sacrificing the objectives of supporting the vulnerable population as well as giving a fair deal to farmers. This rationalisation of food policy needs to come up high in priority, with changed policy instruments, if we have to fulfil the pledges we made to our people in 1947.

Gulati is Infosys Chair professor for Agriculture at ICRIER

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Foreign states must continue to hammer home the message that militancy based out of Afghanistan will not be accepted, while it should also be communicated that religious freedom and women's rights must be assured." — DAWN

A failing state, a visionary president

President Ashraf Ghani, a theorist of state-building, will have to share blame if Afghanistan descends into civil war



SANJIB BARUAH

NO ONE KNOWS what the future holds for Afghanistan once US-led foreign troops fully withdraw from the country. But the swift battleground victories of the Taliban since the troops' withdrawal began, have surprised many observers. While a return to Taliban rule is unlikely, few would rule out a descent into civil war.

There is a particular irony to this turn of events. It is happening under the watch of a cerebral head of state globally respected for his expertise on state failure and civil wars. President Ashraf Ghani is often described as a technocrat perhaps because of his stint at the World Bank. But Ghani is a humanistically oriented academic and a policy intellectual. An anthropologist by training, he is deeply knowledgeable of the history, politics, and economics of Afghanistan. "Afghanistan's Theorist-in-Chief", the appellation given by American writer George Packer, seems more apt.

Packer asks if President Ashraf Ghani, "an expert on failed states can save his country from collapse". Ironically, Ghani's ideas on how to fix failed states -- to borrow the title of the book he co-authored with Clare Lockhart -- provide the best explanation for the country's current crisis. Ghani and Lockhart see the failed state not just as a localised problem of individual states. That "forty to sixty states, home to nearly two billion people, are either sliding backward and teetering on the brink of implosion or have already collapsed", they argue, is "at the heart of a worldwide systematic crisis".

Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Building a Fractured World is a critique of the international community's piecemeal and incoherent response to the problem. Ghani and Lockhart offer a framework of coordinated action that could reorient the aid system "towards building capable states".

If Ghani speaks relentlessly about the need for a state-building strategy, Americans like to talk of nation-building, though oddly, only to disavow it as a goal. "We did not go to Afghanistan to nation-build", declares President Joe Biden. He is not the first US president to disavow nation-building. George W Bush said as a presidential candidate in 2000 that US troops should not be used for nation-building, but "to fight and win war". Barack Obama and Donald Trump both promised not to get mired in nation-building.

But what do Americans mean by nation-building? It is not what most of us in India would understand by the term. It is a "false friend" -- a word in a foreign language that seems familiar but has a different meaning. While the term has lost its saliency in Indian public discourse, it retains its old meaning -- building national political communities.

Columnist Vir Sanghvi recently invoked the term in remembering Hindi cinema star Dilip Kumar. "In the 1950s, when the term

nation-building was in vogue," he writes, Jawaharlal Nehru enlisted Kumar "for the task of helping build up morale in the young nation". Kumar promoted India's new social welfare programmes, played leading roles in short patriotic films, appeared in events promoting national integration and raised money for the armed forces. And significantly, he did all this free of charge.

Contrast this to the use of the term in American public discourse. US diplomat and security expert James Dobbins defines nation-building as "the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict to promote enduring peace and establish a representative government". When the US invaded Iraq in 2003, Dobbins declared that "no military in the world had more nation-building experience".

The two meanings could not be more different. To most people in the global South, the idea of an invading force engaging in nation-building would seem suspect. Significantly, when many American civil and military officials disavow nation-building they often do it with a sense of wistfulness. The American general David Petraeus once told a reporter that he understands "the intellectual aversion to nation-building", but he doesn't "see how you avoid it".

When commentators talk unfavourably about military personnel serving short tours of duty in Afghanistan or Iraq, the contrast is with British or other European imperial forces spending most of their careers in the colonies where they could learn the cultures and languages of the "natives".

It is hard to miss the nostalgia for empires. American journalists reporting from Iraq or Afghanistan referred to a couple of the US ambassadors to those countries as Viceroy. While one can quarrel with this choice of words, there is little doubt that during that time the US ambassador was the most powerful person in that country, at least until the "formal handover of sovereignty" to "the host government".

In *Fixing Failed States*, Ghani and his collaborator point out that in half the countries that emerge from conflict there is renewal of hostilities within a decade. If civil war returns to Afghanistan, it will be primarily because the US and its allies lacked the political capacity to target their assistance towards building a functioning state.

It was much easier for US presidents to mobilise Congressional support for a form of assistance where US private contractors were the key agents. The result, to extend one of Ghani's examples, was that out of each US dollar "generously allocated by the American citizen to support stability in Afghanistan" as much as 80 cents ended up in the US, and at least 10 cents of the rest pocketed by Afghan elites may have ended up in Dubai. Despite evidence that the emergence of a national construction industry could be a critical factor in fixing failed states, no such industry could come up under these circumstances. If Afghanistan were to descend into civil war, President Ghani, of course, will have to share part of the blame, but only for his failure to master politics as the art of the possible despite being dealt a bad hand.

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ZAMEER UDDIN SHAH

Listening to Mohan Bhagwat

His call for Hindu-Muslim dialogue resonates, despite his apparent backtracking

I ATTENDED THE launch, organised by the Muslim Rashtriya Manch, of Khwaja Iftikhar Ahmed's book, *The Meeting of Minds - A Bridging Initiative* at the Mewar Institute, Ghaziabad on July 4. The author had assisted me, whilst I was Vice-Chancellor, Aligarh Muslim University, in explaining to the RSS, the ethos of this institution of national importance. The function was presided over by Mohan Bhagwat and leading functionaries of the RSS and General VK Singh, MP.

I have been a leading proponent of Hindu-Muslim dialogue to foster amity between the two estranged communities. I was accused of angling for a gubernatorial appointment and a sprinkling of brother-officers, lifelong friends, "advised" me and members of my family, who have been active on social media, saying what they believe is best for our country, to "Go to Pakistan". I ignored these as the rantings of immature minds.

The author gave a lengthy, impassioned speech, spelling out the book's contents, supported by references to the Holy Quran. Bhagwat took note and commented upon these in his 45-minute scholarly, impassioned appeal for amity.

He explained that he had agreed to the launch because continuous dialogue and amity between Hindus and Muslims is imperative for progress. In a democracy, religious groups cannot dominate one another. The demand that Muslims should not live in

India is counter to the Hindu ethos and is rightly opposed by the majority. The Constitution guarantees the safety of minorities and their apprehension that "Islam is threatened in India" is unfounded. Religion and patriotism are not contradictory.

Bhagwat dwelt, at length, on the fact that the cow is sacred but condemned incidents of lynching by vigilantes as "anti-Hindutva", warranting action by the law without partiality. He, however, cautioned against counter FIRs being registered. All have the right to protest in forums like the legislature, judiciary, NHRC etc.

I would like to stress that the police can easily ascertain facts and must not shield culprits. Also, why restrict protest to limited forums? Citizens have a right to publicly protest. Freedom of speech, essential for the preservation of democracy, is guaranteed under Article 19 (1)(a) of the Indian Constitution with a limiting clause, under Article 19(2), that "reasonable restrictions can be imposed on the exercise of this right for certain purposes". Do peaceful, non-violent protests warrant the imposition of restrictions?

Another contentious point was Bhagwat's statement that "India is a Hindu Rashtra and all citizens are Hindu", immediately clarified to mean "All citizens are Bharatiyas". This latter position is acceptable to the minorities as the former has a religious connotation. As far as Hindu "Rashtra" is concerned, India was always one, in my opinion. It makes no difference.

The majority in a democracy will always call the shots, even if, for the sake of nicety, "secular" is prefixed/suffixed.

The assertion that nationalism should be the basis of unity among all sections of people would be more acceptable if this unifying factor is substituted with patriotism. There is a danger of nationalism snowballing to hyper-nationalism -- witness Nazi Germany, Japan and erstwhile Yugoslavia. Bhagwat conveyed that he meant well for the minorities. Amity was at the top of his agenda. He acknowledged he would probably be criticised by some of his cadres, viewing it as Muslim appeasement.

Was it this compulsion that compelled him to backtrack somewhat in his later statement at Guwahati, on July 21, where he supported the CAA and NRC? He asserted that a communal narrative was being peddled for political mileage. Governments across the world document their respective country's population through NRC-like exercises, essential to identify illegal immigrants. This stand cannot be contested but has a flip side. The NRC, completed in Assam in 2019 on the instructions of the Supreme Court, compiled a registry of citizens, a key charter of the Assam Accord. The roster excluded around 1.9 million of the nearly 33 million applicants from the NRC. The list was dubbed faulty by most people, citing the exclusion of genuine citizens and inclusion of persons with doubtful identity. Protesters in Assam alleged that the NRC vi-

olated the 1985 Assam Accord that provided for the deportation of all refugees and migrants, who entered Assam after March 25, 1971. If the result of the NRC in Assam, despite the time and expense, was dubious and inconclusive, one can imagine its fate at the national level.

The contentious CAA, which was passed in Parliament in 2019, fast-tracks Indian citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis who entered India on or before December 31, 2014, from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Refugees from other neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Myanmar have been left out, as are the Ahmadiyyas, Shias and Hazaras facing persecution in their home countries. This exclusion of Muslims is, therefore, viewed as discriminatory even by organs of the UN.

Sceptics remonstrated, "we told you so". I, however, have profound hope in the well-intentioned efforts of Bhagwat. The only plausible explanation is that a person of his stature has to keep in mind the sensitivities of all constituencies to maintain a balance. It is time for the hardliners from both communities to weigh his words carefully and carry forward the process of dialogue. Amity, across all sections, is essential for India's progress.

The writer is a retired lieutenant general, educationist, and author of The Sarkari Mussalman

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WHITHER DEMOCRACY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Phantom Democracy" (IE, July 31). India's inclusion in the list of partially free and failing democracies should be a matter of great concern. Years of stagnant progress and widening socio-economic gaps, especially post globalisation, have led to a clamour for a strong and authoritarian leader, willing to "restore" India's prestige. Due process and fundamental rights are being seen as an unnecessary hurdle in the path of development. The nightmare of the Pegasus scandal and unwillingness to come clean only reinforces these fears. **Ila Railkar, Mumbai**

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Phantom Democracy', (IE, JULY 31). The author has rightly pointed out that democracy is dying in India. It seems the people of India have only one true right, that is the right to vote. We must have some framework to hold the representatives of the people accountable so that they will act responsibly. **Amar Dombre, Parbhani**

FLAWED SYSTEM

THIS REFERS TO the article 'How does a democracy die?' (IE, July 31). The writer has convincingly bared the rough and crude side of our democracy. What continues to be a black spot on our democracy is that even when it is entering the 75th year of our independence, the people remain bereft even of their basic needs. The make-believe politics of our

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● **OPPOSITION MUST FOCUS ON ISSUES THAT MATTER: MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI**

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rulers does not appear to be the right answer to chinks visible in our overrated largest democracy. **Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur**

FIND THE TRUTH

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Disrespecting House' (IE, July 31). India's Parliamentary Affairs Minister described Pegasus as a "non-issue", which does not merit a discussion in Parliament. Information obtained illegally may have been used to compromise institutions, to steal elections, sabotage Opposition campaigns, and even dislodge Opposition governments. The truth about these revelations must be unearthed through an investigation by the SC or any other credible mechanism. **SS Paul, Chakdaha**

TOP OF THE WORLD



President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador

MEXICO

Mexico votes on whether to probe ex-presidents

MEXICANS ARE set to vote on whether to investigate five of the country's former leaders in a referendum championed by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, amid criticism that the move is a political stunt and turnout could be low. Lopez Obrador has cast past administrations as deeply corrupt and made combating graft his top priority. But critics say he hopes to use the consultation to energise his base, and that it is unlikely to muster enough votes to be valid. At least 40% of registered voters, or 37 million people, would need to vote for the results to be binding. Analysts say they doubt the turnout, which was slightly above 50% in June elections, will be sufficient. **REUTERS**

PAKISTAN

Police guarding polio vaccine teams attacked

GUNMEN ON a motorcycle shot and killed a police officer returning home after security duty with polio vaccination workers in northwest Pakistan, police said. The killing came during one of two attacks Sunday on police providing security for polio vaccination teams. The attack leading to the officer's death happened in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The officer was returning home on his motorcycle after providing security for a polio team, police said. **AP**

GERMANY

Former death camp guard, 100, to go on trial

A 100-YEAR-OLD former guard at the Sachsenhausen Nazi concentration camp near Berlin will face trial in the autumn, 76 years after the end of the Second World War, German weekly Welt am Sonntag reported. The district court of Neuruppin admitted the charges of accessory to murder in 3,500 cases, and the trial is slated to start in October. The defendant should be able to stand trial for 2 to 2-1/2 hours a day, a court spokesman told the paper. The accused, who was not named, was said to have worked as a camp guard from 1942 to 1945 in Sachsenhausen. **REUTERS**



NEW ZEALAND SORRY FOR RAIDS ON PACIFIC PEOPLE

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern sat motionless Sunday as members of the Pacific Island community pulled a large white mat over her head, completely covering her. Moments later they removed it and embraced her. It was part of an emotional ceremony at the Auckland Town Hall during which Ardern formally apologised for a racially charged part of the nation's history known as the Dawn Raids. It's when Pasifika people were targeted for deportation in the mid-1970s during aggressive home raids by authorities to find, convict and deport visa overstayers. **AP**

Pakistan finalises Bill to give provisional provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan: report

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, AUGUST 1

PAKISTANI AUTHORITIES have finalised a Bill to give provisional provincial status to strategically located Gilgit-Baltistan, a media report said on Sunday.

India has clearly conveyed to Pakistan that the entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of India by virtue of its fully legal and irrevocable accession.

India maintains that Pakistan's government and judiciary have no locus standi on territories illegally

and forcibly occupied by it.

Dawn newspaper reported that under the Bill proposed by the Ministry of Law and Justice, the Supreme Appellate Court (SAC) of Gilgit-Baltistan may be abolished and the region's election commission is likely to be merged with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

Sources in the law ministry told the newspaper that the draft of the Bill titled '26th Constitutional Amendment Bill' had been prepared and submitted to Prime Minister Imran Khan.

In the first week of July, the prime minister had assigned the task of preparing the Bill to fed-

eral Law Minister Barrister Farogh Naseem.

The proposed law suggests that due to sensitivity attached to the region, it could be given provisional provincial status by amending Article 1 of the Constitution that related to the provinces and territories, sources said.

They added that a set of amendments would be introduced to give the region representation in Parliament, besides the establishment of the provincial assembly in the territory.

The sources are confident that the constitutional amendment is in accordance with the international practice of merger

of territories and it will not adversely affect the Kashmir cause in any manner, the report said.

The Pakistan government and the Opposition had reportedly discussed the move prior to last year's meeting of the political leadership with Pakistan's Army chief.

According to an Opposition leader, Gilgit-Baltistan has acquired great significance in the region due to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. **PTI**

Myanmar military ruler takes PM role, again pledges elections

REUTERS
BANGKOK, AUGUST 1

MYANMAR'S MILITARY ruler Min Aung Hlaing has taken on the role of prime minister in a newly formed caretaker government, state media reported on Sunday, six months after the army seized power from a civilian government.

In a speech on Sunday, Min Aung Hlaing repeated a pledge to hold elections by 2023 and said his administration was ready to work with a future regional envoy on Myanmar.

The announcement and speech came exactly six months after the army seized power February 1 from a civilian government following elections that were won by Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling party but that the military said had been fraudulent.

Min Aung Hlaing has chaired the State Administration Council (SAC) that was formed just after the coup and that has run Myanmar since then, and the caretaker government will replace it.

"In order to perform the country's duties fast, easily and



Myanmar's military ruler Min Aung Hlaing

effectively, the state administration council has been re-formed as caretaker government of Myanmar," a newsreader on state Myawaddy television said.

In his speech, Min Aung Hlaing repeated a pledge to restore democracy, saying, "We will accomplish the provisions of the state of emergency by August 2023".

He added: "I guarantee the establishment of a union based on democracy and federalism."

Shortly after the coup, junta leaders promised new elections within two years. The reference on Sunday to August 2023 was interpreted by some local media

as extending that time frame by six months.

Min Aung Hlaing also said his administration would work with any special envoy named by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

ASEAN foreign ministers are to meet on Monday, when diplomats say they aim to finalise a special envoy tasked with ending violence and promoting dialogue between the junta and its opponents.

The army seized power after Suu Kyi's ruling party won elections that the military argues were tainted by fraud. It has said its takeover was in line with the constitution. The country's electoral commission has dismissed the fraud allegations.

After the coup, Suu Kyi, 75, was charged with several crimes. Her trial on charges of illegally possessing walkie-talkie radios and breaking coronavirus protocols is scheduled to resume on Monday.

The military authorities have faced months of protests, strikes that have paralysed public and private sectors, and a resurgence of armed conflicts in the borderlands.

Israel, US, UK blame Iran for attack on tanker

Tehran denies role in drone strike on ship off coast of Oman

JON GAMBRELL
DUBAI, AUGUST 1

THE UNITED STATES and the United Kingdom joined Israel on Sunday in alleging Iran carried out a fatal drone strike on an oil tanker off the coast of Oman in the Arabian Sea, putting further pressure on Tehran as it denied being involved in the assault.

Calling it an "unlawful and callous attack", British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said his country and its allies planned a coordinated response over the strike Thursday night on the oil



The oil tanker Mercer Street

tanker Mercer Street. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken soon followed, saying there was "no justification for this attack, which follows a pattern of attacks and other belligerent behaviour."

While no one has claimed re-

sponsibility for the attack, Iran and its militia allies have used so-called "suicide" drones in attacks previously, which crash into targets and detonate their explosive payloads. x

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh described the allegation Iran carried out the attack as "baseless."

"It's not the first time that the Zionist regime occupying Jerusalem has made such empty accusations against the Islamic Republic of Iran," Khatibzadeh said. "Wherever this regime has gone, it has taken instability, terror and violence with it." **AP**

EXPLAINED Ongoing shadow war

IRAN AND Israel have been waging a shadow war for years, with attacks on each others' facilities and interests being carried out without any public acknowledgement. In the past couple of years, the major arena for this confrontation has been the sea, with a number of attacks on Iranian and Israeli ships in recent months for which each side has blamed the other.

Outgoing Iran president: Govt not always truthful

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, AUGUST 1

IRAN'S OUTGOING President on Sunday acknowledged his nation at times "did not tell part of the truth" to its people during his eight-year tenure, as he prepares to leave office with his signature nuclear deal with world powers in tatters and tensions high with



Hassan Rouhani

the West.

President Hassan Rouhani's comments, aired on state television, come as officials in his government have appeared rudder-

less in recent months amid a series of crises ranging from the coronavirus pandemic to parching droughts fueling public protests.

After appearing just days earlier to be lectured by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei about their failures in the nuclear negotiations, Rouhani's remarks appeared aimed at acknowledging the problems his government faced in its waning hours.

President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, a protégé of Khamenei, will be inaugurated Thursday.

"What we told people was not contrary to reality, but we did not tell part of the truth to people," Rouhani said at his last Cabinet meeting as president. "Because I did not find it useful and I was afraid it would harm national unity." He did not elaborate on what he meant by his remarks.

Zoom reaches \$85 million settlement of lawsuit over user privacy, 'Zoombombing'

JONATHAN STEMPEL
AUGUST 1

ZOOM VIDEO Communications agreed to pay \$85 million and bolster its security practices to settle a lawsuit claiming it violated users' privacy rights by sharing personal data with Facebook, Google and LinkedIn, and letting hackers disrupt Zoom meetings in a practice called Zoombombing.

A preliminary settlement filed on Saturday afternoon requires approval by US District Judge Lucy Koh in San Jose, California.

Subscribers in the proposed class action would be eligible for 15% refunds on their core subscriptions or \$25, whichever is

larger, while others could receive up to \$15.

Zoom agreed to security measures including alerting users when meeting hosts or other participants use third-party apps in meetings, and to provide specialized training to employees on privacy and data handling.

The company denied wrongdoing in agreeing to settle. It did not immediately respond on Sunday to a request for comment. Saturday's settlement came after Koh on March 11 let the plaintiffs pursue some contract-based claims.

Zoom's customer base has grown sixfold since the Covid-19 pandemic forced more people to work from home. **REUTERS**

BRITAIN RACES TO INOCULATE AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE BEFORE COLDER WEATHER ARRIVES

Pizza for shots: UK targets youth with vaccine incentives

DANICA KIRKA
LONDON, AUGUST 1

RESTAURANTS, RIDE-HAILING apps and food delivery services are backing Britain's Covid-19 vaccination drive, offering discounts and even free slices of pizza to persuade young people to roll up their sleeves and get the shot.

The programme, announced Sunday by the Department of Health and Social Care, is designed to boost the vaccination rate among adults under 30 as Britain races to inoculate as many people as possible before colder weather arrives.

While more than 90% of

adults in Britain have received at least one dose of vaccine, the rate for people between the ages of 18 and 30 is about 60%, according to government statistics.

As he thanked businesses for helping out, Health Secretary Sajid Javid urged people to "take advantage of the discounts." Uber, Bolt, Deliveroo and Pizza Pilgrims are among the brands to offer incentives.

"The lifesaving vaccines not only protect you, your loved ones and your community, but they are helping to bring us back together by allowing you to get back to doing the things you've missed," he said.

Britain is not the only nation



UK PM Boris Johnson at a Pizza Pilgrims store. The new programme announced by the government ropes in food, ride-hailing apps and other brands to offer discounts to encourage adults under 30 to get vaccinated. *Reuters file*

to try more carrot — and less stick — to persuade the reluctant to roll up their sleeves. US

President Joe Biden this week called on states and local governments to join New York and

Minnesota in offering \$100 rewards, hoping a financial incentive will spur the hesitant to be vaccinated as the highly contagious delta variant sweeps through parts of the country.

Britain is keen to increase vaccination rates amid a surge in new infections as the government seeks to fully re-open society.

Meanwhile, politicians are anxious to bolster the economy as the national furlough program, which guaranteed the wages of millions of people who were unable to work due to government restrictions, comes to an end.

Treasury chief Rishi Sunak is urging Prime Minister Boris Johnson to ease international

travel restrictions, arguing that Britain's "draconian" rules are unnecessary given the success of the vaccination programme.

The Sunday Times reported that Sunak wrote to Johnson to encourage him to let people enjoy their summer holidays, while expressing concern about the impact the restrictions are having on tourism and the hospitality industry.

Johnson's Cabinet will meet later this week to review the current travel rules, which require expensive Covid-19 testing for people arriving from most popular holiday destinations in Europe and force anyone coming from France to self-isolate for up to 10 days. **AP**

ECONOMY

SECTOR WATCH AGRICULTURE

Fertiliser sales down on erratic monsoon rains

ALL-INDIA FERTILISER SALES

	2020	2021	% Growth
April	20.56	20.05	-2.48
May	40.02	31.24	-21.94
Jun	68.74	65.87	-4.18
Jul	92.31	77.03	-16.55
Apr-Jul	221.63	194.19	-12.38

In lakh tonnes

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

RETAIL SALES of fertilisers have fallen 12.4 per cent in April-July over the corresponding four months of last year. All major nutrients have posted lower sales: urea (minus 12.8 per cent), di-ammonium phosphate (minus 27.5 per cent), muriate of potash (minus 8.8 per cent) and complex fertilisers (minus 6.5 per cent). Only single super phosphate sales have registered a 4.6 per cent year-on-year increase.

Reduced fertiliser purchases by farmers is consistent with the Agriculture Ministry's data that shows a 4.7 per cent drop in the area sown under kharif crops till July 30, relative to the coverage during the same period of the 2020 season. Farmers have so far planted 4 per cent less area under rice, with these lagging by 3 per cent for pulses, 5.7 per cent for coarse cereals, 5.5 per cent for oilseeds and 8.7 per cent for cotton.

Both fertiliser sales as well as kharif acreages being down are largely due to an erratic monsoon. While the country received 9.6 per cent above long-period average rainfall in June, it was 6.7 per cent below normal in July. But more important was an extended dry spell from around June 20 to July 11. Since mid-June to mid-July is the peak time for kharif sowing, many farmers are seen to have missed out on that window. While the rains revived from July 12, overall sales of fertiliser for the month were still 16.6 per cent down compared to July 2020 (see table).

Satish Chander, director-general of the Fertiliser Association of India, felt that comparing April-July 2021 sales to April-July 2020 may not be wholly accurate. Last year, there was lot of panic buying because of the lockdown-related uncertainties. Although agricultural inputs were exempted from any movement, distribution or retailing restrictions, farmers as well as dealers stocked up material in anticipation of kharif demand. Fertiliser sales in April-July 2020 were, in fact, 56.7 per cent higher over April-July 2019.

But sales slowed in the subsequent months, with the fiscal (April-March) as a

whole recording 9.7 per cent growth.

"We are back to normal growth now and hope it to be so for the rest of the year," said Satish Chander.

A significant source of worry, however, is international prices. In the last one year, prices of urea imported into India have doubled to about \$520 per tonne. The landed cost and freight prices of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and muriate of potash (MOP) have similarly gone up from \$330 and \$230 to \$630 and \$280 per tonne, respectively, while also rising for inputs such as phosphoric acid (\$625 to \$1,160), ammonia (\$205 to \$670) and sulphur (\$75 to \$200).

Fertiliser prices have basically tracked global agri-commodity prices. The Food and Agriculture Organization's world food price index has soared by 33.9 per cent between June 2020 and June 2021.

But, in fertilisers, there are a couple of additional factors at work.

The first is China. India has been importing roughly 3 million tonnes (mt) of urea and 2-3 million tonnes of DAP annually from China. But China has, of late, been resorting to strategic stockpiling of fertilisers rather than supplying to the world market. The second is Belarus, which is India's second largest supplier of MOP after Canada. The recent economic sanctions imposed by the US and the European Union against the Belarusian regime have raised the prospects of a further hardening of MOP prices.

"Morocco's state-owned company OCP, too, has raised its supply price of phosphoric acid for India from \$998 to \$1,160 per tonne. This is a clear indication we are in a seller's market in fertilisers similar to that witnessed back in 2008," an industry expert pointed out.

According to him, the problems in fertiliser will not be in kharif, but in the upcoming rabi season. "The government should review the stock availability of all nutrients factoring in view the tightening global supply conditions. Not doing can prove costly just ahead of Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and other states in February-March," he added.

MANUFACTURERS SEE M-O-M IMPROVEMENT IN JULY

Easing curbs, low cases unlock sentiment: Car sales in fast lane

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

CAR SALES picked up pace in July in line with dip in Covid cases, relaxation in lockdowns across the country and improvement in macroeconomic conditions and consumer sentiment. Market leader Maruti Suzuki announced domestic passenger vehicle sales of 1,33,732 units in July, up 36 per cent over last year and 75 per cent higher than June 2021. Hyundai Motor India, too, announced a 25.8 per cent y-o-y jump in sales in July at 48,042 units.

Among other players, Tata Motors saw its domestic PV sale at 30,185 units in July, up 101 per cent over that of last July. Honda Cars announced sales of 6,055 units in the domestic market, up from 1,398 units in July 2020. Similarly, Nissan, MG Motor and Skoda reported healthy growth in sales last month, following improved market sentiment and despite supply constraints of semi-conductors.

With decline in Covid cases and relaxation in lockdowns across states, car manufacturers reported a month-on-month improvement in wholesale numbers in July. While sales dipped sharply in May, following stringent lockdown conditions on account of sharp rise in Covid cases, the situation has been improving over last couple of months.

While MSI saw its sales dip to 32,903 units in May, Hyundai Motor and Tata Motors had seen their sales fall to 25,001 units and

RISING DOMESTIC PV SALES

	JUL-20	MAY-21	JUN-21	JUL-21
Maruti Suzuki	97,768	32,903	1,24,280	1,33,732
Hyundai Motor	38,200	25,001	40,496	48,042
Tata Motors	15,012	15,181	24,110	30,185
Honda Cars	1,398	2,032	4,767	6,055



15,181 units, respectively, in May. As Covid cases jumped in May, several companies advanced their maintenance shutdown in May and shut production for a large part of the month. However, sales have picked up over the last two months and is rising progressively in line with opening up of dealer outlets.

"A positive growth momentum is clearly visible in the passenger vehicle industry with the stabilisation of macro-economic factors, good monsoons and increase in consumer shift towards personal mobility," said Tarun Garg, director, sales, marketing and service, Hyundai Motor India.

Rajesh Goel, sr VP and director, marketing & sales, Honda Cars India, said market sentiment has improved amid prevailing lower Covid infection rate, adding he expects the "upcoming festive period will help the industry to maintain this momentum". He, however, said the industry will keep a closer watch on the challenges related to Covid and rising cost of acquisition of cars due to

price hike from this month.

Maruti Suzuki witnessed sales growth across utility vehicles, compact segment and mini segment. While the sales in mini segment, comprising Alto and S-Presso, stood at 19,685 units, compared to 17,258 units in the year-ago month, the compact segment that includes models, such as WagonR, Swift, Celerio, Ignis, Baleno and Dzire, rose 36 per cent to 70,268 units as against 51,529 cars in July last year. The UV segment including Vitara Brezza, S-Cross and Ertiga witnessed a strong 68 per cent growth as it rose to 32,272 units last month as compared to 19,177 in July 2020.

While Nissan India reported a multi-fold jump in its domestic sales at 4,259 units in July, up from 784 units in year-ago month, MG Motor India reported a two-fold increase in retail sales at 4,225 units last month, compared to sold 2,105 units in July 2020. Skoda Auto India, too, saw three-fold increase in sales at 3,080 units compared to 922 units in July 2020.

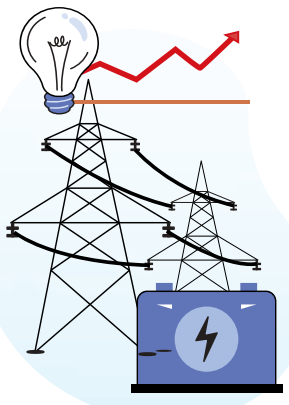
Power consumption bounces back to pre-Covid level in July

The country's power consumption grew nearly 12% in July to 125.51 billion units and returned to pre-Covid level due to easing of curbs and delayed monsoon, as per Power Ministry data

July 2020

Power consumption stood at 112.14 BU, lower than 116.48 BU in the same month of 2019 (pre-pandemic level). Thus, consumption of power has not only grown year-on-year but also returned to pre-pandemic level

Commercial and industrial power demand and consumption got affected April onwards this year due to lockdown restrictions imposed by states



Power demand as well as consumption returned to pre-Covid levels in July and a strong recovery is expected in coming months

Recovery in power demand and consumption in July 2021 is mainly due to delayed monsoon and surge in economic activities amid easing of lockdown restrictions by states, said experts

Easing of lockdown restriction by the states help

Peak power demand met or the highest supply in a day touched an all-time high of 200.57 GW in July (recorded on July 7, 2021)

Source: Power Ministry/PTI

Dhoot moves NCLAT against Twin Star's Videocon takeover bid

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

VENUGOPAL DHOOT, former promoter of Videocon Group, has moved the NCLAT, challenging an order of the insolvency court NCLT approving Rs 2,962 crore takeover bid by Anil Agarwal's Twin Star Technologies for 13 companies of the debt-ridden group.

Dhoot, in his petition filed before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has re-

quested to set aside the order passed by the Mumbai Bench of the NCLT and to direct the lenders to consider Rs 31,789 crore settlement plan submitted by him under Section 12 of the IBC.

He questioned the role played by the Resolution Professional and said he should have mentioned the foreign oil and gas assets of Videocon Group in the information memorandum (Tender Form) to all the bidders and hence no valuation was considered. **WITH PTI**



The RBI in Mumbai. File

by the incoming high frequency data and we expect growth to turn positive on a two-year CAGR basis from quantitative easing in September," it said.

With an easing of supply and distribution disruptions and monsoon gathering pace, head-

Deepak Das takes charge as CGA

New Delhi: Civil Accounts Service officer Deepak Das on Sunday took charge as the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) under the Department of Expenditure, the Finance Ministry said.

A 1986-batch Indian Civil Accounts Service officer, Das has held important positions at different levels in ministries such as science & technology, environment and forest, and Departments for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. He is the 25th officer to hold the position of CGA, who is the principal advisor on accounting matters to the government. **ENS**

MARKET WATCH

SIX COS LOSE ₹96,642 CR IN VALUATION

New Delhi: Six of the 10 most valued domestic firms witnessed a combined erosion of Rs 96,642.51 crore in their market valuation last week, with Reliance Industries Limited taking the biggest hit. Last week, the Sensex dipped 388.96 points or 0.73 per cent. **PTI**

What is Akasa, the new airline looking at Indian skies?

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

AFTER OVER A year of distressing performance caused by the pandemic, the Indian airlines' space is gearing up for entry of two airlines — Jet Airways 2.0, and Rakesh Jhunjhunwala-backed Akasa. While the detailed plans for both the airlines are being finalised, it has underscored investor appetite in the segment at a time the existing players are in the red because of muted travel demand during the pandemic.

What is Akasa?

Akasa is an upcoming "ultra low-cost carrier", or ULCC, being launched by stock market investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, who will hold a 40 per cent stake in the airline company.

Jhunjhunwala has reportedly planned to launch the airline by April 2022, and has onboarded aviation industry veterans such as former Jet Airways CEO Vinay Dube and ex-IndiGo president Aditya Ghosh. While Dube is expected to be the CEO of the company, Ghosh is expected to be on the board as Jhunjhunwala's nominee. The Mumbai-based investor will pump in \$35 million, according to a Bloomberg report, and is planning to have a fleet of 70 planes over the next four years. The airline expects to be granted a no-objection certificate from the Civil Aviation Ministry over the next few days.

How is India's airline space shaped?

Currently, InterGlobe Aviation Ltd-run budget airline IndiGo is India's largest airline, with over 54 per cent market share in the domestic passenger market, followed by state-owned Air India, SpiceJet, GoAir, Vistara and AirAsia India. GoAir, which has filed papers for its initial public offering, recently rebranded itself to GoFirst and plans to revamp its business model to become a ULCC. The upheaval of the Indian airline industry has largely been on the back of deep losses reported in 2020-21 (April-March) because of Covid — a situation that has persisted with the second wave in the new fiscal. "Massive, perennial losses have created a debt trap which has resulted in most airlines having very limited means of recapitalisation. The government is providing almost no direct support; lenders have by and large closed their doors to airlines, even for restructuring purposes; and lessors will soon have no option but to start applying pressure on defaulting airlines. Simultaneously, we are heading into a higher cost environment, while staff morale is declining," CAPA noted in its India airline outlook for 2021-22.

Is there a case for new players in the sector?

With the 2019 closure of Jet



Stock market investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala will hold a 40 per cent stake in the airline. File

Airways, a potential disinvestment of Air India, and the weakened position of other existing players, the airlines industry is facing a threat of consolidation of market share with the major players. Additionally, with vaccination rollout gaining momentum, market participants expect the sector to bounce back. In his interview with Bloomberg TV, Jhunjhunwala said: "I'm very bullish on the Indian aviation sector in terms of demand and I think some of the increment players will not recover".

What is the ULCC model?

In the ULCC airline business model, the company focusses on keeping operating costs even lower than typical budget airlines like IndiGo and SpiceJet. In the low-cost model, airlines unbundle certain amenities that are usually associated with the full-service airline experience — like seat selection and food and beverages. In the ultra low-cost model, there is an even further unbundling of services like checked-in and cabin baggage. Traditionally, while LCCs operate with significantly lower fares and only somewhat lower costs than full-service carriers, ULCCs operate with minimal costs to ensure profitability.

Who will Akasa compete against in India?

Being a ULCC, Akasa will potentially attempt to take IndiGo head on, which has bled through the pandemic. However, despite its massive losses, IndiGo remains in a comparatively strong position. Speaking at the post-earnings conference call on July 27, IndiGo's CFO Jiten Chopra said: "The strength of our balance sheet is our biggest defense in the fight against Covid and we will continue to enhance this strength by focusing on cost reduction, liquidity enhancement and capacity addition". CAPA said it expects Indian airlines to lose a consolidated \$4.1 billion in FY22, similar to that in FY21. In addition to Akasa, the relaunch of Jet Airways will also be key, primarily on the expectation that the two entrants will look to aggressively pursue market share in the initial days. However, their ability to go aggressive on the fares will depend on the government doing away with fare curbs that were imposed during the reopening of Covid lockdowns.

Input costs, slow sales crimp India Inc profits

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

FROM BIOCON, Maruti Suzuki, Nestle, Dr Reddy's Labs and TVS Motors to a host of smaller companies like Crompton Greaves and Rallis, results for Q1FY22 have barely met the Street's expectations. However, producers of metals like JSW Steel have seen their profits soar while IT players have done reasonably well. Larsen & Toubro reported a good set of numbers with the engineering behemoth seeing an uptick in ordering prospects.

The Q1FY22 numbers must be read in the context of the very weak base from a year-on-year perspective and a slightly strong base effect on a quarter-on-quarter basis. Net sales have fallen sequentially both for consumer and industrial businesses, not surprising given the local lockdowns across the country during the quarter.

At TVS Motors, revenues declined 26 per cent q-o-q while at Crompton Greaves, they were down 28 per cent as lockdowns impacted revenues. Maruti Suzuki volumes fell 28 per cent q-o-q. UltraTech reported a 23 per cent

q-o-q drop in volumes while at JSW Steel, they were down 11 per cent. Gross margins for a host of companies were under pressure as raw material costs remained high. At HUL, for instance, gross margins fell 140 bps y-o-y to 50.4 per cent driving down Ebitda margins by 115 bps y-o-y.

What stands out is that even after the considerable cost cutting in FY21 companies continue to eke out savings by trimming expenses. At Vedanta, for instance, costs were muted across divisions.

The concern is that rural demand might not be as resilient as in the last couple of years, given many areas were badly hit during the second wave. Lenders like Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services, which have a fair bit of exposure to rural India, are reporting weak numbers. **FE**

BRIEFLY

Joblessness rate

New Delhi: Unemployment rate fell to a four-month low of 6.95 per cent in July. The rate had spiked to 11.9 per cent in May, as per CMIE. **FE**

RBI new rules

New Delhi: The RBI's directions on raising interchange fee and making available the facility of bulk clearing round the clock have become effective from Sunday.

GST returns

New Delhi: GST taxpayers with a turnover of over Rs 5 crore can self-certify their annual return, CBIC said. **PTI**



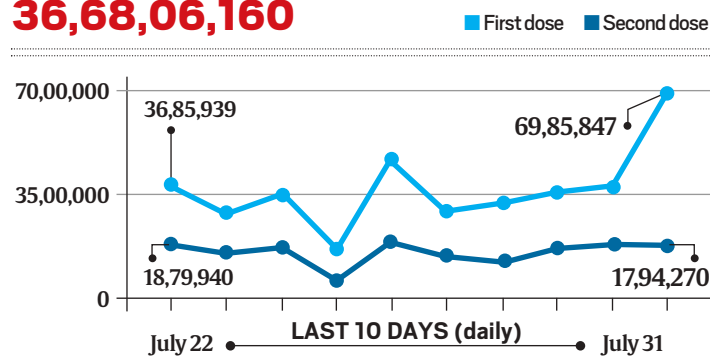
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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

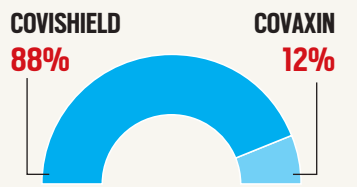
CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

TOTAL VACCINATED IN INDIA (at least one dose)
36,68,06,160



TOTAL DOSES
47,02,98,596

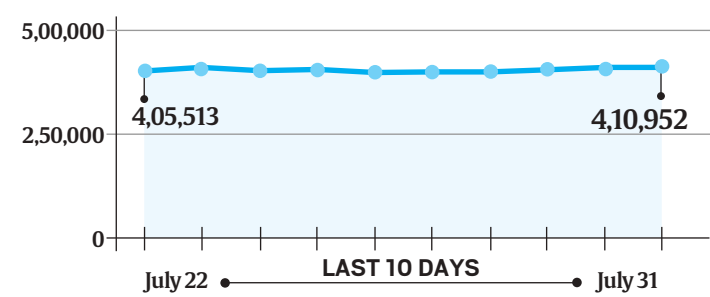
(Sputnik V's 4,74,544 doses not represented in pie)



DOSES ON JULY 31 87,80,117
JULY 30: 54,84,725 (1ST DOSE: 36,79,574; 2ND: 18,05,151)

INDIA ACTIVE CASES

4,10,952

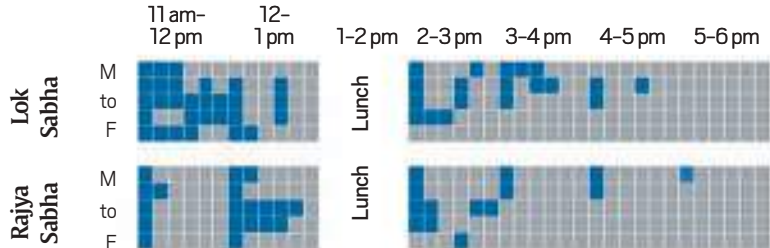


Note: The July 31 figures in these graphs are based on the government updates on August 1

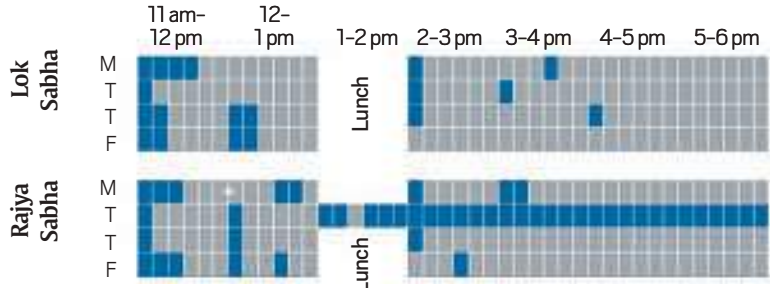
WHEN PARLIAMENT WORKED OR DID NOT, HOUR BY HOUR

A graphical representation of the hours of work and adjournment in Parliament during the last two weeks:

WEEK OF JULY 26-30



WEEK OF JULY 19-23



■ Duration Parliament functioned ■ Duration Parliament remained adjourned
Each cell represents a 10-minute interval. Time is rounded off to the next 10-minute mark.
* RS adjourned for 1 hour in memory of Raghunath Mohapatra and Rajeev Satav

Source: PRS Legislative Research



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EXPLAINED ELECTION ARITHMETIC

Punjab Congress & caste vote

Hit by infighting ahead of Assembly elections, the Punjab Congress has appointed four working presidents, each from a different community. How have these communities voted over the years?

EXPERT EXPLAINS

SANJAY KUMAR

From The Indian Express panel of specialists, exclusive insight



THE CRISIS within the Punjab Congress as a result of the power struggle between Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and Navjot Singh Sidhu suggests that the Congress has scored a self-goal. Even if these two leaders are able to work out a formula, supporters of these two leaders may find it difficult to work together on the ground. A four-cornered contest seems inevitable during the 2022 Assembly elections, which the Congress had a good chance of winning — until this crisis and the self-goal happened.

The Congress party's vote share has been above 35% in all recent Assembly elections in Punjab (Table 1). It won the 2017 Assembly elections with 38.5% of the votes. During the 2022 elections, even if its vote share declines by 5-6 percentage points, it would still have about one-third of the total votes (33%), which should be enough for the party to win another election. Punjab has returned the same government only once — in 2012 when the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)-BJP was re-elected — and the Congress should have been able to repeat that feat. But to do that, it needed to put its house in order, something in which it has failed miserably.

In view of the damage caused, the party has appointed four working presidents from different caste groups keeping an eye on the vote of these communities — Kuljit Singh Nagra from the Jat Sikh community; Sangat Singh Gilzian from the Lubana caste, representing the OBC Sikh community; Sukhwinder Singh Danny from the Dalit Sikh community; and Pawan Goel from the Hindu community. These appointments, however, may not be enough to make up for the damage done to the party by this division within.

This article makes an attempt to map the support base of the Congress among the communities from which the working presidents have been appointed.

The Jat Sikh

Jat Sikhs constitute about 20% of the total

TABLE 1 VOTE SHARE OF PARTIES				
Year	Congress	SAD+BJP	AAP	
2002	35.8%	36.8%	—	
2007	40.9%	45.3%	—	
2012	40.1%	41.9%	—	
2017	38.5%	30.6%	23.7%	

TABLE 2 JAT SIKH VOTE				
Year	Congress	SAD+BJP	AAP	
2002	23%	55%	—	
2007	30%	61%	—	
2012	31%	52%	—	
2017	28%	37%	30%	

TABLE 3 OBC SIKH VOTE				
Year	Congress	SAD+BJP	AAP	
2002	39%	32%	—	
2007	43%	43%	—	
2012	44%	46%	—	
2017	37%	32%	26%	

Source: CSDS Data Unit (Table 1); Punjab Assembly Election Studies 2002, 2007, 2012 & 2017, CSDS Data Unit (Tables 2 to 6)

voters in Punjab; roughly 60% of Sikhs belong to the Jat Sikh community. They are not only numerically large, but also economically, socially and politically dominant.

Findings of surveys conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) indicate that Jat Sikhs have been loyal supporters of the Akali Dal. A large majority of Jat Sikhs have voted for the Akalis in various elections, except for the 2017 Assembly election when the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) made a dent among the Akalis' Jat Sikh vote base (Table 2).

TABLE 4 DALIT SIKH VOTE				
Year	Congress	SAD+BJP	AAP	
2002	33%	26%	—	
2007	49%	32%	—	
2012	51%	34%	—	
2017	41%	34%	19%	

TABLE 5 HINDU DALIT VOTE				
Year	Congress	SAD+BJP	AAP	
2002	47%	11%	—	
2007	56%	25%	—	
2012	37%	33%	—	
2017	43%	26%	21%	

TABLE 6 NON DALIT HINDU VOTE				
Year	Congress	SAD+BJP	AAP	
2002	52%	26%	—	
2007	49%	38%	—	
2012	46%	36%	—	
2017	48%	22%	23%	

The Congress has never been popular amongst the Jat Sikhs. By appointing Nagra as one of its working presidents, the Congress is trying to mobilise the Jat Sikhs towards its fold.



FROM LOKNITI ARCHIVES
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The OBC Sikh

The votes of the Sikhs belonging to OBC communities have remained divided between the Congress and the Akalis. Data from CSDS surveys indicate the two parties have got an almost equal proportion of votes among voters belonging to this community, with only shades of difference (Table 3).

THIS WORD MEANS: e-RUPI

Voucher system ahead of digital currency

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

TAKING THE first step towards having a digital currency in the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch an electronic voucher-based digital payment system, e-RUPI, on Monday. The platform, developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the National Health Authority, will be a person-specific and purpose-specific payments system.

How will e-RUPI work?

e-RUPI is a cashless and contactless digital payments medium, which will be delivered to mobile phones of beneficiaries in form of an SMS string or a QR code. This will essentially be like a prepaid gift voucher that will be redeemable at specific accepting centres without any credit or debit card, a mobile app or Internet banking. e-RUPI will connect the sponsors of the services with the beneficiaries and service providers digitally, without any physical interface.

The system, built by NPCI on its UPI platform, has onboarded banks that will be the issuing entities. Any corporate or government

agency will have to approach the partner banks, which are both private and public-sector, with details of individuals and the purpose for which payments have to be made. The beneficiaries will be identified using their mobile number; a voucher allocated by a bank to the service provider in any individual's name will only be delivered to that individual.

Where will it be used?

According to the government, e-RUPI is expected to ensure a leak-proof delivery of welfare services. It can also be used for delivering services under schemes meant for providing drugs and nutritional support under mother-and-child welfare schemes, TB eradication programmes, drugs & diagnostics under schemes like Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, fertiliser subsidies etc. The government said even the private sector can leverage these digital vouchers as part of their employee welfare and corporate social responsibility programmes.

How is it different than digital currency?

In effect, e-RUPI is still backed by the existing Indian rupee. The underlying asset and specificity of its purpose makes it different from a virtual currency, and puts it closer to a voucher-based payment system. The government is already working on de-

veloping a central bank digital currency, and the launch of e-RUPI could potentially highlight gaps in the infrastructure that will be necessary for digital payments.

What are these plans?

The Reserve Bank of India had recently said it has been working towards a phased implementation strategy for a central bank digital currency (CBDC). A CBDC generally takes a digital form of the nation's existing fiat currency. Speaking at a webinar on July 23, RBI Deputy Governor T Rabi Sankar said that CBDCs "are desirable not just for the benefits they create in payments systems, but also might be necessary to protect the general public in an environment of volatile private VCs".

While RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das had flagged concerns over cryptocurrencies in the past, there seems to be a change of mood now in favour of CBDCs on Mint Street. Although a CBDC is conceptually similar to currency notes, its introduction would involve changes to the enabling legal framework since the current provisions are primarily synced for paper currency.

Does India have an appetite for a digital currency?

According to the RBI, there are at least four

reasons why digital currencies are expected to do well in India: One, there is increasing penetration of digital payments that exist alongside sustained interest in cash usage, especially for small value transactions.

Two, India's high currency-to-GDP ratio, according to the RBI, "holds out another benefit of CBDCs". Three, the spread of private virtual currencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum is another reason. As Christine Lagarde, President of the ECB has mentioned in the BIS Annual Report "... central banks have a duty to safeguard people's trust in our money. Central banks must complement their domestic efforts with close cooperation to guide the exploration of central bank digital currencies to identify reliable principles and encourage innovation."

Four, CBDCs might also cushion the general public in an environment of volatile private VCs.

Are there global examples of a voucher-based welfare system?

In the US, there is the system of education vouchers or school vouchers, which is a certificate of government funding for selected students. These are essentially subsidies given directly to parents of students for the specific purpose of education. The school voucher system has also been used in countries such as Colombia, Chile, Sweden, Hong Kong etc.

BJP's "election engineering" and flagged concerns over illegal structures being regularised.

On Saturday, Goa Forward Party MLAs submitted a memorandum to Governor P S Shreedharan Pillai not to give his assent to the 11 Bills, which the state government passed "in an utmost hurry, obviously with oblique motives..." The Bhumi Putra Bill, the GFP stated, "smacks of *malafides*" and its provisions would "amount to giving a premium on illegalities and perpetuate further illegalities." They said that this would recognise encroachments by slum-dwellers that are over 30 years old as Bhumi Putras.

Former Revenue Minister Rohan Khaunte said, "This Bill has opened the floodgates for the migrant population that has been staying in densely populated areas in Goa and has no legality."

Who is a Bhumi Putra in Goa, and why is Opposition objecting to new law?

MAYURA JANWALKAR
PANAJI, AUGUST 1

ON FRIDAY, the Assembly passed the Goa Bhumi Putra Adhikarini Bill, 2021 recognising anyone living in the state for 30 years or more as a 'Bhumi Putra (son of the soil)' and giving such a person the right to own his or her 'small dwelling unit' if ownership was undetermined so far. Assembly polls are six months away and the Bill, along with 10 others, was passed even as 12 Opposition MLAs walked out on the last day of the three-day Assembly session.

Why was the need for such a Bill felt?

The 'Statement of Objects and Reasons' of the Bill, introduced on Thursday, states, "The

Bill provides for a mechanism to give ownership right to the self-occupied dweller of a small housing unit to enable him to live with dignity and self-respect and exercise his right to life." Once recognised as a Bhumi Putra, an individual can stake claim to ownership of their house of not more than 250 sq m, built before April 1, 2019.

The objective, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said, was to enable the 'mool Goenkar (original Goan)' to live with dignity. Addressing the House on Friday, he said, "In the last so many years there have been cases of homes built by a person or his parents but the land is not in his name. There is always a sword dangling over their head that someone will file a case against them (over ownership). The land is of different kinds like ancestral property, comunidade property,

panchayat land. Everyone had wished for the house that they lived in, their generations lived in, to be theirs." He said there were several such cases in rural areas including Sattari, Sanguem and Pernem. "My brothers and sisters have been waiting for this. They built 250-300 sq m homes, built by their parents, but the land could never be theirs."

The possible number of beneficiaries is yet to be estimated, officials said.

How does one apply?

The Bill provides for the constitution of the Bhumi Putra Adhikarini — a committee consisting of the Deputy Collector as its Chairperson, and officials from the departments of Town and Country Planning, Forest and Environment, and Mamlatdars of respective *talukas* as its members.

The Bhumi Putra may apply to the committee if his house has been built before the cut-off date. The committee will invite objections within 30 days, including from the land owner which could also be a local body, and then take a decision of granting ownership to the Bhumi Putra.

Once recognised as Bhumi Putra, will ownership of the house be free?

The claimant or Bhumi Putra, once recognised, does not get the house for free. The Bill states the Bhumi Putra Adhikarini may, by an order, "declare a Bhumi Putra to be the owner of the dwelling unit occupied by him upon payment of an amount equivalent to the value of land calculated at the market rate".

An appeal against the Bhumi Putra Adhikarini's decision can be filed before the

Administrative Tribunal within 30 days. The four-page Bill states: "No suit, prosecution or any other legal proceedings shall lie against the Government or any officer or employee of the Government or any person authorised by the Government or Bhumi Putra Adhikarini or its members for anything which is done, or intended to be done, in a good faith under this Act." It states that no court shall have jurisdiction "to entertain, decide or deal with any question which is to be decided by the Bhumi Putra Adhikarini and Administrative Tribunal under this Act".

Why is the Opposition objecting?

The Opposition had said there was not enough time in the curtailed Assembly session to study or debate the Bill, and 10 others passed "in a haste". It called this the ruling



“ I really don't know anything about him...he did a fantastic job. ”

FRED KERLEY
WHEN ASKED ABOUT MARCELL JACOBS, THE NEW 100-M OLYMPIC CHAMPION

Bolt from the blue



EYE ON INDIA



ATHLETICS
WOMEN'S DISCUS THROW
(MEDAL ALERT)
Kamalpreet Kaur- final at 4:30pm
Kamalpreet Kaur (in pic) was one of two athletes to meet the automatic qualification mark of 64m.

WOMEN'S 200M
DUTEE CHAND- HEAT 4 7:24am
Semifinal (upon qualification)
starts from 3:55pm

EQUESTRIAN
INDIVIDUAL EVENTING
Fouaad Mirza
Jumping qualification starts from **1:30pm**
Jumping final (upon qualification) starts from **5:15pm**

HOCKEY
WOMEN'S QUARTERFINALS
India vs Australia 8:30am
India will take on Australia, who finished top in Pool B and scored 13 goals in five games, conceding just once.

SHOOTING
MEN'S SOM RIFLE THREE POSITIONS
India vs Great Britain
Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Sanjeev Rajput
Qualification **8am**
Final (upon qualification) **1:20pm**

WORLD WATCH

BADMINTON
MEN'S SINGLES
Viktor Axelsen (DEN) vs Chen Long (CHN).
Rio gold medallist Chen Long of China will aim to emulate compatriot Lin Dan in winning consecutive Olympic titles. He will take on Rio bronze medallist Viktor Axelsen of Denmark.
Gold medal match **5:20pm**

LONG JUMP
FINAL 6:50am
After finishing seventh in Sunday's high jump event, Juvaughn Harrison will go vertical on Monday. The American, nicknamed Mr. Jumps, is in the final starting Jamaican Tajay Gayle and Cuban Juan Miguel Echevarria.

100M HURDLES
FINAL 8:20am
Puerto Rico's Jasmine Camacho-Quinn (in pic, who won the semi-final in an Olympic record 12.26 seconds, will aim to finish ahead of Jamaican Britany Anderson and American world record holder Kendra Harrison.

MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

With the bronze in Tokyo, PV Sindhu has now won five world championship medals and two Olympic medals, the only Indian woman to finish on the podium twice at Summer Games

BRONZE 2013
World Championships

BRONZE 2014
World Championships

SILVER 2016
Rio Olympics

SILVER 2017
World Championships

SILVER 2018
World Championships

GOLD 2019
World Championships

BRONZE 2020
Tokyo Olympics

GOAT - Grittiest Of All Time



PV Sindhu after sealing a historic win on Sunday.

Reuters

Sindhu becomes country's first woman double medallist, winning a hard-fought bronze against Chinese He Bingjiao, 21-13, 21-15

SHIVANI NAIK
AUGUST 1

COMETH THE elusive podium, cometh the woman. Colour of medals varies and her fellow podium peers change, but Sindhu signifies podium-permanence.

On Sunday, she became the first woman internationally since Beijing 2008, to medal in women's singles in back-to-back Olympics. Only three other women - Korean Bang Soo Hyun, Indonesian legend Susi Susanti and Chinese double Olympics champion Zhang Ning have been on the podium at successive Games. Sindhu says 2024 is doable, so she's not done yet.

While a gold has been elusive for the Indian at the Games, she stomped out of stacked fields in two straight Olympic cycles, to maintain her place in the 1-2-3 over the last 5 years - something that none of her contemporaries of the Golden Generation have managed, owing to injury or big-occasion fragility.

She is also yet to lose to a Chinese shuttler when a medal is at stake on the big stage.

More than anything else, Sindhu got the job done, 24 hours after her biggest dream of an Olympic gold, crashed to the floor. In what was her most commanding display of the Games, Sindhu was pushed for every point she won, and even more on the ones that He BJ nicked away.

Sindhu's success has always been built on a base of a ploughman's plod. Not for her since the World Championship of 2019, when she rode roughshod over all in sight, the spectacular sizzle of a Tai or the clinical precision of Chen Yufei. You would shudder to call her a defensive

retriever owing to the big smash; but you'd never be able to label her a one-dimensional boom bombastic smash player, because she is so stubborn to catch every shuttle in play.

On Sunday, battling for bronze, Sindhu had to release herself from the burdensome bind of India's famous 4th place. He BJ isn't a manic runner, nor does she boast of irretrievable smashes. What she can do successfully is suck the power out of any Sindhu smash, smother the force in the rally to deny the Indian any pace.

This meant, Sindhu had to work her limbs to generate power everytime she sent the shuttle back. It's easier to use an opponent's pace on a fast court to deflect and work the angles. Here Sindhu was re-starting the engine shot after shot.

As such, it was apt that the reward for this plod was a bronze. Because it was hard work even if the result seemed predestined and the match one-sided.

All those months spent making her defense solid were put to test. He BJ made her defend all around the net, kept a steady supply of flat pushes and made her run around till the very end. Unlike against Tai, Sindhu could find her wits and the time to persevere before she shifted pressure on the Chinese. Sindhu wasn't unduly hassled by the southpaw angles. Instead she used her crosscourt smashes and drops - a chunky dozen of them to attack He BJ's backhand back corner.

Sindhu doesn't always need to scream to show her intent. Against the technically proficient Chinese, she had to chase the shuttle to every corner of the court, and in that the Indian displayed her work ethic and commitment. Going into the interval at 11-8, she would open

up a gap, and close out the set with a string of versatile winners. The outwitting at the net at 13-8, the smash-tap sequence at 17-11, a round the head zinger, an unfettered straight smash, Sindhu would pin He BJ to the 12 points, and power along with no mercy from her end.

The cross court smashes got even more menacing in the second, and Sindhu merrily went for a body shot early in the set. He BJ's last resistance happened around the mid-game interval of the second, when surprisingly she attempted to unfurl a backcourt flurry, dumping her reliance on the net. It was like opening a dainty six spoke umbrella in a stormy bluster of showers. She got rained over.

For four matches at this Olympics Sindhu has lapsed into a concentration fade at around this point. She was alert for the lull today and went double quick at He BJ from then. While her pushes and cross drops were bothering the Chinese, the latter narrowed it at 15-13. The Indian didn't allow a breach.

A backline winner at 17-14 was just reward for all her toil, and despite trading punch clears, Sindhu would be in striking distance at 18-14. Perhaps Sindhu's most-improved shots since Rio, giving her a well-rounded game, are her backhand drives and taps. And it was this stroke that gave India its third medal of the Games.

Sindhu has won the World Championship playing more aggressively than this. She's won a higher medal - silver at Rio, getting the better of players ranked above her. But she will prize this bronze medal. She woke up on a sad-denning Sunday, went out there and punched in the gut the total wretchedness of the lifelong regret of a scary 4th place. It makes her India's grittiest of all time.

Sindhu's method: More than just the smash

PV SINDHU'S famed attack is headlined by the smash. But the bronze medal match against He Bingjiao on Sunday was an embodiment of Sindhu's attacking play, that goes beyond just the big booming smash-kill.

Target Backhand

He BJ is a left-hander with a highly dependable backhand. Leading at 9-8, Sindhu would get into a long rally, with an aim to break He BJ down on her backhand. In the last 20 stroke exchange, with 10 from Sindhu, 5 were aimed at the Chinese shuttler's backhand, forcing her to go across the body.

Interspersed across the rally pinning the opponent to deep backhand, this was Sindhu's sequence - a reflexive forehand thwack, a net lift, a loopy drop, another lift at the net, and finally the ending smash.

He BJ would employ her entire range of the backhand to deal with this line of attack - she went across the body her arm parallel to the



PV Sindhu went chasing the shuttle against He Bingjiao, undaunted by the striding work,

ground, she then sent back a toss from around the head.

The straight one

While crosscourts were Sindhu's go-to and yielded many points on the day, the venom came from the straighter one. It wasn't a scornful, snappy shutting off of her opponent though. At 10-8 in the opener, Sindhu would pick shuttles diligently, go chasing them to all corners, negotiate the lengths, lunge, bend, reach out wide, scramble, but never get out of

position. He BJ gave her time on the strokes, she wasn't particularly fast or deceptive today. But Sindhu's anticipation even when she was retrieving immense number of strokes indicated she wasn't being mentally stretched.

The point of no return

At 15-13 He BJ trailed in the second still harbouring hopes of reversing the momentum. She had built herself some pattern of reducing the gap on Sindhu's 11-8 lead. But Sindhu went back to work on grabbing the next point, fighting for it as if it was the first one she played.

In the ensuing rally, Sindhu would forget about the steep smash, and the outstanding cross drop and a mammoth round the head smash she had played moments ago. Putting her head down, she would go chasing the shuttle, undaunted by the striding work, and just when He BJ built herself a dream of comeback, Sindhu would pause to send back a crosscourt smash the Chinese way. **SHIVANI NAIK**

A CALL TO NOT LET DOWN INTENSITY AND FAMILY NO LESS THAN A CONVEYER BELT OF TALENT

Coach's message to team: Your work has just started



MIHIR VASAVDA
TOKYO, AUGUST 1

SO, THAT feels different: India in an Olympic semifinal.

Pinch yourself. Just a week ago, the same team lost 7-1 to Australia in the group stage game. Now, on Tuesday, they will take on world champions Belgium for a place in the Olympic final.

One would assume a lot would have changed within the team after such a morale-sapping defeat. But in truth, very little did. The team, coach Graham Reid said, did not panic even though it was India's biggest defeat in terms of scoreline at the Games. "The thing is if you actually go and have a look at the game, we weren't that bad," India coach Graham Reid said. "The result was bad but the numbers didn't show a 7-1 game."

The statistics showed, according to Reid, that India was ahead in most areas. The problem, however, was that the team allowed the Australians to control the narrative from the midfield and gave them plenty of space in that area.

To Reid, that was the only minor arrangement that needed to be made. Reid, however, said he only wanted to get one point across

to his players: you weren't that bad. Since that 7-1 defeat, India have not lost a single match, finished second in a group that also comprised Olympic champions Argentina and are now in the semifinals.

This outcome, for many, might not be surprising. Jinx-breaking and historic, sure. But within the hockey circles, India had gradually started to earn respect. In Sreejesh, the team had a world-class goalkeeper who had single-handedly bailed them out on several occasions. Defender Harmanpreet Singh is considered to be one of the fiercest drag-flickers in the world. Manpreet Singh has gained in reputation as a leader in the last year or so. As for Reid, he is a man on a mission after failing to lead Australia into the last four of the Rio Olympics.

This was the reason Belgium coach Shane McLeod had, in fact, predicted on Sunday morning that one of the semifinals would be between his team and India - and he turned out to be right. Even former Netherlands coach Paul van Ass, in an interview to hockey.nl a month or so ago, had listed India as an outside favourite for the title in Tokyo.

Whether India can progress further will depend not on the skill - that they possess in abundance - but it will be in their ability to respond under pressure, as they did against Britain.

Sunday's quarterfinal was a match flush with drama that compensated for serial imperfections of both teams.

Britain might not induce the same level of fear among Indians but like so many other countries in the last four decades, they too have not missed a chance to stab them in the heart. Especially at the Olympics, where, be-



Gurjant Singh(left) celebrates after scoring against Great Britain on Sunday.

AP

fore tonight, India had not beaten them since 1988. Britain had won all four matches between the two teams from 1988 to 2000.

The match was a classic clash of styles. Britain ran a lot, were cynical at times and kept their shape. India were fluid, played with flair, weren't organised always but they had their moments of brilliance which dragged the team beyond the finish line.

It was widely expected to be a game that would be settled by drag-flicks, given both teams' prowess in the department, but India showed refreshing willingness to move forward even in the last couple of minutes, when the immediate instinct of the players was to sit back and protect the lead.

It meant India, so far largely a one-trick pony with Harmanpreet and Varun Kumar scoring with their cannonball-like drag-flicks, suddenly surprised Britain with free-

flowing attacking plays and scored three field goals. "To win this competition you have to have corners going well and field goals being scored," Reid said.

The win was also significant in terms of overcoming the mental barrier. India have considered too many late goals and have lost in the quarterfinals of a major tournament more than once. Sunday, Reid felt, could mark the beginning of something new. "At the end of the day, what was lacking is just that experience of big games," he said. "They have the belief. You have to learn to win and then you have to repeat it."

That was his message to the players immediately after the hooter was sounded. The team huddled in the centre of the pitch and Reid had only reminder: "Enjoy the next couple of hours. But our job has only just started."

Gurmail, Rajbir, Jugraj ... now Hardik

NITIN SHARMA

CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 1

PUNJAB POLICE superintendent (SP) and former player Varinderpreet Singh still remembers his four-year-old son Hardik accompanying grandfather Pritam Singh, a former Indian Navy player and coach, to the hockey ground at their village Khusrapur near Jalandhar.

While Pritam and Varinderpreet didn't get a chance to play for India, Pritam's younger brother Gurmail Singh was part of the 1980 Moscow Olympics gold medal-winning Indian team. On Sunday, as 22-year-old midfielder Hardik first assisted Gurjant Singh for India's second goal and later scored the third to seal a 3-1 win against Great Britain. Varinderpreet was keenly following his son's every move.

"Hardik's grandfather was as passionate about hockey as anybody. I still remember it was the month of June when a four-year-old Hardik accompanied my father to the village hockey field. When we said that it's too hot, my father replied, 'If the kid does not feel the heat, then why should we be scared. Unfortunately, my father died in 2017. If he was alive today, he would have applauded Hardik donning the Indian jersey and helping India reach the semifinals at Olympics,'" Varinderpreet told *The Indian Express*.

The Singh family also includes Gurmail and Rajbir Kaur, former Indian women's hockey captain, apart from uncle and former India drag-flicker Jugraj Singh.

It was not until 2018 that Hardik got a chance in the senior Indian team and there was a time when he had started thinking about playing in leagues abroad rather than concentrating on his India career. He would make his



On Sunday, Hardik assisted Gurjant Singh for India's second goal and later scored the third to seal the 3-1 win.

Reuters

senior debut at the Asian Champions Trophy and would also feature in the 2018 World Cup. Jugraj remembers his conversation with Hardik at that time. "Hardik has been a very disciplined boy. The best thing about him is that he is an attacking midfielder. I remember in 2017 when he became a bit impatient about not getting a chance at senior level and wanted to play leagues, I told him that he still has a long way to go. With experience, he has shown that he has skill and strength apart from presence of mind," Jugraj says.

Gurmail, a right-half in the Moscow team, hopes to have another Olympic medallist in the family. "Being a member of the last Indian team to win an Olympic gold, it has been a long wait and we are praying for Hardik and the Indian team to bring another medal for India." Hardik's mother Kanwaljeet Kaur will be reciting Sukhmani Sahib path when India play Belgium in the semifinals. "Hardik calls us before every match and tells us to not only pray for him but for the whole Indian team. That's what we did today and will be doing for the semis," she says.