



38 CHAMPIONS SCRIPT HISTORY IN HOCKEY. 1.3 BILLION INDIANS WALK AN INCH TALLER...

Indian Men's and Women's Hockey teams
made a historic entry into the Semi-Finals
at Tokyo Olympics.

Jai Hind!

CONGRATULATIONS TEAM INDIA!



Odisha is proud to have partnered with Hockey India
in this remarkable journey

A 20x20 crossword puzzle grid. The grid is composed of white squares for letters and black squares for empty space. The black squares are arranged in a repeating pattern of 2x2 blocks. The grid is numbered 1 through 21, indicating the starting positions for the words to be placed.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Complaining about a new variety of truffle (7) | 1 Father has to confess and make headlines (5) |
| 4 Committee meals (5) | 2 When alone, get changed and stretch out (8) |
| 7 Stygian fare (4) | 3 Dislike having to change a hotel (6) |
| 8 Jean took a horse in for a period after Elizabeth (8) | 4 It has a strong scent (10) |
| 10 Nocturnal phantom could be dead in the open (10) | 5 They are the ones in suits (4) |
| 12 Note I'm unusually punctual (2,4) | 6 Power line? (7) |
| 13 A cheering word (6) | 9 Its owner will have impressions of many countries (5,5) |
| 15 Table inlaid with nacre design for a place of worship (10) | 11 Gag and shoot a lunatic (8) |
| 18 Organic defence for the soul? (8) | 12 Trials or evidence of plea bargaining? (7) |
| 19 Music is nothing to a Manx cat (4) | 14 Supported or delayed (4,2) |
| 20 Play for a drink on the street (5) | 16 They're often seen in Assisi (5) |
| 21 They may well ruin a sea trip (7) | 17 Texas is represented by one (4) |

RE-FACES HIS EARLY LIFE - BEFORE HE BECAME A THINKANDOLIC...
 C'MON, RJ, EMBRACE THIS NERDY, THOUGHTFUL, ACTUALLY LITERATE VERSION OF YOU!
 NO! THAT GUY'S A LOSER!
 BUT HE'S JUST YOU WITHOUT THE JUNK FOOD TOXINS COURSEING THROUGH YOUR VEINS...
 ...IS THIS WHAT YOU PEOPLE WANT?...
TWO VERNES?!
 SEE? OUR ADORING READERS ARE VIOLENTLY SHAKING THEIR HEADS **NO!**
 ALL SEVEN OF THEM!
 YES! HE'S BORING! HE FLOSSES HIS TEETH AND LISTENS TO "SELECTED SHORTS" ON NPR! HE'S YOU!!
 SPOCK BARS
 FANNY PACK
 GROSS
 SELECTED SHORTS ON NPR! HE'S YOU!!
 TWO VERNES?
 ALL SEVEN OF THEM!

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READY?

NO.

♪

HURRY UP!

OKAY, I'M READY!

WILETSA 6-17

HERE'S YOUR QUARTERLY PARENTING JOB PERFORMANCE REVIEW

I HOPE TO SEE SOME IMPROVEMENT NEXT QUARTER

M. M. M.


| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | 8 | | | 5 |
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| 2 | 9 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 8 |
| 5 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 9 |
| 3 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| 8 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 9 | 3 |
| 4 | 7 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 5 |

WESTERN RAILWAY
DEVELOPMENT OF
NANDURBAR GOODS SHED

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager,
 Divisional Railway Manager's Office,
 Mumbai Central, Mumbai - 400 008,
 invites tender for following work:
Tender Notice No: WR-MMCTO/CO
 MM/CGG/6/2021 **Date:** 29.07.2021
Type of Tender: Open Tender
 (Single Packet System) **Name of the**
work: Development of Nandurbar
 Goods shed as a Common User
 facility with maintenance of existing
 infrastructure and provision of new
 infrastructure such as Warehouse,
 open stacking area, truck parking
 terminal etc. on a PPP model for a
 period of 10 years. **Earnest Money**
Deposit / Guarantee Amount :
 ₹. 5,99,100 /- Earnest Money
 Deposit shall be accepted only in the
 form of Demand Draft /
 Banker's Cheque **Tender**
Document available for download
from website: Available on
 Western Railway's website
www.wr.indianrailways.gov.in
Issuing of Tender Document : On
 all working days (10.00 hrs. upto
 17.00 hrs.) **Last date of issue of**
Corrigendum, if any: Up to
 25.08.2021 **Date and time of**
closing of sale of Tender
Document : At 17.00 hrs on
 30.08.2021 **Date and time of**
receipt of Tender Document : Up
 to 15.00 hrs on 31.08.2021 **Date and**
time of opening of Tender
Document : At 15.30 hrs on
 31.08.2021 **Place of opening of the**
Tender : Divisional Railway
 Manager's Office, Commercial
 Department, Ground Floor, Mumbai
 Central, Mumbai - 400 008. In case,
 the date of the opening of tenders
 happens to be a declared holiday,
 tenders will be opened on the
 following working day. **0308**

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REMC Limited

(formerly known as Railway Energy Management Company Limited)
(A Joint Venture of Indian Railways and RITES Limited)
RITES Bhawan, Plot No. 1, Sector-29, Gurugram-122001 (Hr.)

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

NIT No.: REMCL/CO/Solar/210 MW/CAPEX/2021 **dt. 02.08.2021**

REMC Ltd. invites bids in single stage two packet system for "Development of Grid connected Solar PV Project(s) up to 210 MW Capacity on Vacant Railway Land".

EMD @Rs 4.0 Lacs/MW Estimated Cost- Rs. 945 Crore

Date of Pre-bid: 1st-17.08.2021 & 2nd-21.09.2021, Date of submission of bid: 21.10.2021

Bid documents may be downloaded from web site <https://www.bharat-electronictender.com> on payment of Rs. 29,500/- (non-refundable). Bids may be submitted as per bid guidelines through online mode on e-bidding portal and offline mode at office of CEO/REMC Ltd. at Ground Floor, RITES Bhawan, Plot No.1, Sector-29, Gurugram 122001; Phone No.-0124-2818748/752 on or before bid due date.

Amendment/Corrigendum, if any, would be hosted on the web site <https://www.bharat-electronictender.com> only. (CEO/REMC Ltd.)

| OFFICE OF ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER PHED, JAIPUR REGION-I, JAIPUR | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Jyoti Nagar, Sahakar Marg, Jaipur-302005 | | | | | |
| Phone: 0141-2740170(o) ace1.jpr.phed@rajasthan.gov.in.com | | | | | |
| No. F/A(CE)/PHED/A. Dausa/ NIT 56-57/2021-22 5711-731 Date: 19/7/21 | | | | | |
| (e-NIT No 56-57/2021-22) | | | | | |
| <p>Online tenders are, hereby, invited on behalf of the Governor of Rajasthan for the following works from the bidder meeting eligibility as per criteria mentioned in the detailed tender document which can be seen and downloaded from website https://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in. Tenders are to be submitted online in electronic format on website https://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in as per schedule given below:-</p> | | | | | |
| NIT No. | Name of Work | Estimated Cost (Rs. In Cr.) | Earnest Money (Rs.) | Last date for submission of tender | Due date for opening |
| 56/ 2021 -22 | Work of Augmentation of various RWSS to provide FHTC including one year Defect Liability period of SVWS under JJM in the Jurisdiction of PHED Sub Division Dausa Rural Dist. Dausa on SPR Turnkey basis. | 5.17 | Bidder has to submit Declarati on on Rs 50/- Plus 30% surcharge stamp | 16.08.2021. up to 18:00 Hrs | 17.08.2021 at 15:00 Hrs |
| 57/ 2021 -22 | Work of Augmentation of RWSS Kalipahadi- Dantali- Purohito Ka Bas to provide FHTC including one year Defect Liability period of various MVS under JJM in the jurisdiction of PHED Sub Division Dausa city dist. Dausa on SPR Turnkey basis. | 4.06 | 30% surcharge stamp paper as per F.D. Circular Dt23.12.2020 | 16.08.2021. up to 18:00 Hrs | 17.08.2021 at 15:00 Hrs |

| NIT No. | NIB No. | UBN No. |
|------------|--------------|------------------|
| 56/2021-22 | PHE2122A2346 | PHE2122WLOB05235 |
| 57/2021-22 | PHE2122A2346 | PHE2122WSOB05238 |


**Sd/-
(Arun Srivastava)
Addl. Chief Engineer
PHED, Jaipur Region-I, Jaipur**

DIPRC/F/366/2021

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Traffic Department
Central Office, Vahtuk Bhavan, Dr. Anandrao Nair Marg, Mumbai Central, Mumbai- 08

मुख्य कार्यालय विचार विचार (पूर्व)



दुबळीक : २०७०-२०७१/२०७१/०२/०३/०४/०५/०६
फॅक्स : ०२०७-२५२५१९७७
ई-मेल : vasaaviracorporation@yahoo.com
जा. क्र. : व.वि.श.म./बांध/५५५/२०२१
दिनांक : ३०.०८.२०२१

जाहीर फेर ई-निविदा सूचना (द्वितीय वेळ मुदतवाढ)

वसई विचार शहर महानगरपालिका प्रभाग समिती 'आय' कार्यक्षेत्रातील एकूण ७ कामांची जाहीर फेर निविदा सूचना दि. ०७.०७.२०२१ रोजी दै. लोकमत, दै. मुंबई चौफेर, दै. प्रहार, दै. प्रातःकाळ, दै. खबरे आजतक, दै. इंडियन एक्सप्रेस, दै. सॅण्डई पोस्ट या वर्धमानपत्रात सेवेचे (<https://mahatenders.gov.in>) या संकेतस्थळावर जा. क्र. व.वि.श.म./बांध/८८१/२०२१ दि. ०५.०७.२०२१ अन्वये निविदा प्रसिद्धीस मंजुरी घेऊन दि. २२.०७.२०२१ रोजी दु. ०२.०० वाजेपर्यंत ई-निविदा मागविण्यात आल्या होत्या, प्राप्त झालेल्या निविदेपैकी ५ कामांना प्रथमवेळ मुदतवाढ देण्यात आली होती. सदर प्राप्त कामांपैकी काम क्र. १, काम क्र. ३, काम क्र. ४ व काम क्र. ७ या कामांसाठी प्रीप्रेशनकरिता अरपसतिपत्र मिळाल्याने सदर प्रीप्रेशनची व स्वीकृत मुदत खालीलप्रमाणे वाढविण्यात आली आहे.

मुदतवाढीचा तपशील खालीलप्रमाणे.

| | |
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| १) ऑनलाईन ई-निविदा स्वीकृती दिनांक - दि. १०.०८.२०२१ दु. ३.०० पर्यंत राहिल. | |
| २) ऑनलाईन ई-निविदा उघडण्याचा दिनांक - दि. १२.०८.२०२१ दु. ३.३० वा. | |

सही/-

कार्यकारी अभियंता

वसई विचार शहर महानगरपालिका



THE 16 WHO SCRIPTED INDIAN WOMEN'S HOCKEY HISTORY

RANI, SAVITA, GURJIT, VANDANA, GRACE, NEHA, NIKKI, UDITA, NISHA, SUSHILA, MONIKA, NAVJOT, SALIMA, NAVNEET, LALREMSIAMI, SHARMILA

**MIHIR VASA VDA**
TOKYO, AUGUST 2

RANI RAMPAL leaned on the fence, closed her eyes and, as the first droplets of rain fell on her face, allowed herself a wide grin.

Soaking in the freshly minted feeling of being an Olympic semifinalist, the India captain was in a daze. She walked from the pitch towards the dressing room through a narrow, barricaded path, stopped for a second, pumped her arms and shouted: "Yaaaay!" Then, she hopped onto a cart and embraced her coach Sjoerd Marijne. "Is this real?" they asked each other.

It didn't feel real. Not to Rani. Not to Marijne. Not to the few hundred people inside the Oi Hockey Stadium or the billion back home. But as the Tricolour

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



The players celebrate after winning their quarterfinal match against World No. 3 Australia 1-0 on Monday. Reuters

Fitter, tougher, faster, fearless: how coach Sjoerd Marijne changed a team on, off field

MIHIR VASA VDA
TOKYO, AUGUST 2

LAST WEEK, as the Indian women's hockey team stared at an early exit from the Olympic Games after their third loss in a row, a fuming coach Sjoerd Marijne called a meeting. The players expected a dressing

down, but were in for a surprise. Marijne didn't utter a word in anger. Instead, he screened an inspirational movie.

On Monday, after toppling Australia 1-0 to enter the semifinals, captain Rani Rampal recalled that session, and said it really helped the team regroup and make a roaring comeback.

The 47-year-old Dutch

coach, meanwhile, kept his cards close to his chest — after all, there's a semifinal to play against the sharp Argentines. "I won't reveal the name (of the movie), you can read it in my book," he laughed.

It was a glimpse into Marijne's coaching philosophy. "He knows when to push our triggers and how. If we lose, it

won't mean he will be hard on us," said a player. "Similarly, if we win, there is no guarantee he will be pleased."

This was apparent after the team qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in late 2019. After making a meal of a seemingly straightforward match, India defeated the US to qualify for

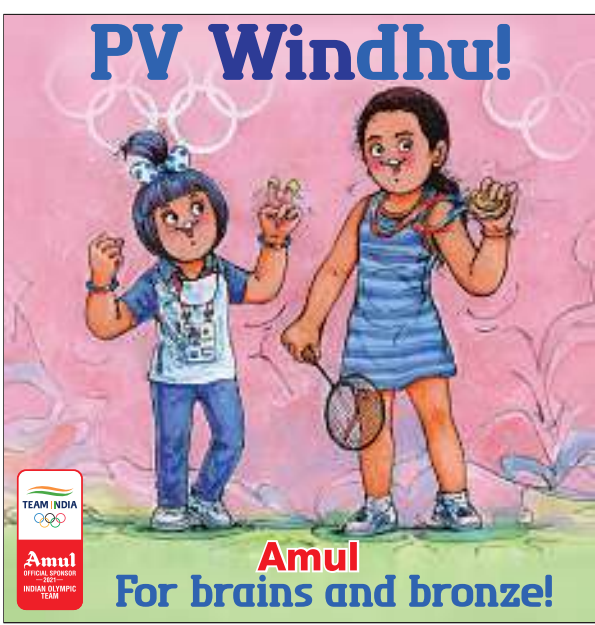
CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

BUSINESS AS USUAL

BY UNNY



Will the new Parliament be open enough to accommodate more women?



IN LINE WITH OPP DEMAND

Nitish breaks ranks, calls for Pegasus probe, House debate

On caste census, says may meet PM with Bihar leaders, hold own count

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, AUGUST 2

BIHAR CHIEF Minister Nitish Kumar, an important ally and coalition partner of the BJP, on Monday threw his weight behind the Opposition's demand for a debate in Parliament on the Pegasus surveillance controversy.

Nitish also said that should the central government continue to reject the JD(U)'s demand for a caste census, the state government "would always have the option" of carrying out its own caste census exercise.

The Centre has stonewalled persistent demands by Opposition parties for an inquiry, or even a debate in Parliament, on the revelations made by a global media investigation on possible surveillance of phones using the Pegasus spyware developed by the Israeli cyber-intelligence company NSO Group.

It has also not responded to repeated demands by parties like the JD(U) and RJD to carry out a census exercise to determine the



Nitish at his 'janta durbar' in Patna on Monday. P77

numbers of different caste groups.

"Let there be a discussion (in Parliament) on the matter (of alleged snooping). Phone-tapping has been discussed for a long time. One never knows how one's phone can be tapped these days. So there must be a probe," the Chief Minister said in response to reporters' questions on the Pegasus controversy at his janta durbar in Patna.

"People have been talking about it (the alleged snooping) in Parliament. People can be harassed and disturbed with phone tapping. If one takes my view, the matter should be probed," he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Ambani bomb scare: NIA collects cellphones seized from jailed IM chief

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

THE NATIONAL Investigation Agency (NIA) team probing the bomb scare outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's Mumbai residence has taken into possession two cellphones recovered from Tehseen Akhtar, the alleged chief of the Indian Mujahideen, who is lodged in Tihar Jail.

Akhtar has accepted that the two Android phones belong to him, but denied sending the messages shared over the Telegram app on them, which claim re-

sponsibility for the explosives found in an SUV outside Ambani's house in the name of purported terror outfit Jaish-ul-Hind.

The NIA collected the phones from the Delhi Police Special Cell office in Lodhi Colony last week. Highly placed sources said the agency is looking into evidence against a senior officer of the Mumbai Police, after which permission would be sought for his arrest.

Akhtar is believed to have taken over as head of the IM after the arrest of its co-founder Yasin Bhatkal in 2013, and is one of the accused in the Mumbai

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Maharashtra eases lockdown curbs for 25 dists, shops to operate till 8 pm on weekdays

In Mumbai, shops allowed to remain open till 10 pm, film shooting allowed

VISHWAS WAGHMODE

MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

MAHARASHTRA ON Monday further eased lockdown restrictions for 25 districts, including Mumbai. As per the new directives, shops in these districts will now be allowed to operate till 8 pm on weekdays against the earlier closing time of 4 pm.

In Mumbai, however, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation came out with its own set of guidelines allowing shops and other establishments to remain open till 10 pm, and hotels and restaurants to operate till 4 pm through the week.

As per the BMC order, all indoor and outdoor sports, exclud-

ing swimming pool and close-contact activities, will be allowed throughout the week. Film and television serial shooting will also be permitted as per the regular timings in the BMC limits.

On July 29, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had held a meeting with the State Covid Task Force and senior health department officials to discuss the easing of restrictions a day after the ministers demanded relaxations in the state cabinet meeting. The state had subsequently given indications that it would announce the relaxations soon.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan had on July 31 held a review of the Covid-19 situation in 10 states, including

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

POOJA CHAVAN SUICIDE CASE

'No denying audio clips retrieved from woman's phone of ex-minister Rathod'

MOHAMED THAYER

MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THERE IS "no denying" that audio clips forensically retrieved from the mobile phone of Pune student Pooja Chavan, who died by suicide on February 7, were conversations between the 22-year-old woman and former Maharashtra cabinet minister Sanjay Rathod, a senior Pune police official said Monday.

"No one is denying that the voices do not belong to Chavan and Rathod," an official said Monday.



Rathod had resigned as Maharashtra forest minister on February 28.

Pune police sources also confirmed Monday for the first time that the voices on a dozen audio clips circulated publicly after Chavan's suicide, had been forensically "matched with the voice samples of Sanjay Rathod, his aide Arun Rathod and Chavan".

Soon after Chavan's death,

Permanent solution to border row will be from Supreme Court: Sarma

LIZ MATHEW

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

WITH THE Centre prodding the Assam and Mizoram governments to dial down tensions after almost a week of the stand-off at the border, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that while the "healing process is on", a long-term solution to the "complex" issue is in the hands of the Supreme Court.

"If the Supreme Court can look into the history, various governments' administrative decisions and decide the boundaries, Assam has no issue... A permanent solution, I think, will be from the Supreme Court of India. If it takes decisions... the issue will be resolved permanently," Sarma said in an interview to *The Indian Express*.

Sarma also blamed previous Congress governments at the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

**'IT'S A HISTORICAL INJUSTICE THAT HAS COME TO US, THANKS TO CONG'**HIMANTA BISWA SARMA
ASSAM CHIEF MINISTER**FACING 'DRACONIAN' BLOCKADE: MIZORAM**
PAGE 12

INSIDE

**CHILDREN RETURN AS ALL CLASSES OPEN IN PUNJAB****LAX HOME ISOLATION BEHIND KERALA SURGE: GOVT TEAM****U.S. PULLOUT BEHIND MOUNTING CRISIS: AFGHAN PRESIDENT**
PAGES 8, 14

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

CHINA USED its "close connections" with Left parties in India to "build domestic opposition" to the Indo-US nuclear deal between 2007 and 2008. This might have been the "first instance for China to operate politically in Indian domestic politics".

This revelation, that could have political and diplomatic ramifications, is part of former foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale's new book, *The Long Game: How the Chinese Negotiate with India*, published by Penguin

Random House India, which hit the stands recently.

As Joint Secretary (East Asia), Gokhale was dealing with China in the Ministry of External Affairs in 2007-09, when the deal was being negotiated and India got a waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) after Beijing yielded.

In his diplomatic career of 39 years, Gokhale, who is proficient in Mandarin, has spent more than 20 years in China, seven years on the China desk in MEA and seven years in East Asia. He has served as India's ambassador to China and is considered one of the top China-watchers in



Vijay Gokhale, who spent 20 yrs in China, is out with a book

the country. In January 2018, he replaced S Jaishankar as foreign secretary and retired last year. Gokhale's book covers six

topics on which India and China negotiated in the last 75 years — starting from India's recognition of the People's Republic of China to

Tibet, nuclear tests in Pokhran, Sikkim, the Indo-US nuclear deal and Masood Azhar's listing as a 'global terrorist' at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

In the chapter on Masood Azhar, Gokhale reveals how China used the Russians to stall the listing of the Jaish-e-Mohammed chief. At one point, he says, the Chinese side also claimed that Pakistan had reliably assured them that the "JeM was defunct" and that "Masood Azhar had 'retired'".

India obviously did not buy that line. As Foreign Secretary, Gokhale was one of the lead negotiators for the Indian govern-

ment when Azhar was designated global terrorist at the UNSC in May 2019.

However, one of the most interesting claims in the book is how China tried to use the Left parties to scuttle the Indo-US nuclear deal.

"...China utilized the close connections with the Left parties in India. Top leaders of the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) would travel to China for meetings or medical treatment.

"Both parties were avowedly nationalist when it came to the Boundary Question and other matters of bilateral interest, but

the Chinese were aware that they had fundamental concerns about the Indo-US nuclear deal," Gokhale writes.

"Knowing the influence that the Left parties wielded in the United Progressive Alliance government of Dr Manmohan Singh, China perhaps played on their fears about India's tilt to the Americans. This may have been the first example of China's foray into domestic politics, but they were careful to remain behind the scenes," he further writes.

Gokhale says China's interactions with India throughout this period were in contrast to the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



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EXPRESS AUDIO

Examining Dhanbad judge's death

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

Indian Express' Abhishek Angad, talks about the death of the Additional Sessions Judge of Dhanbad Uttam Anand, and why it had led the police to institute a murder probe.

ASUS ROG ZEPHYRUS DUO 15 SE REVIEW: A GAMING NINJA

This notebook is for those who want the best one, and who have surplus money to splurge on Louis Vuitton bags and the ROG Zephyrus Duo without a second thought.

EXPRESS ENTERTAINMENT

THE VERDICT: SARPATTA PARAMBARAI DELIVERS

This July, two movies wore boxing gloves, but only one scored.

VIDEO

LOCKDOWN WOES HIT SHILLONG

Hit by huge losses, restaurant owner runs a vegetable stall

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THE VERDICT: SARPATTA PARAMBARAI DELIVERS

This July, two movies wore boxing gloves, but only one scored.



LOCKDOWN WOES HIT SHILLONG

Hit by huge losses, restaurant owner runs a vegetable stall

FROM PAGE ONE

Maharashtra

Maharashtra, which were reporting a high positivity rate. Subsequently, the Centre had advised these states to impose strict restrictions on the movement of people.

Taking heed of the Centre's suggestion, the Maharashtra government issued relaxation orders only for 25 districts in the state. These relaxations will not be applicable to the Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, Pune, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Solapur, Ahmednagar, Beed, Raigad and Palghar districts which are reporting high positivity and growth rate of Covid-19 cases.

"These relaxations will come into effect from Tuesday. Even if the restrictions are relaxed in some districts, the citizens should follow the health norms and continue to wear masks in any situation," said Thackeray.

All essential and non-essential shops (including shopping malls) can remain open all week-days till 8 pm and till 3 pm on Saturday. All shops and malls except essential shops will remain closed on Sundays. Gymnasiums, yoga centres, hair cutting salons, beauty parlours, and spas can remain open without the use of air-conditioners and with 50 per cent capacity till 8 pm on weekdays and till 3 pm on Saturdays. These services will remain closed on Sundays.

Besides, all the restaurants can remain open with 50 per cent seating capacity till 4 pm on weekdays, subject to adherence to all Covid-19 protocols. No changes in parcel and takeaway services have been imposed.

All the government and private offices have also been allowed to operate with full capacity. "Staggering of work hours to be done to avoid crowds while travelling. Offices that can function through working from home should continue to do so," said the order. Also, all agricultural activity, civil works, industrial activity, and transportation of goods can remain functional at full capacity.

However, the government has not given any relief to the cinema theatres, drama theatres and multiplexes (independent and inside malls) and they will remain closed till further orders. Also, all places of worship in the state will remain closed till further orders.

The order further said the restrictions on movement will be applicable from 9 pm to 5 am. In order to avoid crowding, restrictions imposed on birthday celebrations, political, social and cultural events, elections, election campaigning, rallies, protest marches will be continued, it added.

Sanjay Rathod

who were discussing a woman who had agreed to undergo "treatment" and was apparently suicidal, police said. Some of the leaked conversations were on dates after Pooja's death on February 7. In one con-

versation, which appears to have taken place perhaps minutes or hours after her death, a man is purportedly heard asking another to break open the door and get hold of her phone quickly, police said.

The Pune police, however, continues to remain non-committal about filing charges. "The process of collecting evidence is underway. Depending upon what is revealed, the next course of action will be decided," a source said. Pune Police Commissioner Amitabh Gupta declined to comment on the issue.

The Indian Express had Sunday reported that "prima facie, based on the evidence retrieved from the phone, the person talking to Chavan appears to be Rathod". The conversations, which the woman had recorded on her phone, "took place in the Banjara language", a police source told The Indian Express.

A Shiv Sena MLA from Digras in Yavatmal district, Rathod had resigned as the state's forest minister on February 28 after he came under the scanner for Chavan's death on February 7. There were allegations that Rathod was in a relationship with Chavan, both of whom hail from the tribal Banjara community.

The Pune police had also sent for forensic analysis a grab from CCTV cameras installed on the Yavatmal Medical College premises that purportedly showed Chavan and Arun entering the medical college around 4.34 am. The Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) in Pune has confirmed that the CCTV camera footage was genuine, police said.

Mumbai Port

Then principal adviser to the chief minister Ajoy Mehta had suggested at the same meeting that as there was no land available in that area, one option could be to locate the new premises in the suburbs. He said 75 to 100 acres was readily available in Pahadi village of Goregaon in western area of Mumbai, free from encumbrances and encroachment, accessible to the public from two Metro stations.

The government is also planning to locate Mumbai's proposed National Law University on this land parcel at Goregaon. The chief justice, however, has conveyed that MbPT land would be more convenient in view of its proximity to the present building. Members of the bar are also understood to have conveyed this to the chief justice.

It was agreed at the December 2020 meeting that the matter would be pursued with MbPT and the Centre.

Principal secretary of state law and judiciary department Neeraj Dhote said as he had taken over recently, he was not aware of the issue. The then chief secretary Sanjay Kumar, who was present at the December 2020 meeting, said he did not remember such a discussion. Kunte did not respond to mes-

Dravidian patriarch as a leader "in a class of his own".

"For him, his mother-tongue was the object of worship... Kalaigarr [as Karunanidhi was fondly called by Tamils] was a leader in a class of his own. He was among the last links we had with the stalwarts of our national movement," Kovind said. On the Madras legislature, he said: "The concept of the welfare state has taken deep roots in this legislature irrespective of who rules here."

He said the Madras Legislative Council dated back to

Nitish breaks ranks, calls for Pegasus probe, House debate

The Pegasus affair has struck another chord in the JD(U) given that one of the potential targets was strategist Prashant Kishor. "He was with the JD(U) between September 2018 and January 2020 and was in constant touch with senior leaders. Targeting his phone is a serious issue for us as well," said a source.

On the caste census, Nitish said he had been talking to all parties in Bihar to send a joint letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterating the demand, and to possibly also meet him in a delegation.

The Chief Minister, who also raised the demand for the caste census at his party's national executive meeting last week, recalled that "a resolution on the caste census was passed unanimously by the Bihar Legislative Council in 2019 and by the

Assembly in 2020."

Asked if the Bihar government could hold its own exercise if the Centre did not oblige, Nitish said: "We will always have this option open. I have been saying this since 1990... A caste census was last done during the rule of the British. It will make every social group happy, and also help in better governance."

He added: "The Centre did not release the list of castes saying it had flaws. What we had learnt was that the list was updated only till 2013. If there are indeed flaws, they can be rectified through the caste census."

Asked about the statements from some leaders, mainly from the BJP, that the caste census could cause social discord, Nitish said: "I wonder why some people have been talking like this when a unanimous resolution

had been passed in the House in 2019. It could be just their individual opinion..."

In New Delhi, the JD(U)'s newly elected president Lalan Singh led a delegation of his party's leaders to a meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah to press the demand for a caste census on Monday. Lalan later told reporters that Shah had given them an assurance that the matter would be discussed.

On July 20, however, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai had told Lok Sabha that the census for 2021 would not record caste populations other than the overall numbers of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Sources in the BJP said the party was hesitant to back the demand for a caste census because it feared that such a move

could jeopardise its plans in a number of states, including poll-bound UP.

Veteran BJP leader and former Governor of Haryana and Tripura Kaptaan Singh Solanki on Monday said he was in favour of a probe into the Pegasus allegations — however, since the matter would now be heard by the Supreme Court, it should be left to the court. "Democracy rests on mutual trust and privacy of individuals. This Pegasus issue is raised by foreign agencies. It has given many names, including MPs of both sides (ruling and Opposition), journalists and many others. It has resulted in an atmosphere of distrust. Therefore, I have said that... it should be probed," PTI quoted Solanki as saying.

(WITH ENDS, NEW DELHI)

sages.

The 16

went up on the graffiti wall inside the stadium, below Argentina's Albicelste, it couldn't have been more real.

The Indian women's hockey team had defeated World No. 3 and former gold medallists Australia 1-0 in one of the greatest upsets of all time to gatecrash into the semifinals of the Olympic Games — for the first time ever.

The team that had finished 12th out of 12 teams at the Rio Olympics five years ago, last played a competitive match in October 2019, saw half-a-dozen players getting infected with Covid in the second wave, and landed in Tokyo under-prepared to get spanked in their first three matches, had somehow turned the tables.

It was almost a seminal moment for Indian hockey, which has kept the sport afloat in other parts of the world but itself under-achieved for decades together. After 41 years of nothing, the women and men's Indian hockey teams have placed themselves within touching distance of an Olympic medal with incredible wins on back-to-back days, within 24 hours of each other.

But while the men, who take on world champions and gold favourites Belgium on Tuesday (7 am IST), were primed to reach this stage after years of investment and exposure, the women have for long been an afterthought for many.

Indeed, there are underdog stories, and then there's the story of this women's hockey team. Each player has overcome seemingly insurmountable odds to reach this far: prejudice, poverty and patriarchy. Each player has been driven by nothing else but passion. "This is the real 'Chak De!' moment," Marjine, the Dutchman in charge

of the team, said.

As for the coach, who has displayed strong will and a forensic ability to work the smallest of details, taking the team this far is an admirable achievement.

For one, he has transformed the team's fitness levels along with South African strength and conditioning coach Wayne Lombard. Then, during the lockdown, he combined with former USA coach Janneke Schopman, whose team India had defeated to qualify for the Olympics, to finetune tactics and technique.

All those tiny steps, many taken over four-and-a-half years, came to fruition on a sultry morning that sucked every ounce of energy. India's women out-ran, out-thought and out-played Australia — a feat that seemed beyond belief even hours after the final second of play.

Belief, however, was what carried the team through. "We know Australia don't like playing us," goalkeeper Savita Punia, who pulled off crucial saves, said. "They gave us the space to play our game and we executed our plan perfectly. I'm so, so proud of this team."

This was as good a team performance as they come. India got the match-winner in the 22nd minute from a penalty corner that drag-flicker Gurjit Kaur converted. They then defended well but were never defensive in approach.

Whenever they held possession, the Indians darted forward at breakneck speed with seamless, telegraphed passing that was once Australia's hallmark. And every time they were pushed deep in their own half, they showed uncharacteristic calmness and a high level of technical skill to keep the Australians at bay even when they went all out in the final stage.

In a way, India had out-Aussied Australia. This was acknowledged by a tiny bunch of Australians in the stands, whose frustration at their

team's failure turned to admiration for Rani and her teammates as the minutes ticked by.

When the hooter sounded, the Indian players, overcome by emotion, looked at each other in bewilderment, unable to grasp the magnitude of the situation. They huddled at the centre of the pitch, posed for a selfie, punched the air and jumped in joy. There wasn't a dry eye — even the sky, cloudless and bright until then, opened up.

Finally, when they exited the pitch after almost 30 minutes of impromptu celebrations, Salima Tete and Lalremisiami, the two young stars who dazzled Australian defenders with their pace, hugged each other tightly, fought back tears and broke into a loud giggle. "Can you believe it!" Siami yelled. Few could.

Fitter, tougher

back-to-back Olympics for the first time ever.

But if the players were expecting their coach to be happy with the outcome, they were in for a reality check. When the team re-assembled for the national camp at their base in Bengaluru, Marjine scheduled a one-off eight-hour training session. It started at 8 in the morning and ended at 4 pm, with a short lunch break being the only downtime.

After the Australia scalp on Monday, though, the coach was over the moon. He hugged the team, clicked pictures with them and, from the pitch side, was seen video-calling his wife and three children in Amsterdam. Later, he posted a happy team picture from the bus with a message for his family: "Sorry family, I coming again later."

That heartfelt post drew a reply from Bollywood's most famous "hockey coach" Shah Rukh Khan. And the real hockey coach's followers on Twitter rocketed from 2,000-odd at the start of the day to

32,000 by late evening.

From the time he joined the Indian team in 2017, Marjine has been working to make the players mentally and physically tougher. He started with a largely disjointed unit, one in which most players couldn't run, pass or score goals, and was not too happy with the individualistic performances of many who crumbled under pressure.

Fast-forward to four-and-a-half years later, and the historic win against World No. 3 and former Olympic champions Australia in the quarterfinals was reflective of the cultural change brought in the team. By now, Marjine had democratised team meetings and created an atmosphere where players could freely express themselves, both on and off the field.

This, in a way, was also redemption for the coach.

His appointment as the women's team coach was a result of their last-place finish at the Rio Games, which marked India's maiden appearance at the Olympics in more than 30 years. "When Sjoerd first joined the team, I think he would have thought, 'oh my god, what is this team!'" Rani had said earlier.

But according to the man who had coached the World No. 1 Dutch women's team before coming to India, what surprised him more was that the players called him "sir". But then, he saw the team train. "There was no speed at all. And they did not have much understanding of tactics," he said.

Marjine and his then assistant Eric Wonkink, both tactical nerds, along with South African strength and conditioning coach Wayne Lombard, became fixated on improving the team. Every training session since early 2017 was used to make the team quicker and fitter, which in turn helped enhance their understanding and implementation of structure and tactics.

The progress Marjine made impressed a hard-to-please Hockey India so much that when they were looking for a coach for the men's team in September 2017, they ended up poaching the women's coach.

Marjine was informed of this decision via a phone call when he was away with the women's team on an exposure tour to Europe. And former men's coach Harendra Singh was subsequently handed over the reins of the women's team — he led them to a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games last year.

The men, however, did not buy into Marjine's ideas and as a consequence, returned from Gold Coast without a medal. Soon after, in what felt like a promotion for Harendra and punishment for Marjine, their roles were swapped.

But the Dutchman took it on the chin and since May 2018, when he rejoined the women's team, the graph has only gone in one direction — upwards. Yet, the coach and his players will hope the peak is yet to come.

Himanta

Centre for letting issues fester among the Northeastern states to suit the party's "political purpose". Northeastern states, he said, "are still reeling under historical wrongs" committed by the opposition party.

"When they [Congress] formed the states, they did not define the boundaries clearly and they left it to states to fight among themselves. When the Congress government carved out Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya, they should have defined the boundaries also. But they did not do so. It was a time when the Congress had governments in every state. Had they made efforts and made the demarcation clear, the situation would have been different," said Sarma, who joined the BJP from the Congress in 2015, and took over as Chief Minister after the BJP returned to power in the March-April elections earlier this year.

Pointing out that the Union Home Ministry has been making efforts to ease the tension between the two states, Sarma said that a long-term solution to this "very, very complex" issue is also complex. "There are some regional and constitutional issues for which a solution is not happening," he said.

"People of Assam did not create these boundaries... they were given by the Government of India. But we are being looked at with suspicion..." Sarma said.

On Monday, Mizoram Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati met Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Parliament House to discuss the standoff between the two states. The Governor said the Centre and state governments were working closely and efforts are underway to resolve the issue. Members of Parliament from Assam also held a meeting with the Prime Minister.

Ambani

blasts of 2011. The phones had been recovered from his barracks during a search operation by

Tihar Jail authorities along with the New Delhi Range of Delhi Police Special Cell on March 11.

"Police found that the cellphones were being used by him since October. The Tihar jail administration also conducted an internal inquiry to ascertain how he got the cellphones, but they failed to identify anyone," a senior jail official said.

Sources told The Indian Express that a team of the New Delhi Range first questioned Akhtar inside the prison complex, and he said the devices were being used by six other prison inmates as well, including a member of the Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). "Police seized both the cellphones, and sent them for forensic examination, but they did not find anything. Akhtar was later questioned by the NIA as well, and he again denied sending the messages (related to the Ambani bomb scare case)," sources said.

Ex-foreign secy

position taken by them during the 1998 nuclear tests. The topic of the 123 Deal and the clean waiver that India was seeking from the NSG was never raised by the Chinese in bilateral meetings, and rarely discussed whenever India raised the issue, he says.

"Instead, the Chinese appeared to operate through the Left parties and the left-leaning media in India that had an ideological problem with regard to nuclear weapons, in an effort to build domestic opposition to the Indo-US deal," he writes.

When contacted, Prakash Karat, who was CPI(M)'s General Secretary at the time of the nuclear deal — in 2008, the Left withdrew its support to UPA government over the nuclear deal — told The Indian Express, "Our opposition to the nuclear deal was because it cements the Indo-US strategic alliance of which the military collaboration was the key. That is the reason we opposed it. Subsequently, the unfolding of events have shown that that is what has finally come. What has the nuclear deal got us? They said we will be able to increase our nuclear power, expand it... nothing happened. All that has happened is we have become closer, forged closer ties with USA militarily and strategically. And that is exactly what we had said would happen if we entered into such a deal."

"Our understanding was that the nuclear deal will make us completely dependent on the US strategically," he added.

On whether he or any of the other Left leaders had any discussion with China on the nuclear deal at any point in time, he said, "We have had no discussions whatsoever."

"Even if China had agreed to support India in the NSG, that would have made no difference to us," he said. At the 2008 NSG meeting that granted India the crucial waiver to enable it to carry out nuclear commerce, China did not oppose the waiver but raised specific questions.

(WITH INPUTS FROM MANOJ CG)

President hails Madras House legacy, unveils ex-CM portrait

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHENNAI, AUGUST 2

PRESIDENT RAM Nath Kovind Monday unveiled a life-sized portrait of former Chief Minister M Karunanidhi at the Tamil Nadu Assembly premises as he paid tribute to the progressive social legacy of the legislature during its centenary celebration.

At the event attended by Chief Minister and Karunanidhi's son M K Stalin and Governor Banwarilal Purohit, among others, Kovind hailed the

Dravidian patriarch as a leader "in a class of his own".

"For him, his mother-tongue was the object of worship... Kalaigarr [as Karunanidhi was fondly called by Tamils] was a leader in a class of his own. He was among the last links we had with the stalwarts of our national movement," Kovind said.

On the Madras legislature, he said: "The concept of the welfare state has taken deep roots in this legislature irrespective of who rules here."

He said the Madras Legislative Council dated back to

1861 and an advisory body set up back then bloomed into a law-making assembly in 1921.

It became the fountainhead of many progressive pieces of legislation which were subsequently replicated across the country to empower the weaker sections of society and strengthen democracy, he said.

The President referred to the "revolutionary" ideas that came from the Madras legislature — the abolition of the Devadasi system, widow remarriage, mid-day meals in schools and distribution of agricultural land to the landless.

SC notice to states, HCs on cases still registered under scrapped Sec 66A

This cannot continue, says court

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

THE SUPREME Court on Monday issued notices to all states, Union territories and registrars general of High Courts on a plea highlighting continued use of Section 66A of Information Technology Act even though it was held unconstitutional by the court in 2015. "This cannot continue," the court said.

"As this matter pertains to not only the courts but the police as well, in fitness of things notice be issued to all States & UTs and Registrar of High Courts," a bench

of Justices R F Nariman and B R Gavai ordered while hearing the plea by the NGO People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCIL).

The bench asked senior advocate Sanjay Parikh, who appeared for the petitioner, to also make all states parties to his petition, as police is a state subject. The plea pertains to continued use of the provision by law enforcement agencies in states and even lower judiciary.

"Judiciary... we can take care of separately but police is also there in this instance. There must be one proper order in this because this cannot continue," the bench ob-

served. On March 24, 2015, in the case Shreya Singhal v. Union of India, the top court struck down "Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000". The court found the law "in its entirety being violative of Article 19(1)(a) and not saved under Article 19(2)", and that "it is clear that Section 66A arbitrarily, excessively and disproportionately invades the right of free speech and upsets the balance between such right and the reasonable restrictions that may be imposed on such right".

But the provision was invoked in many cases even after that, against which the PUCIL moved the SC. The petitioners stated that "in spite of the judgment, it be-

came clear from newspaper reports that the said provision continued to be invoked by the State's investigative machinery as well as the judiciary, probably under the impression that Section 66A remained on the statute books".

On July 5, the court had sought the Centre's reply in the matter, terming it a "shocking state of affairs". In its reply, the Centre told the court that police and law and order being state subjects, law enforcement agencies of the state concerned share equal responsibility to comply with the Shreya Singhal ruling. It submitted that "police and public order are State Subjects as per Constitution of India and prevention, detection,

investigation and prosecution of crimes, and capacity building of police personnel are primary responsibility of States. The Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) take legal action as per provisions of law against the cyber crime offenders. Accordingly the LEAs share equal responsibility to comply with the said judgement."

The Centre also said both the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the Home Ministry had written to chief secretaries of states, administrators of Union Territories and DGPs of states and UTs, asking them to sensitise LEAs and direct the police not to register cases under the quashed provision.

5 THE CITY

ADULT FILMS CASE

HC reserves order in Raj Kundra's bail appeal against 'illegal' arrest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THE BOMBAY High Court on Monday reserved its order in a plea filed by businessman Raj Kundra, alleging that his arrest in the adult films case was illegal as he was not served any legal notice. Kundra, along with his associate Ryan Thorpe, who has also been arrested, has sought interim bail pending hearing of his plea seeking the case to be quashed.

A bench of Justice AS Gadkari was hearing Kundra's plea, which stated that he has not been named in the FIR. It alleged that as police were to search his office, he was directed to remain present at the crime branch office. The



Raj Kundra

petition added that he was arrested without being served a notice, in violation of laws safeguarding a person from arrest when the offence carries less than seven years of imprisonment.

Mumbai Police, through chief public prosecutor Aruna Pai, continued its arguments and told the bench that as of now 68 pornographic movies have been seized from the accused along with material from personal laptops, mobile phones and 51

videos found on storage area network (SAN). The accused were enabling streaming porn on mobile phone applications, HotShots and Bollyfame, Pai said. She added that Kundra and Thorpe had deleted incriminating content from their personal devices and as police could not be a "mute spectator" while the accused were destroying evidence, they had been arrested to prevent the same.

Pai also said Kundra and Thorpe, his IT technician, were duly served a notice under Section 41A, mandating his appearance before a police officer to avoid unnecessary arrest under the Code of Criminal Procedure. While Thorpe accepted the notice, Kundra had

refused, she added.

Appearing for Kundra, senior advocate Aabad Ponda said the new charge, Section 201 (punishment for causing disappearance of evidence) under the Indian Penal Code, was added after a petition was filed as an "afterthought" without informing the accused. Ponda denied the charges and said if Kundra had been deleting data, then it would have been mentioned in the panchanama or first remand, but that was not done. He said there was no material to show that he deleted data on the night of his arrest on July 19.

Ponda also said there were 22 police personnel when the arrest panchanama was recorded. "How is it that when Kundra was

allegedly deleting the content, that not a single one of them noticed it at the relevant time and did not mention it in the panchanama?" Ponda questioned.

Advocate Abhinav Chandrachud, representing Thorpe, adopted Ponda's arguments and said while his client had acknowledged the police notice, he was not given an opportunity to comply and, therefore, his arrest was illegal and sought relief from the court.

He added that there were discrepancies in the prosecution's case pertaining to the date of deletion of the videos.

The court then concluded the hearing and reserved the pleas for orders, which it will pronounce in due course.

Occupants of 21 high-risk cessed buildings in South Mumbai to be relocated to camps in same area

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

WITH OCCUPANTS of dilapidated buildings in South Mumbai reluctant to relocate to transit camps in Mumbai suburbs, the MHADA's Mumbai Building Repair and Reconstruction Board (MBRRB) announced Monday it will provide such camps to the occupants of 21 high-risk cessed buildings in the area itself this year.

Forty-seven occupants of such dangerous building, officials said, will be relocated to transit camps in the first phase, while the 177 others will soon be shifted.

"These (transit) camps are being made available in several places in South Mumbai like Mazgaon, Tardeo, Dadar,

Khetwadi, Worli, New Hind Mill, and Israel Mohalla. Occupants (of dangerous buildings) will be relocated to the same old area only for their convenience. Also, if necessary, efforts will be taken to classify the small-sized flats, which are not in demand by the Mumbai Board, as transit camp premises," Vinod Ghosalkar, the chairman of MBRRB, said.

According to the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority, occupants of the high-risk cessed buildings in South Mumbai generally refuse to relocate to transit camps in the suburbs even after receiving eviction notices and this ultimately delays the process of eviction, repairs and demolition of the dangerous buildings.

To avoid such a situation and loss of life and property due to an

accident, the MBRRB has decided to make reconstructed buildings available to tenants/occupants of dangerous buildings.

There are around 14,755 cessed buildings under the jurisdiction of MBRRB which are old and dilapidated. These buildings are surveyed every year before the monsoon. This year, 21 buildings have been declared high risk. There are 460 residents and 257 non-residents tenants in these buildings. Of them, 236 residents have made their own alternative arrangements elsewhere, officials said.

"Under the first phase, it is planned to relocate 47 tenants/residents in these transition lanes. The remaining 177 occupants will be provided with flats as per their requirements," Ghosalkar said.

BJP targets Sena again for failing to name Ghatkopar-Mankhurd flyover after Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj 'in time'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

A DAY after the 2.9-km Ghatkopar-Mankhurd Link Road (GMLR) flyover was inaugurated and opened to the public, the BJP slammed the Shiv-Sena for failing to name the flyover after Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj "in time". At present, the cornerstone installation at the site bears the name—Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Marg flyover—

At present, the cornerstone installation at the site bears the name—Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Marg flyover

Shiv Sena could not give the name of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to the flyover is definitely painful for the whole of Maharashtra," said MP Manoj Kotak.

The naming of the flyover has been a controversial topic after Sena MP Rahul Shevale demanded that it should be named after Sufi saint Khwaja Garib Nawaz Moinuddin Chishti. Kotak had opposed the move and sought it to be named after Shivaji Maharaj.

The name of the flyover was also not used in the speech made by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday. The BMC also avoided using the name of the flyover in its official invite and press releases.

Why can't those who took both doses of vaccines be allowed in suburban trains, HC asks state

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THE BOMBAY High Court on Monday asked the Maharashtra government as to why people who have received both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine could not be permitted to travel by local trains in Mumbai. "What is the benefit of being vaccinated? After taking the vaccine people are not supposed to stay at home, they are supposed to work and earn their livelihood," the court said as it asked the government to work on a comprehensive plan so that the burden on other modes of transport can be reduced.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Girish S Kulkarni was hearing PILs filed by the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa (BCMG) and other lawyers, through senior counsel Milind Sathe, seeking directions to the state government to consider practising advocates as essential service providers and permit over 1,000 lawyers to commute by local trains to attend hearings and for other professional purposes.

Advocate General Ashutosh

Kumbhakoni, representing the state government, said that through a tentative formula, vaccinated lawyers can approach through Bar associations or BCMG and produce their vaccination certificates, after which organisations would issue certificates for train travel, based on which they can get Railway passes.

Kumbhakoni said the Railway Authorities were requesting a letter from the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) in this regard which the Authority, headed by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, was "slightly reluctant" to issue as presently only frontline health workers and certain government employees are allowed to take local trains. "However, we will try our best to avail the letter from SDMA," Kumbhakoni told the HC.

"Courts have begun functioning physically. Lawyers will have to go to the Courts. Please use your good offices. Railways are also co-operating. Let us have a beginning. Not just for lawyers, but people from other walks of life too. Spread the net wide. We are concerned for lawyers and are concerned for others as well," the Court told Kumbhakoni.

The bench also referred to a PIL filed by a city resident, Mohan Bhide, seeking directions to the authorities to relax travel restrictions for fully vaccinated people who have completed 15 days since the date of their second dose, allowing them to travel by suburban local trains.

The bench then asked AG Kumbhakoni, "Why people travelling by buses cannot be shifted to trains? Is there a comprehensive plan for the near future for all stakeholders regarding the entire population that is vaccinated? Because it is not like the roads are in a good condition. It takes three hours one way to reach Dahisar (from south Mumbai). Why entire population travelling by road cannot travel by train?"

The HC said state and Centre can consider opening dedicated ticket counters at railway stations for fully vaccinated persons. Through these counters, those who have got two doses of anti-Covid vaccines can avail fresh identity cards and passes indicating vaccination status.

The Court sought the state government's response for local trains' access to lawyers and other vaccinated persons by August 5.

New stretch of Kopri Bridge likely to open to traffic soon

YOGESH NAIK
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

WORK ON the expansion of the Kopri Bridge, which connects Thane to Mumbai, is near completion and the stretch is expected to be thrown open for public use within a fortnight.

The Rs 250 crore project of widening the bridge from an existing 4-lane stretch to an 8-lane stretch is under execution by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA).

Vehicles headed to Thane city, northern Maharashtra, northern India, Kalyan Dombivli use this stretch. The expansion was needed due to the deteriorating condition of the existing bridge. MMRDA Commissioner S V

R Srinivas told *The Indian Express*, "It will ease traffic to Thane city and other places and also ease traffic to the Thane Railway Station. It will be opened in some time and some issues need to be sorted out."

Once the traffic on the new stretch stabilizes, the authorities are contemplating razing the older portion of the bridge and construct a new one in its place.

Deputy Commissioner of Police of Thane's traffic police branch Balasaheb Patil said, "After the new flyover is inaugurated, the existing one will be rebuilt and the flow of traffic will be smooth. The IIT-Bombay has already given a report that the existing bridge is very weak and needs to be pulled down. I was told that the old bridge will be rebuilt by February 2022."



The Rs 250 crore project of widening the Kopri bridge from an existing 4-lane stretch to 8-lane is being executed by the MMRDA. Deepak Joshi

Portuguese man o' war washes ashore on Juhu beach; mangrove cell to put up awareness signs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THE VENOMOUS but beautiful Portuguese man o' war, also called the bluebottle, has been sighted at one of the famous beaches in the city—Juhu—over the past three days.

To educate people on how to avoid coming in contact with these marine species as well as measures to be taken in case of a sting, the mangrove cell and Marine Life of Mumbai (MLOM)—a group of marine enthusiasts—are putting up signboards at the beaches.

It is an annual phenomenon

for the bluebottle to wash up on the shores during this season, as these deep-sea creatures are pushed by the monsoon winds. Some experts have said these creatures come to the shore because of the rising temperature of the seawater.

Onshore, they get stuck in the sand and return with the tide. Most, however, die on the shore. They have a transparent gas-filled bladder that helps them float along with tentacles.

The sting from a bluebottle causes a burning sensation in humans and tends to cause swelling with red rashes. While many get stung by stepping on it or by picking them up, experts



The sting from a bluebottle causes a burning sensation in humans and tends to cause swelling with red rashes. File

suggest that the sting is more dangerous when a person is in the water.

On being stung, experts sug-

gest pouring seawater on the affected area without rubbing it or washing the wound with warm water. Victims are advised to go

to hospitals and not to pry the creatures.

A large number of bluebottles had washed ashore on several beaches in Mumbai in 2018, and over 150 people, including several children, ended up being stung at popular beaches like Girgaum Chowpatty, Juhu and Aksa.

Shaunak Modi, director of Coastal Conservation Foundation, who documented the marine species on Juhu beach last week, tweeted, "Last few days of strong onshore winds have brought our yearly monsoon visitors back to our shores. Thousands of Portuguese man o' war have been stranded at Juhu beach today."

is providing doorstep vaccination.

On Monday, two teams began the drive in the morning from the K/ east ward, and administered vaccine to several people, including a 102-year-old beneficiary.

Following this, the team administered vaccines to residents of the neighbouring K/ west ward. BMC has received requests from 4,488 eligible citizens for home vaccination.

Those wanting to avail of the facility are required to mail their details to covidvacc2bedridden@gmail.com.

CHANDIGARH HOUSING BOARD
 8, Jan Marg, Sector 9-D, Chandigarh, Ph. : 0172-4601612

Corrigendum
Subject : e-Tender for Commercial and Residential Properties on Free-Hold basis.
 The Chandigarh Housing Board has invited e-Tenders for 151 built-up commercial units and 38 built-up residential units for sale on lease hold basis vide Public Notice dated 13.07.2021 with the last date of e-bid submission as 02.08.2021 till 6.00 PM.
 All the prospective bidders are hereby informed that the date of start of lease period for each of the unit has been provided on the website of the Chandigarh Housing Board i.e. www.chbonline.in
 Now the last date of e-bid submission has been extended to **10.08.2021 till 10.00 AM** and the e-bids will be opened on same day at 10.15 AM. The prospective bidders have option to modify (increase or decrease) their bid amount upto 10.00 AM on 10.08.2021.
Chief Accounts Officer,
Chandigarh Housing Board, Chandigarh
WEAR MASK, WASH YOUR HANDS, WATCH YOUR DISTANCE

| MUNICIPAL COUNCIL KARANJA DIST WASHIM | | | | |
|---|--|--|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Tender Notice | | | | |
| (11 th Call) | | | | |
| Karanja Municipal Council/ Karanja invites sealed tenders on Percentage/lumsum basis for the work as under, from the experienced Architects Registered with Council of Architecture and PPP Project Consultants with proven experience in prestigious PPP/BOT building projects. Detailed Tender notice will be available on https://www.mahatenders.gov.in from date 30/07/2021 | | | | |
| Sr. No. | Name of Work | Earnest Money | Tender Fees | Time limit for completion of work |
| 1 | Empanelment of Architectural consultant For preparation of plans Estimates and Design of the shopping centre and office building on B.O.T. basis | Rs. 100000/- | Rs. 5000/- | 18 Months including Rainy season |
| Sr. No. | Municipal Council Stage | Contractor Stage | Start Date & Time | Expiry Date & Time |
| 1 | Release Tender | | 30.07.2021 09:00 | 30.07.2021 18:00 |
| 2 | | Bid Submission | 30.07.2021 09:00 | 05.08.2021 18:00 |
| 3 | Technical Bid Opening | | 07.08.2021 09:00 | 07.08.2021 18:00 |
| (Dadarao Dolharkar) Chief Officer Municipal Council Karanja | | (Sheshrao Dhoke) President Municipal Council Karanja | | |

6 MAHARASHTRA

Class XII results for state board today, says Gaikwad

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THE MAHARASHTRA State Board of Secondary and Higher Education (HSC) will announce Class XII results Tuesday, said state education minister Varsha Gaikwad.

"The Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education will declare results of standard 12th, batch 2021 on August 3 at 4pm," Gaikwad said Monday.

The results, which were earlier expected on July 31, were delayed due to floods in Konkan and western Maharashtra.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Class 12 exams were cancelled and it was decided that students will be promoted based on internal assessment for the last three academic years.

The formula was evolved after interacting with academicians and other experts, said Gaikwad. Elaborating on the assessment process, Gaikwad also said, "Performance in the best three subjects in Class 10 was given a weightage of 30 marks and an equal weightage was given to internal assessment of Class 11. The internal assessment for Class 12 has been given a weightage of 40 marks."

In case a student is unhappy with the results, they would get the opportunity to appear for an examination, when the Covid-19 situation normalises, authorities said. After being rescheduled twice, it was decided that the Class 12 board exams would be held on June 3. However, they were cancelled following a spurt in cases across the state.

Gaikwad said, "The decision to cancel the exams and adopt an internal assessment process was taken keeping in mind the health and safety of children. Also, it has ensured uniformity between the state and Centre," she added.

ELGAAR PARISHAD CASE

NIA to HC: Trial court order extending Sudha Bharadwaj's custody did not cause prejudice to rights of accused

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

NATIONAL INVESTIGATION Agency (NIA) opposed the default bail plea filed by lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj, an accused in the Elgaar Parishad case, and said the 90-day extension granted to Pune Police in 2018 by a trial court to file a chargesheet in the case did not cause any prejudice to the rights of the accused.

The NIA counsel was responding to claims made by Bharadwaj's counsel advocate Yug Mohit Chaudhry. While referring to responses filed under the Right to Information (RTI) Act availed from the High Court Registry, Chaudhry alleged that additional sessions judge KD Vadane of the trial court in Pune was not designated to hear matters regarding scheduled offences under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Bharadwaj's plea also alleged that the judge was not authorised as a "special judge" to take cog-

MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

Deshmukh skips ED summons again, says agency 'abusing' power, authority

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

FORMER MAHARASHTRA home minister Anil Deshmukh on Monday failed to appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) again in connection with its probe into an alleged money laundering case and accused the agency of abusing its power in its investigation.

In a letter to the probe agency, Deshmukh said he was shocked and concerned over fresh summons issued by the ED asking him and his son, Hrishikesh Deshmukh, to appear in person on August 2 as he has challenged the "entire investigation" launched by the agency in the Supreme Court, which is due to hear the matter Tuesday.

"With regard to the subject summons, at the outset, I may express my grave dismay, shock and concern, especially to the timing of the issuance thereof. As you are well aware as a contesting respondent that the entire investigations being carried out by your office has been challenged by me before the Hon'ble Supreme Court," Deshmukh stated in his response Monday.

Deshmukh in his petition before the apex court has contended that the ED probe against him is "actuated with malice both in law as well as fact" and stands "vitiated on account of grave violation of the procedure established by law".

"...your subject summons, issued soon after the date of the hearing of the matter by the Supreme Court and seeking my personal appearance on a day prior to the next hearing before the Supreme Court, substantially strengthens my apprehensions that investigations being carried

DESHMUKH CALLED THRICE FOR QUESTIONING

APRIL 14 CBI records statement of former home minister Anil Deshmukh based on allegations made by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh

APRIL 24 CBI registers an FIR against Deshmukh on charges of bribery, corruption and criminal conspiracy. Also searches his residence

MAY 11 ED files a money laundering case against Deshmukh for allegedly obtaining illegal gratification

MAY 25 ED searches the residence of Deshmukh aide Sagar Bhatewar

JUNE 24 ED searches the residence of Deshmukh after it finds a money trail of Rs 4 crore, allegedly paid by bar owners in Mumbai to the NCP leader over three months

JUNE 25 ED arrests Deshmukh's personal assistant Kundan Shinde and personal secretary Sanjeev Palande in the case

JUNE 26 ED summons Deshmukh for questioning

in the case

JUNE 29 Deshmukh writes to ED seeking exemption from personal appearance due to the Covid-19

JULY 3 ED issues the second summons to the NCP leader in the case

JULY 5 Deshmukh writes to ED informing the agency that he has approached the top court to ensure the money laundering probe against him is fair

JULY 16 ED provisionally attaches immovable assets worth Rs 4.20 crore belonging to Deshmukh and his family under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)

JULY 18 ED searches ancestral homes of Deshmukh in Maharashtra

JULY 28 CBI conducts searches on middlemen and a few police officers in connection with the case against Deshmukh

JULY 30 ED once again summons Deshmukh and his son Hrishikesh asking them to appear before it for questioning.

out by you are neither fair nor just or above-board. Brute abuse of power and authority is apparent on the face of the record," Deshmukh said.

He also said that the agency

was yet to give him a copy of the Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) in the case.

The NCP leader had earlier skipped the ED summons three times. In his first reply, Deshmukh



Advocate Inderpal Singh, legal representative of former home minister Anil Deshmukh, arrives at the Enforcement Directorate office, in Mumbai on Monday. *Ganesh Shirsekar*

said he was unable to appear in person before the agency due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequently, he asked the ED to wait for the Supreme Court to decide his petition seeking protection from coercive action by the probe agencies in the case.

Last month, the ED probe found that Deshmukh, while acting as the home minister of Maharashtra, "received illegal gratification of approximately Rs 4.7 crore in cash from various orchestra bar owners" through now dismissed Mumbai Police API Sachin Waze, arrested in the Ambani terror scare case.

According to the ED, Deshmukh's family "laundered the tainted sum of Rs 4.18 crore and projected it as untainted by showing the same amount received by the trust, namely Shri Sai Shikshan Sanstha".

The ED probe into Deshmukh's financial transactions is in line with the CBI probe into former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh's allegations of corruption against

the NCP leader. Deshmukh has denied the allegations. In his March 20 letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, after he was removed as the Mumbai Police chief, Singh had alleged that Deshmukh had asked police officers, including now suspended API Sachin Waze, to collect Rs 100 crore, including Rs 40-50 crore each month, from 1,750 bars and restaurants in Mumbai.

The ED registered a case against Deshmukh for allegedly obtaining illegal gratification, based on an FIR filed by the CBI in April. The CBI FIR said Deshmukh had used his official position to obtain certain undue advantages and had also influenced transfers and postings in the Mumbai Police, as alleged by Singh.

Waze is being probed by the NIA for his alleged role in the case related to the bomb scare outside Mukesh Ambani's residence and the murder of businessman Mansukh Hiran. After being suspended for 15 years for a custodial death case, Waze had rejoined the police force in 2020.

HC to Centre: Consider devoted edu channel, radio programmes for students amid pandemic

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THE BOMBAY High Court told the Centre on Monday, through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, to consider setting up a dedicated television channel and radio programmes so that students, including specially abled children, particularly in rural areas, do not suffer due to lack of internet connectivity during the pandemic.

The court pointed out that there were several TV channels for entertainment and movies and asked the I&B Ministry why it couldn't consider a dedicated education channel for students, including hearing and visually impaired pupils. "Why cannot there be full-fledged devoted channels for education, not only for specially abled students but for those who have suffered? We have to go back to old technology now as the network issue will continue," the bench said. It sought the central government's response on the matter by August 5.

The division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Girish S Kulkarni was hearing a PIL

NIA seeks 30-day extension to file chargesheet in Ambani terror scare case

SADAF MODAK
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THE NIA has sought another extension to file a chargesheet in the Ambani terror scare case.

In an application filed before the special court recently, the central agency has sought another 30 days to file the chargesheet against dismissed policemen Sachin Waze, Riyazuddin Kazi, Vinayak Shinde, Sunil Mane and Naresh Gaur.

The NIA has said in its plea that it is not possible to complete the "enormous task" of investigation and submission of the final report against the five this month as five more men were arrested subsequently.

Special Judge Prashant R Sitre had on June 9 granted the NIA an extension of 60 days to file the chargesheet after the agency cited grounds, including restrictions owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, voluminous data and the accused being "highly influential" former policemen.

Since the accused are booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the NIA can file the chargesheet against them in up to 180 days. The agency, however, requires to seek an extension from the court to file the chargesheet and extend their custody.

"...The extended period of investigation was utilised in the investigation against newly arrested five co-accused persons and detailed analysis of seized documents collected during the investigation, which are voluminous in nature, hence a detailed probe for further analysis needs sufficient time," the NIA has said.

The NIA had arrested retired cop Pradeep Sharma and four others alleging that they were linked to the conspiracy to plant explo-

In its plea, the central agency has said it is not possible to complete the "enormous task" of investigation and submission of final report against five accused this month as five more were arrested

sives in an SUV parked near the residence of industrialist Mukesh Ambani on February 25 and the subsequent murder of a man linked to the vehicle.

The NIA has said that the larger conspiracy in the case is spread over several parts of the country and the investigating officers are carrying out investigations by visiting the scenes of crime, tracing seized documents and material from the accused as well as recording statements of witnesses.

The NIA has claimed that the conspiracy was planned with an intent to strike terror in the minds of people in Mumbai and Maharashtra and the suspects were in touch with police personnel and others during the alleged offence.

The special court will hear the accused on the NIA plea before deciding on whether the extension can be allowed. If the plea is allowed, the NIA can file the chargesheet in the case in September.

Meanwhile, apart from Waze, other accused including Kazi and Mane have also filed pleas seeking default bail. Their applications state that they should be released on bail since the NIA did not file the chargesheet within 90 days. All the 10 accused are currently in judicial custody.

Deputy chief vigilance officer from dairy development dept caught accepting bribe

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

A DEPUTY chief vigilance officer from the dairy department was booked under the Prevention of Corruption Act after he was allegedly caught accepting a bribe of Rs 10,000 on Monday in lieu of not taking action against an alleged unauthorised construction in Aarey Colony.

According to the Mumbai unit of the ACB, the accused has been identified as Udas Tulse, 48.

The complainant owns a house and shop in Aarey milk colony in Goregaon (East) and Tulse received a complaint that the properties were unauthorised.

Tulse asked the complainant to pay a visit to his Worli office on July 29 along with property documents, officials said. When the complainant visited his office, Tulse said his properties were unauthorised, threatened him of action, and demanded a bribe of Rs 25,000, they added.

On July 30, the complainant approached the ACB office and submitted a complaint against Tulse.

Five months after resignation, chorus for Sanjay Rathod's reinduction in cabinet grows

Sena leader cycles from Yavatmal to Mumbai, submits memorandum to CM

VISHWAS WAGHMODE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

MORE THAN five months after he resigned as a state minister in the wake of allegations linking him to the Pooja Chavan suicide case, there is a voice growing within the Shiv Sena in favour of Sanjay Rathod's rehabilitation stating that there is no complaint from the woman's family and the police had found no foul play.

On July 31, Girish Vyas, the deputy city chief of the party's Yavatmal unit, reached Mumbai on a cycle from the cotton city to press for Rathod's reinduction as a minister in the state cabinet. He had left Yavatmal on a cycle on July 22.

"I came here to submit a memorandum to Sena chief and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray with a demand to induct Rathod to the cabinet. It is to ensure that the development in Yavatmal

I came here to submit a memorandum to Sena chief and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray with a demand to induct Rathod to the cabinet. It is to ensure that the development in Yavatmal does not stop"

— GIRISH VYAS, DEPUTY CHIEF OF YAVATMAL UNIT OF SHIV SENA

does not stop," Vyas said, adding that many other party activists felt the same.

A four-time Shiv Sena MLA from Digras in Yavatmal district, Rathod had resigned as the state forest minister on February 28 after he came under the scanner for the death of 22-year-old Chavan, a resident of Parli Vajjanath in Beed district, who died allegedly after falling from the balcony of a flat in Pune's Hadapsar area on February 8.

Pune Police investigating the suicide case has recently found the recordings of "several calls" between her and a man, pur-

ported to be Rathod, in the "four-five days" before her death. Earlier, several photos and audio clips had surfaced allegedly linking Rathod to her suicide.

Accusing the BJP of levelling false allegations against Rathod in the suicide case, Vyas said, "There is no complaint from the (Chavan's) family. Also, there has been no action by the police in the past five months. So, he should be inducted into the cabinet."

When asked about Vyas's demand, Rathod said Monday it showed that the activist's love for him. "He is Shiv Saik and cycled to Mumbai out of love for me. I resigned as minister in the wake of allegations. The police will probe into it and submit a report to the CM, who will then decide about my future," Rathod told *The Indian Express*.

A senior Sena leader said Rathod belongs to the Banjara community and is known as the party's pillar in the Vidarbha region. "He has a huge following in the Banjara community, which has stood behind him. So, this cannot be ignored and he will have to be rehabilitated," the leader said. A final decision about Rathod, he added, will be taken by Thackeray.

World's costliest injection not enough as 13-month-old Vedika loses battle to rare genetic disease

MANOJ MORE
PUNE, AUGUST 2

THIRTEEN-MONTH-OLD Vedika Sourabh Shinde, whose deteriorating health condition from a rare disease had drawn worldwide support, died Sunday evening at Dinanath Mangeshkar Hospital.

"Vedika was her playful self last evening when suddenly she developed a breathing problem. We immediately rushed her to a nearby hospital," her father Sourabh told *The Indian Express* on Monday. "After her condition was stabilised at Bhosari Hospital, we rushed her to Dinanath Mangeshkar Hospital. She was immediately put on ventilator.

Doctors made all efforts to save her life but could not do so. She passed away in the evening," he said.

Vedika had been administered the world's costliest injection at Rs 16 crore a month-and-a-half ago to bring her out of her debilitating state.

The Shindes are residents of Bhosari in Pimpri-Chinchwad. "After the injection was given to Vedika last month, there was improvement in her condition. Before the injection was given, she could not hold her head and was always bedridden. But afterwards, she could make movements. We also celebrated her birthday last month. The doctors had said we needed to take extra care for the next three months



Vedika had been administered the world's costliest injection at Rs 16 crore a month-and-a-half ago to bring her out of her debilitating state. *File*

after which there will be major improvement in her condition," Shinde added.

Vedika suffered from spinal muscular atrophy, a rare disease that occurs due to a single missing gene and results in progressive muscle wasting, according to doctors.

"When Vedika was four months old, she was unable to hold her neck. She used to fall sideways and was not able to hold herself upright," Shinde said.

Doctors diagnosed it as a rare genetic disorder that would lead to degeneration of her body muscles, causing them to fail before she turns two.

Doctors recommended Zolgensma, said to be world's

most expensive drug costing Rs 17 crore, saying it could help stop the disease from damaging Vedika's muscles. The injection was procured for Rs 16 crore.

"Around Rs 16 crore was raised through multiple platforms. MP Amol Kolhe appealed to the government in Lok Sabha to waive import duty on the injection, which was available in the US. Actor John Abraham also appealed for donations...The fundraiser infused new hope in us. We don't know who the donors or well-wishers are. They are from around the world. They did everything they could to save our child. But destiny had something else in store for her..." said a family member.

Shinde said there were 17 such children in India who have been given this injection. "Vedika was the second one from Pune...The first one made a recovery after the injection," he said.

Dr Sandeep Patil of Dinanath Mangeshkar Hospital said, "Such babies generally suffer from feeding intolerance...And that is what happened with Vedika. She died of asphyxia. It is a rare genetic disorder which is detected a few months after birth. Such cases are one in 4,000-5,000 births. There are three types of spinal muscular atrophy disease. Vedika suffered from type one disease."

Vedika was given the injection one-and-a-half months

ago, said Patil. "She was discharged a couple of days later. We had been monitoring her health and there was improvement..." he added.

Like Vedika, another baby from Pune was also given the injection, he said.

"The baby was given the injection a year-and-a-half ago and she is doing well," Patil said, adding that three to four such babies in Maharashtra have been given the injection.

The expensive injection has been available in the US for the past two-three years, Patil said. "There are no long-term studies about the injection but studies in the US have recommended its use in such cases because of its proven effectiveness," he said.

Shiv Sena workers ‘vandalise’ Adani airport board at CSMIA

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

SHIV SENA workers on Monday allegedly vandalised a board which was put up at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport branding it as “Adani Airport”.

The activists said they had objection to the airport being referred to as Adani Airport when its officials name is Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA).

In July this year, Adani Group took over the management of the Mumbai International Airport from the control of the GVK Group.

Shiv Sena Parliamentarian Arvind Sawant, who heads Bharatiya Kamagar Sena, the labour wing of the Shiv Sena, said: “Our BKS workers and members led by Sanjay Kadam had been to airport to protest.

“We would have had no problem if they had named it Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport — operated by Adani group” — A SENA ACTIVIST

There is a statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at the entrance of the connector to the airport. There was a GVK logo earlier there. Now they have removed the name and there is an Adani Airport logo in its place. This is an insult to Shivaji Maharaj, Marathi pride and Maharashtrians.”

Another Shiv Sena activist, Nitin Dicholkar, said, “This airport has been named after Chhatrapati Shivaji by Late PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee. We would have had no problem if they had named it Chhatrapati Shivaji

International Airport — operated by Adani group. Our feelings are hurt.”

The Adani Group, meanwhile, released a statement and said the branding was in compliance with the norms of the Airport Authority of India (AAI), adding no changes had been made to the airport’s branding.

“We firmly assure that Adani Airports Holding Limited (AAHL) has merely replaced the previous branding with Adani Airports branding and that no change has been made to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport’s branding or positioning at the terminal. The branding at CSMIA is in compliance with the norms and guidelines of Airport Authority of India (AAI). AAHL will continue to adhere to all the guidelines laid out by the government in the interest of the aviation community at large,” the statement said.



Amid rain, people wait in a line to get vaccinated against Covid-19 at a vaccination centre in Mumbai on Monday.
Ganesh Shirsekar

Over 8,700 cases solved in Lok Adalat, Rs 480 crore collected

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

A PROGRAMME of National Lok Adalat was held on August 1 in the courts of the metropolitan magistrates in Mumbai.

A total of 8,728 cases were settled and Rs 479.90 crore of the settlement amount was collected. It is the highest amount of settlement in the court of metropolitan magistrates, Mumbai. Shrinivas B Agarwal, Principal Judge, City Civil and Sessions Court, Greater Bombay, Sayali Dande Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Esplanade Mumbai, Hitendra Wani Secretary District Legal Services Authority Mumbai took efforts to make the Lok Adalat a success.

Ganesh festival: Pune civic body bans procession, 2nd year in a row

AJAY JADHAV
PUNE, AUGUST 2

URGING PEOPLE to celebrate the upcoming Ganesh Chaturthi in the city in a simple manner, the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has banned procession during the festival for the second year consecutively in view of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

However, Ganesh mandals can erect pandals as per the instructions of the civic body. Pune is known for its 10-day Ganesh festival that attracts tourists from across the country and abroad. The procession and decorations are the main attractions of the festival.

In an order, issued by Municipal Commissioner Vikram Kumar, the PMC said the festival has to be celebrated in a simple way as per the state’s direction. The Ganesh mandals have to take permission of the civic body and follow instructions regarding celebrations while maintaining the existing restrictions.

“There should not be a procession during the installation and immersion of idols during the festival. Children and senior citizens should avoid going for immersion,” Kumar said.

The maximum height of idol for those to be installed in Ganesh mandal should be four feet.

MP protests, govt stays appointment of Washim collector

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THE GENERAL administration department, Maharashtra, stayed the posting of Aanchal Goyal as the collector of Washim district after a local political leader protested her appointment.

Goyal, a 2014 batch IAS officer, was appointed as collector of Washim after the incumbent official, Deepak Mugalikar, retired on July 31.

However, when she reached the district to take up her posting, she was denied the charge. Instead, Mugalikar handed over the charge to the additional collector of Washim.

The incident caused concern among IAS officers, some of whom conveyed their protest to top officials of the general administration department. Prior to this, Goyal, 31, was working in Mumbai as the joint managing director of Film City.

Chief Secretary S J Kunte was not available for any comment on the matter, however, a senior government official confirmed that the appointment was stayed because a local MP objected to Goyal’s posting.

Pune among five districts with high number of infections

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, AUGUST 2

AS THE state health department data indicates that Pune, Ahmednagar, Satara, Solapur and Sangli continue to account for a high number of cases and deaths, experts cited good amount of testing during this phase as one of the reasons for this rise in infection and fatality rates.

“Extensive testing during this peak has increased the positivity rate,” Dr Sanjay Pujari, expert member with the national Covid-19 task force told *The Indian Express* while commenting on the reasons for the long tail or high plateau of the pandemic in Pune district.

On August 2, total 4,869 new cases and 90 deaths were reported in Maharashtra. Pune circle, including Pune rural, Pune Municipal Corporation, Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation, Solapur and Satara reported 1,574 new infections. Till date, Maharashtra has reported more than 63 lakh Covid-19 cases and 1.33 lakh deaths.

While Pune district till date has reported more than 10.58 lakh people recovering from Covid-19, the daily district data set on August 1 shows Pune rural continues to report a high number of cases. On Sunday, the new cases detected in Pune rural were 492, while areas under the PMC and the PCMC reported 256 and 190 cases each respectively.

The daily recovery, however, was higher than the case load. According to data from the district health department, as against 995 new infections on Sunday in Pune district, 1,256 patients had recovered. Around 20,000 samples are being tested daily at present.

“There is still a large susceptible population as the last sero survey indicated 58 per cent positivity in Maharashtra – the second lowest across Indian states,” he said.

Apart from the lull and fatigue in complying with Covid-appropriate behaviour coupled with opening of lockdown like restrictions, the Delta variant of SARS-CoV2 virus is in circulation and linked with high transmission rates, the expert added.

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

THE BOMBAY High Court on Monday asked the Central and State governments to take measures to rectify the errors in vaccination certificates issued through CoWin portal, after it was informed that the certificates issued to a few beneficiaries consisted of the same date and batch numbers for both the doses besides incorrect names being mentioned in some certificates.

The Court also asked the Central government to inform it about the distribution of vaccines to all states including Maharashtra after it was told by the petitioners that vaccination drives at various places in Maharashtra were intermittently being stopped in the past month due to shortage in supply of vials.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Girish S Kulkarni was hearing a PIL filed by Yogeeta Vanzara, through advocates

Is booster shot a must? HC asks govt

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court on Monday asked the Maharashtra government if a third dose or a booster shot of anti-Covid-19 vaccine was required to be taken in near future by the citizens who have already received two jabs. A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Girish S Kulkarni referred to State Covid Task force headed by Dr Sanjay Oak, which had informed the administrative committee of the HC that despite having taken both doses of the vaccines, people might need a third dose or a booster

shot of vaccine to protect themselves from several variants of the virus. The bench told Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni for the state, “The doctors from the Task force had said that a third dose might be required to be taken 10 months from the second Covishield dose and six months from the second dose of Covaxin. Is that still the case? Please seek response from the Covid Task Force how far the third dose is necessary. It should not happen that we are happy with the second dose, but there is an increase (in cases).” **ENS**

Rajesh Vanzara and Jamsheed Master. The plea raised several issues related to CoWIN, seeking orderly administration of jabs. The HC was also hearing a PIL filed by Mumbai-based lawyer

Siddharth Chandrashekar, represented by advocate Anita Shekhar-Castellino seeking the court’s intervention on issues faced while booking slots on the CoWin portal and priority vaccination slots for the elderly.

Additional Government Pleader Geeta Shastri, representing Maharashtra government, informed the bench that the state, which had a population of approximately 12 crore

Zika virus infection: Central team to visit Pune

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, AUGUST 2

A CENTRAL team of experts will visit Pune district to monitor the Zika virus situation after the first case was detected at Belsar village in Purandar tehsil.

The three-member central team will include a public health expert from the office of the regional director, Pune, a gynaecologist from Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi, and an entomologist from the National Institute of Malaria Research.

The team will work with the state health department and take stock of the situation to assess whether the Union health ministry’s action plan for Zika management is being implemented.

According to Dr Ujjwala Jadhav, Purandar tehsil health officer, their house-to-house survey is underway, and on the second day, as many as 15 teams visited 593 houses in Belsar and its five surrounding villages.

A total population of 2,408 was covered and the teams identified 11 pregnant women.

State invites suggestions, objections from public on its amendments to farm laws

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, AUGUST 2

THE MAHARASHTRA government has sought suggestions and objections from general public regarding the amendments it has carried out to the three central legislations. The last date for filing the same is September 20.

During the recently concluded monsoon session of the state assembly, the Maharashtra government carried out the amendments to the three central farm laws. The farm laws have become a sore point for the central government with the farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana carrying on an almost year-long protest against them.

The amendments that Maharashtra carried out is more suited to the state’s existing eco system. The main amendment carried out by the state in the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, is to specify that pre-har-

The last date for filing the objections and suggestions is September 20

vest contracts between the farmer and the buyer should not be below the government declared minimum support price (MSP).

In case an agreement is made for a price below the MSP, it will be valid only for two years. Also, instead of the sub-divisional officer, who is designated in the central act to hear complaints, the state’s law makes provision of competent authority and appellate authority to hear cases of dispute.

Similarly, for the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, is to introduce the need for buyers to take licence before trading outside the trade areas. Trade areas, as per the definition in the central act, are the physical boundaries of the wholesale

markets or mandis.

In the central act, free trade outside the mandis was allowed, for which traders would not have to take any licence from any authority. Maharashtra’s amendment while allowing for such trade has made it mandatory for the trader to procure license before they trade.

Also, the dispute redressal mechanism is made robust in Maharashtra’s amendment. Of the three central acts, this was perhaps the most contentious as farmers feared the collapse of the present mandi system would leave them at the mercy of big traders.

The state government in its amendment to the Essential Commodities Act, 1950, took on the power on itself to prescribe stock limits on essential commodities. The softcopy of the all the three acts are available on the website of Maharashtra legislature (www.mls.org.in). Suggestions and objections can be mailed to al.assembly.mls@gmail.com.

Marketing & Communication Department, Corporate Centre, 9th Floor, State Bank Bhavan, Madam Cama Road, Mumbai - 400021

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

RFPNO: CC/M&C/2021-22/01

DATED: 30.07.2021

Bids are invited by State Bank of India from the eligible bidders for empanelment of agencies for Video Production services for SBI. For details, please visit 'Procurement news' at <https://www.bank.sbi>

Last date and time for submission of bids: 23.08.2021 up to 15:00 hrs.

Place: Mumbai

Sd/-

Date: 03.08.2021

DGM (M&C)

GOVT. OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF, WATER RESOURCES
ODISHA, BHUBANESWAR
'e' Procurement Notice No. CEMKS 01 OF 2021-22

1. **Name of the work**

: Protection to scoured bank at improvement to Chitrotpala left embankment from RD 00 Km to 15.00 Km under NABARD Assistance RIDF-XXV

2. **Amount put to Tender**

: Rs. 10,71,34,055.00

3. **Bid Document Cost**

: Rs. 10,000.00 (online)

4. **E.M.D.**

: Bid Security Declaration to be furnished as per Annexure-III of Section-6 of Technical Bid Document.

5. **Class of Contractor**

: Special Class & Super Class

6. **Period of Completion**

: 18 calendar months (548 Days)

7. **Other details are as follows.**

| Procurement Officer | Bid Identification No. | Availability of Tender On-line for bidding | | Date of Opening of Technical Bid (Cover-I) |
|---|-------------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| Chief Engineer & BM, Mahanadi Kathajodi System, Bhubaneswar | CEMKS MND 01 OF 2021-22 | 04.08.2021 10.00 hrs | 19.08.2021 17.00 hrs | 23.08.2021 11.00 hrs |

8. **e-mail Id**

: celmbbsr@yahoo.co.in

Further detail conditions can be seen from the Govt. website www.tendersorissa.gov.in

Sd/- Chief Engineer & Basin Manager

Mahanadi Kathajodi System Bhubaneswar

OIPR-32252/11/0002/2122

GOVT. OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS, CIRCLE, BHAWANIPATNA
Bid Identification No.: BPT/Online-05/2021-22 Date-29.07.2021
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS FOR ROAD WORKS IN ODISHA
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement

1. **Name of work**

: Improvement of road works under BIJU KBK Plan for the year 2021-22 in the district of Kalahandi.

2. **No of Works**

: 03 Nos.

3. **Location details**

: Kalahandi District

4. **Estimated Cost**

: As per NIT.

5. **Period of Completion**

: As per NIT.

6. **Cost of tender paper**

: Rs. 10,000/- per set.

7. **Other details**

:

| Availability of tender for online bidding | | Last date & time for seeking tender clarification | Date and time of opening of technical bid |
|---|----------------------|---|---|
| From | To | 19.08.2021 | 24.08.2021 at 11.00 A.M. |
| 06.08.2021 11.00 A.M. | 23.08.2021 5.00 P.M. | | |

Further details can be seen from the web site "www.tendersorissa.gov.in"

Sd/-

Chief Construction Engineer

Rural Works, Circle, Bhawanipatna

OIPR- 25102/11/0005/2122

Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation

City Engineering Department

Tender Notice No. NMMC/ C.E./EE(Airoli)/105 /2021-22

| Sr. No. | Name of Work | Estimated Cost (Rs.) |
|---------|---|----------------------|
| 1 | (72241)Improvement of Nana Patil garden in Sector 8 Ward No. 22 Airoli | 20920533/- |
| 2 | (73378)Providing and Laying sewer lines from E-01 to labour naka,labour naka to Q36,Q group and J-01 to J-70 in sector 04 at ward no.17, in Airoli Ward | 8500132/- |
| 3 | (73581)Improvement of Footpath by doing Stamp Concrete from Rajiv Gandhi Garden to Khandoba Temple, sector 3, Airoli | 3341114/- |
| 4 | (67693)Improvement to road by lowering the 600 mm dia. from Savita chemical junction to IKEA co. on Thane-Belapur road. | 16954074/- |
| 5 | (72674)Annual Repairs and Maintenance of NMMC's Rajmata Jijau General Hospital in Sec-3, UHP in sect-2 and UHP in Cinchpada, Airoli | 3682812/- |
| 6 | (73591)Improvement of Footpath by doing Stamp Concrete from Bharat Bijli Underpass to Railway Station Underpass , sector 3, Airoli | 6485310/- |

Tender booklets will be available on e-tendering computer system at <https://nmmc.tenders.in> and at www.nmmc.gov.in website of NMMC on dt. 03/08/2021. The tender is to be submitted online at <https://nmmc.tenders.in> For any technical difficulties in the e-tendering process, please contact the help desk number given on this website.

The right to accept or reject any tender is reserved by the Hon'ble Commissioner of Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation

Sign/-

City Engineer

NMMC/IPR Ad no.543/2021

Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation

‘Friendship with nature’: Cathedral Infant School students plant 240 saplings

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

STUDENTS OF Cathedral & John Conon Infant School at Malabar Hill planted 240 fruit saplings in four public gardens in the school’s vicinity on August 1, celebrated as Friendship Day, to celebrate their friendship with nature.

Each student received a sapling at home in June. The students in the age group of 5 to 7 years nurtured these saplings for a month to feel a sense of ownership and



The drive at Cathedral & John Conon Infant School. Express

While maintaining Covid-appropriate behaviour, the students visited these four gardens with their parents, teachers and planted these saplings.

The school, as part of their EVS curriculum, planned this event to honour the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and with this theme of the World Environment Day 2021. In the wake of the recent cyclone during which Mumbai lost 2,363 trees, the institution took the initiative to engage its students in restoring what was lost.

responsibility for co-dwelling.

8 IN PARLIAMENT MONSOON SESSION

5 QUESTIONS



PR KASHA SABHA MP BANDA PRAKASH SPEAKS TO AVISHEK G DASTIDAR ON WHY HE RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT THE INLAND WATERWAYS BILL PASSED IN THE UPPER HOUSE MONDAY.

You raised certain concerns on The Inland Vessels Bill ?

The length of the rivers and canals in the country is 32,792 km... we are using only 4,000 km of inland waterways... this Bill is a totally unified law ignoring the state government's claims and framework. I said the state governments should also be given proper attention while making laws. Only around 1,100 waterways have been declared as national waterways. I requested that Godavari and Krishna should also be included.

Are you suggesting that the new law encroaches into the domain of the states?

It is an integrated Bill. As per this Bill, the state governments will have no role... registration, licensing... everything will be done by the Centre...

Are you seeing a pattern?

After Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister, whatever Bills they are bringing are all centralised Bills ignoring the federal spirit of the country...

The Bill was passed in the din.

It is a compulsion for them to run the show. They are passing the Bills... In Lok Sabha, without discussion, Bills have been passed. But for the first time in the Rajya Sabha it is happening....

What is the TRS's stand on the Pegasus scandal?

National political parties will fight on many issues. But our interest is only our state. State interest is the top priority for the TRS.

Insurance law amendment passed without LS debate, tribunal reforms Bill introduced

LIZ MATHEW

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

THE MONSOON session saw another acrimonious day in the Lok Sabha on Monday due to the stalemate between the Treasury and Opposition benches.

Amid Opposition protests over the Pegasus spyware controversy and farm laws, a Bill to amend the general insurance law -- to allow the government to pare its stake in state-owned insurers -- was passed without debate, while another to abolish as many as nine appellate tribunals set up under various Acts was introduced.

The General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2021 is aimed at generating required resources from the Indian markets so that public sector general insurers can design innovative products.

Opposition leaders alleged that the government deliberately



Speaker Om Birla; Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman (left) in Lok Sabha on Monday. PTI

brought the Bill, which has far-reaching impact and was introduced on Friday, amid the protests for consideration and passing without discussion. "The Bill is a dangerous one -- it's in a way denationalising the public sector general insurance companies," RSPMP N K Premachandran said.

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury objected when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stood up to withdraw the Tribunals Reforms

(Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Bill. "By riding roughshod over the Opposition's legitimate right, the Government has been bulldozing one after another legislation without any discussion."

The Bill, introduced in the Budget Session, could not be passed at that time and an ordinance had been promulgated in its place on April 4.

On Monday, Sitharaman introduced a fresh Bill, The Tribunals Reforms Bill, in its place to amend

nine Acts -- the Cinematograph Act 1952, the Customs Act 1962, the Airport Authority of India Act, 1994, the Copyrights, Act, 1957, the Patents Act, 1970, the Trade Marks Act, 1999, Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001 and the Control of National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act, 2002.

The amendment is aimed at abolishing tribunals or authorities

under various laws by amending various statutes to streamline the justice delivery system. All cases pending before such tribunals or authorities will be transferred to the Commercial Court or High Court, said the statement of objects and reasons of the Bill.

The government pushed the Bill in the afternoon even as the Opposition MPs -- of the Congress-led UPA, Left, BSP, SAD and TMC -- continued shouting slogans and raising placards demanding a discussion on the Pegasus issue, standing in the well of the House.

The House witnessed repeated adjournments. Before adjourning the House till 12 noon, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla asked the Opposition members to go back to their seats and said that crores of money has been spent to run the House. "This House is for discussion and dialogue and to raise the problems of the people," he said.

Highest number of students 'without access to digital device in Bihar'

New Delhi: Over 2.96 crore school students across 24 states do not have access to digital devices with Bihar reporting the highest number, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said in a written response to a question in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

The total of 2.96 crore does not include such students from Delhi (4 per cent), Jammu and Kashmir (70 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (70 per cent), Punjab (42 per cent) and Chhattisgarh (28.27 per cent) as their absolute numbers were not shared. Data for states, including Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra, Manipur and Uttar Pradesh is not available, while the survey for West Bengal was still in process. Bihar has the highest number of such students at 1.43 crore, followed by Jharkhand (35.52 lakh), Karnataka (31.31 lakh) and Assam (31.06 lakh). Uttarakhand has 21 lakh such children. **PTI**

Amid Opp protests, Rajya Sabha clears inland waterways Bill

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

AMID PERSISTENT sloganeering by the Opposition demanding a discussion into the Pegasus scandal and the withdrawal of the farm laws, The Inland Vessels Bill, 2021 was cleared by Rajya Sabha on Monday.

The Bill had earlier been passed by Lok Sabha on July 29.

The government said the Bill aims to bring uniformity in the application of law relating to inland waterways and navigation within the country. Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said it replaces the "obsolete" act of 1917, and is designed to "encompass trade and transportation by inland vessels throughout the country without any hindrance... The proposed Bill will make the inland waterways sector more attractive



Opposition members protest in Rajya Sabha. PTI

to investment resulting in more employment opportunities, more avenues and more economic development in the state".

However, some members who spoke on the Bill amid the uproar, expressed concern that it encroaches into the powers of state governments.

Arguing that inland water-

ways transport in India is highly underutilised as compared to developed countries, TRS's Banda Prakash said, "This Bill is a unified law for the entire country... Instead of having separate rules and regulations framed by the states the entire control is in the hands of the Centre."

AIADMK's M Thambidurai, who was Minister of Shipping and Surface Transport in 1998-99 in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, said the Bill intends to take away the powers of the state governments. "That is the only objection. I have no objection with regard to the intention of the Bill that you want uniformity and everything. But, if in the name of uniformity, you are taking away the powers of the state governments, then our federal system will collapse."

In response, Sonowal said fears that the "Central Government would be infringing upon the rights of States to legis-

late on state list, intrude into the domain of the state legislature and affect the traditional fishermen and movement of their boat, are completely unfounded".

YSRCP's Ayodhya Rami Reddy pointed out that the certificate of registration granted under the proposed law will be deemed to be valid in all the states and the Union Territories and there will be no need to seek separate permission from states.

"We hope that this provision has been enacted with due regard to states' jurisdiction and in consultation with the line Departments of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. Any loss of revenue must also be compensated for the first five years by the Central Government to the respective states," he said.

The government also introduced the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

Covid norms go for a toss as schools in Punjab reopen

DIVYA GOYAL GOPAL

MOHALI, AUGUST 2

ON MONDAY, children in Punjab attended physical classes of their new session (2021-22) for the first time. But the fresh attempt to get in-person schooling off the ground again brought forth challenge of sticking to Covid-appropriate behaviour.

Even as the state has patted itself on the back for an overwhelming 1 lakh new enrollments in this session in its government schools, teachers said that there was no space to accommodate them due to shortage of classrooms.

"Today 202 of our 442 students attended classes. We were not expecting such good response... Now, we are planning to hold classes in shifts to ensure social distancing," said Karamjit Singh, head teacher of the government primary school in Mohali's Nayagaon.

Teachers in other districts such as Moga, Ludhiana, Muktsar and others said that on day one, while some schools had even 60-65 per cent attendance, others had less than 50 per cent attendance.

Lax home isolation the reason for Kerala surge: Central team

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

A CENTRAL high-level multi-disciplinary team that is currently visiting Kerala is learnt to have concluded that the state's Covid-19 surge has been triggered by inadequate monitoring of coronavirus-positive individuals in home isolation because of pandemic fatigue.

Significantly, based on the preliminary communication by the expert team to top officials at the Centre, sources said that the "inspired narrative" that minority-dominated districts were driving the surge in Covid infections especially after the Eid celebrations was "probably not correct".

Kerala has been an outlier in that Covid case numbers have stubbornly refused to come down in the state, even as almost the entire country has seen infections abate dramatically after the second wave of April-May.

Given this situation, the Centre on July 29 despatched a six-member team headed by Dr Sujet Singh, director of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to Kerala, to take stock of the situation and recommend necessary public health interventions.

Top government sources said the team is currently visiting districts with high positivity, and will submit a detailed report soon.

"There was an inspired narrative that the districts which are minority dominant are showing higher positivity. The team has found that Pathanamthitta district, which is minority-dominated, is in fact, showing a lower positivity of around 6.5-7 per cent," a top official told *The Indian Express*. "When you look at other districts with 12-13 per cent positivity, and some are reporting even 17 per cent positivity, this whole narrative that minority districts are driving the pandemic in Kerala is probably not correct," the official said.

Instead, sources said, the central team had found that people in home isolation in the state were not being monitored closely enough, leading to the spread of the infection. "The team has said that there was inadequate monitoring of people who are in home isolation. People who have tested positive and are in home isolation are generally circulating in the neighbourhood, and therefore

spreading the infection. This is a preliminary assessment. The team is now visiting some of the districts which are reporting high positivity," a source said.

The "major factor" behind the lax monitoring of home isolation was the "general pandemic fatigue" in the state that has a very robust public health cadre.

"The major factor is the general pandemic fatigue among the public health cadre. States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have grass-roots public health cadre who are present on the ground. These public health cadre officials were earlier monitoring home isolation patients very rigorously. But because of the fatigue, there is less than adequate monitoring, due to which (Covid-positive) people are roaming around," the source said.

Officials said the team has recommended that in order to ensure effective clinical management of the disease, the state should admit to hospital all those patients with otherwise mild symptoms who are "slightly serious". "The central team thought that the...state should take a call, whoever is slightly serious among the mild symptoms, they should be hospitalised. Because Covid-19

beds in Kerala are mostly lying vacant," the source said.

The team has also identified the recent spike in deaths as a cause for concern. "...In the last three weeks, the weekly death figures are going up. Historically, Kerala had lower death rates. But now Kerala is seeing 55-65 deaths a day," the official said.

The full reasons behind the surge in deaths, especially with regard to critical issues related to effective implementation of clinical management protocols, will be detailed in the report of the central team, sources said.

The central team travelled to Kerala against the backdrop of the state contributing over 37 per cent of the country's active cases. According data tracked by the Centre, 11 districts reported more than 10 per cent positivity between July 26 and August 1: Palakkad (19.43 per cent), Thrissur (15.53 per cent), Wayanad (14.27 per cent), Malappuram (13.94 per cent), Kozhikode (13.42 per cent), Kannur (12.68 per cent), Kottayam (11.01 per cent), Ernakulam (10.95 per cent), Alappuzha (10.92 per cent), Kollam (10.36 per cent), and Kasargod (10.11 per cent).

Mumbai loses a cinema lover, film critic, poet and much more

ALAKA SAHANI & SAGAR RAJPUT

MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

IN MANY charming ways, Rashid Irani -- a much-respected film critic, a book lover and working partner of a quaint Irani café -- represented the old world and spirit of Mumbai.

It came as a rude shock to the city's film and culture circles when 74-year-old Irani's body was recovered from the bathroom of his Dhobi Talao home on Monday afternoon.

When Irani, who suffered from Covid last year and had

multiple health issues, didn't show up at regular haunts in Mumbai for two or three days, his close friend Rafeeq Elias informed the police and they broke his door on Monday.

Police have registered a case of accidental death. Senior police inspector Bhushan Belnekar said: "They found him (Irani) unconscious inside his bathroom. We rushed him to JJ hospital where he was declared dead before admission."

Irani, who for the last five decades followed cinema with dedication, shared a long association with the Mumbai Film Festival as a member of its



Rashid Irani. Mumbai film festival

Selection Committee.

Smriti Kiran, artistic director, Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival, said: "It is hard to imagine MAMI without Rashid. He is, in fact, such an integral part of the cinematic

history of the city. But he hated technology as much as he loved the movies. Just five days back we were all ecstatic that he got on his life's first Zoom call. We called it a 'technological breakthrough'."

Writer-director Barnali Roy Shukla mentioned his love for Iranian and South American filmmakers. "The cinematic exposition was important for him and verbose films put him off. What he valued was the empathy and the art in the way a film director would engage in evoking rather than provoking."

The Press Club Mumbai called Irani, whose reviews have

appeared in several national dailies, "one of the pillars" of their "film society".

Other than cinema, Irani's biggest love was books. He collected books, magazines, journals. Kiran said, "Irani had mountains of books and papers at his home that he didn't want to be moved."

Almost always seen dressed in a bush shirt, a pair of loose trousers, and chappals, Rashid often carried with him a bottle of water, newspaper, and umbrella. "He would keep leaving the umbrella in various places, mostly cabs, and say: 'Hopefully, someone needy will get it,'" Roy Shukla fondly recalled.

Rajnath dials Kharge, but no end to impasse; Opp meet today

MANOJ CG

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

AS THE logjam in Parliament continued over the Pegasus snooping issue, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday spoke to Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge and sought his cooperation to end the impasse. With the government not agreeing to a debate on Pegasus, the Opposition signalled that it was hardening its position and is drawing up plans to step up its offensive against the government.

The Opposition leaders -- from as many as 17 parties from both Houses -- will meet over breakfast on Tuesday on the invitation of senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to strategise on their next course of action. Sources said that some parties have proposed that the MPs hold a mock session in the Parliament premises to highlight what they called the stifling of their voices inside the two Houses.

The Opposition parties have been disrupting both houses of Parliament for two weeks, demanding a structured discussion on the snooping issue in the presence of either Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Home Minister Amit Shah. They want Shah to reply to the discussion.

Sources in the Opposition said Singh had signalled to Kharge last week that he would call a meeting of all parties to break the impasse after his return from Tajikistan, but that meeting did not happen. Opposition leaders feel that more strident sections in the government may have intervened to prevent such an outreach.



Rajnath Singh, Mallikarjun Kharge

Singh on Monday reached out to Kharge but sources in the Opposition said he offered no concrete proposal to end the stalemate. "The government has to offer a proposal for us to respond. Seeking our cooperation to ensure smooth functioning of the House cannot be considered as a constructive engagement," an Opposition leader said.

The Opposition leaders will meet on Tuesday to chalk out their course of action. After the breakfast at Constitution Club, sources said that the Opposition leaders could walk to Parliament, some 500 metres away, showing their unity.

Sources said the parties -- having taken a public position that they want a discussion on the snooping issue to be replied to by the home minister, cannot now climb down and agree to let the House function. Amid the disruption, and the government refusing to hold a discussion over Pegasus and pushing Bills without discussion, the Opposition leaders want their "version to be heard by people as only the government version is coming out".

Rahul's breakfast invitation is also significant since it is seen as part of conscious efforts by him to engage more with Opposition leaders and lead the unity efforts from the front.

WITH INPUTS FROM LIZ MATHEW

SC junks plea by rape victim and convict seeking bail for marriage

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

THE SUPREME Court on Monday dismissed petitions filed by a rape victim from Kerala and the convicted rapist, ex-Catholic priest Robin Mathew alias Robin Vadakkumcheril, seeking interim bail for the latter to solemnise their marriage.

"We do not find any ground to interfere with the order passed by the High Court. The Special Leave Petitions are, accordingly, dismissed," a bench of Justices Vineet Saran and Dinesh Maheshwari said.

Mathew, a former priest of the St Sebastian Church at Kottiyoor in Kerala, was sentenced to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act in 2019 for raping and impregnating the minor girl in May 2016. She delivered a baby at a church-run hospital in 2017 and he was defrocked following his arrest in February that year.

Earlier this year, Mathew approached the High Court seeking interim bail for two months for the purpose of solemnising his marriage with the victim and to make necessary arrangements with the Child Welfare Committee to obtain joint custody of their child.

The HC rejected this saying that the question whether Mathew committed an offence in the case depends on whether the victim was a child at the time of the incident. It pointed out that the trial court had indeed found her to be a minor when it happened and added that to grant the reliefs sought for as long as the finding remains would amount to giving judicial approval to such marriage.

The bench said the HC had made the remarks after examining all aspects of the issue and that it did not wish to disturb the HC order.

TRACKING THE SECOND SURGE

519 DAYS SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN

NEW CASES: 29,369
ACTIVE CASES: 4,04,675
TOTAL VACCINATION: 47,22,23,639

DAILY DEATHS 429 **TOTAL DEATHS 4,25,202** **WEEKLY CFR 1.43%** **OVERALL CFR 1.36%**



TESTS TODAY: 20,01,659 **TOTAL TESTS: 47,16,47,153**
WEEKLY POSITIVITY: 2.28% **OVERALL POSITIVITY: 6.73%**

STATES REPORTING MOST CASES

| STATE | NEW CASES | ACTIVE CASES | WEEKLY POSITIVITY | TOTAL VACCINATION |
|------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| ■ Kerala | 13,984 | 1,65,755 | 12.29% | 2,03,70,704 |
| ■ Maharashtra | 4,869 | 75,303 | 3.33% | 4,46,72,654 |
| ■ Tamil Nadu | 1,957 | 20,385 | 1.23% | 2,33,07,320 |
| ■ Andhra Pradesh | 1,546 | 20,582 | 2.64% | 2,18,87,925 |
| ■ Karnataka | 1,285 | 24,045 | 1.25% | 3,06,65,708 |

STATES REPORTING MOST DEATHS

| STATE | TODAY'S DEATHS | TOTAL DEATHS | WEEKLY CFR | OVERALL CFR |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| ■ Kerala | 118 | 17,034 | 0.80% | 0.54% |
| ■ Maharashtra | 99 | 1,36,435 | 2.68% | 2.19% |
| ■ Odisha | 67 | 6,086 | 2.77% | 0.64% |
| ■ Tamil Nadu | 28 | 34,130 | 1.21% | 1.35% |
| ■ Karnataka | 25 | 36,612 | 1.65% | 1.27% |

Note: Data as on Aug 2; vaccination numbers as of Aug 1. Deaths include those caused by comorbidities.

Potential spying 'targets', five journalists move apex court

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

FIVE JOURNALISTS, whose names allegedly figured in a list of potential targets for alleged snooping using Pegasus software, have moved Supreme Court, contending that the unauthorised surveillance violated their fundamental rights.

The plea said such surveillance through sophisticated software such as Pegasus will have a "tremendous chilling effect" on the right to free speech, violate funda-

mental right to privacy and deter people from bringing forth information on wrongdoings in the government, and in turn will affect transparency and governance. Those who moved the court are Paranjay Thakurta, S N M Abidi, Prem Shankar Jha, Rupesh Kumar Singh and Ipsa Satakshi.

The court has listed three petitions seeking independent probe in the matter for hearing on August 5. These include a plea by senior journalists N Ram and Shashi Kumar, another by advocate M L Sharma, and a third by CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas.



@ieExplained

#ExpressExplained

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

SIMPLY PUT

Why Gilgit-Baltistan matters to India and Pak

The Pakistan government has finalised legislation for incorporating the region as a province. How was it ruled so far, and why the change of status now?

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

PAKISTAN'S Law and Justice Ministry has finalised draft legislation to incorporate Gilgit-Baltistan, the region known before 2009 as Northern Areas, as a province of the country, according to a report in *Dawn* newspaper.

New Delhi, which has asserted that Gilgit-Baltistan is an integral part of India "by virtue of the legal, complete and irrevocable accession of Jammu & Kashmir to the Union of India in 1947", is yet to respond to the latest report, but is certain to do so. The area's strategic importance for India has increased in light of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor agreement, under which Beijing is investing hugely to develop the area as part of its Belt and Road Initiative, and the concerns of a two-front war after the standoff in Eastern Ladakh last year.

History of the region

Gilgit was part of the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir, but was ruled directly by the British, who had taken it on lease from Hari Singh, the Hindu ruler of the Muslim-major-

ity state. When Hari Singh acceded to India on October 26, 1947, the Gilgit Scouts rose in rebellion, led by their British commander Major William Alexander Brown. The Gilgit Scouts also moved to take over Baltistan, which was then part of Ladakh, and captured Skardu, Kargil and Dras. In battles thereafter, Indian forces retook Kargil and Dras in August 1948.

Before that, on November 1, 1947, a political outfit called the Revolutionary Council of Gilgit-Baltistan had proclaimed the independent state of Gilgit-Baltistan. On November 15, it declared it was acceding to Pakistan, which accepted the accession only to the extent of full administrative control, choosing to govern it directly under the Frontier Crimes Regulation, a law devised by the British to keep control of the restive tribal areas of the northwest.

Following the India-Pakistan ceasefire of January 1, 1949, Pakistan in April that year entered into an agreement with the "provisional government" of "Azad Jammu & Kashmir" — parts that had been occupied by Pakistani troops and irregulars — to take over its defence and foreign affairs. Under this agreement, the "AJK" government also ceded administration of Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan.

Beyond the provinces

In 1974, Pakistan adopted its first full-fledged civilian Constitution, which lists four provinces — Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan were not incorporated as provinces. One reason ascribed to this is that Pakistan did not want to undermine its international case that the resolution of the Kashmir issue had to be in accordance with UN resolutions that called for a plebiscite.

In 1975, PoK got its own Constitution, making it an ostensibly self-governed autonomous territory. This Constitution had no jurisdiction over the Northern Areas, which continued to be administered directly by Islamabad (the Frontier Crimes Regulation was discontinued in 1997 but repealed only in 2018). In reality, PoK too remained under the control of Pakistani federal administration and the security establishment, through the Kashmir Council.

The main difference was that while the people of PoK had rights and freedoms guaranteed by their own Constitution, which mirrors the Pakistan Constitution, the people of the minority Shia-dominated Northern Areas did not have any political representation. Although

they were considered Pakistani, including for citizenship and passports, they were outside the ambit of constitutional protections available to those in the four provinces and PoK.

First changes

It was only in the first decade of the new century that Pakistan began considering changes to its administrative arrangements in the Northern Areas, as the constitutional limbo became untenable due to the new post-9/11 dynamics of the region and the increasing Chinese involvement in strategic development ventures. Gilgit-Baltistan was vital to those projects, given that it provides the only land access between the two countries.

In 2009, Pakistan brought in the Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order, 2009, replacing the Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC) with the Legislative Assembly, and the Northern Areas were given back the name of Gilgit-Baltistan. The NALC was an elected body, but had no more than an advisory role to the Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas, who ruled from Islamabad.

The Assembly is only a slight improvement.

It has 24 directly elected members and nine nominated ones. The ruling party in Islamabad has won every election held to the region's Assembly since 2010. In November 2020, Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan-Tehreek-i-Insaf won with 24 of 33 seats.

Provincial status

On November 1, 2020, observed in Gilgit-Baltistan as "Independence Day", Imran Khan announced that his government would give the region "provisional provincial status". In March this year, the newly elected Assembly passed a unanimous resolution demanding an amendment to the Constitution to make Gilgit-Baltistan a provisional province of Pakistan, "without prejudice to the Kashmir dispute".

According to *Dawn*, Imran Khan had in July asked his Law Minister to fast-track a draft legislation for making Gilgit-Baltistan a province, and it has been finalised now as the 26th Constitutional Amendment Bill and submitted to him. The proposed law is believed to suggest that because of its status as part of the unresolved Kashmir issue, Gilgit-Baltistan be given provisional provincial status by amending Article 1 of the Constitution. Separately, a

set of amendments would be introduced to give Gilgit-Baltistan representation in Pakistan's parliament, besides establishment of the Assembly. It is also said to have provisions for representation of the region in the National Assembly and the Senate.

The change in status, when it happens, will meet a long-standing demand of the 1.5 million people of Gilgit-Baltistan. There is anger against Pakistan for unleashing sectarian militant groups that target Shias, but the predominant sentiment is that all this will improve once they are part of the Pakistani federation. There is a small movement for independence, but it has very little traction.

While some reports have suggested that Pakistan's decision is under pressure from China, wary that Gilgit-Baltistan's ambiguous status might undermine the legality of its projects there, there is also speculation that this could be a precursor to Pakistan's acceptance of India's August 5, 2019 changes doing away with Kashmir's special status. During the PoK elections, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) had alleged Imran Khan was about to incorporate both Gilgit-Baltistan and PoK as provinces of Pakistan in a "secret deal" with India.

Where tigers roam mountains

Uttarakhand has flaunted its tiger range up to 12,000 ft. How commonly are tigers found at such altitudes?



NTCA/WII



Emmanuel Rondeau/WWF-UK

Clockwise from top left: Camera-trap images of a male tiger in the Mishmi Hills of Arunachal Pradesh in 2017; a tiger in a wildlife corridor in Bhutan in 2017; a tiger in Sikkim's Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary in 2018; and a tigress in Askot Musk Deer wildlife sanctuary in Uttarakhand in 2016.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

TO CELEBRATE International Tiger Day last week, the Uttarakhand government highlighted the expanse of the state's tiger map from Corbett National Park to Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary. Between the terai and the mountains, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami flaunted the tiger range from an elevation of 1,181 ft (360 m) to 12,073 ft (3680 m) as a testimony of Uttarakhand's success in tiger conservation.

The tiger's usual range is under 6,000 ft (below 1,800 ft, think Kasauli). That makes its presence above 12,000 ft — the elevation of the Kedarnath temple — rare. But tigers have shown up before a strategically placed motion-triggered camera at higher altitudes.

Global spotlight

While there have been ample anecdotal accounts of tigers roaming significantly higher slopes of their Himalayan habitats, the global fascination with the so-called high-altitude or snow tigers was triggered by a BBC documentary that claimed to have "discovered a lost tiger population in Bhutan mountains" in 2010.

The documentary, *Lost Land of the Tiger*, made splashes around the globe, even as conservationists pointed out that the tigers in question were never lost. In fact, the first photographic evidence of a tiger in Bhutan was recorded in 2000 in Phrumsengla national park at 9,728 feet (2,965m), then the highest altitude record of the species.

Then, not long before the BBC team landed in Bhutan, another camera-trap study



WII

set a new elevation record for tigers, capturing an adult male in the snow inside Jigme Dorji National Park at 13,780 ft (4,200 m) in 2008. Since the global hype generated in 2010, high-altitude tigers have been photographed in Bhutan on multiple occasions, including the first high resolution capture above 11,000 ft by Emmanuel Rondeau for WWF-UK in 2017.

In 2020, Nepal also captured two ridge-scaling tigers — one at 8,200 ft (2,500 m) in Dadeldhura in April, and another at 10,400 feet (3,165 m) in Kangchenjunga Landscape region in November.

Sightings in India

In India, anecdotes of high-altitude tigers survive in community tales, as also in the accounts of hunters, adventurers and naturalists. Back in 1912, in the annals of his expeditions in Tibet and Assam Himalaya, British political officer F M Bailey alluded to the tigers in the high-altitude forests of the Mishmi Hills (Arunachal Pradesh).

Naturalist H S Prater (Bombay National History Society, 1948) observed that "the tiger has left its tracks in the winter snows of



East Wildlife Division, Sikkim

the Himalayas at an altitude of 10,000 ft". In his *Man-eaters and Memories* (1959), Indian Forest Service officer J E Carrington Turner wrote about shooting a man-eating tiger in Gori Valley, now in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district. In *Forbiddan Land* (1898), anthropologist Arnold Henry Savage Landor described how a Rajwar (belonging to Ban Raji tribe) from Uttarakhand's Askot offered to take him tiger hunting.

In recent times, a 70-metre-long track of tiger pug marks were spotted in the snow at 10,000 feet near Jelep La — a mountain pass between east Sikkim and Tibet Autonomous Region, China — in March 2009. Photographic evidence emerged in January 2014 in Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh at a relatively modest 5,800 ft (1,765 m). Since 2016, multiple records of tigers above 10,000 feet have been recorded in India:

MARCH 2016: A tigress was camera-trapped at 10,742 ft (3,274 m) in Askot Musk Deer wildlife sanctuary near Pithoragarh in Uttarakhand.

JANUARY 2017: Two male tigers were captured at 11,909 ft (3,630 m) and 10,650 ft (3,246 m) in the Mishmi Hills (Dibang Valley)

of Arunachal Pradesh. These two were the first photos of tigers (other than Russia's Amur tigers) in the snow.

DECEMBER 2018: A tiger was photographed at 9,563 ft (2,915m) in Sikkim's Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary.

MAY 2019: A tiger was camera-trapped in Rudrapurag's Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary at 11,155 ft (3,400m).

Causes for concern

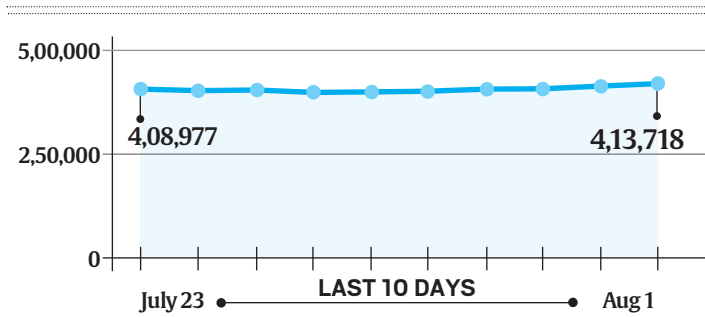
Records of high-altitude tigers getting somewhat routine have alarmed a section of conservationists. Warming induced by climate change, they argue, is making the higher mountains tolerable for tigers.

But the fact that tigers are found roaming the snow indicates that their upward movement is not deterred by the cold. A more likely explanation is that tigers, given an opportunity, have always ventured far and wide. Thanks to a better monitoring regime and camera-traps, scientists and managers are now getting to learn more about their actual ranges.

The fact that there are enough tigers in certain pockets to wander around is certainly good news. But that should not prompt hasty proposals, such as declaring a high-altitude area as tiger reserve, or even shifting a conservation area upward, based on a few tiger photos.

Like Siberian tigers do not actually live in Siberia (but in temperate broadleaf-mixed-pine and pure deciduous forests), it is unlikely that tigers spotted in the snow have settled down there. Their survival still depends on the forests below. There can be no trade-off between traditional tiger habitat and these new heights of feline interest.

INDIA ACTIVE CASES



Note: The August 1 figures in these graphs are based on the government updates on August 2

INDIA TOTAL CASES 3,16,95,958

Source: Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, updated at 11 pm on August 2

TELLING NUMBERS

Child labour: 58,000 rescued in 2020-21

IN 2020-21, over 58,000 children were rescued across India from work, rehabilitated and mainstreamed under the National Child Labour Project, according to figures tabled in Lok Sabha on Monday by Minister of State for Labour and Employment Rameshwar Teli in response to a question by Congress MP Vishnu Prasad M K. Madhya Pradesh accounted for half the rescued children that year.

| STATE | 2019-20 | 2020-21 |
|-------------|---------|---------|
| MP | 4,010 | 29,179 |
| UP | 10,371 | 9,383 |
| W Bengal | 13,879 | 6,671 |
| Assam | 6,175 | 2,800 |
| Maharashtra | 9,337 | 2,031 |
| All India | 54,894 | 58,289 |

Source: Ministry of Labour and Employment; Lok Sabha response

Covaxin works against Delta Plus: reading the findings of new study

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, AUGUST 2

WHILE THE Delta variant mutated into 'Delta Plus', first detected in India in April 2021, researchers decided to study the efficacy of the Covaxin vaccine. They have found that despite a slight reduction in neutralisation antibody titres, the vaccine remains effective against the Delta, AY.1 (Delta Plus) and B.1.617.3 variants. Covaxin has been developed by Bharat Biotech and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

Delta & Delta Plus

The Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2 has been classified as a variant of concern (VoC) by the

World Health Organization. Apart from being associated with the second wave in India during March-May this year — it is estimated to be responsible for 90% of the cases reported in the country — the variant has spread across nearly 99 countries and been found to be more infectious than the Alpha, Beta and Gamma variants. The Delta variant has also been identified as the leading cause of breakthrough infections globally among vaccinated individuals.

Recently, the Delta variant has mutated into the sub-lineages Delta AY.1, AY.2 and AY.3. Of these, the apparently highly infectious Delta AY.1 (Delta Plus) variant was first detected in India in April 2021, and subsequently in 20 other countries as well.

The prevalence of Delta AY.1, however, has

been relatively low so far. Genome sequencing by INSACOG (Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium) has found 70 cases of Delta Plus.

Why the study

So far, no information was available on the efficacy of currently available vaccines against the Delta Plus variant. It is also uncertain whether Delta Plus is associated with higher transmissibility, severe disease, and evasion of immune response compared to the Delta variant.

The possibility of the variant escaping the immune response has been a major concern during the ongoing vaccination programme. This variant contains an additional mutation (K417N) in the spike protein and emerging

evidence suggests that this mutation could lead to resistance against monoclonal antibodies called casirivimab and imdevimab.

Researchers at ICMR-National Institute of Virology (NIV), therefore, took up the research. They studied the neutralisation activity of the sera of 42 individuals vaccinated with two doses of Covaxin, 14 recovered cases after two vaccine doses, and 30 breakthrough cases after two doses against the Delta, Delta AY.1, and B.1.617.3 variants, compared to the B.1 variant.

The findings

"Our research study showed that Covaxin vaccine could still neutralise Delta, AY.1 and B.1.617.3 variants," Dr Samiran Panda, Head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases,

ICMR told The Indian Express. Sera of vaccines — Covid-naïve, recovered cases with full vaccination, and breakthrough cases — demonstrated 1.3, 2.5 and 1.9-fold reduction against the Delta variant in comparison to the B.1 variant respectively, said the study, 'Comparable neutralisation of SARS-CoV-2 Delta AY.1 and Delta in individuals sera vaccinated with BBV152, published on the preprint server *bioRxiv*.

Lead author Dr Pragya Yadav said a minor reduction was observed in the neutralising antibody titre in recovered cases, fully vaccinated and post-immunised infected cases as compared to Covid-naïve vaccinated individuals. "However, with the observed high titres, the sera of individuals belonging to all the groups in the study would still neu-

tralise the Delta, Delta AY.1 and B.1.617.3 variants effectively," Dr Yadav said.

Covaxin against Delta

In a previous study, Covaxin had demonstrated 77.8% effectiveness against symptomatic Covid-19 and 65.2% protection against the Delta variant, according to Bharat Biotech.

In this new study, despite the sera of vaccinated Covid-recovered cases and those of breakthrough cases showing considerable reduction in the neutralisation antibody titre, Covaxin could still neutralise Delta, AY.1 and B.1.617.3 variants. "The bottom line is that Covaxin is effective and a slight reduction in neutralisation antibody titres is not going to be detrimental for the vaccination programme," Dr Panda said.

The Indian

EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

SHE’S A WINNER

PV Sindhu's second Olympics medal is only the latest success in a larger story of striving and achieving by India's sportswomen

MEN'S SPORT IN India may be in need of urgent bucking up — an Olympic medal has not been won since London 2012. In this period, spanning the Games in London, Rio and Tokyo, Indian sportswomen have added seven medals across four sports. PV Sindhu has now become the first Indian woman to win a medal at successive Games. The success of women at the Olympics has meant a broadening of the pyramid base from the traditional hubs. It is n't just the wrestlers from Haryana, gymnasts from the east, shuttlers from Hyderabad and lifters from Manipur. Tokyo 2020 has also turned the glittering spotlight on a fencer from Chennai and a boxer from Assam. With the best of sport now available on smartphones, ease of communication because of social media and hyper-efficient search engines, there's no telling when and where a dream gets kindled, watching women sports stars perform and win consistently.

Gymnast Dipa Karmakar didn't just dream up a high difficulty vault for the Rio Olympics, she took her effort to the logical conclusion, came within striking distance of a medal. Sindhu ensured that Saina Nehwal's bronze was upgraded to silver and elevated badminton to a headline television sport, before she returned to the Olympics for a bounce-back bronze. Perhaps the greatest first day at the Olympics for India was when Mirabai Chanu demolished her demons of failure from four years ago to chase down a weightlifting silver, a score of years after Karnam Malleswari's feat barely registered. Mary Kom refuses to go gently into the fading dusk of her career at 38. Another pugilist from the Northeast, Lovlina Borgohain from Assam, has picked up the baton. At the start of Week 2, all eyes are on wrestler Vinesh Phogat, five years after Sakshi Malik salvaged India's twelve-day-long zero count at Rio. Most hearteningly, India's women's hockey team has come to the party, beating mighty Australia.

It seems women go to the Olympics focussing on the podium, and work backwards on the effort needed to get as close to the target as possible. Keenly aware of the deficiencies of opportunities and facilities, and of the slim chances they might be afforded given societal traditions, they don't waste time to get going. Like Nehwal and Mirabai, they take disappointment to heart, and return to work harder. Like Lovlina and Sakshi, they go out there, fearless but without hubris, not giving themselves the cushioning of a "next time" — the sort of second-chances, for instance, that this time's medalless Olympic debutant Saurabh Chaudhary or Amit Panghal might be glibly given. PT Usha, Sania Mirza, Anju Bobby George — they are not just bright stars streaking across TV screens, but role models for countless young women. PV Sindhu went to eight majors and brought home medals from seven. India's sportswomen deliver on their promises, time and again. They get the job done.

ON THE UP

Centre's finances have fared well. But limited disinvestment, need for higher spending, could build up pressure

RECENT DATA SUGGESTS that with the second wave of infections subsiding, and with state governments easing localised restrictions, economic activities in India bounced back strongly from the lows observed in May. At 95.3, the Nomura India Business Resumption Index for the week ending July 25 was only 4.7 percentage points below its pre-pandemic level. It had dipped to 60.2 in May. In line with these trends in the broader economy, recently released data also signals a marked improvement in central government finances during this period. In fact, with the economic fallout of the second wave being less than feared, government finances have fared considerably better in the first quarter of the current financial year than over the same period last year when the imposition of the national lockdown led to a virtual collapse in revenues.

At the aggregate level, the Centre's gross tax collections have touched 24 per cent of budgeted expectations in the first quarter (April-June) of the current financial year, with indirect tax collections doing a tad better. Under the broad rubric of indirect taxes, recent data signals a rapid pick up in both GST and excise/cess collections. GST collections at Rs 1.16 lakh crore in July were higher than in both May (Rs 1.02 lakh crore) and June (Rs 92,849 crore). With average daily e-way bills generated in July higher than in June and May, the outlook for collections is significantly brighter. Further, with economic activities picking up, fuel demand also rose sharply in July. In fact, as reported in this paper, preliminary sales data shows that petrol consumption has reached pre-Covid levels with state-owned fuel retailers selling 2.37 million tonnes of petrol in July. Even non-tax revenues have been bolstered by a higher than expected surplus transferred by the Reserve Bank of India. However, there continues to be cause for concern. As against an ambitious disinvestment target of Rs 1.75 lakh crore, so far proceeds through this channel have only been to the tune of Rs 7,645 crore. An inability to shore up disinvestment proceeds, coupled with the possibility of having to provide additional support to struggling parts of the economy, could add pressure on government finances down the line.

On the expenditure side, while the Centre's revenue expenditure has grown at a steady pace sequentially during this period, capital expenditure has been volatile, presumably due to lockdown restrictions. With the second wave receding, economic activity picking up, and greater clarity over its revenue streams, the government should now step up spending to provide support to the economy.

PARADISE FOR PIGS

In China, the tallest pig farm in the world is utopia and dystopia, a model for the republic and revolution

IT IS NO easy task to go *Through the Looking Glass*, past *Animal Farm*, and establish *The Republic*. Yet, on a sacred mountain in southern China, a collection of non-descript concrete buildings has stoked and surpassed the imaginations of some of the world's greatest writers. The tallest pig farm in the world, nine storeys high, with 1,270 pigs on each floor, both a porcine utopia and dystopia, an absurd fantasy and a marvel of the modern state.

"The time has come, the Walrus said" in Lewis Carroll's classic, to ponder such deep questions as "whether pigs have wings". In China, while the ungulate cannot fly, it can take the lift. Individual care, 24/7 medical facilities and quick, hygienic disposal of the diseased have been put in place in the condominiums on Yaji ("sacred") mountain. This pampering of pigs — they are weighed, measured, sorted and kept in secure "bio-bubbles" — has ostensibly been necessitated by disease and the threat of dietary shortages. Over the last two years, China lost over 200 million pigs to African Swine Fever and other viruses. And the one-party state, that has been relatively unsuccessful in remaking Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang, has set up a Platonic Republic for the animals. Each creature is cared for, its future predetermined.

But a word of caution: Pigs, like Politburo members, can become self-serving. A duck may ask, along with his sheep and goat friends: Why am I slumming it in farms, on the ground, while the portly pigs enjoy climate-controlled surroundings in high rises? In *Animal Farm*, while all animals were equal, some were more equal than others. The lesson from Orwell, which People's Parties often forget, also is that before there was Utopia, there was dissent and revolution. Revolutions can always come around again.



YASHWANT SINHA

THE RECENT GOINGS-ON in the standing committee on information technology has once again drawn attention to the system of standing committees, which is one of the major innovations of our parliamentary system of governance. Along with the earlier committees, some of which are mandated by the Constitution, these committees do enormous amount of work for Parliament but generally behind closed doors. It is a pity that in this day and age of complete transparency, the committees are forced to function confidentially. This is one of the main reasons why their good work is not known outside Parliament. It is high time to throw open the proceedings of the committees to public scrutiny as happens in most democracies.

Be that as it may, as someone who has dealt with these committees both as a minister and as member/chairperson, I am a great admirer of the system. So, when I read in the media about what happened in the committee on information technology, I was considerably saddened. In my time, the parliamentary committees generally functioned on non-partisan lines, with some unfortunate exceptions. I headed the standing committee on the ministry of external affairs briefly in the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-14) and the standing committee on finance for almost five years. There were three of us in the BJP in those days, who pretended to understand economics and finance, Murli Manohar Joshi, Jaswant Singh and me. The real expert was Arun Shourie, but he was in the Rajya Sabha and only a member of the Lok Sabha could head the finance committees. I was the junior-most of the three. So, Dr Joshi and Jaswant Singh always got what they wanted. I had to make do with whatever was left. So, in the 15th Lok Sabha, Jaswant Singh took the public accounts committee (PAC), Dr Joshi took the standing committee on finance and I had to go to the standing committee on external affairs. Soon

Parliamentary committees have worked with dignity, in non-partisan ways. Sadly this has changed

The present dispensation has little use for parliamentary conventions, practices and precedents, indeed for Parliament itself. With all due respect to the Congress, I have to admit that the 'Congressisation' of the BJP is now complete. The only regret is that the present-day BJP has adopted all the wrong practices of the Congress but none of its virtues. Add rabid communalism to that and the picture is complete. If that means the erosion of democracy, then so be it.

thereafter, Jaswant Singh was expelled from the party and it took all the diplomatic skills of Sushma Swaraj to persuade him to resign from the chairmanship of the PAC, which by tradition belonged to the main opposition party in Lok Sabha. After his resignation, Dr Joshi preferred to go to the PAC as its chairman rather than continue as chairman of the standing committee on finance. At this point, Sushma Swaraj wanted to know whether I would like to continue where I was or shift to the finance committee.

I was reminded of what Jaswant Singh once told me when he was minister of external affairs and I was minister for finance — that the real work was in the finance ministry, external affairs ministry was mere laf-fazi (verbiage). So, I told Swaraj that I would prefer to go to the finance committee. I never regretted that decision.

We indeed did an enormous amount of legislative work in the finance committee between 2009 and 2014. I had as colleagues some of the best parliamentarians of the day and the proceedings of the committee were conducted with a lot of energy but also with a lot of dignity. I always asked my questions at the end, after I had offered an opportunity to all members to ask their questions, if any. In fact, the best day of my parliamentary career was when we held the last meeting of the committee, an informal one, and exchanged views for one last time. I was overwhelmed when member after member showered me with encomiums regarding the impartial manner in which I used to conduct the committee meetings. As a result, the proceedings were always smooth, differences were aired with dignity and there was no ill-will even when a member had a major difference of opinion and gave a note of dissent, though it was rare.

I recall with pleasure the joint parliamentary committee which had been constituted to look into the stock market scam of 1992. I

was only four years old in Parliament then, but Chandra Shekhar thought it fit to nominate me to that committee. The chairman of the committee, Ram Nivas Mirdha of the Congress, conducted the meetings of the committee with great fairness. He allowed Jaswant Singh to function almost as the deputy chairman of the committee and gave us the space we wanted. He tasked S S Ahluwalia of the Congress then to work with some of us in close concert so that the committee could produce a unanimous report. But not all committees functioned like that. The second JPC on the 2G scam was a disaster and functioned on purely political lines. We had many ugly scenes in the committee meetings and ultimately had to write a parallel report. The PAC headed by Dr Joshi, which was examining the 2G scam, also saw very ugly scenes. The Congress members were under instruction not to allow the committee to adopt its report. So, when the time came to consider the report, my good friend, and a thorough gentleman otherwise, Saifuddin Soz, even climbed on the table to disrupt the proceedings of the committee. But politics in the committees was more an exception and most of the time the committees functioned as a cohesive unit setting aside party affiliations.

Today everything has changed. The present dispensation has little use for parliamentary conventions, practices and precedents, indeed for Parliament itself. With all due respect to the Congress, I have to admit that the "Congressisation" of the BJP is now complete. The only regret is that the present-day BJP has adopted all the wrong practices of the Congress but none of its virtues. Add rabid communalism to that and the picture is complete. If that means the erosion of democracy, then so be it.

The writer, a former Union external affairs and finance minister, is vice president Trinamool Congress

SETTING NEW HOUSE RULES

Increase number of sittings, give more time to Opposition, to end disruption



CHAKSHU ROY

DISRUPTION IS replacing discussion as the foundation of our legislative functioning. The passionate debate that should inform the country is taking place everywhere other than in Parliament. Last week, this newspaper reported that the government is considering curtailing the monsoon session of Parliament. If that happens, then all four sessions since last year would have been cut short. The first two because of Covid, this year's budget session because of campaigning in state elections, and the ongoing session on account of disruptions.

Political parties understand what causes disorder and the changes required to prevent it. In 2001, a day-long conference was held in the Central Hall of Parliament to discuss discipline and decorum in legislatures. A galaxy of political leaders including the then Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Sonia Gandhi, and leader of the All-India Trinamool Congress, Mamata Banerjee, weighed in on the subject. Their inputs and those of parliamentarians like Arun Jaitley, Pranab Mukherjee, and former prime minister Chandra Shekhar helped identify four reasons behind the disorderly conduct by MPs.

The first was dissatisfaction in MPs because of inadequate time for airing their grievances. The second was an unresponsive attitude of the government and the retaliatory posture of the treasury benches. The third was political parties not adhering to parliamentary norms and disciplining their members. Finally, the absence of prompt ac-

tion against disrupting MPs under the legislature's rules. Two of the conference suggestions to curb disorder in Parliament were enforcement of a code of conduct for MPs and MLAs and an increase in the sitting days of legislatures.

These ideas are not new. For example, the Lok Sabha has had a simple code of conduct for its MPs since 1952. Earlier, the rules required MPs not to interrupt the speech of others, maintain silence and not obstruct proceedings by hissing or by making commentaries during debates. Newer forms of protest led to the updating of these rules in 1989. Accordingly, members should not shout slogans, display placards, tear away documents in protest, play cassettes or tape recorders in the House. A new rule empowers the Lok Sabha Speaker to suspend MPs obstructing the Houses' business automatically. The conference also resolved that Parliament should meet for 110 days every year and larger state legislative assemblies for 90 days.

But these suggestions have not been enforced so far. The government decides when Parliament should meet, for how long and plays a significant role in determining what issues the House should discuss. Successive governments have shied away from increasing the working days of Parliament. When a contentious issue crops up, the government dithers on debating it, leading to Opposition MPs violating the conduct rules and disrupting the proceedings of Parliament. Since they have the support of their parties in breaking the rules, the threat of suspension from the House does not deter them.

Breaking this pattern of parliamentary disruptions requires a few changes in the functioning of Parliament. As recommended by the 2001 conference, there should be an increase in the working days of Parliament. Our legislature should meet throughout the year, like parliaments of most developed democracies. But these increased days will not help prevent disruptions if opposition parties don't have the opportunity to debate and highlight important issues. Currently, government business takes priority, and private members discuss their topics post lunch on a Friday.

In the United Kingdom, where Parliament meets over 100 days a year, opposition parties get 20 days on which they decide the agenda for discussion in Parliament. The main opposition party gets 17 days and the remaining three days are given to the second-largest opposition party. Usually, decisions of the House passed on opposition days are not binding on the government and are an opportunity for the opposing parties to focus national attention on issues that it deems crucial. Canada also has a similar concept of opposition days.

More strengthening of our Parliament is the solution to prevent disruption of its proceedings. There should be a deepening of its role as the forum for deliberation on critical national issues. It is the only mechanism to ensure that disrupting its proceedings or allowing them to be disrupted ceases to be a viable option.

The writer is head of outreach, PRS Legislative Research

AUGUST 3, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

CONG (U) STRIFE

JAGJIVAN RAM HAS been warned that he will be expelled from the Congress (U) if he attends the August 5 meeting of the All India Congress (U) Committee convened by Shyam Dhar Mishra, the recently deposed UP Congress (U) head, and others. The three Congress (U) General Secretaries, K P Unnikrishnan, Banka Bihari Das, and Ambika Soni have made this clear. In an answer to a question on whether Ram would be expelled if he attends the meeting, Soni replied, "Yes, anybody who joins the meeting will be expelled. Nobody will be given any special treatment". Congress (U) President Devraj Urs also threatened disci-

plinary action against anyone attending the meeting, "even if its Jagjivan Ram". The aim of the August 5 meeting is to elect a new party chief.

VIOLENCE IN GODHRA

ONE PERSON WAS stabbed to death and three others were wounded when some unidentified gunmen attacked them after pulling out from a truck on the outskirts of Godhra town on the national highway. Godhra, the headquarters of Panchmahals district in In Gujarat, was under indefinite curfew clamped since August 1 after clashes between groups of two communities in which two persons were killed and eight injured.

CABINET RESHUFFLE

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi may reshuffle her cabinet before her departure for Nairobi. The expectation is that some of the dual charges, now held by ministers, might be ended. Planning Minister N D Tiwari looks after labour, and Commerce Minister Pranab Mukherjee is also in charge of steel.

US SCORES A POINT

THE UNITED STATES has got what it wanted at the North-South meet to be held in Cancun in October. There will be no specific agenda, only "free and open discussion" as demanded by US President Ronald Reagan.

THE IDEAS PAGE

India & Greater Middle East

One of the unintended consequences of Erdogan's overweening regional ambition is the extraordinary opportunity for Delhi to widen India's reach to the west of the Subcontinent



By C Raja Mohan

AN EGYPTIAN SCHOLAR, Mohammed Soliman, has recently written about the significance of what he calls the emerging “Indo-Abrahamic Accord” and its trans-regional implications to the west of India. Soliman’s concept builds on the normalisation of Israel’s relations with the UAE and Bahrain under the so-called Abraham Accords signed last August in Washington. The naming of the accords was arguably an inspired choice to denote the shared origins of the Jewish and Islamic religions. The UAE and Bahrain were followed by Sudan and Morocco in signing the Abraham Accords.

Although Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) had established diplomatic relations with Israel earlier, the Abraham Accords are widely seen as making a definitive breakthrough in the relations between Israel and the Arabs. Soliman sees the Israel-UAE relationship as having acquired a character independent of Israel’s relations with Palestine and a promise of expansive political, economic and technological cooperation.

Soliman also points to the transformation of India’s relations with the UAE and Israel under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Although Delhi had relations with Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv for many years, they certainly have acquired political depth and strategic character under Modi. Soliman sees this tri-lateral relationship as the potential nucleus of a wider regional coalition.

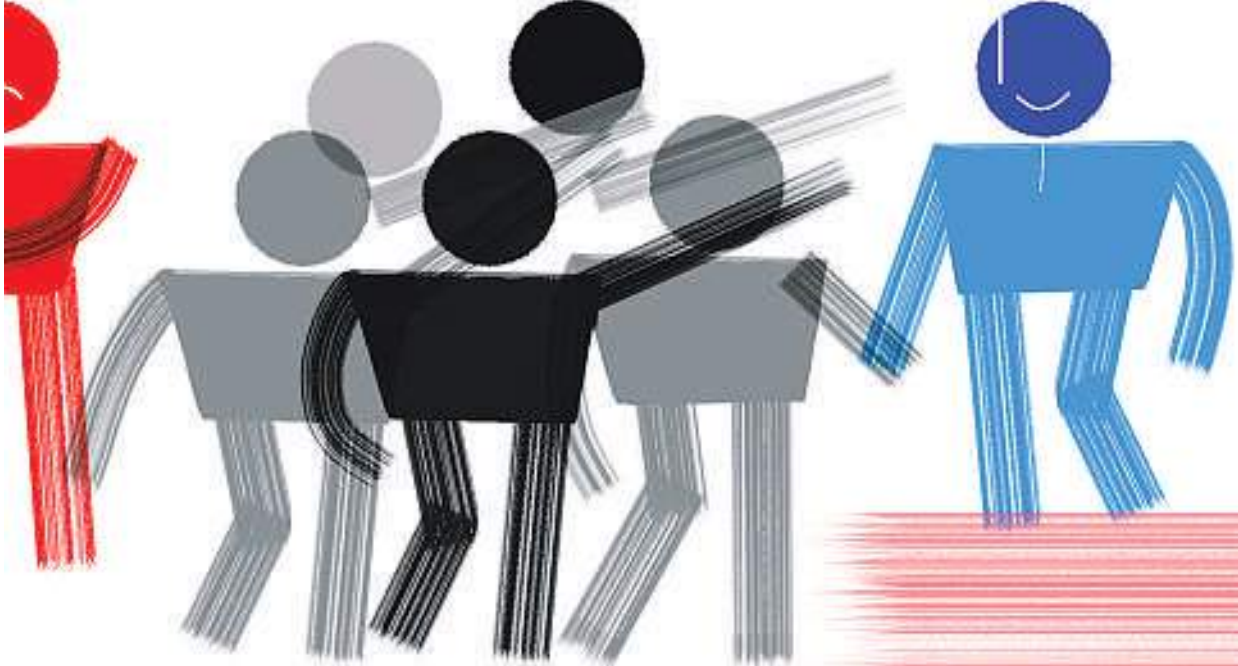
Soliman underlines the converging interests between India, the UAE, and Israel amidst Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s assertive claims for the leadership of the Islamic world. The new geopolitical churn is also driven by Pakistan’s growing alignment with Turkey and its alienation from its traditionally strong supporters in the Arab Gulf — the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

The fragile efforts since the end of the Cold War at normalising relations between Delhi and Ankara have also broken down, thanks to Erdogan’s hostility towards India. Erdogan has been championing Pakistan’s case on Kashmir after India changed the territorial status quo of the state in August 2019. At Pakistan’s behest, Erdogan is also blocking India’s entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Turkey’s quest for regional dominance has also widened the Indo-Abrahamic convergence to the eastern Mediterranean to include Greece and Cyprus. The discovery of new hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean, the renewed territorial disputes between Ankara and Athens, and the Turkish quest for regional dominance has drawn Greece and the UAE closer.

Greece has also looked towards India to enhance bilateral security cooperation. India’s external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar was in Athens at the end of June and the two sides have begun defence exchanges. Greece’s European partners like France, which have a big stake in the Mediterranean as well as the Arab Gulf, have taken an active interest in countering Turkey’s regional ambitions.

Many in Delhi will shake their heads in disapproval at the framing of India’s Middle East possibilities in religious terms. But the idea



C R Sasikumar

has considerable traction among groups that are otherwise deeply antagonistic.

For example, many in Pakistan have long convinced themselves of a “Hindu-Yehudi conspiracy” to undermine its very existence. They could throw in the Greeks and add Christians to the conspiracy. Those in India that view the Middle East through the religious prism might believe Hindus and Jews are natural allies in the region. But the deepening of Indian and Israeli ties with moderate Arab states spoils the religious paradigm that so many in India and Pakistan would love to believe in.

The idea of an Indo-Abrahamic accord also troubles those in South Asia who view the Middle East through such secular tropes as anti-imperialism and the contradictions between Israel and Arabs. The intra-regional contradictions in West Asia have always been sharper than those between the region and the external powers.

Arabs do empathise with the Palestinians’ plight, but many of them are no longer willing to let the Palestinians veto their normalisation of relations with Israel. Nor do all Arabs see the conflict with Israel as the principal contradiction in the region. For some, non-Arab powers like Iran and Turkey pose a bigger threat than Israel.

Viewing the region either exclusively through the religious or secular lens misses the complex interplay between competing versions of a common faith, the quest for profit, and diverging political interests within the region. Erdogan’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which seeks to overthrow the current political order in the region, has deeply angered the governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Fighting the Brotherhood and balancing Turkey have become existential challenges for Cairo, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi. Although Erdogan’s Islamic radicalism might appeal to the Arab street, the Arab elites are not about to let Erdogan reimpose the Ottoman imperium over their lands.

As the current turmoil reconfigures the region’s geography, its traditional subdivision into the Gulf, West Asia, and North Africa makes little sense today. Nor can the region be separated from Southern Europe and the Mediterranean at one end and the Subcontinent on the other. The familiar regional institutions like the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation might endure but are incapable of addressing the re-

Viewing the religion either exclusively through the religious or secular lens misses the complex interplay between competing versions of a common faith, the quest for profit, and diverging political interests within the region. Erdogan’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which seeks to overthrow the current political order in the region, has deeply angered the governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Negligence and VIP culture contributed to the spread of the Delta variant in Karachi, and the resultant lockdown is the high price that citizens have to pay.” — DAWN

To Kabul, with burden of past

London’s Afghan engagement has been influenced by entrenched colonial assumptions and ignorance



Davood Moradian

AMIDST THE ONGOING developments concerning Afghanistan, an exchange of diplomatic pleasantries between the UK Secretary of Defence and the Taliban spokesperson has received scant attention. In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, Ben Wallace announced that Britain will work with the Taliban should they enter government in Afghanistan. The Taliban’s spokesperson seized upon the announcement and described it as “positive”.

The exchange illustrates the lesser-known aspect of the UK’s intervention in Afghanistan since 2001: To what extent does Britain’s colonial past shape its Afghanistan mission? The UK was a junior partner in the US-led Afghanistan mission that is on the edge of implosion. UK-Afghanistan relations, however, span more than two centuries. Unlike popular interest in, and coverage of, the British Raj or Germany-Britain relations, Afghanistan remains a specialised subject and interest in the UK. But for many Afghans, the UK has impacted upon Afghanistan more than any other country, including in shaping its geographical boundaries and political culture and identity since the mid-19th century. It was inevitable, therefore, that the UK’s re-entry in Afghanistan in late 2001 would ignite historical memories, prejudices, suspicions and fascination on the part of both sides.

On the surface, the Afghan war was projected as part of the global war on terrorism with a strong undertone of “liberal intervention”. Many in London could not, however, tame their temptation to look at Afghanistan from the point of view their ancestors had adopted in the early 20th century. Reading Rudyard Kipling’s *Great Game* and watching *Carry On Up the Khyber* became compulsory for the plethora of British military and civilian personnel deploying to Afghanistan.

The UK’s choices of place, programmes and policies also articulate its colonial past in the country. The UK chose Helmand as its area of responsibility, a province rich with the memory of the Anglo-Afghan wars. The UK assumed the lead role in tackling Afghanistan’s flourishing illicit drug economy, which was mainly concentrated in the southern provinces, once the frontier of British India. More importantly, as early as 2008, the UK was the first country to emphasise the futility of a military solution and advocate the need for a negotiated settlement. Mediation between Afghanistan and Pakistan was another of the UK’s priorities.

Less known are the UK’s efforts and “success” in “tribal balance”. The UK supported the presidency of Ashraf Ghani, who belongs to the Ghiljai branch of Pashtun — to which most Taliban fighters are believed to belong. They reasoned that a Ghiljai president could induce the Taliban to join the political process.

The UK’s entrenched colonial assumptions and ensuing hubris, ignorance and blunder are reflected in a number of statements made by senior UK officials. Before deploying his country’s troops to Helmand, the UK Secretary of Defence at the time, John Reid,

had the audacity to proclaim, “We would be perfectly happy to leave in three-years time without firing one shot.” In reality, Helmand became the scene for “the fiercest fighting involving British troops since the Korean War”. Another former UK Secretary of Defence, Liam Fox, advocated for a negotiated settlement and revealed that the UK’s main rationale in being in Afghanistan was not “for the sake of the education policy in a broken, 13th-century country”. If Fox had acquired an elementary knowledge of the history of the country, he would have known that in the 13th century, Herat was the capital of the Timurid Empire (1370-1507) and a cosmopolitan and globally oriented city.

In 2007, the Afghan government took an unprecedented step by expelling two senior UN and EU officials, with Irish/British passports. The officials were expelled because they had cultivated unauthorised contacts with the Taliban, including by way of the distribution of cash. The Afghan government suspected the officials of being British spies. One of the two deported, Michael Sample, who has married the daughter of a senior Pakistani army general, managed to return to the country and continues to pursue his decades-long interactions with the Taliban.

The Afghan allegations of British collusion with the Taliban were not mere paranoia or conspiratorial. The Taliban are the third militant Islamist movement active in Afghanistan that has been supported by the UK and which aims to replace a progressively leaned political order with a draconian, repressive Islamist one. The UK played an important role in two previous successful attempts of Islamists to capture the Afghan state. The uprising against Afghanistan’s modernising and enlightened king and Britain’s sworn enemy, Amanullah Khan, in the 1920s combined tribal and clerical elements that had received significant support and encouragement from British agents. The second attempt comprised the Taliban’s predecessors, the Mujahideen. Margaret Thatcher roused the Mujahideen by telling them that “the hearts of ‘free world’ were with them in their bid to fight evil”. Such rhetorical support was accompanied by massive financial, military and diplomatic support. The UK Chief of the General Staff, Nicholas Carter, has recently assumed additional responsibility for reviving the UK’s mediation effort between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the triangle of Afghanistan-Pakistan-UK, many Afghans would describe it as “2+1”, similar to the Palestinians’ view of the US’ role in the Palestine-Israel conflict. The UK’s Pakistan-centric South Asia policy is further illustrated by the absence of any dialogue between London and Delhi on Afghanistan since 2001.

While too much focus on the role of colonial assumption and mindset would lead to an overly deterministic account of the UK’s two-decades involvement in Afghanistan, it nevertheless deserves due recognition and scrutiny. Despite losing more than 450 troops and investing significant amounts of financial and political resources, the UK has failed to attain any of its stated objectives in the country. A UK emancipated from its colonial burden would have been in a better position to contribute to Afghanistan’s stability and security.

The writer is founder and director-general, Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies



Oopali Operajita

BLINKEN (VERB): TO assiduously and tactfully refuse to be drawn into controversy; to maintain pivotal, cordial relationships, notwithstanding a cacophony of patently instigated noises, and, thereby, render those noises irrelevant.

The recent visit to India by the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, cemented the robust and time-tested relations between the world’s largest and oldest democracies. On the agenda for urgent discussion: Covid-19, Afghanistan, the Quad, and a raft of other pressing matters that could brook no delay. In the wake of this visit, and, in particular, the press conference that he and India’s External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, held at the conclusion of their talks, there was a flurry of articles trying to gloss over the fact that Blinken categorically — and graciously, in deference to accepted diplomatic protocol — refused to be drawn into any kind of commentary on India’s internal affairs. These articles epitomise a refusal to accept what is true. If only he had cried havoc and let slip the dogs of war! We might work ourselves into a lather all we want, and read dozens of meanings into his statements on both democracies, but the truth is that Blinken assiduously avoided being judgemental about India, saying that he approached India with a sense of “humility”. He alluded to our democracies as “works in progress” and offered up tangible

The art of Blinkening

US Secretary of State’s praise for India came from the heart

praise for India as a democracy. I, therefore, name this sage diplomatic strategy the art of Blinkening, infused with fresh meaning and depth as it has been, by Antony Blinken. There is just too much at stake in this crucial relationship to let self-righteousness taint it. It takes a large dollop of naïveté to assume that any leader is simply going to jump into an arena now populated by activists and belligerent mediapersons, and, thereby, jeopardise important bilateral relations. The real world does not work that way. The very act of requesting another nation to interfere in India’s internal affairs is both immature and treacherous, and epitomises our colonial hangover.

Calling the US-India relationship “one of the most consequential relationships we have with any country on earth,” Blinken added: “Finally, our bilateral relationship is strengthened by our shared values. As two of the world’s leading democracies, we take seriously our responsibilities to deliver freedom, equality and opportunity to all of our people ... Part of the promise of democracy is the constant striving for better. Those values are at the heart of our democratic systems. They’re at the core of the vast array of partnerships connecting our countries, not only between our governments but also between our private sectors, universities, civil societies, and most of all between our people.” As someone whose

professional and personal investment in, and connection with, North America dates back to 1980, and whose areas of specialisation are cross-cultural communication, international relations, and public policy, I believe I have a reasonably accurate take on exactly what Blinken meant. He was not fudging around; what he said, with discernible eloquence, came from the heart.

In the above context, a couple of comments in the media need responses: One Indian journalist thinks Blinken “waffled painfully, trying his best to say nothing when asked about the Modi government’s democratic backsliding. But Dr S Jaishankar leapt in, right after, to reveal the three issues the US raised with India.” This is inaccurate, and sheer fabrication: I watched the press conference live. Blinken chose to reply first, to Courtney McBride of *The Wall Street Journal*, when she asked him about his perception of India as a democracy, and here is an excerpt from what he said: “I’m happy to start ... The most remarkable democratic elections in the world, in many ways, are here in India, just by sheer numbers. It’s the largest expression of free political will by citizens anywhere on earth ... And we celebrate that the world’s oldest and the world’s largest democracies are dedicated at heart to a shared set of values that I be-

lieve will ensure not only the success of democracy, but the success of the relationship between India and the United States.” Now, for someone who was trying to say nothing, Blinken said rather a lot, and there wasn’t the slightest trace of a waffle or discomfiture in his response.

In a predictably wilful and schismatic map of misreading, a writer at another daily refers, in a tweet, to her article which magnifies, out of proportion, Blinken’s discussion of “CAA, love jihad and farmers’ protests with civil society representatives”, hoping, desperately, to delineate this meeting as the reason for a US Secretary of State’s India visit. This is a risible and misfired attempt to diminish the centrality and positive outcome of the Blinken-Jaishankar dialogue, and the Blinken-Modi meeting, as if they were postscripts.

All those manufactured and spurious correlations, the hectoring and the cotton candy cozenage — they were all astutely banished. “Blinkened”, if you will. Blinken complimented India as a strong and resilient democracy, on more than one occasion, and with elegance. India now looks forward to President Biden’s visit.

The writer is a Distinguished Fellow at Carnegie Mellon University. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TOP-DOWN ORDER

THIS REFERS TO the article, “The green warrant” (IE, August 2). The Supreme Court’s blanket judgment is skewed and it must make corrections to the same. It is no secret that men in white-collar jobs don’t understand the lives of their blue-collar counterparts but get to make laws for them and decide their fate for them. The Khorri Gaon eviction order is no exception. The order purportedly taking a hard stance for environmentalism forgets that ruling with an iron hand on such sensitive issues can not only be detrimental to the people living there but also counterproductive.

Udit Sarkar, Kolkata

GRUELLING OLYMPICS

THIS REFERS TO the report, “Super Sindhu Sunday” (IE, August 2). Badminton star P V Sindhu has won the bronze after defeating China’s He Bingjiao 21-13, 21-15 during Sunday’s third-place play-off. India had a special moment when its women’s hockey team entered the semi-finals. While these stirring events kept India afloat, there is also the litany of heart-breaks. The Games exert immense pressure as it is always about the athlete combining individual excellence with national pride. It is never easy and the Indian contingent would vouch for that going into the second week.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

IDEAS ONLINE

ONLY IN THE EXPRESS

● UNEVEN PLAYING
FIELDS: SOHAM MUKHERJEE
AND SUMANTA ROY

● A NEW AGE OF
SURVEILLANCE: JAVED
IQBAL WANI

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NEP PIPE DREAM

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, “Walking NEP talk” (IE, August 2). The NEP 2020, a year on, remains largely a decent document. And like most government “visions”, it remains largely a pipe dream. What seems to be happening on the ground is that education is being left to the private, for-profit sector, at both schools and the university level. What is needed is a strong, neighbourhood-based public school system — along the lines of Britain’s Comprehensive Schools — and an expansion of government universities.

Biswadeep Chatterjee, via email

Ladakh standoff: India, China agree to disengage from a key patrol point

Agreement on Gogra Post, but not Hot Springs; movement in next few days

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY & KRISHN KAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

ENDING THE stalemate in border talks that lasted nearly six months, India and China have agreed in principle to disengage at a key patrol point in eastern Ladakh even though other friction areas remain in the region, government sources said.

The agreement on PP17A was reached during the 12th round of Corps Commander-level talks Saturday.

The meeting, which was part of a series of measures to resolve the 15-month standoff in Ladakh, was held on the Indian side of the Chushul-Moldo border.

Sources said China has agreed to step back from PP17A, also known as the Gogra Post, but is "not inclined" to move back from PP15 or the Hot Springs area.

"Modalities are being worked out. But on PP17A, there is an agreement to disengage. On PP15, China continues to insist that it is holding its own side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC)," an official said.

The proposals are with the government, and details of how the troops will move are being discussed, sources said. The

movement is expected to start within the next couple of days, they said.

The issue of Chinese ingression in the Depsang Plains and Charding-Ninglung Nallah (CNN) in the Demchok area were not discussed, sources said. But the latest breakthrough is significant, they said, considering the stalemate since February.

A joint statement issued Monday said the two sides had a "candid and in-depth exchange of views on resolution of remaining areas related to disengagement along the Line of Actual Control in the Western Sector of India-China border areas".

It said: "The two sides noted that this...meeting was constructive, which further enhanced mutual understanding. They agreed to resolve these remaining issues in an expeditious manner in accordance with the existing agreements and protocols and maintain the momentum of dialogue and negotiations."

The statement said the two also agreed that in the interim, "they will continue their effective efforts in ensuring stability along the LAC in the Western Sector and jointly maintain peace and tranquility".

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Zoramthanga, Sarma say FIRs against officers to be withdrawn

Mizoram claims 'blockade crisis', Assam says no orders against truck movement

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, AUGUST 2

BOTH MIZORAM Chief Minister Zoramthanga and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said they would withdraw the FIRs registered against their respective officers in connection with the July 26 violence, in what can be seen as further de-escalation at the inter-state border.

While Zoramthanga on Monday said he had directed the police to withdraw the FIR filed at Vairengte police station, Kolasib district, against all accused Assam officials, Sarma said he would "heartily reciprocate this positive gesture" and withdraw the cases against Kolasib Deputy Commissioner H Lalthlangliana and Vairengte SDPO Tharta Hrangchal.

Four other officials had also received summons by Assam Police. G P Singh, Special DGP, Assam Police, told The Indian Express that the charges against the four had not been dropped since "they were at the spot when firing took place".

As a result of the border clashes, six police personnel died and 50 were injured on the Assam side. There were about seven injuries on the Mizoram side.

The move comes a day after both CMs sought to dial down tension after talks with Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

In a Twitter post Monday evening, he wrote: "In order to build a conducive atmosphere for amicable solution to the #MizoramAssamBorder dispute



Trucks stranded at the state border last week. Tora Agarwala/File

& to reduce the plight of suffering citizens, I have directed @mizoram police to withdraw FIR dt 26.07.2021 filed at Vairengte, Kolasib District, Mizoram against all the accused..."

A couple of hours later, Sarma tweeted: "...I heartily reciprocate this positive gesture and ask @assampolice to withdraw cases against DC Kolasib and SDPO Virengte."

He added that he was sending two of his cabinet ministers, Atul Bora and Ashok Singhal, to Aizawl for further dialogue on August 5.

On Sunday, Mizoram said it was dropping Sarma's name from the FIR, following which Sarma said he had directed withdrawal of the case against K Vanlalvena, MP from Mizoram who had been booked in connection with a media interview.

The border, however, remains tense, said Ramandeep Kaur, SP Cachar district.

"While we retreated from the disputed territory on the day itself and took position behind the CRPF, Mizoram Police still has not de-escalated and their personnel are occupying the same position as they were on July 26," Kaur told The Indian Express.

However, her Kolasib counterpart Ralte said the "tension was less". "Assam Police is still there at their post, so is the CRPF and so are we," he said.

Meanwhile, a freeze on movement of essential supplies from Assam to Mizoram through Lailapur-Vairengte continues.

On Monday, Mizoram Health Minister Dr R Lalthlangliana in a statement said the state was "under serious crisis due to a blockade created by the Assam Government". He requested the Prime Minister and Home

Minister to intervene at the earliest. "Following the border dispute which occurred on the 26th of July 2021, Assam Government on the 29th July 2021 summoned all the transporters in Guwahati who have been operating in Mizoram to stop transporting any goods into Mizoram due to 'security concerns'. This resulted into a complete halt of any type of goods coming to the state including basic medicines, life-saving medicines and Covid-19 medicines as well. Even oxygen cylinders, oxygen plant materials, and Covid-19 test kits have been blocked," he said.

David H Lalthlangliana, Deputy Secretary, Home Department, Mizoram, said, "The drivers are willing to proceed to Mizoram... we have asked Assam to please ensure that they are released immediately."

Cachar's Kaur said there were some trucks at the border and less movement through Lailapur, despite there being "no directions from Government of Assam restricting their movement. We have asked them to move but many do not want to risk going themselves." She added that supplies were continuing to Mizoram through Tripura and Manipur.

Ralte said both parties should negotiate so that there is free flow in movement of goods.

Mizoram Governor Dr Hari Babu Kamhampati met Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss the border issue. PTI quoted him saying that Shah was trying to defuse the situation.



MPs from four states with PM Narendra Modi on Monday. ANI

Border clash: BJP MPs from N-E meet PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

A GROUP of BJP MPs from four Northeastern states Monday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the border skirmishes between Assam and Mizoram claiming that foreign forces were fuelling fire in the region. They accused the opposition Congress of "politicising" a sensitive issue.

Union ministers Kiren Rijiju and Sarbananda Sonowal, along with BJP MPs from Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh, met Modi in Parliament House. The MPs also gave a four-page memorandum to him.

There were 16 MPs in the meeting — 12 from Assam, two from Arunachal Pradesh and one each from Manipur and Tripura.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, Rijiju claimed "foreign forces are fuelling fire" in the region by making inciting statements and promoting manipulated content.

Quoting Modi, Rijiju said the Prime Minister asserted that he doesn't look at the region from

the prism of politics and that it's close to his heart.

In the memorandum, the BJP MPs said that they want to convey to all those elements who view the Assam-Mizoram issue as a means of "spreading chaos in India that their shenanigans will not work". The BJP MPs said they were pained by the violence on the Assam-Mizoram border.

"At the same time, we would like to express our clear disapproval of the attempt by sections of our polity led by the Congress Party to indulge in politics over these happenings and use this as a means to indulge in one-upmanship," the MPs said in the memorandum.

The parliamentarians underlined that the chief ministers of Assam and Mizoram have expressed the desire to amicably resolve issues. "A series of confidence building measures have also taken place over the last few days. Yet, the actions of the Congress Party remain devious and mischievous," they said, adding that the party and its leaders have zero regard for the culture of the region.



The late Judge Anand's father Sadanand Prasad (above) is a lawyer. So are his wife and brother-in-law. Abhishek Angad

Dhanbad judge's father recalls his struggle to top

ABHISHEK ANGAD
HAZARIBAGH, AUGUST 2

"I AM in no position to talk," says Sadanand Prasad, 78, gripping the handle of his wicker chair. And then he talks, slowly, of his son who "struggled like me" and worked his way up to become a judge.

On July 28, his son, Dhanbad Additional Sessions Judge Uttam Anand, 50, was killed by an auto-rickshaw that visibly veered sharply towards him on an empty road. On Saturday, a day after the Supreme Court took cognisance of the alleged hit-and-run case, the Jharkhand government recommended that the matter be investigated by the CBI.

"We did not speak very regularly and the pandemic had limited his visits home. But he had a deep connection with all of us, the house..." says Prasad, a practising lawyer. The shelves behind him are stacked with legal records and files. "I am a self-made man, so was Anand. He worked hard, graduated from Delhi University's Faculty of Law. His death is a big loss... to our family, to society."

Besides the late judge's father Prasad, his wife and brother-in-law Prabhat Kumar Sinha are lawyers too. Sinha, who practises in the Jharkhand High Court, takes over from his father-in-law.

"This is no doubt a murder... If you see the video carefully... this is not an accident. Let the investigation bring out the truth," he says, adding that while the judge had no enemies at home, "his

colleagues in court will be able to tell you more".

Calling Anand a "friend more than a brother-in-law", Sinha says, "He was a great dad, husband. We also bonded well professionally. We would discuss several legal points but he wouldn't disclose anything on the case he was working on."

Saying Anand was "very objective" in his work, Sinha says, "There have been instances where, in the cases that he dealt with, the interested parties have come to me for bail. But when he got to know, he recused himself."

Judge Anand passed 36 orders in July, of which 34 pertained to bail in cases ranging from murder to coal smuggling, alleged sexual harassment, sale of fake lottery tickets and the alleged diversion of scholarships meant for minority school students, which was investigated by The Indian Express.

In the six cases in which he granted bail, the period of custody was the main ground. In the remaining cases, he rejected the pleas for bail citing the nature of the crime.

While he copes with Anand's death, Prasad has another worry. "Anand's wife Kritee has barely talked ever since he died. Anand's death is a big loss for us, but for his wife and children, it is a loss that can't be compensated for," he says.

Sinha adds that Anand always wanted his wife, also a lawyer, to clear the Judicial Services Examination. "But he was very clear that he wouldn't impose his career choice on his two daughters and son," he says.

'If people saw CM sit back, things would have gone bad in Assam'

ASSAM CHIEF Minister HIMANTA BISWA SARMA told LIZ MATHEW that the "healing process is on" between his state and Mizoram — after the bloody clashes along the border — with the Centre's "cooperation", but a permanent solution can be found only by the Supreme Court. Excerpts:

Do you think the current standoff between Assam and Mizoram at the borders is over now?

The situation at the border is still tense. The government of India is talking to both the states. We, both the states, are also talking to each other using our own channels. We hope a solution will emerge.

There is a truce for the time being. What is the role played by the Centre, especially the Union home ministry?

For the last six months, the ministry has been working very hard to make the states reach an agreement over the borders. But unfortunately, it did not have a result for some reasons. After the July 26 incident too, the Home Ministry, including the ministers and senior officials have been trying to resolve the issue by talking to both sides. They are ensuring that no more clashes take place.

Isn't it a failure of the Centre too? Two days after Home Minister Amit Shah visited the region, the clashes broke out.

This incident was not anyway related to the Home Minister's



visit. It's a very very complex issue and a solution to it is not possible overnight. This has been going on since last October. There are efforts from both sides too, but there are some regional and constitutional issues for which a solution is not happening.

How did things become so bad last week?

This has been an issue since the late 1980s. Assam has lost almost 200 people in conflicts with neighbouring states. When they formed the states, they did not define boundaries clearly... When the Congress government had carved out Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya, they should have defined the bound-

aries also... Because of that the people of Northeast are fighting against each other... it's a historical injustice that has come to us.

But why did Assam take it to a different level? You have issued travel advisories against the Mizoram government. You have treated them like a foreign country.

Travel advisories do not mean anything. Even in Covid time, we issued alerts... It's not to stop you from going there, but to be alert. When there is tension and conflict, how can you let people go there? We have also issued another advisory to protect the lives and properties of Mizo people in Assam. I do not know why everyone singled out only one advisory.

You have made some remarks that were seen as provocative. Despite being the convener of NEDA, why did you do that?

See, once our policemen died, you must understand there are sentiments in Assam also... There was no damage to Mizo people or Mizoram. If the people would have seen that the Chief Minister was sitting back without saying anything, things would have gone bad in Assam. But I have been keeping my channel of communication with Meghalaya also...

What do you think is the long-term solution?

Long-term solution is very very complex. Assam needs to protect its constitutional boundaries. Others can claim historical facts. Our state is a result of var-

ious administrative arrangements made by the Government of India... unlike other states, Assam is not just about one community and the state is not created on a particular community's demand... These boundaries were given to us by Parliament... If the Supreme Court can look into the history, various governments' administrative decisions and decide the boundaries, Assam has no issue.

You have asked for a neutral agency to probe the incident.

Like the Supreme Court took the dispute with Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, the apex court can take a decision. The Supreme Court has the mandate to decide on the inter-state boundary dispute. The matter is pending... If the Supreme Court takes a decision, we will be grateful.

Do you think this incident will affect your efforts to coordinate between states?

We have been trying to find common issues to work together. But we have been burdened with the issues created by Congress governments in the past. Congress felt a united Northeast couldn't be governed. That was the reason it played divisive politics in this region. Our efforts to come together are going on... the healing process is going on with Mizoram. At some point of time, with the active cooperation of the Government, we will be able to work together. A permanent solution, I think, will be from the Supreme Court... the issue will be resolved permanently.

Behind Olympic hockey success, Odisha's support over the years

AISHWARYA MOHANTY
BHUBANESWAR, AUGUST 2

AS INDIA celebrates the entry of the men's and women's hockey teams in the Olympics semifinals, the success holds a special significance for Odisha, which has been at the forefront of supporting the sport. Not only are the current vice-captains of the men's and women's teams from Odisha, but the state has over the years produced several national-level hockey players and stepped up to develop infrastructure and sponsor national teams.

When in 2018, the state government decided to sponsor the

Indian national hockey teams (men/women, junior/senior) for a tenure of five years, replacing Sahara, it was the first time that a state government had decided to sponsor a national team. The government had pledged Rs 150 crore for the purpose.

"The main objective is to bring back the glory of Indian hockey. Indians have an emotional connection with hockey. Therefore, Odisha will extend all possible support in the coming years," Secretary, Sports and Youth Department, Government of Odisha, Vineel Krishnan said.

The state has hosted major tournaments in the last five years. It hosted the World Cup in 2018,



Indian players celebrate their quarterfinal victory against Australia. PTI

2014 Champions Trophy, and Hockey World League final in 2017. It is also the host for the 2023 Men's

Hockey World Cup, to be played in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela.

"The fact that national teams have camped in Bhubaneswar ahead of major tournaments is a manifestation of how we have progressed in terms of infrastructure and logistical support," former Indian hockey captain and chairman of Hockey Promotion Council Dilip Tirkey said.

With the World cup in mind, the state cabinet in March this year approved the 'State-Sports Infrastructure Development Project' for development of infrastructure at Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar, and construction of International Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, at an estimated cost of

Rs 356.38 crore. The Rourkela stadium will be the largest in India, with 20,000 seating capacity.

In 2018, collaborating with Tata group, the state government established a Hockey High Performance Centre at Kalinga Stadium. It also has 12 grassroot centres. Of the 20 sports hotels in the state, two in Sundargarh are dedicated to hockey. The government is now working to set up 17 astro turfs in all 17 blocks of the district.

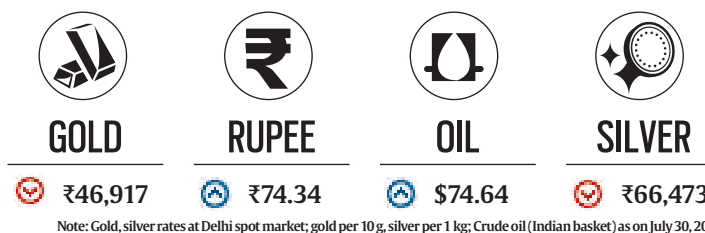
The state has produced greats like Dilip Tirkey, Ignace Tirkey, Lazarus Barla and Sunita Lakra. The current Indian team has Birendra Lakra, vice-captain of men's team, and Deep Grace Ekka, vice-captain of women's team. The

common link between them all is their home district of Sundargarh.

In Sundargarh, hockey is more than just a sport. "We get queries about hockey even from remote villages. With the infrastructure development, we will produce more national players from here," said Sundargarh District Sports Coordinator and senior hockey coach Milton Bilung.

"Deep was 11 when she started training under me. Over a decade a lot has changed. Many children are more interested in hockey," Tejkumar Kess, senior coach of the state hockey team and Deep's uncle, said.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com



POLITICAL FUNDING DONATIONS

Parties get ₹150.5 cr via electoral bonds in July; over half from SBI Kolkata branch

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, AUGUST 2

POLITICAL PARTIES received electoral bonds worth Rs 150.51 crore from donors in July, a non-election period and three months after the polls in Kerala, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal.

Of this, as much as Rs 97.31 crore-worth bonds were sold by the Kolkata main branch of State Bank of India (SBI), Rs 30 crore bonds were sold by Chennai branch of SBI and Rs 10 crore bonds by SBI's Hyderabad branch.

As much as Rs 126 crore bonds were of the face value of Rs 1 crore each and Rs 23.60 crore bonds were of the face value of Rs 10 lakh each, SBI said in reply to the RTI application filed by Commodore Lokesh K Batra (Retd).

The bond sale, 17th phase, happened between July 1 and 10. With this, political parties have received a total of Rs 7,380 crore in 17 phases from donors, mainly corporate houses and industrialists, towards "funding of elections". In April 2021, when election process in four states and one Union Territory was in full swing, SBI sold bonds worth Rs 695.34 crore to donors of parties. Voting for five Assembly polls began on March 27, with results being declared in first week of May. The Supreme Court had refused to stay sales of electoral bonds ahead of the polls on a PIL filed by an NGO pertaining to funding of parties and alleging lack of transparency.

FACE VALUE OF ₹1 CREAM

₹126 cr

■ As much as Rs 126 crore bonds were of the face value of Rs 1 crore each and Rs 23.60 crore bonds were of the face value of Rs 10 lakh each, SBI said in reply to the RTI application filed by Commodore Lokesh K Batra (Retd)

Electoral bonds are purchased anonymously by donors and are valid for 15 days from the date of issue. A debt instrument, these can be bought by donors from a bank, and the political party can then encash them. These can be redeemed only by an eligible party by depositing the same in its designated account maintained with a bank.

The bonds are issued by SBI in denominations of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh and Rs 1 crore. Political parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which have secured not less than 1 per cent of the votes in the last general election to an Assembly or Parliament, are eligible to open current accounts for redemption of electoral bonds.

Even major political parties have not disclosed the amount they received through electoral bonds. Donors gave Rs 1,056.73 crore in 2018, Rs 5,071.99 crore in 2019 and Rs 363.96 crore in 2020, SBI had said in a previous RTI reply to *The Indian Express*.

INTEREST COSTS TO FALL, CASH MANAGEMENT TO IMPROVE: EXPERTS

MSME liquidity line set to widen as more NBFCs start 'factoring'

SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

PARLIAMENT'S CLEARANCE to The Factoring Regulation (Amendment) Bill, along with a government plan to mandate companies with over Rs 250-crore annual turnover to register on the TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System) platform, will significantly boost funding availability for MSMEs, lower interest costs and improve cash management, industry sources said.

Currently a handful of NBFCs and banks were providing funding to MSMEs against their receivables. Factoring law amendments have been cleared in both Houses of Parliament in the current session. This will enable nearly 9,000 NBFCs to participate in the factoring market instead of just seven now. Improved participation by NBFCs in the factoring market will enhance liquidity for MSMEs and lower their interest costs.

Factoring is a transaction where an entity (like MSME) sells its receivables (dues from a corporate) to a third party (a 'factor' like a bank or NBFC) for immediate funds. Banks and NBFCs provide finance against these receivables,

EXPLAINED
E What is factoring?

FACTORING IS a transaction where an entity (like MSME) sells its receivables (dues from a corporate) to a third party (a 'factor' like a bank or NBFC) for immediate funds. Banks and NBFCs provide finance against these receivables, enabling availability of ready funds for the MSMEs.

enabling availability of ready funds for the MSMEs. This is done on an online TReDS platform initiated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). TReDS facilitates financing and discounting of MSME trade receivables through multiple financiers.

"Only in India, factoring could be done by the banks or NBFCs that have a factoring licence — those who do over 50 per cent of business through factoring. Now, all NBFCs have been allowed to do factoring business, irrespective of proportion of income from factoring. This, therefore, brings liquidity into

factoring business, which was deprived of it as only largely banks and few NBFCs could participate in it," said Sundeeep Mohindru, CEO of M1exchange, an online platform for trade receivables.

NBFCs' lending to MSMEs is typically against the balance sheet strength of these smaller companies, leading to interest rates that can be higher than 16 per cent. But in the case of funding against receivables (or factoring), the NBFC is taking a risk on the customer of the MSME who is larger corporate, leading to lower (nearly halving) interest costs, he said.

The Finance Ministry also plans to accept suggestion of a Parliamentary panel studying the impact of Covid-19 on MSMEs that it should be made mandatory for CPSEs with turnover of over Rs 250 crore to register on TReDS platform, a senior government official said. "As on 31.12.2020, of 4,599 companies having turnover of more than Rs 500 crore, as identified by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 1,461 companies have registered themselves on TReDS platform. 170 CPSEs and 3,903 MSMEs registered with these CPSEs have also been onboarded on the platform. Totally, 11,690 MSMEs have on-boarded," the Department-re-

lated Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry noted in its report on MSMEs last week.

"The Committee recommends that the registration should be made mandatory for all CPSEs having a turnover of more than Rs 250 crore (from Rs 500 crore at present) as it would enlarge the ambit of TReDS," it said. Every tax invoice raised by GST-registered MSMEs should reflect automatically on the TReDS platform.

The legal changes have also enabled intermediaries to register a factoring transaction on the Central Registry of Securitisation Asset Reconstruction and Security Interest (CERSAI) portal instead of the existing practice of banks doing assignment in CERSAI one by one.

With 3,000-5,000 factoring transactions in a single day, assignment entry onto CERSAI has been time consuming so far.

"Now the change in Factoring Act has permitted intermediaries like us to register the factoring unit directly on the CERSAI portal... this will reduce the lead time on operating on the portal from days to few minutes and hours. This makes the process faster, efficient and reduces chances of duplicity of transactions," said Mohindru.

'Construction of 6 lakh homes worth over ₹5 lakh cr face delay'

Construction of over six lakh housing units valued at over Rs 5 lakh crore is either fully stuck or delayed across seven cities as of mid-2021, an Anarock report said

'Totally stuck' projects:

Among more than six lakh units, that are part of projects launched in seven cities on or before 2014, the report by Anarock Property

Consultants classified 1.74 lakh homes valued at ₹1.40 lakh crore as "totally stuck", adding that two-thirds of these are priced below ₹80 lakh



Use of SWAMIH fund: The Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) fund has rescued several projects, but the exact help tendered by the scheme has not been specified

Totally stalled projects:
■ Delhi-NCR: 1.13 lakh units worth ₹86,463 cr
■ Mumbai Metropolitan Region: 41,730 units worth ₹42,417 cr
Source: Anarock/PTI

Major reasons for jump in stuck or delayed projects in NCR:
■ Litigations ■ Pandemic ■ Issues around funding

Southern cities: Housing projects in southern cities, namely Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru, are mostly on track

BRIEFLY

Exports up 47%

New Delhi: Exports rose 47.19 per cent to \$35.17 billion in July, provisional data by Commerce Ministry showed Monday. Meanwhile, the RBI said services exports in June rose 24.1 per cent on-month to \$19.72 billion in June. **PTI**

Oil slumps 4%

New York: Oil prices tumbled about 4 per cent on Monday as weak economic data from China and the US and higher crude output from OPEC producers stoked fears of weakness in demand.

Afterpay buyout

Sydney: Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey's payments firm Square Inc will acquire for \$29 billion 'buy now, pay later' pioneer Afterpay Ltd, in the biggest buyout of an Australian firm. **REUTERS**

Essar Oil UK CEO

New Delhi: Essar Oil (UK) Ltd on Monday announced appointment of Deepak Maheshwari as its new CEO.

Koo compliance

New Delhi: In its monthly compliance report, Koo said it has proactively moderated 65,280 content pieces, while 3,431 posts were reported by its users in July. **PTI**

Google processor

Bengaluru: Google will use in-house designed processors, called Tensor, for its Pixel 6 and Pixel 6 Pro phones launching this fall, in a shift away from Qualcomm Inc's technology that has powered Android devices for over 15 years. **REUTERS**

LIC new MD

New Delhi: Mini Ipe took charge as Managing Director of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC). **ENS**

AMID COVID

Unemployment rate in urban areas rose to 13.3% in July-Sept 2020: Labour survey

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

IN THE aftermath of Covid, unemployment rate in urban areas shot up to 13.3 per cent in July-September 2020 from 8.4 per cent in the corresponding period a year ago, the quarterly Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Monday showed.

Urban unemployment was recorded at 20.9 per cent in April-June 2020, 9.1 per cent in January-March 2020, 7.9 per cent in October-December 2019, 8.4 per cent in July-September 2019 and 8.9 per cent in April-June 2019.

Urban unemployment in the

As per the quarterly Periodic Labour Force Survey, labour force participation rate for all ages was 37% in July-September 2020

age group 15-29 years was 27.7 per cent in July-September 2020 as against 20.6 per cent in July-September 2019 and 34.7 per cent in April-June. Female unemployment rate was recorded at 15.8 per cent in July-September, up from 9.7 per cent in the corresponding period a year ago and but lower than 21.2 per cent in the previous quarter. For urban males, it was at

12.6 per cent in July-September as against 8.0 per cent in July-September 2019 and 20.8 per cent in the previous April-June quarter.

As per the survey, labour force participation rate for all ages was 37 per cent in July-September 2020, up from 36.8 per cent in the same period a year ago. It was 35.9 per cent in April-June 2020. Workforce Participation Rate stood at 32.1 per cent in July-September 2020, down from 33.7 per cent in the same period a year ago. It was 28.4 per cent in April-June 2020.

Unemployment data for urban areas is released quarterly based on current weekly status. This dataset differs from the Annual Report of Periodic Labour Force Survey, which covers both rural

EPFO invests ₹7,715 cr in equity during Q1

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

IN THE first quarter of this fiscal, retirement fund body EPFO made equity investment of Rs 7,715 crore, Parliament was informed Monday. The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has invested Rs 7,715 crore in equity till June 30 in 2021-22, Minister of State for Labour and Employment Rameshwar Teli said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

However, he added that the EPFO invests only in exchange traded funds (ETFs) through ETF manufacturers (SBI-Mutual Fund and UTI-Mutual Fund) and not in individual shares. The EPFO can invest up to 15 per cent of investment in equity as per the Pattern of Investment notified by the central government and the internal guidelines of the EPFO approved by the Central Board of Trustees, Employees' Provident Fund.

The equity investment of the EPFO was Rs 31,025 crore in 2020-21, Rs 32,377 crore in 2019-20.

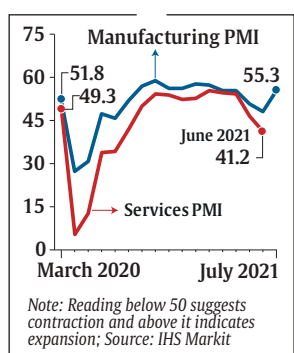
MoS Finance: No formal proposal from Cairn to settle dispute

New Delhi: Facing a payout of \$1.2 billion-plus interest after an arbitration award went against it, the government said it has not received any formal proposal from UK's Cairn Energy plc to resolve the issue within the country's legal framework, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary told the Lok Sabha on Monday.

An international arbitration tribunal consisting of a judge appointed by India, had last December overturned the levy of taxes on Cairn retrospectively and ordered refund of shares sold, dividend confiscated and tax refunds withheld to recover such demand.

Since then, Cairn has been pressing India to pay while the government has looked for possible solutions within the existing framework. **ENS**

'Manufacturing PMI growth at 3-month high'



Mumbai: Following the nationwide Covid-19 unlocking, the manufacturing sector in July showed the strongest rate of growth in three months.

After slipping into contraction for the first time in 11 months in June, the seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) moved back above the critical 50.0 threshold in July. The headline figure rose from 48.1 to 55.3, as factory orders rose on reports of improved demand. **ENS**

Bhagwati, Rangarajan conferred with Prof CR Rao Gold Medal

New Delhi: Dr Jagdish Bhagwati, professor of economics, law and international relations at Columbia University and director of the Raj Center on Indian Economic Policies, and Dr C Rangarajan, former Chairman, Economic Advisory Council of the PM and ex-RBI Governor, have been conferred with the inaugural Prof CR Rao Centenary Gold Medal.

The Indian Econometric Society Trust has instituted the award to honour the doyen of mathematical statistics and the society's founder-president professor CR Rao's contributions to quantitative economic theory and practice. **ENS**

POST-MONEY VALUATION OF \$3.44 BILLION

Unacademy raises \$440-mn funding

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

UNACADEMY HAS raised a fresh \$440 million in funding led by Temasek at a post-money valuation of \$3.44 billion.

The investment was also backed by General Atlantic, Tiger Global and SoftBank Vision Fund.

Mirae Asset, Aroa Ventures, the family office of Oyo founder Ritesh Agarwal, and Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal participated in the funding round that gave an exit to some of Unacademy's angel investors, the company said.

In a tweet, Gaurav Munjal, founder at Unacademy Group, said fresh capital will be used to build and scale varied offerings. **FE**

PolicyBazaar eyes ₹6K-cr IPO

New Delhi: PolicyBazaar aims to raise up to Rs 6,017.5 crore through its initial public offering (IPO), according to the preliminary documents filed with Sebi.

The offer consists of fresh issuance worth Rs 3,750 crore and a Rs 2,267.5-crore offer for sale by a clutch of shareholders, including SoftBank and the firm's co-founder and group CEO Yashish Dahiya. While SoftBank plans to sell shares worth up to Rs 1,875 crore, Dahiya along with co-founder and group CFO Alok Bansal, collectively aim to sell shares worth up to Rs 345 crore, as per draft red herring prospectus. **FE**

Q1 RESULTS

HDFC standalone profit falls 1.6%

Mumbai: With Covid hitting the home loan segment, mortgage lender Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) on Monday posted a 1.66 per cent fall in standalone net profit at Rs 3,000.67 crore against Rs 3,051.52 crore in the same quarter last year.

The profit declined 5.63 per cent from Rs 3,179.83 crore registered in March 2021 on a sequential basis. On a consolidated basis, profit after tax rose 31 per cent on-year to Rs 5,311 crore. **ENS**

PNB net rises over three-fold

New Delhi: State-owned Punjab National Bank on Monday reported over three-fold jump in its standalone net profit for the quarter ended June 30 at Rs 1,023.46 crore, mainly due to fall in operating expenses and good recovery.

PNB had posted a net profit of Rs 308.45 crore in the same quarter last year. Sequentially, it was up from Rs 586.33 crore in the March 2021 quarter. **ENS**

VOUCHER-BASED DIGITAL PAYMENTS PLATFORM

PM: e-RUPI to deliver 'targeted, transparent, leakage-free' benefits



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the launch of e-RUPI, via video conferencing, on Monday. **PTI**

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

LAUNCHING THE digital payments solution e-RUPI on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the voucher-based system will "play a huge role in making DBT (direct benefit transfer) more effective in digital transactions in the country and give a new dimension to digital governance".

"This will help everyone in targeted, transparent and leakage free delivery... e-RUPI is a symbol of how India is progressing by connecting people's lives with technology," he said.

The e-RUPI platform, has been developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the National Health Authority 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 people-specific and purpose-specific payments system will essentially function 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 in a digital manner without any physical interface.

The Prime Minister also spoke about how technology was being leveraged to bring in transparency and integrity in transactions while making available newer opportunities for the poor. "For reaching today's unique product, foundation was prepared over the years by creating the JAM (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) system which connected mobile and Aadhaar. Benefits of JAM took some time to be visible to people and we saw how we could help the needy during the lockdown period while other countries were struggling to help their people," he said.

He added that so far, over Rs 17.5 lakh crore has been transferred directly to the accounts of the people via DBT through over 300 schemes. "The biggest benefit of this all is that Rs 1.78 lakh crore were prevented from going to the wrong hands."

According to the government, e-RUPI — built on NPCI's UPI system — would ensure leak-proof delivery of welfare services. It will initially be deployed alongside the National Digital Health Mission and to support the vaccine drive, but added that it can also be used for delivering services under schemes meant for providing drugs and nutritional support.

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

HIGH COST of acquisition due to a variety of reasons, including higher GST than other major nations, is slowing down car demand and unless the Centre and states take steps to reduce it, the industry is unlikely to experience reasonable growth, as per Maruti Suzuki India Chairman R C Bhargava.

Addressing shareholders in the company's Annual Report for 2020-21, he said after the second Covid wave hit the first quarter of FY22, the performance in next three quarters will depend on how effectively people get vaccinated.

"The GST on cars, based on the past rates of excise duty, is much higher than the GST (or equivalent) in all other major countries of the world. It is unlikely that the car industry will experience reasonable rates of growth unless the central and state governments consider

how to reduce the initial acquisition cost of car," Bhargava said.

Auto Expo 2022 postponed

New Delhi: The Auto Expo, which was scheduled to take place in February at Greater Noida, has been postponed due to Covid and apprehensions of a third wave. SIAM said on Monday. **PTI**

TOPOF THE
WORLD

Anthony Wong

HONG KONG

Pro-democracy singer held for 'corrupt conduct'

HONG KONG'S anti-corruption watchdog on Monday charged a singer and prominent pro-democracy activist, Anthony Wong, with "corrupt conduct" at a 2018 election rally, the latest legal action against dissent by authorities in the Chinese-ruled city. The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) said in a statement that Wong had provided "entertainment to induce others to vote" for pro-democracy activist Au Nok-hin in a 2018 legislative council by-election. "At the rally, Wong performed two songs on stage. At the end of the performance, he appealed to the participants of the rally to vote for Au at the election," ICAC wrote, adding that he breached the Elections Corrupt and Illegal Conduct Ordinance.

REUTERS

MYANMAR

Shadow govt condemns junta chief for taking on PM role

MEMBERS OF a shadow government set up by opponents of Myanmar's coup condemned the country's military ruler for taking on the role of prime minister in a caretaker government and said the move was designed to try to win legitimacy. "The transition... is a reflection of the fact that they are preparing for an international diplomatic battle, trying to prove the fact that they are a government," said Aung Myo Min, minister for human rights in the National Unity Government, which was formed in April by various groups.

REUTERS

COLOMBIA

Ex-army chief to be charged over extrajudicial killings

COLOMBIA'S ATTORNEY general's office will charge former army commander General Mario Montoya for responsibility of 104 extrajudicial executions, as part of the "false positives" scandal, it said on Sunday. The false positives took place between 2002 and 2008, during the term of ex-President Alvaro Uribe, when soldiers murdered civilians and registered them as guerrilla fighters killed in combat to receive benefits. The country's transitional justice court said 6,402 people were killed this way, but victims' groups say the numbers could be higher.

AP

Afghan President blames worsening security situation on sudden US pullout

Battling Afghan forces, Taliban fighters push deeper into southern provincial capital of Lashkargahon

REUTERS

KABUL, AUGUST 2

TALIBAN FIGHTERS pushed deeper into the southern Afghan provincial capital of Lashkargahon Monday and closed in on government buildings, a senior official said, as the insurgents pressed a rapid advance.

Heavy fighting was raging close to the National Directorate of Security, the prison and the police headquarters in the main city in Helmand province, the government official said, asking not to be named.

President Ashraf Ghani, meanwhile, blamed the country's fast-deteriorating security situation on a "sudden" decision by the US to withdraw its troops.

"We have had an unexpected situation in the last three months," he told the Afghan Parliament.

Ghani added that the Afghan government had a US-backed security plan to bring the situation under control within six



"We have had an unexpected situation in the last three months," Ashraf Ghani told Parliament

months. He also accused the Taliban of keeping up its ties with terrorist groups and of stepping up attacks on women.

The Taliban rejected Ghani's accusations. "Declarations of war, accusations and lies cannot prolong Ghani's government's life; his time has run out, God willing," the movement's spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said on Twitter.

Taliban fighters have moved in on three provincial capitals in the

last few days and seized territory nationwide since Washington said it planned a complete withdrawal of troops by September.

Most of their advances have focused on rural areas and they have yet to take full control of a major city.

An Afghan military commander said the government forces managed to beat back the Taliban later in the day.

"In the afternoon the level of intensity of the fighting (in Lashkargah) decreased as the Taliban suffered heavy casualties following the air and ground operations," Sayed Sami Sadat, the commander of the Maiwand army corps, told Reuters.

Peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban negotiators started last year in the Qatari capital of Doha, but have not made any substantive progress despite a few rounds.

The two sides committed to speeding up the talks, at a meeting last month in Doha between a high-level Afghan political delegation and the Taliban.

US to evacuate journalists, aid workers from Afghanistan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, AUGUST 2

THE BIDEN administration on Monday expanded its efforts to evacuate at-risk Afghans from Afghanistan as Taliban violence increases ahead of the US military pullout at the end of the month.

The US State Department said it was widening the scope of Afghans eligible for refugee status in United States to include current and former employees of US-based news organisations, US-based aid and development agencies and other relief groups that receive US funding. Current and former employees of the US government and the NATO military operation who don't meet the criteria for a dedicated programme for such workers are also covered.

However, the move comes with a major caveat: applicants



MEANWHILE

WILDFIRES BLAZE ON IN DROUGHT-HIT TURKEY

Firefighters using planes and helicopters, and locals with buckets of water, battled wildfires raging for a sixth day near southern resorts in drought-hit Turkey and the government faced fresh criticism of its handling of the disaster. Seven fires were still burning on Monday, fanned by temperatures above 40°Celsius, strong winds and low humidity, the government said.

Belarusian Olympian who feared for her safety is offered asylum in Poland

Sought help at Tokyo airport as Belarus tries to forcibly send her back home

MOTOKORICH & TARIQ PANJA

TOKYO, AUGUST 2

KRISTINA TIMANOVSKAYA, the Belarusian Olympic sprinter who sought protection at a Tokyo airport as her nation tried to forcibly send her home from the Summer Games, has been offered asylum in Poland.

Timanovskaya, 24, entered the Polish Embassy in Tokyo on Monday and will fly to Warsaw on Wednesday, according to Alexander Opeikin, the executive director of the Belarusian Sports Solidarity Fund, a group that opposes the Belarusian government.

Marcin Przydacz, the deputy foreign minister of Poland, confirmed on Twitter that Timanovskaya had received a humanitarian visa.

Timanovskaya had said she feared for her safety in Belarus after she criticised her coaches and the country's national committee for registering her for a relay event for which she had not trained.

She had originally been scheduled to run a heat of the 200 metres, one of her regular races, on Monday but instead spent the day seeking a new country in which to settle.

"She is OK. She's a little bit disappointed, because she wanted to continue in the Olympic Games," Opeikin, who has been in contact with Timanovskaya since the events unfolded Sunday, said by telephone.

"She's disappointed she couldn't compete in the 200 metres today, but she understands the whole situation, she understands her rights, she understands the deep violations of her rights as an athlete, of her human rights," he said. "She needs to tell the whole world about this situation."

The asylum offer capped nearly 24 hours of drama at the Olympics, where Timanovskaya had placed fourth in her heat in the 100



Kristina Timanovskaya runs in the women's 100-metre event at the 2020 Summer Olympics, on Friday. AP

EXPLAINED
Cause for concern

ACTIVISTS SAY there is good reason for Timanovskaya's fears for her safety in Belarus, even though she only criticised sporting decisions taken by authorities. Ever since a massive protest movement erupted a year ago following a presidential election that the Opposition said was rigged, the Belarusian government has relentlessly targeted people who make even mild criticisms of authorities. Activists helping Timanovskaya also said a campaign was already underway against the sprinter in the state-run media in Belarus, worsening her worries. Another detail adding to the concern is that the head of the country's national Olympic committee is the eldest son of Belarus President Lukashenko.

metres Friday. She then said on Instagram that her coaches had informed her at the last minute that she would have to run the 4x400-metre relay in place of a team member who had not taken enough anti-doping tests to qualify for the event.

NYT

Another police officer escorting polio workers killed in Pak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PESHAWAR, AUGUST 2

UNIDENTIFIED GUNMEN shot dead a police officer escorting a team of polio workers in northwest Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday, the second such incident in two days.

The officer was killed by the unknown gunmen riding a motor cycle while he was joining the polio workers in the tribal district of Dera Ismail Khan bordering South Waziristan, police said.

A search operation to arrest the killers is underway, they said.

The attack took place a day after bike-borne gunmen fired at a police constable in the Daudzai area of Peshawar district and fled from the scene.

The policeman was returning home after being with a polio

team when he came under fire, police said.

Polio health workers and law enforcement officials who are tasked with providing security have often been targeted by militants and miscreants in Pakistan.

Last week, the federal government had announced to launch a nationwide five-day polio immunisation drive from August 2 to inoculate 23 million children against the crippling disease.

PM Imran Khan on June 24 expressed hope that Pakistan will become polio-free in the next year.

Taking to Twitter, Khan said only one case of the crippling disease had been reported this year so far, adding: "We will eradicate polio completely in coming year."

Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only two remaining countries in the world where polio is endemic after Nigeria was declared free of poliovirus last year.



Family members greet each other at Terminal 5 of Heathrow Airport in London on Monday. AP

'It means the world': families and friends reunite at UK's Heathrow

BEN MAKORI

LONDON, AUGUST 2

FAMILIES AND friends were overjoyed at London's Heathrow Airport on Monday after a travel rule change meant they could reunite after 18 months of pandemic separation.

"Very, very excited. It means the world," said Sue Blake, as she waited to greet her son, daughter-in-law and grandson who had flown in from New York and who she last saw two years ago.

"It's a big chunk of his life and I'm so thrilled for him that he

can come here," she said of the eight-year-old.

Watching the hugs and tears in the arrivals hall, Heathrow's boss urged Britain to remove barriers to travel, not add to them, amid speculation that the government was poised to impose more rules.

"Let's just make it easier now for people to travel," Heathrow's chief executive John Holland-Kaye told Reuters.

Britain, where the death toll from the coronavirus pandemic has nearly reached 130,000, reopened its borders to large parts of the world on Monday, scrapping quarantine for fully vaccinated ar-

rivals from the European Union, excluding France, and the US.

The move was welcomed by families divided by the pandemic and airlines strained by it. "It is really awesome," said 31-year-old medical writer Colleen Castro after collecting her luggage.

She and her husband had come to London to deliver some happy news to his parents.

"It's been a really long time and, actually, I'm pregnant with my in-law's first grandchild, so it's really exciting to finally be able to be here and share that news with them."

REUTERS

New theory: Earth's longer days kick-started oxygen growth

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, AUGUST 2

SCIENTISTS HAVE a new idea for how Earth got its oxygen: It's because the planet slowed down and days got longer.

A study published Monday proposes and puts to the test the theory that longer, continuous daylight kick-started weird bac-

teria into producing lots of oxygen, making most of life as we know it possible.

They dredged up gooey purple bacteria from a deep sinkhole in Lake Huron and tinkered with how much light it got in lab experiments. The more continuous light the smelly microbes got, the more oxygen they produced.

One of the mysteries in science is how Earth went from having

minimal oxygen to the breathable air we have now. Scientists long figured microbes called cyanobacteria, were involved, but couldn't tell what started the great oxygenation event.

Researchers in a study in Monday's *Nature Geoscience* theorise that Earth's slowing rotation, which gradually lengthened days from six hours to the current 24 hours, was key for the

cyanobacteria in making the planet more breathable.

About 2.4 billion years ago there was so little oxygen in Earth's atmosphere that it could barely be measured, so no animal or plant life like we know could live. Instead, lots of microbes breathed in carbon dioxide, and in the case of cyanobacteria, produced oxygen in the earliest form of photosynthesis.

DEEPENING CRISIS IN POORER COUNTRIES AS DELTA VARIANT SPREADS

Covax, vast global vaccination programme, struggles to get shots into arms

BENJAMIN MUELLER & REBECCA ROBBINS

AUGUST 2

DEATHS FROM Covid-19 were surging across Africa in June when 100,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrived in Chad. The delivery seemed proof that the United Nations-backed programme to immunise the world could get the most desirable vaccines to the least developed nations. Yet five weeks later, Chad's health minister said, 94,000 doses remained unused. Nearby in Benin, only 267 shots were being given each day, a pace so slow that 110,000 of the

programme's AstraZeneca doses expired. Across Africa, confidential documents from July indicated, the programme was monitoring at least nine countries where it said doses intended for the poor were at risk of spoiling this summer.

The vaccine pileup illustrates one of the most serious but largely unrecognised problems facing the immunisation programme as it tries to recover from months of missteps and disappointments: difficulty getting doses from airport tarmacs into people's arms.

Known as COVAX, the programme was supposed to be a global powerhouse, a multibillion-dollar alliance of international health bodies and non-

profits that would ensure through sheer buying power that poor countries received vaccines as quickly as the rich.

Instead, COVAX has struggled to acquire doses: It stands half a billion short of its goal. Poor countries are dangerously unprotected as the Delta variant runs rampant, just the scenario that COVAX was created to prevent.

The urgent need to vaccinate the world goes far beyond protecting people in poor nations. The longer the virus circulates, the more dangerous it can become, even for vaccinated people in wealthy countries.

Without billions more shots, experts warn, new variants



Unloading vaccines provided through Covax in Mogadishu, Somalia. AP

could keep emerging, endangering all nations. "COVAX hasn't failed, but it is

failing," said Dr. Ayoade Alakija, co-chair of the African Union's vaccine delivery programme. "We really

have no other options. For the sake of humanity, COVAX must work."

More supplies are finally on the way, with the Biden administration buying 500 million Pfizer doses and delivering them through COVAX, the centrepiece of a larger pledge by wealthy democracies. The donated doses should begin shipping this month.

But the Biden donation, worth \$3.5 billion, comes with a caveat: To help fund it, the administration is diverting hundreds of millions of dollars promised for vaccination drives in poorer countries, according to notes from a meeting between COVAX and American officials. Short on funding, those countries have had a hard time

buying fuel to transport doses to clinics, training people to administer shots or persuading people to get them.

Even as COVAX officials scramble to fill that funding gap, the overriding question is whether the programme can move beyond its mistakes, and beyond an imbalance of power that has left it at the mercy of wealthy countries and pharmaceutical companies. Pfizer, for example, balked at a direct deal with COVAX this spring, interviews reveal, instead reaching an agreement through the Biden administration, an arrangement that hurt COVAX's credibility as an independent vaccine purchaser.

The programme has strug-

gled with delays and infighting. Bureaucratic barriers imposed by its leadership have held up the disbursement of \$220 million to help countries administer vaccines.

Driven by a nonprofit funded by the Gates Foundation, COVAX is a creation without precedent. It has gotten vaccines to poorer countries faster than was previously typical and developed a system to compensate people for serious post-vaccine reactions and protect vaccine-makers from legal liability.

Still, the 163 million doses it has delivered are a far cry from plans to have at least 640 million doses available by now.

NYT

MEDALS TALLY

| COUNTRY | G | S | B | TOTAL |
|----------------|----|----|----|-------|
| 1. China | 29 | 17 | 16 | 62 |
| 2. USA | 22 | 25 | 17 | 64 |
| 3. Japan | 17 | 06 | 10 | 33 |
| 4. Australia | 14 | 04 | 15 | 33 |
| 5. ROC | 12 | 21 | 17 | 50 |
| 6. G Britain | 11 | 12 | 12 | 35 |
| 7. France | 06 | 10 | 07 | 23 |
| 8. Germany | 06 | 06 | 11 | 23 |
| 9. South Korea | 06 | 04 | 09 | 19 |
| 62. India | 00 | 01 | 01 | 02 |

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

Eye on India

WOMEN'S JAVELIN THROW
ANNU RANI
Qualification: 5:50 AM

MEN'S SHOT PUT
TAJINDERPAL SINGH TOOR
Qualification: **7:25 AM**

HOCKEY
MEN'S SEMIFINAL
India vs Belgium: **7:00 AM**

WRESTLING
WOMEN'S FREESTYLE 62KG
Sonam Malik vs Bolortuya Khurelkhuu (MGL) in 1/8 Final **8:30AM**
Semifinal (Subject to Sonam's qualification) **2:45PM**

WORLD WATCH

WOMEN'S 200M
Final: **6:20PM**
■ The deep field features five runners who have sub-22 times in the event. Olympic champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and her Jamaican teammate Elaine Thompson Herah along with Gabrielle Thomas will be contenders.

MEN'S POLEVAULT
Final: **3:50PM**

FOOTBALL
Men's semifinals
Brazil vs Mexico **1:30PM**
Japan vs Spain **4:30PM**

■ Mexico's squad is almost exclusively formed by their domestic league pros, the Japanese are playing on home soil, while Spain has arguably the deepest and most talented squad. Brazil versus Mexico could also decide the Olympic Golden Boot race.

RESULTS

WOMEN'S 200M
■ Dutee Chand finished 7th in Heat 4 with a timing of 23.85.

EQUESTRIAN
■ Fouaad Mirza and his horse Seigneur Medicott made the eventing final and finished 23rd overall.

SHOOTING
50m Rifle 3 positions men's qualifying: Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Sanjeev Rajput failed to qualify for the final, finishing 21st and 32nd

INTERNATIONAL

BREAKING THE ASIAN STRANGLEHOLD
■ Denmark's Viktor Axelsen beat Chinese defending champion Chen Long 21-15, 21-12 to become the first non-Asian man to claim the singles title since 1996. Compatriot Poul-Erik Hoyer-Larsen was the last winner from outside Asia at the Atlanta Games.

ONEDOWN, TWOTOGO
■ Dutch runner Sifian Hassan surged clear of the field to win the 5,000m with a time of 14min 36.79sec. The win means Hassan's dreams of claiming three gold medals in Tokyo — the 1,500m, 5,000m and 10,000m — remain very much alive. **ENS**

EXPRESS AT OLYMPICS



MIHIR VASAVDA
TOKYO, AUGUST 2

WHILE PULLING off their biggest heist at the Olympics, India made short work of Australia, quite literally.

Playing their biggest, most tense match ever, India resorted to a game of 'mini hockey', a tactical switch executed with breath-taking efficiency. Sjoerd Marijne's team started their quarterfinal by pressing high and unafraid to play long passes from the centre of the pitch to the attacking third, bypassing the midfield completely. But after drag-flicker Gurjit Kaur scored her first goal of the campaign to put India ahead in the 22nd minute, Australia got more aggressive, pushing India deep into their half in search of an equaliser.

That forced Marijne to deploy a different strategy at the start of the third quarter. Continuing with long passes to get some breathing space could have only led to easy interceptions, simple turnover of possession and more pressure on the defence.

So, the team turned to playing a 'mini game'. Instead of going long, the players reduced the distance between themselves on the pitch and started playing shorter passes. It was simple: pass the ball, stop the ball, pass-stop, pass-stop... The mini-hockey game requires strong fundamentals, and during this spell of play, India's players showed how far they had come in terms of their technical abilities. They could play give-and-go hockey – receiving the ball on the run, and passing it in one quick motion – by stopping the ball cleanly and running patterns with two or three players playing this short game together, similar to creating triangles in football. They were receiving the ball close to their body, which made it difficult for the Australians to steal possession.

This also helped India to keep the ball for longer durations, thus breaking Australia's rhythm and it cut out needless running, which was critical given the humid conditions in Tokyo. This was particularly effective on the left flank, where Udit, Salima Tete and Navjot Kaur combined to then feed forwards positioned on the inside, Rani Rampal and Lalremisiami.

This wasn't the first time Marijne had adopted this tactic. In the second leg of the Olympic qualifying playoff against the United States too, India played the short game to wrestle back control after being under pressure for most part of the first half. The problem, almost always, is in the execution. And that's what happened at the Olympics as well. Until Monday.

Turnaround

The tears triggered the turnaround. India were handed a rough schedule. In their opening three group stage matches, the team that finished at the bottom in the Rio Olympics was up against the podium finishers – silver medallists Netherlands first, then bronze winners Germany followed by champions Britain. India conceded 11 goals in those three games and it felt like a Rio repeat all over again. The 4-1 loss to Rio gold medallists Britain, a team they've stolen points from before, hurt the players the most and left the team reeling. Marijne called it their 'worst game'. He's set a benchmark of 6 out of 10 for his players, the bare minimum consideration for what constitutes a good performance. In that match, he said, none of the players passed that test.

Rani, the captain, said the players wept inconsolably following the defeat. ("But) in the first match against The Netherlands, we played so well in the first two quarters. That



Members of India's women's team pose for a photograph after winning their quarterfinal against Australia on Monday. Reuters

gave us a lot of confidence that if we can play like that against the No. 1 team in the world, we can take on any team in the world. We were playing so well in that game, but still we lost," she said. After that defeat, the team got together, watched a movie to motivate themselves and dissected everything that hadn't gone as planned. Marijne and Rani, who have spent several months and years dreaming about a scenario like this, were never in doubt about the team's capability. The bigger issue, as far as the coach was concerned, was to make sure the team's tempo and focus did not waver during a game.

Circles of attention

The Dutchman calls it the 'circles of attention'. Essentially, it is about staying in the present.

"You are in Circle One when you are totally in the zone. The more you start thinking about other situations, be it an umpire's problem or the result or your next opponent, you start drifting outside the first circle," Marijne says. "Our mind is never concentrated on Circle One. But if you stay in the present, your mind remains calm, you can concentrate on your task and function at an optimum level." Monday was one of those days when all these factors magically came together, in a near-perfect performance. India was hungrier of the two teams and were bending more with their stick grazing the turf so that the ball didn't touch their feet, resulting in fewer missed traps and fouls.

It's not often one sees a team keep a clean sheet in a fast-moving, high-scoring sport like hockey; rarer even to see that happen in an Olympic quarterfinal. The fickle nature of sport means it's impossible to say if India will be able to dish out the same level of performance against a physical side like Argentina, one of women's hockey's powerhouses.

But that for Marijne and his team would be drifting way outside the first circle of attention. "Let's savour this win," Marijne said. "Let's live this moment."

In final moments, Sirsa girl makes the 'most vital save for Indian hockey'

NITIN SHARMA
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 2

IN 2003, when Savita Punia joined the Haryana government's hockey nursery in Sirsa under coach Sunder Singh Kharab, she would carry her goalkeeper's kit on state transport buses from her village Jodhka. And often, she would complain to her father about bus conductors touching her kit with their feet or not letting her board with the extra bag.

On Monday, the 31-year-old thwarted every Australian attack to help India register a historic 1-0 win and reach the semifinals of the Tokyo Olympics. In the final minutes of the game, as she stopped two penalty corners, the commentators said: "She has made the most important save for Indian hockey."

Back in Sirsa, her father Mahinder Singh Punia recalled those early days.

"Unlike other players, Savita had to carry an extra bag for the goalkeeping kit from our village to the hockey nursery on local buses. A lot of times, the conductors would ask her to keep the bags aside or move them with their feet. Sometimes, they wouldn't let her board due to the big bags. Sometimes, she would cry because the conductors had kicked her bag aside, which was not acceptable to her," Mahinder told *The Indian Express*.

With her father working as a pharmacist, Savita's interest in hockey grew as her grandfather Ranjit Singh Punia, a farmer, listened to radio commentary of matches and took her along to watch local games. Finally, Mahinder took Savita to the hockey nursery in nearby Sirsa. While Savita initially wanted to be a forward or midfielder according to her grandfather's wishes, coach Kharab insisted on grooming her



Savita Punia didn't want to be a goalkeeper at first.

as a goalkeeper.

"I still remember Savita told us that she wanted to be a midfielder or forward. But when I saw her training and made her undergo drills and tests, I was impressed by her quick reaction time and height. So I suggested to her father to let her become a goalkeeper," Kharab recalled. With the nursery having only two kits for the goalkeepers already selected, Kharab requested Mahinder to buy Savita one of her own. "While we were a bit skeptical of her becoming a goalkeeper, I spent Rs 17,000 to get her a new kit from Sirsa. She would always guard her kit and take extra care of it. She would remain in the hostel and visit home only in case of an emergency. Somehow, it made me believe that she will make us proud one day," Mahinder said. Kharab trained Savita from 2003 to 2007 – during this period, he was shifted to Hisar where he took Savita along – before she was selected for the Sports Authority of India centre there. The youngster played for the Haryana junior teams

and often competed for a spot with players from Shahbad, a town famous for producing more than 10 international players including current India skipper Rani Rampal.

Savita impressed national selectors and made it to the junior Indian team in 2007 before making her senior debut in 2008. "As a goalkeeper, her footwork and arm and leg position were very good even in her junior days and she would make sure to spend a lot of time with the team's forwards and midfielders to understand their thinking. Be it summer or winter, she was always ready for training in the goal-keeping kit. She had a lot of patience," Kharab said.

"Once in a tournament in Delhi, two teams from Haryana – from Shahbad and Hisar – played the final. Even though Hisar lost, former India player and coach M K Kaushik and Amit Bose forwarded Savita's name to be included in the junior Indian team camp," he said. Savita went on to help India win the Asia Cup in 2017, where she was declared the best goalkeeper, and the silver medal at the 2018 Asian Games.

Against Australia in Monday's quarterfinal, as Savita made a number of saves, Kharab noted down points to pass on to her. "She was always in the line of the ball and made some direct saves, too. Even though Australia did not have their experienced penalty corner specialists, she made sure that India survived the last quarter. Earlier in the tournament, she did not follow the line of the ball once and let a goal in. She learnt from the mistake. Hopefully, she will be like a wall in the semis, too," he said.

Coach Azad Singh Malik, who has seen Savita's rise through the Haryana junior teams, was watching, too. "Her biggest strength is her patience. She has a clear mind and keeps seeking defenders' inputs about the opposition forward line or penalty corner moves," he said.

Trans debate rages as Hubbard exits

SRIRAM VEERA & MIHIR VASAVDA
MUMBAI, TOKYO, AUGUST 2

SHE LET the loaded barbells drop to the floor for the third unsuccessful time and smiled graciously. She raised her left hand in silent acknowledgement, and the New Zealand national coach pat her back as she stepped off stage. On social media, the majority mocked her, with cracks about "nob""s" to "couldn't snatch" circulating. They have been at her for days and months now, ever since Laura Hubbard, a weightlifter who was born a male and transitioned to a woman at the age of 35, announced she was going to compete in Tokyo. Now 43, Hubbard, the first transgender Olympian, has been at the forefront of a raging debate on multiple themes: gender, morals, scientific, and human rights.

The fairness angle

It is fair for a transgender woman, who went through puberty as a man, to compete against a cisgender woman? Or is it a great sign of inclusiveness? Or should it be seen as a safety issue? Not in Hubbard's sport of weightlifting but say in boxing, where the power of punches could matter a lot more than mere points. It's been argued that someone who has gone through puberty as a male has inherent advantages related to bone and muscle density.

Technically, within the context of the Olympics, it's legal. Under current guidance, which the IOC updated in 2015, trans-women athletes' testosterone levels must be below 10 nanomoles per litre of blood for at least 12 months before the first competition.

Ross Tucker, a sports scientist explained to this newspaper the bigger sporting context. "I



Laura Hubbard, 43, was the oldest competitor in weightlifting. Reuters

think Hubbard will be the physical manifestation of a debate that is 15 to 20 years old now ... It changes everything," Tucker said before the contest. He adds that Hubbard winning a medal will make it difficult for the IOC and other sports to remain silent. Instead they'll be forced to debate on its fairness. "The conversation will happen more. And of course, if nothing changes, Hubbard will be the first, not the last, and I suspect by Paris 2024, there may be six to ten trans-athletes in contention for Olympic spots."

Testosterone tension

The testosterone argument is a minefield. Elsewhere, Tucker explained: "Testosterone drives the development of male characteristics – larger hearts and lungs, more haemoglobin, denser and differently shaped skeletons, less body fat, and increased muscle size and strength." Taken together, these biological differences create performance advantages – Tucker reckons a top-level boxer can punch 260% more powerfully than the best female.

Not everyone agrees that this percolates down to a transgendered athlete. Joanna Harper, a PhD researcher on the transgender issue at Loughborough University, UK, and who has consulted the IOC, says haemoglobin levels in transgender women drop in line with cisgender women in the space of three to four months.

"Haemoglobin is important for taking up and using oxygen in your muscle," she told Outsports this March. "It's perhaps the single most important reason that men outperform women in endurance events. It has been long noted that haemoglobin levels are closely tied to testosterone levels. When transgender women lower their testosterone levels to female levels, which happens almost universally when trans-women undergo medical transition, trans-women move from male levels of haemoglobin to female levels."

There is a lack of definitive studies on transgender women athletes to make or break the case. Harper further claims that trans-women have disadvantages, as the "larger bodies are powered by reduced muscle mass and reduced aerobic capacity, and can lead to disadvantages in quickness, recovery, and a number of other factors."

However, the uncertainty has cornered Hubbard into an uncomfortable space. She took up weightlifting in her youth to feel more masculine. "I thought perhaps if I tried something that was so masculine perhaps that's what I'd become," she told Radio New Zealand in 2017. It didn't work. And after years of wrestling within, she decided to transition into a woman. "What people don't realise is I actually stopped lifting in 2001 when I was 23 because it just became too much to bear ... just the pressure of trying to fit into a world that perhaps wasn't really set up for people like myself."

Kabarwala celebrates Kamal's 6th spot

NITIN SHARMA
KABARWALA (SRI MUKTSAR SAHIB), AUGUST 2

AS HIS daughter Kamalpreet Kaur finished sixth in the discus throw event at the Tokyo Olympics, Kuldeep Singh made sure that every one of the 100-odd people at their house in village Kabarwala left after having tea and *laddoos*.

While Kamalpreet's mother Rajwinder Kaur was crying during a video call with her daughter, her brother and cousins headed to the garden in their home to burst crackers to celebrate the joint-best finish by an Indian athlete in field events at the Olympics tied with Krishna Poonia's sixth-place finish at the 2012 Olympics.

"What more can we ask for if the medal has not come Kamalpreet's way. She has put us and our tiny village in the prayers of every Indian and on the biggest sporting stage in the world. How many fathers can say that their daughter competed in an Olympics and that too in the final against the world's best and would return with India's joint-best finish in field events ever at the Olympics? It's a day to celebrate for all of us," an emotional Kuldeep told *The Indian Express*.

With relatives and friends gathering from morning itself, the Singh household seemed to be hosting a function. Rajwinder and her nieces would perform Sukhmani Sahib path before the event. As Kamalpreet made a third throw of 63.70m, the villagers would cheer with some curious elders asking youngsters about Kamalpreet's chances of winning a medal. Another round of applause and euphoria ensued when Kamalpreet made it to the top eight throwers after three attempts of the rain-inter-



Kamalpreet's father Kuldeep Singh (left) watches her daughter's discus throw event with friends and relatives at his residence in Kabarwala. Kamleshwar Singh

rupted contest, and became eligible for the final three tries. But with Kamalpreet not being able to improve upon her third throw and needing a mark of well over 65m to have the chance of a medal, some faces turned glum. But there was no mistakeable pride at what she had achieved.

"We have 26 acres of land, including contracted farmland with two of my brothers. When Kamalpreet showed interest in sports and started winning medals at the district level, we thought it was a pastime for her and would subside after 2-3 years. But later, when she told me to get her admitted at the Sports Authority of India Hostel at village Badal, it meant she would rarely visit home. All these years we craved to see her, and today we watched her at the Olympics," said the proud father.

Between throws, Kuldeep and his younger brother Prabhdeep Singh would also go and check the livestock. With their father Gurbax

Singh also keeping an eye on the final, Kuldeep made sure that all the visitors were served tea from fresh milk. "Kamalpreet loves our livestock and whenever she visits home, she makes a point to yield milk with her own hands. While most of the milk was consumed today, tomorrow onwards a major part will be saved to prepare ghee for Kamalpreet. The day she returns, she would ask for aloo paranthas. Kudi ne 2-3 Olympic *chor khedne ne te medal jeetne ne* (The girl has to play 2-3 more Olympics and win medals)," says Prabhdayal.

As for Kuldeep, he has already started making plans for her daughter's return. "She was a bit unlucky as rain made the circle a bit slippery and with her weight, she struggles on this kind of surface. But that's sport. And that's what my daughter loves and we will support her for our lifetime," says the proud father as he is called out for bursting crackers.



HERSTORY

From cradles of the sport to a Naxal stronghold. Some criticised for not doing chores, others moulded by the heat of farms and factories. Living up to a brother who represented the nation, rejoicing a sister who bought a stick with daily wages. Playing to escape an alcoholic father & to vindicate a father who fought societal norms. **SHAHID JUDGE & MIHIR VASAVDA** tell the larger-than-life back-stories of Indian hockey's giant-killers

RANI RAMPAL
(26, FORWARD)
SHAHBAD, HARYANA

RANI HAS been playing international hockey for almost half her life, a journey that began with her playing with a broken hockey stick while wearing a salwar-kameez. She made her debut at the age of 14. Now 26, Rani is the key player of the team. With her unerring ability to be at the right place at the right time, she has been India's saviour on many occasions. She has also helped the team win a Junior World Cup medal, Asian Cup, and was one of the key reasons why India could qualify for the back-to-back Olympics for the first time.

NIKKI PRADHAN
(27, DEFENDER)
HESAL, JHARKHAND

HAILING FROM an area known to be a Naxal stronghold, Pradhan claimed she does get scared when travelling back to meet her parents. Riddled with financial troubles while growing up, her elder sister, who also played hockey, had worked as a labourer in order to purchase a hockey stick. Pradhan got her first pair of hockey shoes and a stick when she moved to an academy in Ranchi in 2006. She was in and out of the national structure before finally securing a spot in the team in 2015, just in time for Rio, where she became the first player from her state to play at the Olympics.

LALREMSIAMI
(21, FORWARD)
KOLASIB, MIZORAM

ONE OF the finest forwards in the team, Siami, as she is called by her teammates, is central to the idea of playing high-tempo hockey. When she was first selected as a 16-year-old, Siami could not speak English or Hindi. She communicated mainly through sign language apart from talking in monosyllables. She shared a room with her idol Rani Rampal, who led Siami's initiation into the team. She created history by becoming the first female player from Mizoram to make it to the Olympics and was the first Olympian from the state in 25 years after Archer C Lalremsanga.

DEEP GRACE EKKKA
(27, DEFENDER)
LULKIDIHI, ODISHA

EKKKA comes from a family of hockey enthusiasts; her older brother Dinesh is a former India 'keeper. Following in his footsteps, Ekka also wanted to be a 'keeper but was pushed to play as a defender by Dinesh & her uncle (also a 'keeper). Her fondness for the sport, & the large amounts of time she'd spend practising her craft prompted the other Lulkidihis-residents to criticise her for not doing her 'chores'. Her family supported her and she'd go on to be a part of the team that won the 2017 Asia Cup. With over 200 caps, she's now playing at her second Olympics.

UDITA DUHAN
(23, DEFENDER)
HISAR, HARYANA

She followed in her father's footsteps by playing handball initially. Hockey was never in the picture, until the handball coach at her school stopped coming for practice. On her mother's advice she decided to try her hand at hockey, and her speed caught everybody's attention. She started as a forward but only realised her potential when she moved into defence. In 2016, she was named captain of the bronze-winning team at the U-18 Asian Cup in 2016. A year later, she was promoted to the senior team & has become a permanent fixture ever since.

NAVNEET KAUR
(25, FORWARD)
SHAHBAD, HARYANA

She is one of eight players in the team who also competed at the Rio Olympics. Navneet has been one of India's most consistent forwards and has been a part of several path-breaking performances, starting with the 2013 Junior World Cup bronze medal. The forward from Haryana considers Australian great Jamie Dwyer as her hero and on Monday, she put up a dazzling performance to defeat her idol's national team. She scored the crucial winning goal against Ireland that led to the quarterfinal berth.

GURJIT KAUR
(25, DEFENDER)
AMRITSAR, PUNJAB

The designated drag-flicker's only goal in Tokyo so far was the one that won the quarterfinal vs Australia. The defender has been chipping in with crucial goals throughout her career, scoring 8 at the Asia Cup triumph in 2017, and was the top scorer when India won the 2019 FIH Women's Series Final. Nicknamed 'Guri', she wasn't overly fond of sports but did try her hand at circle kabaddi. She was sent to a hostel, to avoid the long travel to school which was situated near a hockey ground. Watching people play tempted her to join in, and once she did, she never stopped.

NAVJOT KAUR
(26, MIDFIELDER)
KURUKSHETRA, HARYANA

She was eight when her father, a mechanic who wanted at least one of his children in sports, insisted she take up hockey. She started training in 2003 while at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park School. A midfielder on paper, her ability to poach goals is what saw her break into the senior team in 2012. Since then, she has gone on to win bronze and silver medals at the Asian Games in 2014 and 2018 respectively. She was also in the team that made it to the 2016 Rio Games, and the quarterfinals of the World Cup in 2018.



NEHA GOYAL
(24, MIDFIELDER)
SONIPAT, HARYANA

For a teenaged Neha Goyal, hockey was an escape that came with two meals. This kept her away from her alcoholic father who would abuse her mother. The first-time Olympian worked alongside her mother in a cycle factory, earning Rs 5 to fix one spoke of a wheel. Goyal's calling card in hockey is her ability to turn on her blistering pace and score goals. She made her debut for the national team at the age of 18. Since 2018, Goyal has won the silver medal at the Asian Games and has been conferred the Hockey India Midfielder of the Year Award.

NISHA WARSII
(26, MIDFIELDER)
SONIPAT, HARYANA

A late-bloomer, Warsi only made her international debut two years ago. Partly, it was because she had a rather start-stop association with the game. She took up the sport since there was not much equipment required, and was keenly supported by her father who worked as a tailor. In 2015 though, he suffered a paralytic attack and her mother had to work at a foam manufacturing factory to make ends meet. It took Warsi another three years before she broke into the Indian team in 2018, and since then she's been a mainstay.

SUSHILA CHANU
(29, MIDFIELDER)
IMPHAL, MANIPUR

ONE OF the senior-most players in the team, Sushila has been one of India's most influential players in the last decade alongside Rani Rampal. The half-back from Manipur, who works for the Railways in Mumbai, captained the team at the Rio Olympics, which was the women's team's first appearance at the Games since 1980. She has over 150 caps for the national team, has played across the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, and was instrumental in shutting out the Australians in the quarter-finals.

SALIMA TETE
(19, MIDFIELDER)
HESAL, JHARKHAND

Salima Tete's hockey journey began the same way most people in India fall in love with sports – in a dusty maidan where the stones needed to be removed and the temporary goalposts had to be constructed. The teenager was born in the Naxal stronghold, which is also a hockey hotbed. She worked on the family's farm, earned money and bought a hockey stick for herself. Ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, she had won 29 caps for the senior national team. She'll hope the next two will come with an Olympic medal.

VANDANA KATARIYA
(26, FORWARD)
LUCKNOW, UTTAR PRADESH

To seal a quarterfinal spot, India had to beat South Africa to stand a chance. In stepped Vandana Katariya, three times, becoming the only Indian woman to score an Olympic hat-trick. This came just three months after a personal tragedy. Growing up in Haridwar, locals dissuaded her family from allowing her to play sports instead of focusing on chores. But her father would not have it and fought societal pressures to let her play. He passed away three months ago, and Katariya was unable to attend the funeral. Now she'll play in an Olympic semifinal, a win short of a medal.

MONIKA MALIK
(27, MIDFIELDER)
SONIPAT, HARYANA

Her father Takdeer Singh Malik, an ASI with the Chandigarh Police, had a liking towards wrestling, but Monika asserted that he never forced the sport on her once she decided to follow the hockey route. Born in a village in the Sonapat district, she started her hockey training at a government school in Chandigarh. 'Monu', holds a business administration degree from Kurukshetra University. On the hockey field, the national team's backbone has won the Asia Cup in 2018, a bronze and silver medal at the 2014 and 2018 Asian Games respectively.

SHARMILA DEVI
(19, FORWARD)
HISAR, HARYANA

The teenager happened to make her international debut in Tokyo at the Olympic Test Event in 2019. She was also on the scoresheet when India beat the United States 6-5 on aggregate to secure qualification. Devi developed interest in the sport thanks to her grandfather, a former national level player. She was intrigued by the balls used in hockey, volleyball and football, and took a while before choosing the sport she wanted to pursue. So far she's scored two international goals – the first led to the Olympics, the second was in Tokyo.

SAVITA PUNIA
(31, GOALKEEPER)
JODHPUR, HARYANA

There was a time Punia dreaded being the 'keeper because she'd have to lug the heavy equipment across state transport buses, and wear it for a match during the summer heat. Now she's the main choice 'keeper, the team's vice-captain, and one of the heroes of Monday's quarter-final. Punia was encouraged to play hockey by her grandfather, but it wasn't till her father spent a huge sum of money on a new kit that she started to take the game seriously. She grew in stature just as the women's team started to improve rapidly, picking up two medals at consecutive Asian Games.

From Rio to first week of Tokyo, it's only women on the podium

SHIVANI NAIK
AUGUST 2

INDIA NOW has seven women with eight medals from the last 25 years at the Olympic Games, compared to the eight men and their nine medals. Seven of those women's medals have come from London, Rio and the first week of Tokyo. PV Sindhu has tied the double Olympic medallist score with Sushil Kumar already. Winning the bronze, after her 2016 silver, the reigning World Champion would play no part in India's fourth-place moping. The women's hockey team kept the mighty Australians at bay and reached the semifinals. Mirabai Chanu spent five years trying to keep her imbalanced feet steady when lifting 87kg in one snap motion. Lovlina Borgohain walked the front row of the opening ceremony, and stood tall, rangy and athletic in the ring. Bhavani

Devi made a fast foray into sabre fencing while Manika Batra attempted to move Indian table tennis progress by a painstaking inch. India's story at Tokyo 2020 is about the charge of Indian women athletes, and them securing five medals out of five in this last one-and-a-half Olympics. The first of those five was won by wrestler Sakshi Malik at Rio 2016. It came about after 12 medal-less days. Then a debutant at the Games, India's first female wrestling medallist says it took a handful of month-long training stints in Spain, sparring with reputed World and Olympic medallists, to inject quiet confidence into her. "Just being around that environment of excellence in your sport can boost you and make you believe you belong. Giving those chances of top-level competition are most important for women," Sakshi says. "Now



PV Sindhu has already tied the double Olympic medallist score with wrestler Sushil Kumar. PTI

imagine when given these opportunities consistently. You'll be surprised how far they can take you."

Typically, in contact sports, young girls came up against familiar rivals: "They said 'kaisi ladki hai jo ladkon ke saath kushiti

karti hai (What kind of girl wrestles with boys). No one will marry her, she'll have deformed ears, and ungirly physique. But my

India's story at Tokyo is about the charge of Indian women athletes, and them securing five medals out of five in this last one-and-a-half Olympics.

parents told me exactly the opposite. They said I was good at sport. That was enough," she says of the reinforcement. Children seldom look beyond the family for validation, Sakshi adds.

Ambition meets opportunity

Indian sport has benefitted from the maturity levels of female athletes who show higher cognitive abilities, especially in tactical sports. While outliers like Sindhu (tall, strong, worked hard on agility) can match physical parameters of competition, India's female medallists have shown remarkable adaptability to stay bull-headed about their medal dreams. "Women are driven so they train very hard. But when they

get support of coaching, physios and nutrition, that path to medal becomes very clear. Then like me, you can go to the Olympics feeling fearless and supported, and stay respectful towards competition but not get overawed, put your head down and fight with zero pressure," Sakshi says. Former Commonwealth Games medallist Aparna Popat has now watched three Games bring in badminton medals, and says the 2010 CWG was the turning point for Indian women – as they started raking in medals from 2012. "Support and planning really took off then. It's not about comparing to men: women fight women from other countries. So just make sure you give them what their opponents are getting

- we matched China in badminton because we gave our girls coach, physio, strategist, cook. Maybe you'll fall short, but the women knowing they got everything can do wonders. Then they don't need extra motivation," she explains. That all of this is new for Indian women is making the numbers appear skewed compared to men. But Popat reckons the relentless supercharging of female ambition targeted at medals has changed India for good. "I played in times when we were super-apologetic about why we played sport: because we liked it or some such thing. But with even basic support, things that made women hesitant - clothes, society, injury, just vanish," she says. A female sporting champion has normalised the career path in a decade's time, she says. "With every medal, the challenges of perception and acceptance are chipping away," Popat adds.