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DELHI HAS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF COVID-19 CASES, RECOVERY RATE ALSO REMAINS HIGH



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India Inc in a fix over Chinese checkers

CHINESE IMPORTS MAY CONTINUE TILL FEASIBLE AND COST-EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVES EMERGE: INDUSTRIES

NEW DELHI: Imports from China are expected to continue for the time being till other feasible and cost effective alternatives emerge, according to players in Indian automobile and pharmaceutical industries.

Days after a deadly border clash with China that saw 20 Indian soldiers losing their lives, there has been a call from various quarters to cut imports from the neighbouring country.

Indian auto and pharma industries import several critical components and raw materials from China. Currently, companies based out of China continue to be the leading suppliers of automotive components for the domestic industry.

In 2018-19, India imported auto components worth USD 17.6 billion, of which 27 per cent -- USD 4.75 billion -- were from China. Explaining the rationale behind the imports from China, Maruti Suzuki India Chairman R C Bhargava told PTI that the reason is "either the product



is not made in India, not available or what is made in India does not provide the desired quality, or the product made in India is too expensive."

When asked in today's circumstances, if importing components from China is inevitable, he said, "Yes, unless we can find alternative sources of imports and which do not raise the prices to a level that

consumers get hurt". Bhargava further said: "Remember the price of imports, ultimately who pays for it? Consumers. So, the same people who are boycotting have to remember that in some cases it may lead to their being asked to pay more for the same product".

Similarly, Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) Director General Vinnie Mehta said the industry has started to take steps towards "deep localisation" in order to de-risk business from Chinese imports.

"There is no denying that the industry needs to be "Atma-Nirbhar" and the industry and the government should together define a roadmap and

deliver accordingly," he noted. Ease of doing business, capital availability at lower rates and globally competitive logistics and energy costs are some of the prerequisites that the government should look into to ensure growth of

imports from China include drive transmission and steering parts, electronic and electrical items, cooling systems, suspension, and braking parts, among others. Lack of technological competence with domestic players in various

Indian auto and pharma industries import several critical components and raw materials from China. Currently, companies based out of China continue to be the leading suppliers

the domestic auto component industry, Mehta said.

He, however, stressed on continuing with the imports till other alternatives emerge for the industry. "Post the lockdowns, our value chains, including automotive, have been severely disrupted and are in a disarray, we are gradually piecing them together. Any further disruptions would only be detrimental to the interest of industry and the economy," Mehta said.

The major component

segments like electronics and BS-VI components and sheer price advantage are the two main factors which support Chinese imports, Mehta said.

When asked to comment on the pharma sector, India Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) Secretary General Sudarshan Jain said India imports some critical APIs and intermediates from the neighbouring country, owing to competitive advantages set through incentivisation and subsidies in China.

AGENCIES

Indian economy in deep trouble: S&P



NEW DELHI: S&P Global Ratings on Friday said Indian economy is in deep trouble with growth expected to contract by 5 per cent this fiscal. "India's economy is in deep trouble. Difficulties in containing the virus, an anemic policy response, and underlying vulnerabilities, especially across the financial sector, are leading us to expect growth to fall by 5 per cent this fiscal year before rebounding in 2021," S&P said in a report.

In its report titled "Asia-Pacific losses near USD 3 trillion as balance sheet recession looms", S&P projected the region's economy to shrink by 1.3 per cent in 2020, but grow by 6.9 per cent in 2021. This implies a loss nearing USD 3 trillion output over these two years.

"Asia-Pacific has shown some success in containing COVID-19 and, by and large, responded with effective macroeconomic policies," said Shaun Roache, chief economist for Asia-Pacific at S&P Global Ratings.

"This can help cushion the blow and provide a bridge to the recovery. The recovery looks set to be weighed down by indebted balance sheets, however."

One risk now looming larger is yet another "balance sheet recession" in which at

least one important sector of the economy -- the government, firms, or households -- tries to bolster its weak financial position by saving more, paying down debt, and spending less, S&P said.

"The downturn caused by COVID-19 did not start as a balance-sheet recession but may end up as one," Roache said. "This means less investment, a slower recovery, and a permanent hit to the economy that will last even after a vaccine is found." The pandemic caused a sudden stop in activity and to prevent a collapse, policymakers, helped by banks, have provided extraordinary financial support to firms and households.

Banks may lend less than they normally would in a recovery to focus on the overhang from the pandemic. Private firms may prefer to stabilize debt rather than ramp up spending on new investments, even though demand is improving. S&P Global Ratings kept its forecasts for growth in Chinese economy at 1.2 per cent and 7.4 per cent for 2020 and 2021, respectively.

The economy is healing but private sector confidence remains fragile. If private sector spending does not improve quickly, more stimulus may be unleashed, S&P said. **PTI**

Hinduja brothers in letter dispute



SRICHAND SEEKS A DECLARATION THAT NEITHER DOCUMENT HAS LEGAL EFFECT, WHETHER AS A WILL, POWER OF ATTORNEY, DECLARATION OF TRUST OR OTHER BINDING DOCUMENT

LONDON: The UK-based Hinduja brothers are locked in a legal dispute in the High Court in England over their billionaire family assets, it emerged in a ruling in London.

The case has been brought by Srichand Parmanand Hinduja, 84, described as the "patriarch" of the family, against brothers G P Hinduja, 80, P P Hinduja, 75, and A P Hinduja, 69, and revolves around the "validity and effect" of a letter dated July 2, 2014.

The letter includes statements to the effect that the brothers appoint each other as their executors, and that assets held in any single brother's name belong to all four. A related second letter, dated July 1, 2014, is also linked to the dispute.

"In summary, SP seeks a declaration that neither document has legal effect, whether as a will, power of attorney, declaration of trust or other binding document, or alternatively that the documents are revocable and have been revoked," Justice Sarah Falk notes in her judgment on Tuesday.

"Additional relief is also sought, in particular an injunction restraining use of the documents and an account of the persons to whom the documents have been submitted and steps taken in reliance on them," she notes.

Presiding over a private hearing in the Chancery Division of the High Court, Justice Falk also partially ruled against a privacy order in the case and agreed for S P Hinduja's daughter, Vino, to act on her father's behalf as his "litigation friend" and safeguard her father's interests due to his ill health as a result of a form of dementia. **AGENCIES**

Sebi gives more time for board meeting



NEW DELHI: Markets regulator Sebi has eased compliance requirement on time gap between two board meetings for listed companies till July 31, due to coronavirus pandemic.

As per the norms, board of directors or audit committee need to meet at least four times a year, with a maximum gap of 120 days between any two meetings.

In a circular, Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said, "The relaxation of maximum time gap between two board/audit committee meetings...is further extended till July 31, 2020".

However, the board of directors and audit committees of listed entities will have to ensure that they meet at least four times a year, it added.

This comes following requests from listed companies for relaxation. Earlier in March, the regulator had relaxed the requirement of the maximum stipulated time

"The relaxation of maximum time gap between two board/audit committee meetings...is further extended till July 31, 2020"

gap of 120 days between two meetings of the board and audit committees of listed entities as required under LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations.

This relaxation was provided for the meetings held or proposed to be held between the period December 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020.

This circular will come into force with immediate effect, the regulator said.

On Wednesday, Sebi had given one more month till July 31 for listed companies

to submit their fourth-quarter as well as annual results. Earlier, the deadline to submit the financial results was June 30. The development comes after Sebi received representations from listed entities, chartered accountants, and industry bodies, seeking further extension of time for filing of financial results for the quarter /half year/financial year ended March 31, 2020.

The entities cited many reasons to seek the extension like the continuing lockdown, subsidiaries and associates situated in containment zones facing challenges in the audit process and other operational issues due to the pandemic. Consequently, the regulator has decided to further extend the timeline for submission of financial results by a month to July 31, 2020, for the quarter and the year ended March 31, 2020, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular.

Normally, listed companies are required to file their annual results within 60 days from the end of a financial year, while in the case of quarterly results, firms are required to file it within 45 days from the end of a quarter. Similarly, the timeline for submission of half yearly and annual financial results for the period ended March 31 for entities that have listed non-convertible debentures, non convertible redeemable preference shares and commercial papers has also been extended to July 31. **AGENCIES**

ICICI Bank sells 1.5% stake in life insurance subsidiary

NEW DELHI: ICICI Bank has sold 1.5 per cent stake in its life insurance subsidiary for around Rs 840 crore with an aim to strengthen the balance sheet.

Last week, the lender had informed exchanges about selling a little less than 4 per cent stake in its general insurance subsidiary for Rs 2,250 crore. While announcing its results for 2019-20 on May 9, ICICI Bank had said it would look at further strengthening the balance sheet as opportunities arise.

"In line with this intent and pursuant to approval granted by the Board, the Bank has today divested 2,15,00,000 equity shares of face value of Rs 10 each of ICICI Pruden-

tial Life Insurance Company, representing 1.50 per cent of its equity share capital at March 31, 2020, on the stock exchange for an approximate total consideration of Rs 8.40 billion (Rs 840 crore)," ICICI Bank said in a regulatory filing. Following this, the bank's shareholding in ICICI Prudential Life stands at approximately 51.4 per cent, it added.

On Friday, it had informed exchanges about selling 3.96 per cent stake, equivalent to 1.8 crore shares in ICICI Lombard General Insurance, through open market for Rs 2,250 crore. Following this, the bank's stake in the subsidiary has come down to 51.9 per cent. **AGENCIES**

Rupee woes add to airlines' financial turbulence

INDIAN PLAYERS STRUGGLE HARD AS MOST COSTS ARE PAID IN US DOLLARS, SAYS VISTARA CHIEF

NEW DELHI: Indian airlines are struggling hard as most of their costs like the ones related to aircraft leasing, plane's maintenance and fuel have to be paid in USDs, a Vistara official said on Friday, at a time when rupee has depreciated by approximately 6 per cent since January.

"The reason why the airlines are struggling this hard is because a lot of our costs are all in USD. And with continually depreciating rupee, and as most of us (airlines) predominantly



operate in the domestic market, there is obviously going to be a mismatch," Vistara's Chief Commercial Officer Vinod Kannan said at a webinar organised by aviation consultancy firm CAPA.

While signing contracts with aircraft leasing firms or aircraft maintenance firms, airlines generally have to agree to make payments in USDs only.

In January, one USD was available for around Rs 71.

"The reason why the airlines are struggling this hard is because a lot of our costs are all in US dollar. And with continually depreciating rupee, and as most of us (airlines) predominantly operate in the domestic market, there is obviously going to be a mismatch"

On June 25, the exchange rate said one USD was of Rs 75.65.

Kannan said, "Whether it comes to fuel, aircraft leasing, aviation maintenance organisations or aircraft overhauls, it is all in USD. You can push down your costs to the lowest level possible, all you need is a Rs 10 increase (in price of a USD), or a depreciation of the rupee by 1-3 per cent."

"So, I think that is an important point. How do we address that? I am not sure...But I think it is very pertinent because you can be the slimmest, meanest organisation in the Indian context, but you still might not cut it purely because of factors that are outside your hands," he stated.

Calling the coronavirus pandemic a "black swan" event, Kannan noted that the airlines have a fundamental knack of ordering aircraft when the times are good, and getting the delivery when the times are bad.

"So that is an important reason why the airlines not just in India but around the world have to think twice about (aircraft) utilisation and see how we can improve aircraft utilisation than order more aircraft," he stated.

Scheduled international passenger flights continue to remain suspended in India. After a gap of two months, the Indian government resumed domestic flight services on May 25 albeit in a curtailed manner and with limits placed on airfares. **AGENCIES**

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Covid-19 cases rise, so is recovery rate

THERE ARE ONLY 26,586 ACTIVE CASES; 100% SURVEY OF HOUSEHOLDS PLANNED IN CONTAINMENT ZONES

NEW DELHI: As many as 3,390 fresh Covid-19 cases were reported in Delhi in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 73,780, according to a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Thursday. Moreover, 64 more deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths to 2,429.

Delhi continued to be the city with the highest number of total Covid-19 cases, after it surpassed Mumbai on Wednesday. Though the total number of cases in Delhi is high, 44,765 people have recovered and there are only 26,586 active cases, which is 36.03% of the total cases. Also, 17,305 tests were conducted in a day in the city, taking the total number of tests to 4,38,012. According to a 'Revised Co-



vid Response Plan' released by the Delhi government on Monday, based on direction from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs on Sunday, officials have started preparing for a 100% survey of households in containment zones and a comprehensive survey of the rest of the city.

Teams comprising officials from municipal corporations and Delhi government have been formed for the door-to-door survey and their training has begun from Thursday, according to officials. The survey will be done through a mobile application and is expected to be completed by

'Till now, the problem was that if a Covid-19 positive patient was admitted to the hospital, relatives of the patient were not able to meet them or talk to them'

July 6. "BLO [Booth Level Officer], municipal corporation workers, who check breeding of mosquitoes, ASHA workers and ANMs will be part of the team doing the ground-level survey. The details will be collected in a mobile app 'Assess Karona'," an official from the central district said. The official added that all households will be surveyed.

According to the plan, the existing containment zones have to be assessed and a revised plan has to be developed by Friday. "We have been asked to identify new clusters and increase the number of containment zones," the official said.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has launched a video call facility for Covid-19 patients admitted at the Lok Nayak Hospital, which will assist them in talking to their loved ones.

He also congratulated the doctors for working rigorously and successfully treating the infected patients for the last 100-odd days. While launching the videoconferencing technology for the patients, Mr. Kejriwal interacted with the doctors and patients admitted in the hospital through a

video call.

"Till now, the problem was that if a Covid-19 positive patient was admitted to the hospital, relatives of the patient were not able to meet them or talk to them. They were unable to get information on the condition of the patient. Now, tablets have been installed in every ward of the hospital. The family members can visit the hospital and talk to the patient through videoconferencing," he said.

Briefing Mr. Kejriwal on the services provided by Lok Nayak Hospital to the Covid-19 patients through a presentation, a team of doctors said around 2,751 patients had recovered and been discharged by the hospital, making this the highest recovery figure countrywide. **AGENCIES**

Fresh rules set for Covid-19 patients



NEW DELHI: The Delhi government on Monday issued new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for management of patients who have tested Covid-19 positive. There are separate SOPs for people who get tested by rapid antigen test, which gives result in 30 minutes, and RT-PCR test, which takes more time.

For the rapid test, if found positive, the duty medical officer at the testing centre will assess the severity of illness. All cases of moderate, severe illness will be transferred to a hospital.

If a patient is tested positive by RT-PCR, then officials will contact the patients telephonically to assess severity of illness.

Mild/pre-symptomatic patients will be shifted to Covid Care Centre. Moderate and severe cases will be shifted to hospitals or Covid-19 health centres by ambulance. "As per guidelines, pre-symptomatic/asymptomatic patients unless they have comorbid conditions can be placed under home isolation if they have a residence of two rooms with a separate toilet for the patient," the SoP said.

"All individuals who are positive will be referred to the Covid care centres for assessment of clinical conditions, severity of illness and presence of co-morbidities," it said in an order on Saturday. An assessment will also be done to check whether adequate facilities like minimum two rooms and a separate toilet exist so that the family members and neighbours are protected and a cluster of cases does not develop in that locality, according to the order. **AGENCIES**

NEWSBRIEF

Erring hospitals shall face action: Court

NEW DELHI: The High Court on Thursday asked the Centre and Delhi governments to take stern action against hospitals in the Capital, which are not providing real time update of the availability of beds for treating Covid-19 patients. A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Prateek Jalan made the observation after it was informed that four hospitals - RML, GTB, Apollo and Saroj - were not updating the real time availability of beds in websites and mobile app. The amicus curiae, appointed by the Delhi High Court to assist in the case, said when he had called some of the hospitals asking the availability of beds, they were hesitant to share details. **AGENCIES**

Cancellation of open book exams sought

NEW DELHI: About 25 members of the Academic and Executive Councils of Delhi University (DU) on Thursday wrote to Vice-Chancellor Yogesh Tyagi demanding immediate cancellation of open book examinations for final semester students. Citing reports that a University Grants Commission expert committee had recommended the cancellation of exams for terminal semester students, the letter states that the DU community welcomes the move. **AGENCIES**

No accommodation for Chinese in city

NEW DELHI: Responding to the "nefarious activities of China" in the Galwan Valley where 20 Indian Army personnel were allegedly killed, the Delhi Hotels & Restaurant Owners Association (DHROA) on Thursday announced that the budget hotels and guest houses in the Capital will not provide any accommodation to Chinese nationals. The New Delhi-based organisation said it represents around 3,000 budget hotels and guest houses with about 75,000 rooms. **PTI**

Air India pilot tests positive for Covid-19

NEW DELHI: An Air India pilot was found Covid-19 positive after landing a flight in Sydney from Delhi, senior airline officials said on Monday. The pilot tested positive on Saturday, they said.

"The pilot was tested on June 16 and was found negative. That is why, as per the rules, he was rostered for the Delhi-Sydney flight of June 20. Before the flight, his sample was taken again. He was found positive after landing the flight in Sydney," officials said.

The pilot and his two cockpit crew have been put in quarantine in Sydney, they said, adding the cabin crew or passengers have not been quarantined as they did not get in



touch with the pilot. According to the Air India protocol on pre-flight Covid-19 testing, the crew will be required to visit the designated venue for Covid-19 testing for

the purpose of giving a sample up to five days prior to departure date.

Since the pilot tested negative four days prior to departure of Delhi-Sydney flight of

June 20, he was rostered to operate it. It is not clear why he gave the second sample for testing just before the flight.

An Air India spokesperson said the pilot had a valid pre-flight Covid-19 negative test report just before operating the flight.

Air India's June 20 flight was part of Vande Bharat Mission, under which the central government, has authorised operation of international evacuation flights to help stranded people reach their destinations.

The national carrier is operating a Delhi-Sydney flight on Monday under the mission.

"We had no flight to Sydney yesterday (Sunday), so no one

is stranded there. The crew operating today's (Monday) flight will take their mandatory rest and operate back. We have adhered to all the laid down protocols in this regard," the spokesperson added.

On May 30, an Air India flight from Delhi to Moscow was asked to return midway after its ground team realised that one of the pilots onboard the plane tested positive for coronavirus.

Two senior bureaucrats had confirmed that there was a "lapse" on part of officials responsible to scrutinise the coronavirus test reports of the crew members and that they did not look at the pilot's test results properly. **AGENCIES**

Fake plasma donor held

NEW DELHI: A man was arrested for allegedly posing as a government hospital doctor and duping the Delhi Assembly Speaker on the pretext of donating blood plasma to a Covid-19 patient.

The accused was identified as Abdul Karim alias Rahul Thakur, a resident of Prahladpur, the police said. They police received a complaint on Saturday from the Assembly Speaker, Ram Niwas Goel.

In his complaint, Mr. Goel alleged that when his nephew was in need of a blood plasma donor for the treatment of his father-in-law who was a Covid-19 positive, he posted a request for help in search of a donor on social media and got a call from one Rahul Thakur, who introduced himself as a doctor at a government hospital.

Mr. Thakur told that he has recovered from Covid-19 recently and showed his willingness to donate plasma. However, due to availability of another donor, they did not utilise his service.

But later, on June 19, when Mr. Goel required a donor for one of his acquaintances, his nephew posted a request online again. They received a call from Mr. Thakur who assured to donate plasma and asked Mr. Goel to transfer Rs. 450 on Google Pay account.

After the Assembly Speaker transferred the requested



amount, Mr. Thakur assured that he will reach Medanta Hospital, where the patient was admitted. But later, Mr. Thakur told them that he did not receive the amount and asked to transfer the money again. Later, when they tried to contact Mr. Thakur, his phone was found to be switched off.

Mr. Goel found out that Mr. Thakur had also got Rs. 450 transferred from family members of the patient, the police said, adding it delayed the process of plasma transplantation.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Monika Bhardwaj said an FIR was registered and an investigation was taken up.

Raids were conducted at his hideouts and the accused was arrested, she said. "During interrogation, the accused confessed that he cheated people on the pretext of donating blood plasma amid the Covid-19 pandemic. **PTI**

FIR may not contain name of rioter: Court

NEW DELHI: In a riot case, the first investigation report may not contain the name and description of a rioter, a Delhi court observed on Tuesday and said it is during the course of investigation that the identity gets disclosed.

The court said this will dismissing a bail plea of a man arrested in a case related to the burning of a mosque during the communal violence in north east Delhi in February. Additional Sessions Judge Vinod Yadav did not grant bail to Kundan considering the gravity of the allegations against him in the case.

During the hearing, held through video conferencing, advocate Rakesh Pal Singh, appearing for Kundan, told the court that he has been in judicial custody for more than three months and his custodial interrogation was no longer required in the case.

Kundan has not been named in the FIR and has been falsely implicated in the case, claimed his counsel. Additional Public Prosecutor Tafteeq Ahmed, appearing for the state, opposed the bail plea saying Kundan has been identified in the case by two

independent eye witnesses.

According to the eye witnesses, Kundan was throwing small gas cylinders, and putting bikes and bicycles on fire inside the mosque in the Khajuri Khas area in order to increase the intensity of a fire and to create a blast inside the mosque.

Ahmed said that the accused's role was also being investigated in 12 other



cases related to the February riots. "In a case of riot the FIR may not contain the name and description of the rioter and it is only during the course of investigation the identity gets disclosed..." "The role of applicant (Kundan) is also being investigated in 12 other cases. Considering the gravity of the allegations against the applicant, I do not find it to be a fit case for grant of bail to the applicant," said the judge in his order. **AGENCIES**

Schools in Delhi will stay closed till July 31



NEW DELHI: Schools in Delhi will remain closed till July 31 in view of the Covid-19 situation, while online classes and activities shall continue, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia announced on Friday. Sisodia, who is also the city's Education Minister, made the announcement after a meeting with officials of the Directorate of Education (DoE) on how to reopen schools.

Among issues deliberated upon during the meeting were a 30 to 50 per cent reduction in syllabus to ease students' stress, and class-specific plans for online activities as well.

Schools in Delhi were closed mid-March due to coronavirus outbreak. When the government announced a nationwide lockdown on March 24, which came into effect the next day, they continued to remain

closed. There have been no guidelines yet from the Centre government on when schools can reopen.

"Reopening schools is not merely a technical work, rather, it is a creative work that would give schools a new and bigger role. Schools will continue to be closed in Delhi till July 31. Let's design a plan to reopen schools in a way that would prepare our students to adjust to the new circumstances and not fear them. It would help our students to learn to live with coronavirus," Sisodia said.

According to an official statement, during the meeting, suggestions were given to resume activities to give learning opportunities and emotional support to children using remote methods and support of parents till the schools reopen. **AGENCIES**

Keep vigil on street crime, L-G tells police

NEW DELHI: Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal on Thursday directed senior police officers to keep a strict vigil on street crime, while reviewing the law and order situation in the Capital.

During the meeting, Raj Niwas stated, the L-G directed that the visibility of police on streets should be enhanced and be further extended inside the residential colonies, especially during night. "The L-G also advised the Delhi Police to reach out to the vulnerable groups through proactive measures and build bridges of trust," Raj Niwas said. He also instructed the officers to make its presence more visible and its personnel more accessible, especially in crime-prone areas to check illegal activities.

He also advised that all mobility modes of police such as PCR vans, patrol vehicles, emergency response vehicles, local police movement and motorcycle patrol should be aligned to ensure maximum coverage and reduce duplication. "Technology may be used for monitoring police presence in the field. He further stressed that police pickets may be re-oriented, focusing on street crime, especially snatching and lifting. **AGENCIES**

Video-call facility for Covid-19 patients

NEW DELHI: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday launched a video call facility for coronavirus patients admitted at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash (LNJP) hospital here to talk to their loved ones.

LNJP was declared a Covid-19 hospital on March 17 and since then, it has successfully treated 2,700 coronavirus patients and sent them home. It is the only Covid-19 hospital in the country with 2,000 beds, he said.

The chief minister said that till now, relatives of coronavirus patients were not able to talk to them, but that that issue has been resolved.

"We have installed tablets in coronavirus wards and at

a counter outside. These can be used by patients and their relatives for video calling," Kejriwal said.

After the launch, Kejriwal used the facility to talk to a few patients admitted to the hospital's Covid-19 ward.

Lauding LNJP doctors, the chief minister said the medics don't go home or meet their family members for days on end fearing that the infection may spread.

"All doctors here have worked really hard. You can imagine how tough it is to work wearing PPE kits in this heat," he said, adding the administration is responsible for shortcomings, if any, and not the healthcare workers. **AGENCIES**

Special provisions sought for students from riots-hit area

THERE ARE VERY FEW STUDENTS OF CLASS 12, MAINLY FROM DELHI, WHO HAVE APPEARED IN THE EXAMINATIONS IN ONLY ONE OR TWO SUBJECTS. THEIR RESULTS WILL BE DECLARED BASED ON PERFORMANCES IN THE APPEARED SUBJECTS AND PERFORMANCE IN INTERNAL, PRACTICAL OR PROJECT ASSESSMENT

NEW DELHI: Students hailing from northeast Delhi, where a communal violence in February this year forced postponement of board examinations, may be at a disadvantage in the Delhi University admission process, some professors have said and demanded a separate arrangement for them.

The professors expressed their apprehensions after the CBSE said that results of the students from the area "will be declared based on performances in the appeared subjects and performance in internal, practical or project assessment".

One of the professors said the CBSE decision will put them at a disadvantage as "students usually do not take internals seriously". According to a four-point assessment scheme announced by the Central Board



of Secondary Education (CBSE), marks for the pending classes 10 and 12 exams, which have been cancelled in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, will be awarded on basis of marks scored by a student in his or her best performing subjects.

Taking note of cancellation of a few exams in northeast Delhi in view of the communal violence in the area during the

performance in internal, practical or project assessment," CBSE Exam Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj said. Pankaj Garg, a former member of Delhi University's Academic Council, said that according to the datesheet issued for northeast Delhi students by the CBSE for exams between July 1 and 15, the exams for all the science stream subjects were pending.

"The CBSE cancelled the exams but what about students from northeast Delhi, and specially those from the Science stream, whose exams were pending. From the datesheet that the CBSE had released, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Computer Science and English exams were pending. They will be at a disadvantage since their marks will be calculated on the basis of internal assessment. Students

usually do not take internals seriously," he said. He said the university will have to keep a separate window for those who will take the exams at a later date. "From what the scenario looks like, the new session is unlikely to commence before October. The varsity might keep a window open for students who take the exams at a later stage and maybe say that those students whose marks meet the fifth cut-off will be eligible for admissions to the varsity," he said.

Executive Council member Rajesh Jha said that the cut-offs in the coveted colleges are unlikely to be affected, but added that students with certain kind of subject combinations or students who were relying on some subjects in the remaining exams to score well might suffer. **AGENCIES**

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NEWSBRIEF

Two GFP MLAs not joining BJP

PANAJI: Goa Forward Party chief Vijai Sardesai has rubbished rumours that two of his party MLAs were set to join the BJP. Taking to Twitter, the GFP chief said the rumour was a "diversionary tactic" adopted to hide the state government's failure to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. "With 2 #COVID19 deaths in less than 24 hours, the @GoaGovt has to have a diversionary tactic to hide the #GoaFightsCOVID19 failures! And time and again we in #Goa have seen that for @BJP4Goa, its political health certainly matters more than public health!" **AGENCIES**

HP CM asked to withdraw escort facility

DHARAMSHALA: Senior BJP leader Shnata Kumar has written to Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur seeking withdrawal of his escort facility from July 1. Kumar in his letter said that he has been provided many facilities as the former chief minister of Himachal Pradesh and thanked Thakur for that. He, however, said that since he is also no longer an MP and has moved away from active politics, the escort facility is needed no more. "I am no longer an MP and have been freed from active politics as well. Due to my age I will no longer be touring around. In such a situation, now I do not require an escort facility anymore," the 85-year-old BJP leader said. **AGENCIES**

'BJP diverting MNREGA funds to win 24-seat MP bypolls'

BHOPAL: Madhya Pradesh Congress MLA Govind Singh on Monday said the ruling BJP was diverting MNREGA funds to win bypolls in 24 seats in the state and that he had written to the chief secretary about it. In the 230-member MP Assembly, 22 seats are vacant after Congress MLAs resigned in March and joined BJP while legislators from two constituencies have died. However, no dates have been announced for the bypolls as yet. "I have written a letter to Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bais regarding misuse of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) funds in the 24 seats which will have bypolls. The funds are being diverted by the BJP to win bypolls," Singh said. **PTI**

BJP, Congress in 'Emergency' fight

THE TWO LEADING PARTIES TRADE BARBS ON THE 45TH ANNIVERSARY OF EMERGENCY

NEW DELHI: The Congress continues to suffer from the "Emergency mindset" and puts interests of a family above those of the party and the nation, the BJP said on Thursday, drawing a sharp retort from the opposition party which claimed the saffron party runs a government of two people with all others as mere "sidekicks".

The two parties traded barbs on the 45th anniversary of Emergency, with Home Minister Amit Shah launching a frontal assault on the Gandhi family of the Congress, saying "the interests of one family prevailed over party's interests and national interests, and this sorry state of affairs thrives in today's Congress tool".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has often slammed the Congress for the Emergency, on Thursday paid his tributes to people who fought against it but did not directly attack the opposition party.

Shah was joined by several senior BJP leaders, including party president J P Nadda and Union ministers Prakash



"This virtual election rally (of the BJP) amidst the crisis of the century that has crippled the health infrastructure, and spread of the disease has reached community level in the state, speaks volumes about the priorities of the BJP"

Javadekar and Ravi Shankar Prasad, in attacking the Congress.

Shah said the "Emergency mindset" still remained in the Congress and that the "sad truth" was that leaders were feeling suffocated in the party.

"On this day, 45 years ago one family's greed for power led to the imposition of the

Emergency. Overnight the nation was turned into a prison. The press, courts, free speech... all were trampled over. Atrocities were committed on the poor and downtrodden," he said in his tweets.

Hitting back at Shah, the Congress asked why the BJP-led Centre that runs a "majoritarian rule" is described as a

"government of two people".

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the country's ruling party needs to answer, "Why is horse trading, mass defections and institution capture its only legacy? Why is it obsessed in its vile hatred of Nehru-Gandhi's (sic)."

Why is its majoritarian rule described as a government of two people only and all others as sidekicks, he added.

In his attack, Shah referred to the recent Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting and said many members raised a few issues but they were shouted down. He said a Congress spokesperson was unceremoniously sacked.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Javadekar said the conduct of the Congress even now is to save "one family".

"I wonder, those who killed democracy 45 years ago are questioning the government today. The party that suppressed the entire system, ended the freedom of all and jailed scores of people, particularly from the opposition,

is now raising slogans of freedom," he asked.

Such politics will not work, Javadekar said. Lambasting the Congress, Nadda said its government in 1975 imposed Emergency for selfish political reasons and jailed its rivals, suspended people's fundamental rights and muzzled media.

He offered his tributes to people who fought against it successfully while suffering atrocities from the then government. Union minister Prasad said let the new generations draw the right lessons from Emergency, as he attacked the Congress for its "grossly undemocratic" behaviour which he claimed still continues. In a series of tweets, he said today is the day "to recall the heroic sacrifices of people of India against the grossly undemocratic behaviour of the Congress party".

Lashing out at Shah for targeting the Congress, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot claimed that Modi and Shah have "high-jacked" the BJP and NDA government with no space left for other leaders. **AGENCIES**

'Indira's granddaughter' Priyanka dares UP govt



NEW DELHI: "I am Indira Gandhi's granddaughter, not an undeclared BJP spokesperson like some of the opposition leaders," Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday said, as she alleged that the Uttar Pradesh government is threatening her through various departments for speaking the truth.

Priyanka Gandhi's dare to the Uttar Pradesh government came a day after the Uttar Pradesh child rights panel issued a notice to her, asking her to file a reply within three days for her "misleading" comment on the Kanpur shelter home.

The Congress leader in a Facebook post on Sunday had attacked the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh over a media report about two girls being found pregnant at the state-run child shelter home, saying it shows that facts were being suppressed in the name of investigation at such facilities.

"As a servant of the people, my duty is towards the people of Uttar Pradesh. And this duty is to put out the truth before them and not to put forth government propaganda. The UP government is wasting its time by threatening me through its various departments," Priyanka Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi on Friday

"They can take whatever action they want, I will keep putting forth the truth. I am Indira Gandhi's granddaughter not an undeclared BJP spokesperson like some of the opposition leaders"

"They can take whatever action they want, I will keep putting forth the truth. I am Indira Gandhi's granddaughter not an undeclared BJP spokesperson like some of the opposition leaders," she said.

Her remarks also come days after the Agra administration asked her to withdraw the claim of high coronavirus deaths in the district.

The Congress general secretary in-charge UP East has accused the Yogi Adityanath government of indulging in propaganda instead of dealing with the pandemic.

This week, Priyanka Gandhi repeatedly attacked the Uttar Pradesh government over the "high" COVID-19 mortality rate in Agra and on other issues related to the state government's handling of the pandemic. **AGENCIES**

Kerala CM slams state Congress chief's jibe

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: As the state Congress chief stuck to his 'Covid Rani' jibe against health minister K K Shailaja and refused to apologise, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday slammed the remarks as 'anti-women' and an attempt to target one leading the battle against COVID-19.

The Chief Minister said remarks by such leaders in responsible positions was unfortunate and that the health minister was being targeted for doing her duty. The attempt by the KPCC president Mullapally Ramachandran was to torpedo the health system in the midst of the pandemic, he told reporters here.

"The attack against the minister was due to a peculiar mind set and was anti-women. It is regrettable that the KPCC president has stooped to such a level", Vijayan said. He pointed out that no Congress leader in the state or in Delhi had so far reacted to the remarks. Mullapally Ramachandran



was suffering from "political cataract" and was unable to see the reality, Vijayan said, adding his remarks were an insult to the state.

The Chief Minister said playing politics with people's lives cannot be allowed. "Do not play politics with the lives of people. Their lives are more important," he said.

Vijayan said the attack against the minister was only for getting plaudits from his followers and was regrettable. Ramachandran had on Friday alleged that Shailaja was try-

ing to get the label of "COVID Rani" (COVID Queen).

He had also said that during the Nipah outbreak, Shailaja camped in Kozhikode as a 'guest artist' and tried to become the 'Nipah Rajakumari' (Nipah princess). The CPI(M) had slammed the remarks as sexist and demanded an unconditional apology from him.

"What I have said is right. I stand by my words and have not insulted anyone", Ramachandran told reporters, a day after his words kicked up a storm. **AGENCIES**

WB BJP chief call for 'revenge' against TMC

KOLKATA: The BJP's West Bengal unit chief Dilip Ghosh has called for "revenge" against the Trinamool Congress after his party comes to power in the state, stoking a major political controversy.

In a snide reference to Mamata Banerjee's 2011 slogan of 'Bodla Noy, Bodol Chai' (change, not revenge), Ghosh recently shared a poster on his Facebook page that had a picture of him along with a slogan -- 'Bodlo Hobey, Bodolo Hobey', meaning that there will be change as well as revenge.

The slogan, with which Mamata Banerjee swept the state in the 2011 Assembly election and ousted the CPI(M)-led government, called for change without revenge as people feared that a change in regime after 34 years may lead to widespread political violence.

"The TMC came to power by saying no revenge, but in the last nine years, what they did was only pursuing vendetta politics against the opposition. More than



100 of our party workers were killed in the last few years. When we are voted to power we will take revenge against these anti-socials and corrupt officials, otherwise, people will not forgive us. We believe in paying back in the same coin," Ghosh said justifying his social media post. Hitting out at the BJP, the Trinamool Congress said that such comments prove the "mentality" of the party.

"Only goons and BJP speak the language of revenge and violence. It's for the people of West Bengal to judge. The TMC doesn't believe in the politics of violence," the party's Secretary-General Partha Chatterjee said. **AGENCIES**

Centre urged to confer Bharat Ratna on former PM

HYDERABAD: Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababoo Naidu on Tuesday said the state cabinet and legislature would pass resolutions requesting Bharat Ratna award to former Prime Minister P V Narsimha Rao.

The chief minister said he would meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make the request. Rao recently decided to organise the centenary celebrations of Narsimha Rao on a grand scale. Today, he unveiled the plans for the celebrations.

PV was such a leader that the country should be proud of. He had changed the country's destiny for the better. PV is completely eligible to get the Bharat Ratna award, the highest civilian award, constituted by the Centre, an official release quoted the chief minister as saying.

The Cabinet and the legislature would pass resolutions demanding Bharat Ratna award to Narsimha Rao posthumously and they will be sent to the Centre, it said.

"I will personally meet Modi and request him to confer Bharat Ratna on PV," he said.

On June 28, the birth anniversary of Narsimha Rao, the main programme would be organised at PV Gnaa Bhoomi (the samadhi of the former Prime Minister) in Hyderabad, while it would also be held at 50 locations worldwide around the same time, the release said.

The Chief Minister held a meeting with ministers, officials, Narsimha Rao centenary celebrations committee chairman and TRS MP K Keshav Rao and Narsimha Raos son Prabhakar Rao and daughter Vani Devi.

PV has a history by which every Telanganite can proudly say PV is Telanganas pride. Organise a wide range of programmes for one year on PVs greatness; his services and they should be known worldwide, the Chief Minister said.

Suggesting organising programmes at the national level to make people in the country understand the greatness of Narsimha Rao, the Chief Minister said President Ram Nath Kovind and Modi should be invited for the celebrations. **AGENCIES**



Nitish hatching plots against Oppn: Tejashwi

PATNA: RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Tuesday accused Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who is also the chief of the JD(U), of hatching plots against the opposition.

His remarks come after five RJD MLCs resigned from the party, forced a split in its legislature group in the Bihar legislative council, and joined the ruling JD(U).

The development is being seen as a huge setback for the opposition party in the election year. "I offer my best wishes to my former party colleagues at their new political abode. I laud Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for demonstrating how constructive he has been during the three months he remained confined to his official residence," Yadav, who is RJD's chief ministerial candidate in the Bihar assembly polls due in a few months, said.

The RJD leader was replying to queries of journalists who had rushed to the Raj Bhavan here upon learning that Yadav was going to meet Governor Fagu Chauhan and submit a memorandum. The memorandum was not related to the events of the day and sought to draw the attention of the governor towards the alleged dilution of provisions of reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs. Yadav said that "all the steps taken by Nitish Kumar are aimed at furthering his personal ambitions".

"This was the case when he (Kumar) betrayed us three years ago and returned to the



NDA despite having fought the elections as our ally and getting the popular mandate, which was against the BJP," the RJD leader, who is a former deputy chief minister of Bihar, said.

The leader of the opposition in the state assembly, claimed that he was not perturbed by the 'bhagdar' (stampede) in his party but asserted that "the JD(U) chief will have to explain what the people of Bihar gained". "Nitish Kumar might have gained something psychologically in an election year," he commented. When asked about RJD founding member Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, who stepped down from the post of national vice-president, Yadav said, "Raghuvansh babu is my guardian and one of the nurturers of RJD. At present I am most worried about my health".

"I am in touch with the hospital where he is undergoing treatment for COVID-19. I had spoken to him over phone recently. Once he recovers, I will speak to him again and all things will be ironed out," he said. **AGENCIES**

Pawar is like 'corona' that has infected Maha: BJP

PUNE/MUMBAI: BJP MLC Gopichand Padalkar on Wednesday said NCP chief Sharad Pawar is a "corona" that has infected Maharashtra, drawing an acerbic retort from the ruling coalition party.

The NCP swiftly hit back at the BJP over Padalkar's objectionable comments and said everyday leaders from the opposition party make some or the other statements which better be not taken seriously.

Padalkar also accused Pawar of doing politics over the long-pending issue of reservation for the Dhargar (shepherd) community.

Addressing a press conference at Pandharpur in Solapur district, Padalkar, who hails from the Dhargar commu-



nity, alleged that the "bahujan samaj" has been suffering because of the policies of Pawar, whose party is a key constituency in the Shiv Sena-led MVA government. "According to me, Sharad Pawar is the 'corona' that has infected the state. Pawar has always taken steps that would hamper the pros-



pects of masses," he alleged.

"I do not think he (Pawar) is positive about the Dhargar reservation," the MLC said. The previous government had announced a Rs 1,000 crore package for the Dhargar community, but it could not be implemented as Devendra Fadnavis had to forgo power

Milkman to mayor: BJP's Jai Prakash set for bigger role

Born in 1970 in the city's Sadar Bazar, 'JP', as the party leader is popularly known, was on Wednesday elected unopposed to the post of mayor in the BJP-ruled North Delhi Municipal Corporation

NEW DELHI: He sold milk door-to-door in his youth, dabbled in college politics, spent two decades in the RSS and assumed various responsibilities in the BJP -- meet Jai Prakash, the new mayor of North Delhi.

Born in 1970 in the city's Sadar Bazar, 'JP', as the party leader is popularly known, was on Wednesday elected unopposed to the post of mayor in the BJP-ruled North Delhi Municipal Corporation.

Soon after, he spelt out his priorities, saying, "Using all resources of the corporation optimally to fight COVID-19 would be our top priority".

Prakash recalled his humble



roots and said, "We had a business of milk and I have sold milk to people by going door to door. I am just an ordinary person of this city."

"And, today, I am a mayor,

but I will continue to serve people to the best of my abilities." The 50-year-old leader last served as the chairman of the Standing Committee of the NDMC.

"In between, I enrolled myself in Aurobindo College under the Delhi University in 1989 and served as the secretary in the college's political unit"

Prakash said he had joined the RSS in 1986 and served as its member till 2005. "In between, I enrolled myself in Aurobindo College under the Delhi University in 1989 and served as the secretary in the

college's political unit," he said.

From 2005-2008, he said, he was made the vice-president of the youth wing of the party in Delhi. "From 2008-2010, was made the UP in-charge of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, and in 2010 was made the Sadar Bazar district president of the party," Prakash added.

In 2013, 'JP' said, he became the general secretary of the BJP Delhi unit under then president Vijay Goel.

"From 2015-2020, I was the vice-president of Delhi unit, and became a councillor in 2017," he added. Prakash twice unsuccessfully fought the Delhi Assembly polls in 2013 and 2020. **AGENCIES**

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Auto, pharma unready to forgo China

NEW DELHI RELIES HEAVILY ON BEIJING FOR ELECTRONIC COMPONENTS, DRUG INGREDIENTS

NEW DELHI: Days after a border clash with China this month in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed, New Delhi told firms to find ways to cut imports from China. But two big industries, automobiles and pharmaceuticals, say this is easier said than done.

Like many countries, India relies on China for products such as electronic components and drug ingredients because it cannot make them or source them elsewhere as cheaply, company and industry figures say. Thus, any moves to curb imports or make them costlier without developing alternatives will hurt local businesses.

"We don't import because we like to, but because we have no choice," said R.C. Bhargava, chairman of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd., the country's biggest carmaker.

"To attract companies to produce locally, we need to be more competitive and lower our costs compared with other countries."

India imported about \$70.3 billion of goods from China in the fiscal year to March 2019, and exported



"To attract companies to produce locally, we need to be more competitive and lower our costs compared with other countries"

just \$16.7 billion — its widest trade deficit with any country. The government is now consulting with compa-

nies on tightening curbs on 1,173 non-essential products, a trade body official said on condition of anonymity. They

include toys, plastics, steel items, electronics and specific auto components — which feed vehicle manufacturing.

This is on top of plans to raise trade barriers and import duties on about 300 products from China and elsewhere, as part of a self-reliance campaign. In April, India also tightened rules for

investments from neighbouring countries, including China, to prevent opportunistic takeovers after the pandemic.

Over a quarter of India's auto-part imports — \$4.2 billion — came from China in 2019, including engine and transmission parts, according to data from the Auto Component Manufacturers' Association of India (ACMA).

Some of these components are critical and hard to source elsewhere immediately, said Vinnie Mehta, director general at ACMA.

Chinese supplies have also been a key factor in India's booming drug industry, which exports cheap generic medicines.

India gets about 70% of its supply of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) from there, industry officials said.

"In the immediate future, we are going to continue to be reliant on China," said Sudarshan Jain, secretary general of the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance, which represents major drug makers, although he believed there was only "a very low likelihood" of API supplies being cut off. **AGENCIES**

Auto industry takes steps to slash Chinese imports

NEW DELHI: The USD 57 billion-Indian auto component industry has started taking steps towards "deep localisation" to de-risk business from Chinese imports with the border dispute between the two countries only acting as a catalyst to speed up the process, according to industry body ACMA.

Further, the domestic automobile industry is also seeking to cut dependence on Chinese imports after facing severe shortage of critical components due to the coronavirus pandemic, as companies based out of China currently continue to be the leading suppliers of automotive components.

In 2018-19 India imported auto components worth USD 17.6 billion, of which 27 per cent - USD 4.75 billion - were from China. "With COVID-19 and associated lockdowns, all economies and industries have started to look inwards and minimise their reliance on imports," Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) Director General Vinnie Mehta told PTL.

The auto industry in India has started to de-risk itself and is working on deep-local-



'Post the lockdowns, our value chains have been severely disrupted and are in disarray. We are gradually piecing them together'

isation, he said, adding that the recent standoff between India and China will only hasten the process.

There is no denying that the industry needs to be "atmanirbhar" and companies and the government should together define a roadmap and deliver accordingly, he stated. **AGENCIES**

"This cannot be done singularly by either the industry or the government, both will have to work in tandem," Mehta said. Ease of doing business, availability of capital at lower rates and globally competitive logistics and energy costs are some of the prerequisites that the government should look into to ensure growth of the domestic auto component industry, he added. "Post the lockdowns, our value chains (including automotive) have been severely disrupted and are in disarray. We are gradually piecing them together. Any further disruptions would only be detrimental to the interest of industry and the economy," Mehta said. **AGENCIES**

NEWSBRIEF

Vivek Gambhir resigns as Godrej Consumer MD & CEO

NEW DELHI: Leading FMCG major Godrej Consumer Products Limited (GCPL) on Tuesday said its managing director and Chief executive Vivek Gambhir has resigned citing "personal reasons". Gambhir will step down from the position on June 30. Nisaba Godrej, currently the executive chairperson of GCPL, will assume the charge of MD and CEO of the company with effect from July 1, 2020, according to a company statement. Gambhir, who had joined Godrej Group in August 2009, was elevated as the MD and CEO of the company in July 2013.

On his decision to resign, Gambhir said: "After 11 fulfilling and wonderful years with Godrej, it is time for me to move on to chart the next phase of my journey. For the past many years, I have been living away from my family and seeing them only on weekends." He added, "Recently, I had some health problems that made me think more deeply about my lifestyle. Thankfully, I have fully recovered. I would now like to be able to spend more time with my family." On the whole development, Nisaba said: "I also want to take this opportunity to thank Vivek for his many contributions to Godrej over the past 11 years. Vivek and I have had a strong partnership for over a decade. **AGENCIES**

Welspun India forays into health, hygiene

NEW DELHI: Textiles major Welspun India is foraying into health and hygiene segment as it responds to the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, a top company official said. Under the Welspun Health vertical, the company is offering a range of hygiene products for medical professionals as well as personal care products such as masks, wipes, medical gowns, disposable linen, coveralls, hand sanitising wipes among others. The company is repurposing its decade old technical textiles unit for its new venture. Technical textiles include textiles for automotive applications, medical textiles, agrotiles and protective clothing, among others. "Our essential services were working (during the lockdown) because we repurposed our factory for mask production. "We have a plant for technical textile. As the need arose we started making masks and distributed it in communities, development forum and villages. We gradually made this into a kind of business..." Welspun India Ltd CEO and Joint Managing Director Dipali Goenka said. **PTI**

Grofers not keen on liquor delivery

KOLKATA: Online grocery platform Grofers is not keen to enter into the business of liquor delivery saying it serves mostly families, even as its main competitor BigBasket is set to foray into doorstep supply of alcoholic beverages.

SoftBank backed Grofers, which currently operates in 27 cities of the country, has lined up USD 25-30 million over the next two years to strengthen its in-house brands. Other delivery majors like Swiggy and Zomato are already in the delivery of liquor while e-commerce giant Amazon is also set to play in this segment. "We serve families mostly, so not looking to get into this," Grofers co-founder and CEO Albinder Dhindsa told PTL.

Amazon and Alibaba-backed BigBasket have got approval to deliver liquor in West Bengal. BigBasket said this will be the



company's first foray into the country's liquor delivery segment. "We are happy to add a new category to our range. We are now working on creating the supply chain and building the category on BigBasket. This is a good value addition for our existing customers and helps increase the basket size. "We look forward to partnering with other state govern-

ments as and when the opportunity arises and regulations permit us to do so," BigBasket CEO Hari Menon said.

Researches noted that India's online grocery market could see a whopping 76 per cent hike compared to USD 1.7 billion last year. The growth was attributed to the demand for fresh produce and staples during the nationwide lockdown. **AGENCIES**

Raymond fires 1,000 workers

MUMBAI: Amid an organisational restructuring to tide over the COVID-19 woes, apparel maker Raymond has seen about 1,100 employees either resigning or being sacked since April as part of cost-control measures, retrenched employees claimed, but the firm refuted their assertions on non-payment of full dues.

About a dozen employees PTI spoke to said the Raymond management sought resignations from them, failing which they were threatened with termination.

While some 400 were coerced into resignation, around 700 who did not do so were sacked. Similar notices have been served to 400 more now, they claimed.

The Gautam Singhania-led company had 7,087 employees on its rolls as of March



2019, according to the annual report. A company spokesperson, however, refuted the numbers saying queries on the issue "are factually incorrect, malicious and misrepresented with vested interests."

"We would further like to state that in line with the prevailing market conditions and unprecedented challenges, the company has undertaken the process of cost rationalisation to minimise the impact on business due to the pandemic. "Basis this rationalisation

exercise certain roles were identified to be redundant and the same was communicated to the employees concerned, post which they submitted their resignations," the company spokesperson said. The staff alleged that their salaries were cut by up to 65 per cent since April and before the resignations were sought, and only the basic pay was being paid to those serving notice period.

On this, the company spokesperson said, "as per the employment contract, they have been put on the notice period of three months and are being paid in compliance with the terms and conditions. All the said measures and actions are taken as per the laid down procedures and are in the overall interests of all stakeholders." **AGENCIES**

11 Singapore firms to invest in Assam

GUWAHATI: Eleven Singapore-based companies have expressed their interest to invest in Assam during an interaction with state Industries and Commerce Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary on Monday.

The companies expressed their interest to invest in areas like food processing, hospitality sector, infrastructure development, industrial town development, start-ups, airline catering, skill training, organic farming and marketing, said a government release.

Highlighting Assam's locational advantage as the gateway to South East Asian region, Patowary said that the state offers the perfect launch pad for marketing of goods, products and services encompassing 80 million population in the South East Asian Region.

"Singapore can be a model for accelerated growth in industry, trade and commerce and education sectors in the state", said Patowary during the interaction through the webinar here. He said that Assam Government has tied up ITE Education Service, Singapore for setting up of a Skill University at a cost of Rs 850 crores at Darrang in Assam. The webinar was co-ordinated and facilitated by Enterprise Singapore, a board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry in the SE Asian country, and Invest India.

Participants in the webinar included representatives from companies including Advanced Produce Centre Development Pvt Ltd (APC), Agrocorp, Capita Land (Ascott), Nanyang Polytechnic, Skill SG Venture (SSGV), ALLIN Technologies, etc, the release said.

Chief Secretary Kumar Sanjay Krishna who also attended the webinar stating historical legacy, policy framework, locational advantage and robust infrastructure are prerequisites for any investment cited the instances of the 150 year old glorious tea industry and Asia's first refinery at Digboi. **AGENCIES**

Reliance Infra will be debt-free in FY21

MUMBAI: Reliance Infrastructure Chairman Anil Ambani on Tuesday said the company will be completely debt-free this financial year.

RInfra, which is sitting on a debt of over Rs 6,000 crore, has been working towards monetising its assets to reduce debt.

Addressing the company's 91st annual shareholders meeting through an online platform, Ambani said, "RInfra will be a debt-free company this year."

In 2018, the company sold its Mumbai energy business to Adani Transmission for nearly Rs 18,800 crore, which reduced its debt to nearly Rs 7,500 crore.

In January this year, the company said it had received an in-principle approval from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) for sale of its Delhi-Agra toll road to Singapore-based Cube Highways and Infrastructure for Rs 3,600 crore. Ac-



cording to the company, the deal is on track.

Ambani further said RInfra has around Rs 60,000 crore of receivables stuck in regulatory and arbitration matters which are pending for 5-10 years.

He further said the company has assets of over Rs 65,000 crore and a net worth of over Rs 11,000 crore.

On the COVID-19 related update, Ambani said, "the engineering and construction projects are fully operational with 5,000 people working on sites. All the road toll collection is already at 75 per cent of pre-COVID-19 period and will achieve 100 per cent in the next few weeks." **AGENCIES**

'Country of origin' policy being set for products

IT HAS BEEN ADVISED TO THE COMPANIES THAT COUNTRY OF ORIGIN SHOULD BE DISPLAYED PROMINENTLY ON PRODUCTS. THE COMPANIES SAY IT IS DOABLE, BUT THEY NEED SOME TIME FOR THIS

NEW DELHI: The DPIIT on Wednesday sought views of e-commerce firms like Amazon and Flipkart on mentioning the 'country of origin' on each product sold through their platforms, according to sources.

The e-commerce companies said displaying the information is doable, but they need some time to implement it, the sources added. The issue was discussed in detail at a meeting convened by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

Representatives of e-commerce companies like Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal, Tata Cliq, Paytm, Udaan and Pepperfry participated in the meeting through video-conferencing.



This comes against the backdrop of calls to boycott Chinese goods following border clashes between India and China in Ladakh. The government procurement portal GeM has made it mandatory for suppliers/sellers to specify the country of origin while registering new products on the portal.

According to the sources, mentioning the country of origin would help buyers take an informed decision while purchasing the item.

"It was told to the companies that country of origin should be displayed prominently on the products. The companies stated that it is doable, but

they need some time for this," a source said.

Another company source said there was no disconnect with the idea, but the firms have to check with their technology teams to figure out how long it will take to get this done.

"We welcome and wholeheartedly support the government's decision to promote Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat. We are fully committed to promote India made products and the manufacturing sector in the country."

"We have already initiated discussions with our sellers, merchant partners on the next steps to drive this initiative

further," a Paytm Mall spokesperson said.

The companies suggested to the department to also take sellers' views on the matter as compliance would be needed from their side as well.

"The DPIIT will hold another meeting on this in a few days, most probably in July," a source said.

Domestic traders' body CAIT has demanded making it mandatory for e-commerce firms to mention the 'country of origin' on each product sold on their platforms.

CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal claimed that most e-commerce platforms are selling Chinese goods and consumer are not well aware of this fact.

The confederation has launched a campaign to boycott Chinese goods.

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-affiliated Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) too has urged the government to make it mandatory for e-commerce firms to mention the country of manufacture or origin of a product so that people can identify if the goods are made in China. **AGENCIES**

Office space leasing likely to fall 30% this year

NEW DELHI: The demand for office space across seven major cities is likely to drop around 30 per cent this year from record leasing in 2019 as corporates have deferred expansion plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic, JLL India CEO and Country Head Ramesh Nair said.

JLL India, part of US-based JLL, is a leading property consultant with a turnover of over Rs 4,000 crore in the last financial year.

In an interview with PTI, Nair said, "We expect office space leasing to fall by around 30 per cent during 2020. Sup-

ply will also drop by 30-40 per cent as speculative construction will stop."

In 2019, JLL India had reported a net leasing of 46.5 million sq ft, an all-time high. Asked about the rental outlook, Nair said, "Rentals will remain largely stable. Not too much of reductions in rentals because supply is being pushed out and vacancies are still low."

Real estate developers owning Grade-A office buildings have reported 92-98 per cent of rent collections during the lockdown period, he said.

Talking about the trend in the office market, Nair said



'The space per employee had dropped to an average 80 sq ft per employees from 100-120 sq ft but this could again rise. On residential real estate, he said. 'The housing sales have improved of late. But it was only 30% of the pre-COVID-19 level'

the corporates have cut their requirements of office space in area terms by 20 per cent and are also negotiating for better terms, such as increased rent-free period for doing interiors before occupying the space. The rentals for renewals,

too, are being re-evaluated, he added.

Nair said the corporates have started adopting the "work for home" in their HR policies, as a result around 15 per cent of corporate workforce are expected to work

from home at any given point of time.

The "work for home" policy would have an adverse impact on office demand, he said but added that the need for larger space to maintain social distancing could compensate some of the possible loss in demand. Nair said the space per employee had dropped to an average 80 sq ft per employees from 100-120 sq ft but this could again rise. On residential real estate, he said the housing sales have improved of late but it was only 30 per cent of the pre-COVID-19 level. **AGENCIES**

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NEWSBRIEF

CBIC launches paperless customs export processing

NEW DELHI: The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on Monday launched paperless customs export processing, a move aimed at trade facilitation. "Chairman CBIC Sh. M Ajit Kumar and Members of the Board launched Paperless Customs Export processing under Turant Customs today through video conferencing. It is an initiative to promote Ease of Doing Business and enhanced use of technology," CBIC said in a tweet. Under this initiative, a secure QR code enabled PDF LEO (Let Export Order) copy and Export Gatepass copy will be sent electronically to the exporters immediately. As part of efforts to take India amongst top 50 countries in World Bank's Ease of Doing Business ranking, the CBIC had last year announced reform measure -- Turant Customs -- for speedy clearance of goods at air and sea ports.

AGENCIES

GST Council borrowings for compensation needs to widen general govt debt: FinComm

NEW DELHI: Any borrowing by the GST Council to make good the shortfall in revenue of states would add up to the debt of both the central and state governments, the 15th Finance Commission chairman, N K Singh, said on Friday. "My understanding of the Constitution is that the borrowing of the central government is upon the security of the Consolidated Fund of India. Borrowings by the state governments are upon the security of the consolidated fund of the state. Now whether you have other entities which borrow, whatever the picture is, as far as any kind of borrowing is concerned, it must ultimately reflect itself upon the debt of the general government," Singh told reporters here.

PTI

IRDAI lets insurers to offer short-term health policies

NEW DELHI: Amid mounting COVID-19 cases in the country, regulator IRDAI on Tuesday allowed the health and general insurers to offer short-term health insurance policies that will give coverage against the coronavirus infection. With an objective of making available insurance protection to various sections of people in the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, it is considered that short-term health insurance policies providing coverages specific to COVID-19 disease is the need of the hour, it said in a circular. Accordingly, all insurers (life, general and health) are allowed to offer COVID-19 specific short-term health insurance policies subject to the guidelines, said the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).

AGENCIES

'Clear all pending applications for pension by June end'

NEW DELHI: The Delhi government has ordered officials concerned to clear pending applications for pension by senior citizens, widows and differently-abled persons by June end. The order comes after Delhi Social Welfare Minister Rajendra Pal Gautam conducted surprise inspections across Delhi "to check the status of pension cases" and found that a large number of online applications for financial assistance were pending. "Applications continue to remain pending for months despite several directions from time to time. The minister has now directed that all pendency be cleared by June end," an official order said. "All district officers are directed to resolve pendencies in all three financial assistance schemes, including all cases pending at the operator level and applications under objection," it said. The officers have been directed to submit a compliance report, stating that applications pending up to June 15 have been disposed of, on July 1.

AGENCIES

'Is Yes Bank special?'

COURT GRILLS CENTRE, RBI ON DIFFERENT TREATMENT TO DEPOSITORS OF THE TWO BANKS

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court has directed the RBI and the Centre to explain as to how the depositors of scam-hit Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank are "differently circumstanced" in comparison to Yes Bank, which was revived after infusion of funds by investors including state-owned SBI. The court noted that as per a March notification issued by the Centre, the RBI as well as the central government had a crucial role to play in the decision taken to permit, firstly, the Yes Bank Limited Reconstruction Scheme 2020 being brought into play and, secondly, to have it funded.

The court was hearing a plea seeking direction to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to issue a statement on timelines and safety of deposits with the PMC Bank and to ensure that payments are made to depositors in full along with interest.

Justice Rajiv Shakhder was informed by the Centre that the government has not invested any funds in scam-hit Yes Bank and investors, including state-owned SBI, had invested in its share capital after sanction to the reconstruction scheme.



The affidavits will delve into the aspect as to how the depositors of PMC Bank are differently circumstanced in comparison to the depositors of Yes Bank

The response came in pursuance to the high court's earlier query to the Centre to disclose if it intends to infuse funds to render support to PMC Bank, as it allegedly did in Yes Bank.

In these circumstances, the RBI will file an affidavit as to what propelled it to take action in the public interest to secure the interest of the depositors of Yes Bank and the reason why the Union of India accorded sanction to the reconstruction scheme.

The high court said in the order which was passed on Thursday and made available on Friday.

The court asked the RBI and the Centre to file additional affidavits bringing on record the documents, which will establish the reasons which propelled the decision to be taken, that is, the forging of the reconstruction scheme.

The affidavits will delve into the aspect as to how the depositors of PMC Bank are

differently circumstanced in comparison to the depositors of Yes Bank.

"Furthermore, the affidavit of Union of India will indicate as to the shares it holds in SBI and the representation it has on the SBI's Board of Directors, the high court said.

It asked the RBI and the Centre to file their affidavits within three weeks and listed the matter for further hearing on August 6.

The high court was informed by the counsel for the administrator of PMC Bank that till now none of the assets of the bank, which were seized, have been liquidated and an application in this regard has been before the court concerned.

Given the dire state in which the depositors of PMC Bank are placed today, the Administrator, to my mind, should approach the concerned Court and make an endeavour to hasten the process.

The circumstances created by the coronavirus pandemic affects even the depositors of the PMC Bank, the judge said and asked the administrator to revert on this aspect by filing an additional affidavit in three weeks.

AGENCIES

Rs 79k crore sanctioned to 19 lakh MSMEs

NEW DELHI: Banks have sanctioned loans of over Rs 79,000 crore till June 20 to 19 lakh MSMEs and other businesses, of which Rs 35,000 crore has already been disbursed, the Finance Ministry said on Tuesday.

As part of the Aatma Nirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India) package, the government had last month announced its plan for Rs 3 lakh crore as additional credit to MSMEs and small businesses. Such enterprises were eligible to receive up to 20 per cent of their existing borrowing as additional loans at interest rates which were capped.

"The interventions by Government for MSMEs, have been gaining rapid traction. Under the Emergency Credit Line backed by a Government guarantee, Banks from public and private sectors have so far already sanctioned loans worth over Rs 79,000 crore as of June 20, 2020, of which more than Rs 35,000 crore has already been disbursed," the ministry said in a statement.

The top lenders under the Scheme are SBI, HDFC Bank, Bank of Baroda, PNB and Canara Bank. This has helped 19 lakh MSMEs & other busi-



'Banks from public and private sectors have so far already sanctioned loans worth over Rs 79,000 crore as of June 20, 2020, of which more than Rs 35,000 crore has already been disbursed'

nesses restart their businesses post the lockdown, it added.

Separately, under RBI's Special Liquidity Facility announced in March-April, 2020, SIDBI has sanctioned over Rs 10,220 crore to NBFCs, Micro Finance Institutions and banks for lending to MSME & small borrowers, the ministry said.

National Housing Bank (NHB) has sanctioned its entire facility of Rs 10,000 crore to housing finance companies.

This refinance by SIDBI and NHB is in addition to ongoing schemes through which over Rs 30,000 crore has been sanctioned. Under the Extended Partial Guarantee Scheme for NBFCs and MFI, approvals have crossed Rs 5,500 crore. Transactions for another Rs 5,000 crore are under process of approval, while certain other deals are currently under negotiation, the ministry added.

AGENCIES

S&P lowers Axis Bank rating

NEW DELHI: S&P Global Ratings on Friday lowered its ratings on Axis Bank due to increased economic risks for banks operating in India.

S&P also put Indian Bank ratings on "Credit Watch" because it expects a high risk that the public sector bank's credit profile could weaken over the coming quarters due to COVID-19 as well as the merger with the weaker Allahabad Bank.

"We lowered our ratings on Axis to reflect our expectation that heightened economic risks facing India's banking system will affect the bank's asset quality and financial performance. While Axis' asset quality is superior to the Indian banking sector average, its level of non-performing assets (NPAs) will likely remain high compared to international peers," S&P said.

It expects the bank to maintain its strong market position and adequate capitalisation. The stable outlook reflects our view that our ratings on Axis already factor in some deterioration in the bank's asset quality and performance over the next 12 months.



The agency said economic conditions have turned adverse for Indian banks due to COVID-19 and drastic efforts to curtail the spread of the virus have resulted in a sharp economic contraction.

"The government's stimulus package, with a headline amount of 10 per cent of GDP, has about 1.2 per cent of direct stimulus measures, which is low relative to countries with similar economic impacts from the pandemic. The remaining 8.8 per cent of the package includes liquidity support measures and credit guarantees that will not directly support growth," S&P added.

It has forecast a 5 per cent contraction in the economy in fiscal 2021.

S&P expects tough operating conditions to lead to a rise in non-performing loans (NPLs), credit costs, and delays in recoveries for the banking industry.

"In our base case, we expect the weak assets of Indian banks to shoot up to 13-14 per cent of gross loans by March 31, 2021. Our forecast is higher than the peak of 11.6 per cent witnessed in fiscal 2018, and about 8.5 per cent estimated as on March 31, 2020," S&P said.

The agency said it anticipates the resolution of weak assets to be delayed until at least fiscal 2022. Consequently, banks will likely be saddled with a large stock of weak loans in fiscal 2022 too.

AGENCIES

Rs 50 lakh insurance scheme extended for healthcare providers

NEW DELHI: Amid rising number of COVID-19 cases, the government has extended the Rs 50 lakh insurance scheme for about 22 lakh healthcare providers for another three months till September.

The scheme implemented by New India Assurance was slated to end on June 30, as per the announcement made by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as part of the Rs 1.70 lakh Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan package in March. The insurance provides a comprehensive personal accident cover of Rs 50 lakh to a total of around 22.12 lakh public healthcare providers, including community health workers, who may have to be in direct contact and care of patients suffering from coronavirus infection and who may be at risk of being impacted by this.

Insurance Scheme for health workers in government hospitals and healthcare centres operationalised with effect from March 30,



'Any health professional, who while treating COVID-19 patients, meet with some accident, then he/she would be compensated with an amount of Rs 50 lakh under the scheme'

2020, an official statement said, adding the scheme has been extended up to September. The scheme is funded through the National Disaster Response Fund, operated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Doctors, nurses, paramedics, sanitation workers and a few others working in

hospitals under the central and state governments will be covered under the insurance scheme.

While announcing the scheme, the Finance Minister had said, safai karamcharis, ward-boys, nurses, ASHA workers, paramedics, technicians, doctors and specialists and other health

workers would be covered by the special insurance scheme. "Any health professional, who while treating COVID-19 patients, meet with some accident, then he/she would be compensated with an amount of Rs 50 lakh under the scheme," she had said.

All government health centres, wellness centres and hospitals of the Centre as well as states would be covered under this scheme, she had said. However, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare later in an FAQ clarified that private hospital staff treating COVID-19 patients will also be covered.

"Private persons those who are engaged by both public & private health care institutions/organisation through an agency and were deployed or drafted for care and may have come in direct contact of the COVID-19 patient (with the proof that the service of the agencies were engaged by the institution/organisation)," the FAQ said.

AGENCIES

ESIC scheme adds 2.41 lakh new members

NEW DELHI: Around 2.41 lakh new members joined the ESIC-run social security scheme in April 2020, the first full month under the impact of coronavirus lockdown, data showed.

As many as 8.21 lakh new members had joined the scheme run by the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) in March 2020, against 11.83 lakh subscribers in the previous month, according to the payroll data released last month. The data was part of



a report released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday. The report said gross enrolments of new sub-

scribers with the ESIC were 1.51 crore in 2019-20, against 1.49 crore in the previous fiscal. During the period September

2017 to March 2018, around 83.35 lakh new subscribers had joined the ESIC scheme.

The report said that gross new enrolments with ESIC during the September 2017 to April 2020 period were 3.86 crore. The NSO report is based on the payroll data of new subscribers of various social security schemes run by the ESIC, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).

PTI

Tighter supervision of coop banks sought

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank Employees Association on Thursday welcomed the government's decision to bring all cooperative banks under RBI supervision and requested the central bank to focus on on-site inspection of these banks rather than off-site surveillance.

The government on Wednesday said all urban cooperative banks (UCBs) and multi-state cooperative banks will come under the supervision of RBI.

The President of India will

promulgate an ordinance to this effect, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar had said.

Currently, there is dual control over UCBs by the RBI and the state where they are registered. The RBI regulates and supervises the banking functions of UCBs. It carries out on-site inspections and off-site surveillance of UCBs.

In a letter to RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, the All India Reserve Bank Employees Association (AIRBEA) said

the recent PMC Bank case has triggered a country-wide resentment about the affairs and modus-operandi of such banks where depositors' funds were put at risk, forcing the RBI to take punitive steps.

"The government has now decided to change the dual control regimen of urban co-op banks to total RBI monitoring. This will definitely put the myriad of depositors of such banks at ease," according to the letter, seen by PTI.

PTI

Banks, NBFCs to disclose digital lending agents upfront

...OUTSOURCING OF ANY ACTIVITY BY BANKS/ NBFCs DOES NOT DIMINISH THEIR OBLIGATIONS, AS THE ONUS OF COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATORY INSTRUCTIONS RESTS SOLELY WITH THEM

The direction comes against the backdrop of several complaints relating to exorbitant interest rates and harsh recovery measures, among others, against lending platforms. While the banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) are being directed to disclose the names of agents engaged by on their websites, digital lending platforms have been asked to tell their customers upfront the names of the bank/ NBFC on whose behalf they are disbursing loans.

"...outsourcing of any activity by banks/ NBFCs does not diminish their

MUMBAI: To make digital lending more transparent, the Reserve Bank on Wednesday directed banks, NBFCs and digital lending platforms to disclose full information upfront on their websites to customers.

The direction comes against the backdrop of several complaints relating to exorbitant interest rates and harsh recovery measures, among others, against lending platforms.

While the banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) are being directed to disclose the names of agents engaged by on their websites, digital lending platforms have been asked to tell their customers upfront the names of the bank/ NBFC on whose behalf they are disbursing loans.

"...outsourcing of any activity by banks/ NBFCs does not diminish their



obligations, as the onus of compliance with regulatory instructions rests solely with them," the RBI said in a communication to the scheduled commercial banks and NBFCs. The RBI further said that immediately after sanction of loan, a letter must be issued to the borrower

on the letter head of the bank/ NBFC concerned. "A copy of the loan agreement along with a copy each of all enclosures quoted in the loan agreement shall be furnished to all borrowers at the time of sanction/ disbursement of loans," the RBI said, and also asked the banks

and NBFCs to create awareness about the grievance redressal mechanism.

Issuing these guidelines, the RBI said that often digital lending platforms tend to portray themselves as lenders without disclosing the name of the bank/ NBFC at the backend, as a consequence of which, customers are not able to access grievance redressal avenues available under the regulatory framework.

Also it added, several complaints have come to notice against the lending platforms relating primarily to exorbitant interest rates, non-transparent methods to calculate interest, harsh recovery measures, unauthorised use of personal data and bad behavior.

Although digital delivery in credit intermediation is a welcome development, the RBI

said, concerns emanate from non-transparency of transactions and violation of the guidelines on outsourcing of financial services and Fair Practices Code of banks and NBFCs.

The banks and NBFCs, RBI said, "irrespective of whether they lend through their own digital lending platform or through an outsourced lending platform, must adhere to the Fair Practices Code guidelines in letter and spirit."

Besides, it added, the banks and NBFCs must also meticulously follow regulatory instructions on outsourcing of financial services and IT services.

The RBI also said any violation by banks and NBFCs (including NBFCs registered to operate on "digital-only" or on digital and brick-mortar channels of delivery of credit) will be viewed seriously.

AGENCIES

Poaching in politics needs to stop at earliest

The ruling BJP now has 86 members in the Rajya Sabha after elections to 19 seats across several States on Friday. This is the highest number for the party in the Upper House, though it is still short of the halfway mark. Of a total of 61 vacancies, 42 were filled unopposed earlier and of the 19 contests, the BJP won eight while the Congress won four. Of the 61 outgoing members, 17 were from the Congress and 15 from the BJP. With this round of elections, the BJP's tally increased by 11, from 75. The Congress now has 41. The Opposition benches will now have veterans such as H.D. Deve Gowda, Mallikarjun Kharge (both from Karnataka) Digvijaya Singh (from Madhya Pradesh) and Shibu Soren (from Jharkhand) and K.C. Venugopal (from Rajasthan). A noticeable addition to the treasury benches is Jyotiraditya Scindia, whose defection from the Congress in March brought down the Kamal Nath government in Madhya Pradesh, and brought the BJP back to power there. Bhubaneswar Kalita, the Congress's chief whip in the Rajya Sabha until August last year, is now returning as a BJP member from Assam. All this points to a pattern of the BJP's frenzied approach to increasing its Rajya Sabha strength. After the elections were announced, eight Congress MLAs left the party in Gujarat, and enabled the victory of an extra BJP candidate to the Rajya Sabha. In Rajasthan, the party fielded two candidates though it had the strength to elect only one, leading to speculation that plans were underway to poach Congress MLAs. The sight of political parties hauling in MLAs to luxury confinements ahead of the Rajya Sabha polls has become common. The poaching business needs to stop in the politics. Barriers shall be created for leaders of political parties who switch parties for the sake of power, abandoning their ideologies.



ASHWIN JAYANTI SAYS ONLINE LEARNING IS HURTING THE BENEFITS OF A PHYSICAL CLASSROOM

Streamed education is a diluted one

There are broadly two kinds of helmets, namely, one which protects your head and the other which protects your wallet. These two kinds capture the difference between two artefacts which look the same and go by the same name, but cannot be more dissimilar. So what then is the difference between the two? The most significant is that of design intentions. One is designed keeping safety in mind, made of durable, impact-absorbing material that has been thoroughly tested to be so. The other, on the other hand, is designed to get by and is made of quality-compromising, low-cost material.

What we have here is a dilution in our conception of a helmet from its original meaning from being a gear to protect us in the case of an unfortunate accident to being a gear to protect us from being fined. Intriguingly, the act of fining riders without helmets has translated something valuable (an end-in-itself, in the service of safety) into the merely functional or instrumental (a means-to-an end, in the service of trickery).

This captures the conundrum facing the contemporary: all that is of value is diluting into the functional, and there seems to be no vocabulary to capture this dilution of meaning. Our conception of value itself has been diluted to mean just exchange 'value'. Here, I will relate this to the meaning of education.

Recently, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University Grants Commission had issued a circular to universities encouraging them to adopt massive open online courses (MOOCs) offered on its SWAYAM platform for credit transfers in the coming semesters. This sounds like a benevolent act during the national lockdown. However, it poses great danger since it is also being seen as an instrument to achieve the country's target Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education (envisaged to be 30% by 2021; it was 25.8% in 2017-18).

Here is yet another instance of a conspicuous dilution of meaning and subsequent flattening of the learning curve. Instead of expanding the network of higher educational institutions across the country and increasing seats, the government plans to make online degree programmes available for students to enrol and graduate from and add to GER. 'Education' is now being peddled as a combination of content and consumption, and this diluted meaning is being put to the service of achieving increased GER.

MOOC-based e-learning platforms tend to reinforce a top-down teacher-to-student directionality of learning



It is intriguing to see that the policymakers behind the SWAYAM platform have left out courses in engineering, medicine, dental, pharmacy, nursing, architecture, agriculture, and physiotherapy on the grounds that they involve laboratory and practical work

whereby the teacher 'creates' and the student 'consumes'. This misses the point that teaching and learning are skills that are always in the making. The teacher is after all "an intellectual midwife" who facilitates in the birth of students' ideas and insights through engaging in critical dialogue. In a conducive classroom environment, this role is often switched and the student plays intellectual midwife to the teacher's ideas. Moving to a MOOC-based degree system would rob young teachers and students of these essential lessons in teaching and learning from each other.

Taking higher education online is much like taking up a sport such as cricket, football or boxing online. One has not actually learnt the sport unless one has engaged with it in one's gully, stadium, field, or ring. In education, the classroom acts as a space where skills such as dialogue, debate, disagreement, and friendship are learnt and practised. It is intriguing to see that the policymakers behind the SWAYAM platform have left out courses in engineering, medicine, dental, pharmacy,

nursing, architecture, agriculture, and physiotherapy on the grounds that they involve laboratory and practical work. Although this move makes sense, it seems to suggest that the pure sciences, the arts, the social sciences, and humanities curricula are largely lecture- and theory-based, and, therefore, readily adaptable to the online platform. Nothing can be farther from such a misconception.

Implicit in every curriculum is the tacit assumption that the classroom is a laboratory for hands-on testing of ideas, opinions, interpretations, and counterarguments. A diverse and inclusive classroom is the best litmus test for any theory or insight. Multidisciplinarity happens more through serendipity — when learners across disciplines bump into each other and engage in conversations. Classroom and campus spaces offer the potential for solidarity in the face of discrimination, social anxiety, and stage fear, paving the way for a proliferation of voluntary associations that lie outside the realm of family, economy, and state. In the absence of this physical space, teaching and learning would give way to mere content and its consumption.

Without a shared space to discuss and contest ideas, learning dilutes to just gathering more information. This could also dilute norms of evaluation, whereby a "good lecture" might mean merely a lecture which "streams seamlessly, without buffering". This is not an argument from tradition. One could think of greater value-sensitive and socially just architectures and technologies that further foster classroom engagement and make it accessible for students of various disabilities and challenges, thereby adding more value to the existing meaning of education. But public education modelled on social distancing is a functional reduction and dilution of the meaning of education. It could add value only as an addendum to the classroom.

Such platforms must be seen only as stop-gap variants that help us get by under lockdown situations and complement classroom lectures. They will help us get by with the pandemic just as a "helmet" would help us get by with traffic police waving penalty slips. Our vocabulary has many terms for the loss of function — failure, malfunction, dysfunction, breakdown, etc. — but hardly any for the loss of value. 'Malpractice' is the closest that comes to mind. This malpractice of the dilution of education must be resisted, else we are asking for multiple concussions.

Ashwin Jayanti is an Assistant Professor at IIIT-Hyderabad. Views expressed are his own



GHADA WALY HIGHLIGHTS HOW ECONOMIC DOWNTURN MAY MAKE PEOPLE VULNERABLE TO DRUGS

Drug abuse on rise amidst pandemic

More people are using drugs, and more illicit drugs are available than ever. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed our fragility, with health systems strained and social safety nets stretched to the limit. The economic downturn caused by the global pandemic may drive more people to substance abuse or leave them vulnerable to involvement in drug trafficking and related crime. We have been here before. In the global recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis, drug users sought out cheaper synthetic substances and patterns of use shifted towards injecting drugs, while governments reduced budgets to deal with drug-related problems.

Vulnerable and marginalised groups, youth, women and the poor have been harmed the most. Now facing the gravest socio-economic crisis in generations, governments cannot afford to ignore the dangers illicit drugs pose to public health and safety. All over the world, the risks and consequences of drug use are worsened by poverty, limited opportunities for education and jobs, stigma and social exclusion, which in turn helps to deepen inequalities, moving us further away from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While more people use drugs in developed countries than in developing countries, and wealthier segments of society have a higher prevalence of drug use, people who are socially and economically disadvantaged are more likely to develop drug use disorders. Only one out of eight people who need drug-related treatment receive it, according to the World Drug Report 2020. Some 35.6 million people suffer from drug use disorders globally.



Around 269 million people used drugs in 2018, up 30% from 2009, with adolescents and young adults accounting for the largest share of users. While the increase reflects population growth and other factors, the data nevertheless indicate that illicit drugs are more diverse, more potent and more available

One out of three drug users is a woman but women represent only one out of five people in treatment. People in prison settings, minorities, immigrants and displaced people also face barriers to treatment due to discrimination and stigma.

Around 269 million people used drugs in 2018, up 30% from 2009, with adolescents and young adults accounting for the largest share of users. While the increase reflects population growth and other factors, the

data nevertheless indicate that illicit drugs are more diverse, more potent and more available. At the same time, more than 80% of the world's population, mostly living in low- and middle-income countries, are deprived of access to controlled drugs for pain relief and other essential medical uses.

Governments have repeatedly pledged to work together to address the challenges posed by the world drug problem, in the

SDGs, and most recently in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. But data indicate that support has actually fallen over time, imperilling government commitment as well as regional and global coordination. Development assistance dedicated to drug control fell by some 90% between 2000-2017. Funding to address drugs may be provided under other budget lines, but there is little evidence of international donor attention to this priority. Assistance for alternative development — creating viable, licit forms of income to enable poor farmers to stop growing illicit opium poppy or coca — also remains very low.

Leaving no one behind requires greater investment in evidence-based prevention, as well as treatment and other services for drug use disorders, HIV, hepatitis C and other infections. We need international cooperation to increase access to controlled drugs for medical purposes, while preventing diversion and abuse, and to strengthen law enforcement action to dismantle the transnational organised crime networks.

Health-centred, rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to drug use and related diseases deliver better public health outcomes. As we seek to overcome and recover from the COVID-19 crisis, our societies cannot risk compounding illicit drug threats through inattention and neglect. We need drug strategies addressing the country-level, as well as regional challenges.

Ghada Waly is the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Views expressed are her own

FIVE OBSERVATIONS

ON INDIA'S DOWNGRADING DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH PAKISTAN

- RECIPROCAL DIPLOMACY PREVAILS**
India has told the Pakistani high commission in Delhi to cut its strength by half, on the grounds that officials were supporting 'cross-border violence and terrorism'. A reciprocation is likely in Pakistan too.
- FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND DECISION SINCE 2001**
Since August, when India decided to change the constitutional status of J&K, the two don't have high commissioners in each other's country. New Delhi's action is first of its kind since 2001 Parliament attack.
- PAKISTAN'S TERROR LINK IS EVIDENT**
It is a clear and well-recognised fact that Pakistan sponsors terrorism and engages in asymmetric warfare against India. It has given patronage to terror groups that have conducted attacks here.
- LOWERING TIES MAY BENEFIT CHINA**
All said, Pakistan is a neighbour. Its alliance with China poses a threat as it can lead to an adversarial situation. This must be avoided at any cost. Thus, downgrading ties with it won't help at this time.
- MAINTAIN MINIMUM ENGAGEMENT**
There are no easy solutions. But at the minimum, diplomatic channels of some sort must remain intact to handle unforeseen situations, as well as the other elements of the relationship.

LETTERBOX

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BOOKS: REVIEW

Pak Army is also an industrial and business behemoth

One would think that the Pakistan Armed Forces' tradecraft was limited to securing its borders and creating military strategies to undermine India, but the Fauj is arguably the biggest industrial and business behemoth, also called Pakistani MilBus with over 100 independent businesses operated by subsidiaries of five Foundations of the military, viz. Fauji Foundation (run by the Ministry of Defence), Army Welfare Trust (run by Pakistan Army), Shaheen Foundation (run by Pakistan Air Force), Bahria Foundation (run by Pakistan Navy), and Pakistan Ordnance Factory Board Foundation (run under the Ministry of Defence).

The matrix of this gargantuan enterprise is all pervasive in Pakistan, from cement to cereals,

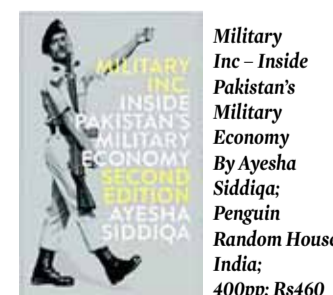
general insurance to gas, fertilisers to fish farms, seeds to stud farms, apparel to aviation, meat to medical equipment, name what you like — the Milbus in Pakistan markets a variety of products with little or no connection to its core duties of defending the borders.

Ayesha Siddiqi in her book "Military Inc — Inside Pakistan's Military Economy", describes Fauji Inc succinctly — "military capital that is used for the personal benefit of the military fraternity, especially the officer cadre, but is neither recorded nor part of the defence budget". She put the cost of this Milbus to at least \$20 billion.

Dawn reported how her expose created consternation in Pakistan. The government tried to disrupt the book's launch by refusing to allow Oxford University Press to

Originally conceived as strategic demi-military organisations, SCO, NLC and FWO have steadily diversified into civilian domains with the objective of making profits. They even bid for govt contracts

hold the function there at the last minute. This ham-handed reaction gave the book a cachet and an appeal it might not otherwise have gained. Dr Siddiqi informed that copies are not available over the counter in Karachi and Lahore. The assumption is that "agencies" have bought up most



Military Inc - Inside Pakistan's Military Economy
By Ayesha Siddiqi
Penguin Random House India
400pp; Rs460

of the first print run. I am willing to bet that few of the book's detractors have actually read it. Indeed, I must confess that having just bought a copy, I am still going through it. Thus, this is in no sense a book review. But the introduction makes the book's seriousness of purpose abundantly clear. Dr Siddiqi has coined the term 'Milbiz' (pronounced 'milbiz') as a shorthand term to refer to the military's business interests.

In its review, The Book Review — Literary Trust, the bare bones of how Fauji Inc dominates Pakistan society is revealed. "The spread of the military fraternity

in all important segments of the state, society and economy represents more than just a belief in the greater capacity of the armed forces. The military as a group has visibly graduated to become a class, and its serving and retired members are benefiting themselves from the organisation's immense power in relation to other domestic players."

The complex and intricate web rules then roost realising that money is the apex of the modern social construct. The Foundations operating these commercial enterprises are registered as charities or societies, and not as companies, under the laws of Pakistan. The Fauji Foundation, Shaheen Foundation and Bahria Foundation are registered under the Charitable Endowment Act of 1890. The Army Welfare Trust was established under the Society Registration Act of 1860. Each Foundation is administered by a Committee of Administration, chaired by the chief of one of the three defence forces. AGENCIES

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NEWSBRIEF

Govt should concentrate on economic revival, says FinComm

NEW DELHI: The government need not at present focus on fiscal consolidation and increased public debt, rather should concentrate on the fastest possible revival of the economy, the 15th Finance Commission Chairman, N K Singh, said on Friday. He said there is acute pressure on the finances of both the central and state governments given the much lower growth number and revenue receipts. Speaking to reporters after the meeting of the commission with the economic advisory council, Singh said this year fiscal numbers look to be way out of what they have been considered, and the finance ministry itself has increased their borrowings from the Reserve Bank and the state governments are also going to borrow more.

AGENCIES

Govt, RBI's policy steps reinvigorate economy

NEW DELHI: The Finance Ministry on Tuesday cited "green shoots" of recovery in agriculture, manufacturing and services sectors, and said

the prompt policy measures taken by the government and RBI have helped reinvigorate the economy with minimal damage. Stating that agricultural sector remains the foundation of the Indian economy, the ministry said that a normal monsoon, as has been forecast, should support the rebooting of economy.

AGENCIES

Haryana tries to bring economy back on track

CHANDIGARH: Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala on Monday said that the state government was making strenuous efforts to bring the economy of the state back on track amid the COVID-19 pandemic. He said that with the government allowing several relaxations, opening of industries has picked up pace in the state. "The state government is making massive efforts to bring the economy of the state back on track," Chautala told reporters in Fatehabad. Replying to a query, the deputy chief minister said that the state government is giving financial assistance to the units being set up for crop stubble management and producing electricity from it.

AGENCIES

Economy to shrink 4.5% in 2020

HOWEVER, INDIA MAY BOUNCE BACK IN 2021 WITH A ROBUST 6% GROWTH RATE

WASHINGTON: The IMF on June 24 projected a sharp contraction of 4.5% for the Indian economy in 2020, a "historic low," citing the unprecedented coronavirus pandemic that has nearly stalled all economic activities, but said the country is expected to bounce back in 2021 with a robust 6% growth rate.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected the global growth at -4.9% in 2020, 1.9 percentage points below the April 2020 World Economic Outlook (WEO) forecast.

"We are projecting a sharp contraction in 2020 of -4.5%. Given the unprecedented nature of this crisis, as is the case for almost all countries, this projected contraction is a historic low, Indian-American Gita Gopinath, IMF's Chief Economist, told PTI as she released the World Economic Outlook Update in Washington.

The COVID-19 pandemic



"Stringent measures to restrict the spread of the virus, which heavily curtailed short-term activity, will contribute to the contraction," says the World Bank

has had a more negative impact on activity in the first half of 2020 than anticipated, and the recovery is projected to be more gradual than previously forecast. In 2021, global growth is projected at 5.4%, the report said.

For the first time, all regions are projected to experience negative growth in 2020. In China, where the recovery from the sharp contraction in the first quarter is underway, growth is projected at 1.0%

in 2020, supported in part by policy stimulus.

"India's economy is projected to contract by 4.5% following a longer period of lockdown and slower recovery than anticipated in April," the IMF said.

The IMF's record reveals that this is the lowest ever for India since 1961. The IMF does not have the data beyond that year. However, India's economy is expected to bounce back in 2021 with

a robust six% growth, it said. In 2019, India's growth rate was 4.2%.

The latest 2020 projection for India is a massive -6.4% less than it's the April forecast of the IMF. The projected growth rate of 6% in 2021 is -1.4% less than its April forecast.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed economies into a Great Lockdown, which helped contain the virus and save lives, but also triggered the worst recession since the Great Depression, Ms. Gopinath said.

Over 75% of countries are now reopening at the same time as the pandemic is intensifying in many emerging markets and developing economies. Several countries have started to recover. However, in the absence of a medical solution, the strength of the recovery is highly uncertain and the impact on sectors and countries uneven, she added.

In a blog post, Ms. Gopinath said that this global crisis like no other will have a recovery like no other.

"First, the unprecedented global sweep of this crisis hampers recovery prospects for export-dependent econo-

mies and jeopardises the prospects for income convergence between developing and advanced economies," she said.

"We are projecting a synchronised deep downturn in 2020 for both advanced economies [-8%] and emerging market and developing economies [-3%; -5% if excluding China], and over 95% of countries are projected to have negative per capita income growth in 2020," she added.

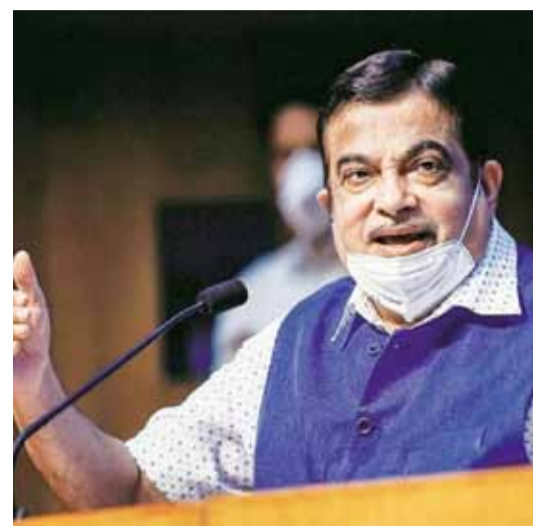
The cumulative hit to GDP growth over 2020-21 for emerging market and developing economies, excluding China, is expected to exceed that in advanced economies, Ms. Gopinath said.

In her blog, she noted that a high degree of uncertainty surrounds this forecast, with both upside and downside risks to the outlook.

On the upside, better news on vaccines and treatments, and additional policy support can lead to a quicker resumption of economic activity. On the downside, further waves of infections can reverse increased mobility and spending, and rapidly tighten financial conditions, triggering debt distress, she said.

AGENCIES

Scheme to provide ₹20,000 cr guarantee cover to MSMEs



NEW DELHI: Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday launched the Credit Guarantee Scheme for Sub-ordinate Debt to provide Rs 20,000 crore of guarantee cover to two lakh micro, small and medium enterprises.

The funding scheme to help the distressed MSME sector entails a sub-debt facility to the promoters of those operational MSMEs that are distressed or non-performing assets (NPAs). It is also called the "Distressed Assets Fund — Sub-ordinate Debt for MSMEs".

According to the scheme, the guarantee cover worth Rs 20,000 crore will be provided to the promoters who can take debt from the banks to further invest in their stressed MSME units as equity.

"It was being felt that the biggest challenge for stressed MSMEs was in getting capital either in the form of debt or equity. Therefore, as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat package, on May 13, 2020, Finance Minister (Nirmala Sitharaman) had announced this scheme of sub-ordinate debt to the promoters of operational but stressed MSMEs," an official statement said.

After completion of the necessary formalities including approval of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs and consultation with the finance ministry, SIDBI and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the scheme was formally launched by

Gadkari in Nagpur.

The scheme seeks to extend support to the promoters of the operational MSMEs that are stressed and have become NPAs as on April 30, 2020.

Promoters of the MSMEs will be given credit equal to 15 per cent of their stake (equity plus debt) or Rs 75 lakh, whichever is lower.

The promoters will in turn infuse this amount into the MSME unit as equity and thereby enhance the liquidity and maintain debt-equity ratio.

Ninety per cent guarantee coverage for this sub-debt will be given under the scheme, whereas the remaining 10 per cent would come from the promoters concerned.

There will be a moratorium of seven years on payment of principal amount, whereas maximum tenor for repayment will be 10 years.

"It is expected that this scheme would provide much-required support to around two lakh MSMEs and will help in reviving the economic activity in and through this sector. It will also help in protecting the livelihoods and jobs of millions of people who depend on them," the statement said.

Promoters of MSMEs meeting the eligibility criteria may approach any scheduled commercial banks to avail benefit under the scheme. The scheme will be operationalised through Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for MSEs (CGTMSSE). AGENCIES

Ladakh works on economy

LEH: Ladakh Lt Governor R K Mathur on Tuesday discussed an eight-point economic development agenda with industry body CII with focus on all-weather road connectivity and revival of tourism sector which contributes almost 50 per cent to the economy of the region.

Mathur also suggested a joint CII and Army conference to encourage the development of new entrepreneurial ventures besides a joint CII-Iceland-UT conference to develop tourism and geothermal energy in Ladakh, an official spokesman said here.

He said the eight point agenda for growth highlighted connectivity and infrastructure, leveraging tourism potential, harnessing solar energy, agriculture and animal husbandry, education and skill development, focus on innovation-based industries, delivery of affordable healthcare and sustainable development.

Speaking at a meeting with CII representatives through video conference, Lt Governor said that with CII's expertise in economy, knowledge of new thoughts



and initiatives can be introduced into Ladakh.

Talking about connectivity and infrastructure, Mathur suggested CII should speak of the Zojila pass issue at the national level and stressed that the Zojila pass should be a national agenda. "What the Indian Air Force has been doing for Ladakh is phenomenal. However, 12-month road connectivity would have avoided the problem of a herculean airlift which our forces have been doing since 1947," he said.

Zojila pass along 434-km Srinagar-Leh national highway attracts heavy snowfall during winter forcing closure of the highway for months together every year.

Speaking about the dent caused in the tourism sec-

tor due to the Pulwama attacks last year and the COVID-19 pandemic this year, LG Mathur said that the economy of Ladakh has been badly affected as tourism contributes almost 50 per cent to Ladakh's economy.

He stressed that the CII come up with initiatives to enable the tourism industry to handle such outside influences in the long run. Talking about non-conventional energies, Mathur said that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called for a "Carbon-free" Ladakh. "This must involve development of hydel and non-conventional energy sectors," he said adding the Solar Energy Corporation had floated tenders for 5000 MW and 14 MW of solar energy.

AGENCIES

India to be middle-income economy by 2030: Niti

NEW DELHI: Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar on Monday said India will transform into a middle-income country from a lower middle-income economy by 2030.

Kumar also said that India will witness a recovery in investment cycle by April 2021 and beef up efforts on trade front as well.

On the coronavirus situation in the country, he said it is unfair to compare India's dealing of the COVID-19 pandemic with Western countries as resources and priorities are not the same. Speaking at an online event by CII, Kumar said

"major programmes are focusing on health and welfare of those who are at the bottom of the pyramid and next (focus is) on the industry and business, reducing liquidity constraint and insolvency especially for MSMEs".

The Niti Aayog vice chairman noted that the government is working on saving lives and livelihoods.



"We will be on our way to economic transformation from a lower middle-income economy to a middle-income economy in this decade by 2030," he added.

"I am sure that India will reach recovery in the investment cycle by April 2021. India will make strong efforts to improve its trade at the global level," Kumar said. Also participating at the event, BLP Group India President and CEO Tejpreet S Chopra said companies that can adapt and adopt new technologies will move faster to normalcy.

A lot of companies are using this time to innovate so that they can come out stronger after the crisis, he added.

AGENCIES

No lockdown in Bengaluru, improving economy equally important: Karnataka

BENGALURU: All efforts will be made to control the spread of coronavirus in the city and there will be no fresh lockdown, the Karnataka government said on Friday as it asserted that it wants to carry on the developmental activities and COVID-19 management hand-in-hand.

The assertion from the government came as Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa chaired a meeting with MLAs, MLCs and MPs of all parties from Bengaluru to discuss measures to control the virus, in the backdrop of spike in the number of cases.

"No lockdown, please put an end to such speculation.

Government is in no mood for lock down. We want developmental works to happen along with the COVID management, as we don't know when the pandemic will end," Revenue Minister R Ashoka, who is also the in-charge of COVID management in the city said.

He said 95 per cent of those from the opposition who attended the meeting too have said no to lockdown, and suggested sealing of areas where cases are there.

"Wherever there are more cases, we will seal places in those areas. MLAs have suggested not only to seal the building where cases are

detected, but to include the street and adjacent streets," he added.

Earlier in the day, ahead of the meeting, Yediyurappa too had asserted that there will not be any lockdown in the city and said improving the economic situation of the state was also equally important.

As of Thursday evening, a total of 1,791 COVID-19 cases, including 78 deaths and 505 discharges, had been reported in the city while the states tally stood at 10,560 compared to just 3,408 cases as on June 1. The state capital has the highest number of cases among the districts.

AGENCIES

'One Nation, One Ration Card' scheme in J&K

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir administration on Tuesday launched the "One Nation One Ration Card" scheme at two fair shops here on pilot basis, a spokesperson said.

Advisor to J&K Lieutenant Governor, Farooq Khan launched the scheme at the fair price shops in Bhagwati Nagar area of Jammu, the spokesperson said.

Khan said under "One Nation One Ration Card" initiative, eligible beneficiaries from any state and union territory would be able to get their entitled food grains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) from any fair price shop in the country with in-

terstate portability.

The scheme was announced last year by the government of India, but it has recently gained momentum on account of migration during the COVID-19 lockdown, the official spokesperson said.

The system will enable any individual or migrant worker and their family member to access Public Distribution System (PDS) from any fair price shop in the country, Khan said.

During the inaugural function at a fair price shop, Khan distributed ration among two beneficiaries from Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh who were already registered with the NFSA in their home



states, the spokesperson said.

These two beneficiaries also became first non-native beneficiaries of Jammu and

Kashmir to receive ration under this initiative, he said. The identified beneficiaries were authenticated through

their Aadhar numbers, the spokesperson said.

The migrant labourers would hugely benefit from this scheme as they can purchase their allotted rations from fair price shops on subsidized rates, Khan said.

After implementation of this scheme there will only be one type of ration card across the entire country and adequate food grains would be provided to poor sections at subsidized rates, he added.

The Department of Food and Civil supplies plans to roll out the scheme in a phased manner by end of August this year, the spokesperson said.

AGENCIES

Economic recovery more likely to be 'U' or 'W' shaped: Analysts

EARLY LOCKDOWN THOUGH CONTAINED THE INFECTIONS AND MORTALITIES; IT WILL DELAY THE PEAK ALSO. SOME ESTIMATES SAY THAT INDIA MAY PEAK AS LATE AS NOVEMBER

NEW DELHI: India's economic recovery is more likely to be a 'U' or 'W' shaped rather than 'V' as the impact of COVID-19 will be profound on a nation that was already struggling for growth prior to the pandemic, analysts said.

"Before the onset of COVID, Indian economy had slowed down to 4.5 per cent GDP growth, not participating in the global resurgence of 2018 and 2019," Centrum Institutional Research said in a report on Monday.

For India, the outbreak of pandemic came at most inopportune time as the economy showed nascent signs of recovery after bold measures, from both the government and the Reserve Bank of India.

"India rightly went in for an early lockdown to counter Covid, thereby delaying the peak, but will have much slower economic recovery. Given the last two years lacklustre growth,

the government has limited resources to support demand in the economy. Thus, we believe that the impact of Covid will be profound in India and the recovery will be more 'U' or 'W' than 'V' expected in some advanced economies," it said.

Economic recession and recovery are often charted in the most common shapes such as U, V and W. V-shaped recessions begin with a steep fall, but trough and recover quickly. W-shaped recessions begin like V-shaped recessions, but turn down again after false signs of recovery are exhibited. Also known as double-dip recessions, because the economy drops twice prior to full recovery.



In a U-shaped recovery, the economy experiences a sharp decline without a clearly defined trough but instead a period of stagnation followed by a relatively healthy rise back to its previous peak. A

U-shaped recovery is similar to a V-shaped recovery except that the economy spends a longer time slogging along the bottom of the recession rather than immediately rebounding.

Centrum said India went for

'In this background, India will take a longer time to come out of this downturn. We expect FY20 demand to return only after 2 years i.e. in FY23 for many sectors'

an early lockdown beginning March 25, delaying the peak.

"However, early lockdown though contained the infections and mortalities; it will delay the peak also. Some

estimates say that India may peak as late as November. This extended period of peaking out will also keep people at home for a longer period, affecting the economic resurgence," it said. Even before COVID-19 India was struggling for growth as the economy faced demand constraints.

"In this background, India will take a longer time to come out of this downturn. We expect FY20 demand to return only after 2 years i.e. in FY23 for many sectors," it said.

Stating that the rural economy is likely to recover faster than the urban economy, the brokerage said the forecast of a normal monsoon, its timely

onset coupled with prospects of a bumper crop output along with minimum support price (MSP) hike and recently announced rural focussed programmes augur well for the rural economy.

"This bodes well for rural income and demand. These developments are likely to cheer farmers and policy makers as they hold potential to diminish the impact of the Covid. These trends emerge as a silver lining amid an imminent growth contraction in FY21," it said. The world over various countries are in different stages of opening up after going through a complete lockdown for 60-90 days.

AGENCIES

NEWSBRIEF

Coal India net dips 23% to 4 625 crore

KOLKATA: State-run Coal India Ltd on Friday reported a 23 per cent decline in its consolidated net profit to Rs 4,625 crore in the January-March quarter of FY'20. The miner had posted a net profit of Rs 6,026 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal. Its sales during the quarter under review were down by four per cent to Rs 25,597 crore as compared to Rs 26,704 crore registered in the same period of FY19.

AGENCIES

Arvind Ltd net loss at Rs 17.32 crore

NEW DELHI: Leading textile manufacturer Arvind Ltd on Saturday reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 17.32 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, impacted by COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 66.71 crore during January-March quarter of the previous fiscal, Arvind said in a regulatory filing. Its revenue from operations was down 11.71 per cent to Rs 1,641.56 crore during the quarter under review, as against Rs 1,859.39 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal.

AGENCIES

EIH Hotels Q4 net profit rises 66.46%

NEW DELHI: EIH Hotels, which runs chain of hotels and resorts under Oberoi brand, on Friday reported 66.46 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 33.16 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 31. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 19.92 crore in the same quarter previous fiscal, EIH Hotels said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated revenue from operations during the quarter under review stood at Rs 410.44 crore as compared to Rs 503.45 crore in the year-ago period, it added.

AGENCIES

RattanIndia Power loss narrows

NEW DELHI: RattanIndia Power consolidated net loss narrowed to Rs 511.77 crore in March quarter, compared to Rs 593.95 crore loss in same period last year. Total income of the company rose to Rs 364.94 crore quarter ended March 31, from Rs 289.38 crore last year, the company said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated net profit of the company stood at Rs 165.15 crore in 2019-20 as against a loss of 3,327.97 crore in 2018-19. Total income of the company in 2019-20 was Rs 1,984.59 crore, down from Rs 2,098.71 crore in 2018-19.

AGENCIES

Fund raising eased for stressed firms

MARKET REGULATOR ALSO MAKES PRICING FRAMEWORK EASY FOR PREFERENTIAL ISSUES

MUMBAI: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has relaxed the norms for preferential allotment for companies that have stressed assets, thereby making it easier for such entities to raise funds.

"SEBI has decided to relax the pricing methodology for preferential issues by listed companies having stressed assets and exempt allottees of preferential issues from open offer obligations in such cases, with immediate effect," the regulator said in a release on Tuesday.

The capital markets regulator said listed entities with stressed assets can make preferential allotment at a price that is "not less than the average of the weekly high and low of the volume weighted average prices of the related equity shares during the two weeks preceding the relevant date."

Further, the watchdog has exempted allottees in such issuances from having to make an open offer even if the quantum of acquisition



"SEBI has decided to relax the pricing methodology for preferential issues by listed companies having stressed assets and exempt allottees of preferential issues from open offer obligations in such cases, with immediate effect"

triggers an open offer or there is a change in control in terms of Takeover Regulations.

A company would be eligible to be called stressed if it

has defaulted on its payment obligations for more than 90 days or if the credit rating agencies have downgraded its securities to 'D'.

An entity, which has an inter-creditor agreement in terms of Reserve Bank of India (Prudential Framework for Resolution of Stressed Assets) Directions 2019, will also be identified as stressed.

SEBI also included certain checks to ensure the relaxations are not misused. The preferential issue cannot be made to entities that are part of the promoter group or those that have been identified as undischarged insolvent, wilful defaulter or fugitive economic offender.

The resolution for such a preferential allotment and the exemption from an open offer will have to be passed by the majority of minority shareholders and the proposed end-use of proceeds of such preferential issue will have to be disclosed.

Also, the proceeds cannot be used for repayment of any loans taken from the promoter group/ or group companies. A three-year lock-in will also be applicable on the shares allotted in such a preferential allotment. Sebi has also decid-

ed to ease pricing framework for preferential allotment with a view to easing fundraising for companies.

It has decided to allow companies to consider two-week average price for pricing preferential share issue, Sebi said in a statement after the board meeting. Currently, any preferential share issuer has to consider the average of weekly high and low for 26 weeks.

The specified securities allotted on preferential basis using this pricing formula will be locked-in for a period of three years. The option in pricing will be available for the preferential issues made between July 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. In addition, the regulator has also streamlined settlement regulations to make procedures faster and more effective.

Besides, it has decided to amend insider trading norms. In a separate development, Sebi has begun the process for recruiting two executive directors for faster and more effective execution of regulatory work.

AGENCIES

Sebi settles insider trading case of Manappuram Fin

NEW DELHI: Markets regulator Sebi on Friday settled an insider trading case with Priyanka Jain in the matter of Manappuram Finance Ltd (MFL) after receiving payment of over Rs 15 lakh towards settlement charges.

Sebi agreed to settle proposed adjudication proceedings in the case, pertaining to alleged violation of insider trading norms, after it was approached by Jain, who was the compliance officer of Ambit Capital, with a plea under the settlement regulations "without admitting or denying the findings of fact and conclusion of law".

In a settlement order, Sebi said it has disposed of the adjudication proceedings initiated against the applicant, Jain.

The regulator in its order said it had conducted an investigation into the matter of selective disclosure of unpublished price-sensitive information (UPSI) of MFL. During the course of in-

vestigation, it was observed in March 2013 that the price of the scrip of MFL declined by 20 per cent coupled with the rise in volume after the company told the BSE that it expects an under-recovery on certain loans due to correction in the gold prices as a result of which the profit for the corresponding quarter will be reduced.

It was alleged that MFL had selectively given guidance pertaining to quarterly results to certain analysts of Ambit Capital. Further, MFL in its board meeting on March 13, 2013, (before making disclosure to the BSE) noted that there is a possibility of making a negative profit for the corresponding quarter, which is deemed to be UPSI as, under PIT Regulations, Sebi said.

On March 18, 2013, analysts from Ambit Capital had a meeting with MFL, wherein allegedly the UPSI was discussed, the regulator added.

AGENCIES

ITI profit drops 47 per cent to Rs 36.4 crore

NEW DELHI: State-run electronics manufacturing firm ITI Ltd on Friday posted a 47 per cent drop in consolidated profit at Rs 36.46 crore for the March quarter on account of COVID-19 disrupting the supply chain.

The company had reported a profit of Rs 68.74 crore in the same period a year ago. "The manufacturing operations completely stopped from March 22. The impact of coronavirus was there on the supply chain at the beginning of March.

"Components from China and neighbouring countries could not be sourced due to COVID-19 crisis. Many high margin products that were ready could not be shipped because of the lockdown," ITI Limited Chairman and Managing Director R M Agarwal told reporters.

Revenue increased by 2.4 per cent to Rs 662.91 crore from Rs 646.76 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal. For the full fiscal 2019-20, ITI posted a 63 per cent jump in consolidated profit at Rs 150.86 crore compared to Rs 92.54 crore in 2018-19. Revenue rose 12 per cent to Rs 2,242.58 crore, from Rs 2,004.84 crore in



"We have submitted a proposal to develop a cluster under the government's EMC 2.0 scheme for which the minimum land requirement is 200 acres"

the preceding financial year. The company expects revenue contribution from manufacturing to double in the current fiscal. "We have signed an agreement with DRDO for making ventilators. The ventilators will be ready in a week for trial. We will begin mass manufacturing of ventilators after the trials. Trials may take around 6-8 weeks' time," Agarwal said.

He said ITI's facility in Bengaluru has the capacity to make 5,000 ventilators per month. Production can be

scaled up to 20,000 units by utilising capacities in other ITI units, based on the demand. "We have also submitted a proposal to develop a cluster under the government's EMC 2.0 scheme for which the minimum land requirement is 200 acres. "We have already floated RFP (request for proposal) for units willing to invest in ITI cluster and will gradually float several other RFP for attracting various kinds of units in the cluster," Agarwal said.

AGENCIES

Sensex rallies over 329 points; Infosys soars 7%



MUMBAI: Equity benchmark Sensex rallied 329 points on Friday, led by gains in Infosys, HDFC Bank, TCS and Reliance Industries amid positive cues from global markets.

The 30-share index settled 329.17 points, or 0.94% higher at 35,171.27, while the NSE Nifty surged 94.10 points, or 0.90%, to 10,383.

Infosys was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying around 7%, followed by TCS, IndusInd Bank, ONGC, HDFC Bank and HCL Tech.

On the other hand, ITC, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Bank and Sun Pharma finished in the red.

According to traders, broad-based buying on the

first day of the new monthly derivatives series and positive cues from global equity markets lifted the benchmarks.

After an unbroken rise in the last two weeks, the markets turned a bit volatile this week, said Joseph Thomas, Head of Research - Emkay Wealth Management.

"This was mainly influenced by factors like the phenomenal rise in the coronavirus cases in the US and India, the military stand-off between India and China at the border, and also with the ongoing spat between China and the US on many issues including trade and the source of the pandemic,"

he said.

AGENCIES

UCO Bank Q4 net hits ₹16.78 cr

NEW DELHI: Public sector lender UCO Bank on Friday reported net profit of Rs 16.78 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, mainly due to fall in NPA and lower provisioning.

The Kolkata-headquartered lender had posted net loss of Rs 1,552.03 crore during January-March quarter of 2018-19. Sequentially also, there was a net loss of Rs 960.17 crore in third quarter of 2019-20. Income during the March quarter increased to 4,511.21 crore, from Rs 4,148.52 crore in same period of preceding fiscal, UCO Bank said in a regulatory filing. The bank's provisioning for bad loans and contingencies fell to Rs 1,199.82 crore during the quarter as against Rs 2,242.58 crore in the year-ago period.

The lender recorded a net profit of Rs 17 crore in the last quarter of previous fiscal and is ready to come out of the PCA framework, UCO Bank MD and CEO A K Goel said. He said the bank has also met the other parameters required to come out of the PCA which are net NPA which has to be less than six per cent, capital adequacy and return on assets (RoA).

AGENCIES

ITC net rises 9.28 per cent to ₹3,926 crore

NEW DELHI: Diversified group ITC Ltd on Friday reported 9.28 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 3,926.46 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 31.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 3,592.80 crore during January-March quarter of the previous fiscal, ITC said in a regulatory filing.

However, its revenue from operations was down 4.93 per cent at Rs 12,560.64 crore during the quarter under review as against Rs 13,212.19 crore in the corresponding period

previous fiscal. Total expenses of the Kolkata-based firm were at Rs 8,484.93 crore in Q4 FY 2019-20, down 3.14 per cent as against Rs 8,760.36 crore.

During the quarter, revenue from total FMCG business slipped 4.18 per cent to Rs 8,940.78 crore from Rs 9,331.05 crore in the year-ago period.

Revenue from cigarette dipped 4.94 per cent to Rs 5,750.44 crore as against Rs 6,049.50 crore a year ago.

FMCG-others segment also declined 2.77 per cent to Rs



3,190.34 crore in Q4 FY 2019-20 compared to Rs 3,281.55 crore in the year-ago period.

ITC's FMCG-others segment consists of branded packaged foods as staples, snacks, meals, dairy and beverages, confections, apparel, education and stationery products,

personal care products, safety matches and incense sticks.

The company said its hotel business fell 6.68 per cent to Rs 494.76 crore during the quarter as compared to Rs 530.19 crore in the same period preceding fiscal.

Revenue from agri-business segment declined 10.04 per cent to Rs 1,899.01 crore as against Rs 2,111.03 crore in the March quarter previous fiscal.

Paperboards, paper and packaging segment slipped 5.10 per cent to Rs 1,458.87 crore, from Rs 1,537.36 crore earlier.

AGENCIES

Apollo Hospitals net zooms over 2-fold

NEW DELHI: Healthcare major Apollo Hospitals Enterprise on Thursday reported an over two-fold jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 209.60 crore for the March quarter, mainly on account of one-off gains.

The company had posted a net profit of Rs 72.80 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal, Apollo Hospitals said in a statement.

Consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 2,922.43 crore for the quarter under consideration. It was Rs 2,499.50 crore for the same period a year ago, it added.

The company, after meeting the closing conditions for sale of investments in its associate Apollo Munich Health Insurance Company to Housing Development Finance Corporation in the quarter ended March 31, 2020, has recorded a profit of Rs 198.30 crore, which has been disclosed un-



der exceptional items, it said.

For the full fiscal 2019-20, net profit of the company came in at Rs 431.80 crore, as against Rs 200.16 crore in the previous fiscal year.

Revenue from operations stood at Rs 11,246.80 crore for the fiscal, compared to Rs 9,617.44 crore in 2018-19. "The financial year 2020-21

or medical tourism, but in the longer term, "healthcare being a resilient industry will bounce back to its normal growth," he added.

On a different note, Reddy said the second decade of the 21st century was supposed to herald automation, artificial intelligence and robotics into healthcare and improve the quality of healthcare delivery.

"Recognising this, we floated a global tender, and after several rounds of selection, chose DXC as our partner in this digital journey. They have already made a significant impact on our health-checks and in bringing about perfection in our medical practice, which is helping all our doctors," he added.

Shares of Apollo Hospitals Enterprise closed at Rs 1,437.85 per scrip on BSE, up 1.96 per cent from its previous close.

AGENCIES

IOC reports massive loss due to inventory losses

THE FIRM, WHICH HAD EARNED \$4.09 ON TURNING EVERY BARREL OF CRUDE OIL INTO FUEL IN JANUARY-MARCH 2019, POSTS A NEGATIVE REFINING MARGIN OF \$9.64 PER BARREL

NEW DELHI: State-owned Indian Oil Corp (IOC) on Wednesday reported a massive Rs 5,185 crore loss in the March quarter after a slump in oil prices resulted in record in-

ventory losses for the company. The net loss of Rs 5,185.32 crore in January-March compared to Rs 6,099.27 crore net profit in the same period a year back, IOC Chairman Sanjiv Singh told reporters here.

The loss was primarily due to inventory losses and lower refining margins.

The company recorded an inventory loss of Rs 14,692 crore in the fourth quarter of 2019-20 as compared to an inventory gain of Rs 1,787 crore in the same period a year back, he said.

An inventory loss is recorded when a company buys raw ma-

terial at a particular price but by the time it is shipped and processed into fuel, rates have fallen. Since retail prices are benchmarked to prevailing international prices, an inventory loss is recorded. In case of reverse, an inventory gain is booked.

The company, which had earned USD 4.09 on turning every barrel of crude oil into fuel in January-March 2019, posted a negative gross refining margin of USD 9.64 per barrel. After excluding inventory losses/gain, the GRM for Q4 FY20 was USD 2.15.

Singh said fuel demand,



which had evaporated by as much as 70 per cent following the coronavirus lockdown grounding most land and air transport, has returned to 80-85 per cent and is likely to reach 90 per cent by the month-end or in the first half of July.

Petrol demand has risen unexpectedly possibly because most public transport is still off roads and private vehicles are being used for commuting. Diesel demand is also picking up on increased rural activity and goods transportation.

However, the demand may reach full pre-COVID levels only by the end of the year when

industrial and aviation demand picks up, he said.

Airlines were grounded in mid-March and only have only partially resumed operations. Singh said net profit in 2019-20 fiscal too fell to Rs 1,313 crore from Rs 16,894 crore net profit in the previous year due to inventory losses and lower refining margins.

The company recorded an inventory loss of Rs 12,531 crore in the fiscal ended March 31, 2020 as compared to a gain of Rs 3,227 crore earlier.

Also, it had foreign exchange loss of Rs 3,945 crore as compared to forex loss of Rs 1,503

crore a year back.

The gross refining margin (GRM) during the year 2019-20 was USD 0.08 per barrel as compared to USD 5.41 a barrel in the previous year. The core GRM for current year after offsetting inventory loss/gain comes to USD 2.64 per barrel, he said.

Revenue from operations of Rs 5,66,950 crore for the financial year 2019-20 compared with Rs 6,05,932 crore in 2018-19.

IOC, he said, sold 89,696 million tonnes of products, including exports, during fiscal 2019-20.

AGENCIES

NEWSBRIEF

British police to quiz terror suspect

LONDON: British counter-terrorism police have been given until June 27 to question a suspect in an attack which saw three people stabbed to death in a park, officers said. "Detectives were granted a warrant of further detention until Saturday June 27, and the man remains in police custody," Counter Terrorism Policing South East (CTPSE) said in a statement. A 25-year-old man, identified as Libyan Khairi Saadallah, was arrested near the scene of Saturday's attack in Reading, west of London. Detective Chief Superintendent Kath Barnes said the investigation into the attack was "continuing". **AGENCIES**

Bolton memoir called 'misleading'

ANKARA: Turkey has denounced as "misleading, one-sided and manipulative" the explosive book by former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton that describes interactions between Turkish and U.S. Presidents Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Donald Trump. In the book "The Room Where It Happened", Mr. Bolton contends that the U.S. leader was inclined to offer "personal favours to dictators he liked." Mr. Trump was said to be receptive when Mr. Erdogan mentioned a criminal probe into one of his country's largest banks over violating U.S. sanctions on Iran. **AGENCIES**

Danish PM postpones wedding yet again

COPENHAGEN: Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen thought she had finally found a date for her wedding, but has now had to postpone it for a third time due to an EU summit, she said Thursday. Many a wedding plan has been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic and it seems not even world leaders are immune. "I am really looking forward to marrying this fantastic man," Frederiksen wrote in a Facebook post alongside a photo of herself and her fiance Bo. "But obviously it can't be that easy, and now there is a council meeting in Brussels called, exactly on that Saturday in July when we had planned to marry," she wrote. **AGENCIES**

Covid-19 gets scarier in populous nations

CORONAVIRUS TAKES STRONGER HOLD IN THE US, OTHER COUNTRIES WITH HUGE POPULATION

SEOUL: While China moved closer to containing a fresh outbreak in Beijing, the COVID-19 pandemic took a stronger hold elsewhere, including the U.S., where surging infections across southern states have highlighted the risks of reopening economies without effective treatment or vaccines.

Another record daily increase in India on Friday pushed the country's case load toward half a million, and other countries with big populations like Indonesia, Pakistan and Mexico grappled with large case loads and strained health care systems.

South Africa, which accounts for about half of the infections on the African continent with 1,18,375, reported a record 6,579 new cases, as transmissions increase after it loosened what had been one of the world's strictest lockdowns earlier this month.

Mexico reported some of its highest 24-hour counts so far with 6,104 new cases and 736 additional deaths, as its treasury secretary began isolating at home after a positive test.



In China, where the pandemic originated in December, authorities have mobilised resources for mass testing and locked down parts of Beijing this month due to an outbreak that has infected 260 people. The 11 new cases reported in the capital on Friday continued a downward trend that suggests transmissions have been largely brought under control.

The U.S., which counts the most infections in the world,

is seeing daily jumps in COVID-19 cases nearing the peak reached in late April.

U.S. officials estimate that 20 million Americans have been infected with the coronavirus since it first arrived in the United States, meaning that the vast majority of the population remains susceptible. Thursday's estimate is roughly 10 times as many infections as the 2.3 million cases that have been confirmed. Officials have long

known that millions of people were infected without knowing it and that many cases are being missed because of gaps in testing.

The news comes as the Trump administration works to tamp down nationwide concern about the COVID-19 pandemic as about a dozen states are seeing worrisome increases in cases.

The administration also looks to get its scientific experts back before the pub-

The Donald Trump administration works to tamp down nationwide concern about the COVID-19 pandemic as about a dozen states are seeing worrisome increases in cases

lic more as it tries to allay anxieties about the pandemic while states begin reopening. Since mid-May, when the government began stressing the need to get the economy moving again, the panel's public health experts have been far less visible than in the pandemic's early weeks.

Twenty million infections means that about 6% of the nation's 331 million people have been infected. "It's clear that many individuals in this nation are still susceptible," Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said on a call with reporters Thursday.

AGENCIES

ASEAN states warn of S. China Sea tensions



HANOI: Vietnam and the Philippines warned of growing insecurity in Southeast Asia at a regional summit on Friday amid concerns that China was stepping up its activity in the disputed South China Sea during the coronavirus pandemic.

Both Hanoi and Manila lodged protests with China in April after Beijing unilaterally declared the creation of new administrative districts on islands in the troubled waterways to which Vietnam and the Philippines also have competing claims.

"Even as our region struggles to contain COVID-19, alarming incidents in the South China Sea occurred," Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte told an online meeting of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders on Friday.

"We call on parties to refrain from escalating tensions and abide by responsibilities under international law," he said.

China has been pushing its presence in the Exclusive Economic Zones of other countries while claimants are preoccupied tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the United States to call on China to stop its "bullying behaviour" there.

In early April, Vietnam said one of its fishing boats was sunk by a Chinese maritime surveillance vessel.

"The pandemic is fanning the flames of dormant challenges within the political, economic and social environment of the world and in each region"

China said that Vietnam's claims in South China sea are illegal and "doomed to fail".

In his opening remarks at the ASEAN Summit, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc said international institutions and international law had been seriously challenged during the global crisis.

"The pandemic is fanning the flames of dormant challenges within the political, economic and social environment of the world and in each region," the Prime Minister said.

"While the entire world is stretched thin in the fight against the pandemic, irresponsible acts and acts in violation of international law are still taking place, affecting the environment of security and stability in certain regions, including in our region," said Mr. Nguyen, who made no mention of China in relation to the comments. **AGENCIES**

Imran Khan calls Osama bin Laden 'martyr'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday called slain al-Qaeda chief and 9/11 mastermind Osama bin Laden a "shaheed" (martyr) and said that Islamabad faced "embarrassment" by taking part in America's war on terror.

Speaking in parliament during the budget session, Mr. Khan said the American forces entered Pakistan and killed bin Laden without informing Islamabad after which everyone started abusing his country.

"I don't think there's a country which supported the war on terror and had to face embarrassment for it. Pakistan was also openly blamed for U.S.' failure in Afghanistan," Mr. Khan said.

"For Pakistanis across the globe, it was an embarrassing moment when the



Americans came and killed Osama bin Laden at Abbottabad... martyred him. The whole world started abusing us after that. Our ally came inside our country and killed someone without informing us. And, 70,000 Pakistanis died because of U.S.' war on

terror," he said.

Bin Laden was killed by U.S. Navy Seals in Pakistan's Abbottabad in May, 2011. Mr. Khan's remarks drew criticism from the Opposition. "Osama bin Laden was a terrorist and our PM called him a martyr. He was behind

"I don't think there's a country which supported the war on terror and had to face embarrassment for it. Pakistan was also openly blamed for US' failure in Afghanistan"

massacre of thousands," said Khawaja Asif of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

In his address, the Prime Minister also defended his government's response to the coronavirus crisis, saying there has been no confusion or contradiction in official policies since the start of the pandemic. "They say again and again that there was confusion ... if there was one country whose government did not have confusion, it was ours," Mr. Khan was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper.

People give the example of New Zealand when talking about social distancing, he said, adding that "New Zealand has social distancing already" with a low population density. "I said from day one we had a dual problem; we had to save the people from corona and hunger, and those dying from poverty," he added, acknowledging that his government had to face "a lot of criticism" at the start and there was pressure to implement a more strict lockdown as was done by India. **AGENCIES**

Bhutan rejects media reports on blocking irrigation water to Assam

THIMPHU: Bhutan on Friday rejected media reports claiming that it has stopped the supply of irrigation water to farmers in Assam, terming them totally baseless and a "deliberate attempt" by vested interests to cause misunderstanding with India.

In a statement, Bhutan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that since June 24, 2020, there have been several news articles published in India alleging that Bhutan has blocked water channels that supply irrigation water to Indian farmers in Baksa and Udalguri districts in Assam adjoining the country's Samdrup Jongkhar district.

"This is a distressing allegation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like to clarify that the news articles are totally baseless as there is no reason why the flow of water should be stopped at this time," it said.

It is a deliberate attempt by vested interests to spread



misinformation and cause misunderstanding between the friendly people of Bhutan and Assam, the ministry said. Bhutan's statement came hours after Assam Chief Secretary Kumar Sanjay Krishna, in a late night tweet, termed the media reports as incorrect and said that the actual reason was natural blockage.

Recent media reports about Bhutan blocking water supply to India has been incorrectly reported. The actual reason being the natural blockage of

informal irrigation channels into Indian fields! Bhutan has been actually helping to clear the blockage, Mr. Krishna said.

According to the statement issued on Facebook by Bhutan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Assam's Baksa and Udalguri districts have been benefiting from the water sources in Bhutan for many decades and they continue to do so even during the present difficult times when we are faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. **AGENCIES**

Japan scraps 'costly' US missile defense system

TOKYO: Japan's National Security Council has endorsed plans cancel the deployment of two costly land-based U.S. missile defense systems aimed at bolstering the country's capability against threats from North Korea, the country's defense minister said Thursday.

The council made its decision Wednesday, and now the government will need to enter negotiations with the U.S. about what to do with payments and the purchase contract already made for the Aegis Ashore systems.

The council is expected to also revise Japan's basic defense plan later this year to update the missile defense program and scale up the country's defense posture.

Defense Minister Taro Kono announced the plan to scrap the systems earlier this month after it was found that the safety of one of the two planned host communities



could not be ensured without a hardware redesign that would be too time consuming and costly.

The Japanese government in 2017 approved adding the two Aegis Ashore systems to enhance the country's current defenses consisting of Aegis-equipped destroyers at sea and Patriot missiles on land.

Defense officials have said the two Aegis Ashore units could cover Japan entirely

from one station at Yamaguchi in the south and another at Akita in the north.

The plan to deploy the two systems already had faced a series of setbacks, including questions about the selection of one of the sites, repeated cost estimate hikes that climbed to 450 billion yen (\$4.1 billion) for their 30-year operation and maintenance, and safety concerns that led to local opposition.

Mr. Kono said Japan has signed contract worth nearly half the total cost and paid part of it to the U.S.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has steadily pushed to step up Japan's defense capability, said last week that in light of the scrapping the government would need to reconsider Japan's missile defense program and do more under the country's security alliance with the U.S. **AGENCIES**

'Wholesale recruitment' of child soldiers faces probe

KARUNA AMMAN HAD CLAIMED THAT HE WAS MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE CORONAVIRUS AS HE HAD KILLED BETWEEN 2,000- 3,000 TROOPS ON BEHALF OF THE LTTE IN ELEPHANT PASS DURING THE WAR

leader Karuna Amman over the "wholesale recruitment" of child soldiers for the Tamil separatist group.

The UN body's demand came as Karuna was being probed over his recent claims glorifying the killing of Sri Lankan soldiers during the brutal civil war.

Karuna alias Vinatagamurthi Muralitharan was on Thursday questioned for over seven hours by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) over his remarks that he killed over 2,000 Sri Lankan soldiers in the island's north during the LTTE's separatist

war which lasted for over three decades.

Addressing a public gathering in the East on May 19, Karuna had claimed that he was more dangerous than the coronavirus as he had killed between 2,000- 3,000 troops on behalf of the LTTE in Elephant Pass during the war.

Following his revelation, a number of individuals, including politicians, had called for Karuna's arrest and an investigation to be launched into the matter.

"He should also be investigated for wholesale recruitment of child soldiers, a crime



"Karuna Amman should also be investigated for wholesale recruitment of child soldiers, a crime under international law"

under international law," the UNHRC tweeted.

Karuna, who is contesting the August 5 parliamentary elections through his own political party, was the LTTE deputy leader and its eastern province commander when they ran a parallel state in their bid to militarily create a separate Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka's north and east

regions. He was the deputy to LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran. In 2004, he walked out of the LTTE with his eastern province cadres and later formed his own political party.

Karuna's leaving the LTTE with his cadres severely weakened the LTTE, leading to its ultimate defeat at the hands of government troops in 2009. He was elected to parlia-

ment in 2010 and became a deputy minister in the then Mahinda Rajapaksa government. Even after leaving the LTTE, the UN had accused Karuna of recruiting the underaged to his own political outfit Tamil Makkal Viduthala Pulikal (TMVP).

Karuna's claim of killing soldiers has led to a political storm in the run up to the August 5 polls. He is being seen as an ally of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Mr. Rajapaksa's party, however, has publicly disassociated from Karuna after his claim of murdering soldiers. **AGENCIES**

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NEWSBRIEF

App to help track Covid-19 symptoms among players

DHAKA: In wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has come up with an app to help its players track symptoms related to contagious disease. Former captain Mashrafe Mortaza and two other former Bangladesh cricketers, Nazmul Islam and Nafees Iqbal have so far tested positive for the dreaded coronavirus and in its bid to help the players, the BCB has come up with 'Covid-19 well-being app'. "This app will help the players maintain their fitness and for the board to keep their records and track of their fitness and health status," BCB Chief Executive Nizamuddin Chowdhury told "The Daily Star", informing that 70 players have installed this app. **PTI**

Sports can help win Covid-19 fight, says PV Sindhu

NEW DELHI: Asserting that sports can help win the battle against coronavirus pandemic in the absence of a vaccine, Olympic and World Championships silver medallist shuttler P V Sindhu on Monday urged everyone to make physical activity an integral part of their lives. The virus has infected over 8.5 million people globally with more than 450,000 people losing their lives. "Sports and other physical activities are very important to maintain a strong immune system and since there are yet no vaccine or treatment, sports can help win this battle," Sindhu said during the inauguration of 'Virtual Healthcare and Hygiene Expo 2020', a virtual exhibition and conference organised by FICCI from June 22-26. **AGENCIES**

Rowing Federation grilled after 22 fail dope test

NEW DELHI: National Anti-Doping Agency Director General Navin Agarwal on Tuesday said that those in charge of managing the rowing national camp will have to introspect what went wrong and take responsibility after 22 U-18 Indian rowers failed dope tests. All the athletes tested positive for probenecid, a drug used to treat gout that is also a masking agent banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency. "The rowing federation and its coaches need to introspect as to what went wrong. If so many players of a national camp test positive for one substance then they have to look at who was arranging all the supplements. Perhaps it was a food supplement that was wrongly taken," Agarwal was quoted as saying by IANS. "We have issued notices to all the rowers and they have said that they want to contest it. So after necessary formalities the hearings will be held." Rowing Federation of India (RFI) secretary general M.V. Sriram said that the federation is investigating the matter. He also said that he is perplexed that test results for samples taken in June 2019 are coming only now. "The samples were taken in July 2019 and the results we have got in June 2020. We are ourselves perplexed. Most of the athletes were from Khelo India. **IANS.**

Recognition of 54 NSFs withdrawn

SPORTS MINISTRY FOLLOWS DELHI HIGH COURT'S ORDER THAT WAS ISSUED ON FEBRUARY 7

NEW DELHI: Following the Delhi High Court's order, the Sports Ministry has withdrawn the annual recognition granted to 54 National Sports Federations (NSFs).

On Wednesday, the High Court directed the ministry to revoke the provisional recognition it had given to 54 NSFs on May 11. The court had said that the ministry by doing so has not complied with an order that was issued on February 7 this year.

The order had required the ministry and the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) to "inform the court in advance" while taking "any decision in relation to the NSFs."

Sports Ministry Deputy Secretary S.P.S. Tomar on Thursday wrote a letter to SAI Director General Sandeep Pradhan saying: "I am directed to refer to this Ministry's letter of even dated 02.06.2020 regarding renewal of annual recognition of National Sports Federations for the year 2020 and to say that in compliance of the order



dated 24.06.2020 passed by the Hon'ble Delhi Court, the department's letter of even number dated 02.06.2020 granting provisional annual recognition of 54 NSFs stands withdrawn."

The court in its order on Wednesday said that the ministry "shall issue a fresh notice within two days intimating all the 54 NSFs concerned that its order giving provisional renewal till 30.09.2020, stands recalled." The ministry usually provides

recognition until the end of the year but it has in this instance only given it provisionally until the end of the year.

Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju had asked the Sports Authority of India (SAI) to look into appointing differently-abled coaches to train athletes with speech and hearing impairments. Rijiju was responding to a suggestion made by the All India Sports Council for Deaf (AISCD) during a virtual meet-

"As an Indian, I understand that we need money for better purposes. (But) we can't lose a good talent. We didn't say anything about it at the time but this is my personal opinion,"

ing on Thursday. A SAI official told IANS that Rijiju agreed in principle to the suggestion. He further asked SAI officials to look into the logistics of hiring a coach. The official however said that the ensuing lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic and a number of factors means that process could take at least six months to go through.

Members of 15 National Sports Federations were also present in the videoconference which was the second round of meetings that the minister is having with presidents and secretary generals of NSFs around the country. In the earlier meeting, Rijiju had asked the representatives of the NSFs if it was feasible for them to

reduce the salaries of foreign coaches. The suggestion was not agreed to by the officials in the meeting.

"As an Indian, I understand that we need money for better purposes. (But) we can't lose a good talent. We didn't say anything about it at the time but this is my personal opinion," Boxing Federation of India Secretary General Jay Kowli had told IANS on Wednesday. "Given a choice I would like to pay them in full. They have been staying away from their families in India. They must be more worried than all of us considering the situation also in the country. They chose to stay back despite all of it." **IANS**

'Special' coaches for hearing and speech impaired athletes



NEW DELHI: The Sports Authority of India (SAI) may soon appoint differently-abled coaches to work with hearing and speech impaired athletes after Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju "agreed in principle" to the recommendation of All India Sports Council for Deaf (AISCFD).

In a virtual meeting with the Sports Minister, which was also attended by 16 other National Sports Federations (NSFs), the AISCFD on Thursday highlighted the need for differently-abled coaches for its athletes for clear communication.

"The All India Sports Council for Deaf highlighted the communication problems of their athletes with able bodied coaches and requested the Minister to consider employing differently-abled coaches for hearing and speech impaired athletes," an NSF official who was present in the meeting told PTI.

"The Minister applauded the suggestion and agreed in principle. He asked the Sports Authority of India officials to look into the matter on urgent basis."

Thursday's meeting was the second round of virtual meeting of Rijiju with NSFs after he interacted with 15 federations on Tuesday to discuss the way forward in terms of training

of athletes, participation in national and international competitions and organising sporting events in India.

Besides AISCFD, others present in Thursday's meeting were NSF officials from tennis, kabaddi, chess, basketball, bridge, billiards and snooker, equestrian, handball, kayaking and canoeing, squash, sepaktakraw, volleyball, wushu, yachting, Special Olympic Bharat and Association of Indian University.

During the meeting the NSFs discussed their short and long-term goals with the minister and called for immediate resumption of training which has been suspended since March because of the coronavirus-forced lockdown.

"The NSFs shared their short and long term goals with the minister. They said their immediate priority is to resume training and assess whether small events can be organised without spectators in a controlled environment," an official present in the meeting said.

"The NSFs also discussed their long-term goals which is primarily preparing for big events. They said they are looking start their national training camps from September or October." The official said most of the NSFs said they are yet to finalise their Annual Competition and Training Calendar as they are still waiting for the finalisation of international calendar which has been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. **AGENCIES**

Either Lanka or UAE will host Asia Cup, says PCB

KARACHI: The Asia Cup will go ahead as scheduled later this year in either Sri Lanka or the UAE, Pakistan Cricket Board CEO Wasim Khan has asserted.

Khan rejected speculation that the event could be scrapped to make space for the currently suspended Indian Premier League.

"The Asia Cup will go ahead. The Pakistan team returns from England on 2nd September so we can have the tournament in September or October," he said at a media conference here.

"There are some things which will only get clear in the due course of time. We are hopeful of having the Asia Cup because Sri Lanka has not had too many cases of the Coronavirus. If they can't do it, then UAE is also ready," he added.

Khan said Pakistan, the original host of the event, had agreed to let Sri Lanka conduct it in return for hosting the next regional event. He also confirmed that the Pakistan board is working on options to play cricket in the window for the T20 World Cup if it doesn't go ahead as planned in October-November.

"We are to go to New Zealand in December after hosting Zimbabwe at home. South Africa are ready to tour in January-February to play two or three Tests and some T20 matches," he disclosed.

Khan said the board was looking at a November window for completing the Pakistan Super League's remaining five matches.

Asked about the steps being taken to criminalise match-fixing offences in Pakistan, the PCB official said he was surprised that until today no one from the board had gone to the government and tried to get a legislation against the menace. **AGENCIES**



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Must protect progress women's sport has made: Belinda Clark

DUBAI: Continued investment in womens sports in the post Covid-19 period and creating inclusive environments for girls and women were the main points of discussion in 100% Unity, the final episode of the 100% Cricket webinar series held on Wednesday.

Former Australia cricketer and Executive General Manager of Community Cricket at Cricket Australia, Belinda Clark and Arijana Demirovic, head of FIFA's Women's Football Development, discussed the challenges ahead in the one-hour conversation moderated by commentator Mel Jones.

The two discussed the infrastructure and environment needed to encourage women in sports and felt the coming period was vital, especially after the successes of the FIFA Women's World Cup 2019 in France and the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020 in Australia, as per an ICC release.

Australia defeated India to claim their fifth T20 World Cup title in front of a record 86,174 fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on March 8 and with the ICC Women's



"I think it will be really important that we protect our investment, that we stay on the path, that we don't become a 'nice to have'"

World Cup 2021 due to be held in New Zealand in another eight months, this period is seen as crucial for women's cricket. Clark, the first cricketer to score a double-century in ODIs, said it was important to continue the good work.

Belinda Clark said: "The biggest challenge is protecting the progress that we have made and not taking it for granted that the next steps will just flow without a similar amount of effort and

attention. Whilst financial belts are being tightened across the world with what we are experiencing at the moment, it is easy to include inclusion as a concept, females playing sports is part of that, but it is really easy for us to go backwards.

"I think it will be really important that we protect our investment, that we stay on the path, that we don't become a 'nice to have'." **AGENCIES**

Liverpool wins Premier League title

LONDON: Thirty years of hurt came to an end for Liverpool when they were confirmed as Premier League champions on Thursday courtesy of second-placed Manchester City's 2-1 defeat by Chelsea.

The result at Stamford Bridge means Liverpool have an unassailable 23-point lead over City with seven games left.

Liverpool were last champions of England when they won the old First Division title in 1989-90 after which a decline in fortunes saw Manchester United and Arsenal, then Chelsea and Manchester City seize power.

Inspirational manager Jurgen Klopp has rekindled the Anfield flame though and delivered the club's 19th top-flight title, one behind arch-rivals United's record of 20, after finishing runners-up to City in a thrilling race last season. As the Chelsea game



moved into stoppage time at an empty stadium in London, 350km away outside Anfield Liverpool fans began lighting red flares as the celebrations began in earnest. Also watching from afar was an emotional Klopp. "I have no words, it's unbelievable and much more than I ever thought would be possible," he told Sky Sports after being congratulated by Liverpool great Kenny Dalglish,

manager of the 1989-90 title winners. "It's easy to motivate this team because of our great history. It's pure joy for me to coach them."

In the last 12 months Liverpool have won the Champions League, the UEFA Super Cup and World Club Cup, but regaining their status as top dogs in England, something that was almost a given in the 1970s and 1980s, was the priority. **AGENCIES**

Paes works on 'new version' of himself

KOLKATA: Tennis legend Leander Paes on Saturday said he has been working on a "new version" of himself during this Covid-19 induced lockdown period to keep himself ready for the rigours of the sport once it resumes.

Paes, who turned 47 on Wednesday, had earlier announced that 2020 would be his last season as a professional player but his plan to bid adieu on a high with a record eighth appearance at the Olympics, was stalled by the pandemic, which has wrecked the sporting calendar. The Tokyo Olympics is now slated to take place from July 23-August 8, 2021.

"If I can use this lockdown to enhance my physical fitness which is what I have done. If I can use this lockdown to take a rejuvenated break to take my mind fresh. Last year in September 2019 I looked to retire



because I was jaded from 30 years of playing this sport. So I had to reinvent myself," Paes, the winner of 18 majors, said during a webinar session organised by the Indian Chamber of Commerce on Zoom platform.

"I had to read, spend time with my father. I looked to enhance my individual being so that when the lockdown opens up and I do come back to my

community, there are many different age brackets and genders and also there are different vehicles that we can use." The 47-year-old said he would love to work on physical education classes in schools in India which he feels are "archaic". "Sports education is one of the things I love doing. In the physical education period in schools, I feel the classes are very archaic. I don't think physical education classes are dealing with mental stress of exams or mental pressure or depression.

"It does not deal with emotional happiness. I believe that sports psychologists or sports educators like myself can go out there and through the PE classes work with local and private, government schools and sports departments in each state by state...make a difference to each one of our children's lives. **AGENCIES**

Clare Connor to be first female MCC president in 233 years

LONDON: Former England women's captain Clare Connor is to become the first female president of Marylebone Cricket Club in its 233-year history.

Current incumbent Kumar Sangakkara, the first non-British MCC president, nominated Connor via video link from his native Sri Lanka during an annual general meeting on Wednesday.

Connor, now the England and Wales Cricket Board's head of women's cricket, is set to take up her new post on October 1, 2021, subject to the

membership's approval.

Presidents of MCC usually remain in post for one year but Sangakkara's term is set to be extended by a further 12 months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

It was not until 1998 that MCC, which owns Lord's Cricket Ground, voted to allow women to become members.

Prior to that, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II was one of the few women allowed in the Lord's pavilion.

"I am deeply honoured to be named the next president of MCC," said Connor in a state-



"We often need to look back to see how far we've come. I made my first visit to Lord's as a starry-eyed, cricket-obsessed nine-year-old girl at a time when women were not welcome in the Long Room (of the pavilion)"

ment. "Cricket has enriched my life so deeply already, and now it hands me this wonderful privilege."

"We often need to look back to see how far we've come. I made my first visit to Lord's as a starry-eyed, cricket-obsessed nine-year-old girl at a time

when women were not welcome in the Long Room (of the pavilion)," she said.

The 43-year-old Connor, now the chair of the International Cricket Council's women's cricket committee, added: "Times have changed. Now I find myself entrusted with this

remarkable opportunity — the opportunity to play a part in helping MCC, cricket's most influential club, to thrive and grow in an even more modern and inclusive future.

"MCC does wonderful work for communities in the UK and overseas. It stages the most uplifting events. It brings people together. And as we take small steps to emerge from this uncertain and difficult time, we are going to need the power of sport and strong sporting organisations like MCC more than ever," she said.

Meanwhile Sangakkara said

he was "thrilled" by Connor's latest cricket appointment, the Sri Lanka great adding: "The club has a significant role to play in cricket's global appeal and with her influence, I am sure she will make a considerable contribution to MCC."

Left-arm spinner Connor made her England debut aged 19 in 1995 and went on to captain her country in 2000 before retiring six years later.

Although MCC no longer runs English cricket, it has worldwide responsibility for the sport's rules. **AGENCIES**

Covid-19 tablet available at ₹103

GLENMARK'S FAVIPRAVIR IS NO MAGIC BULLET FOR COVID BUT WILL HELP AMID RISING CASES, SAY MEDICS

NEW DELHI: As Glenmark Pharmaceuticals launched antiviral drug Favipiravir for the treatment of mild to moderate COVID-19 cases, medical experts have cautioned against seeing it as a "magic bullet" to treat the deadly virus but said it will be helpful as it can be orally administered and reduce viral load.

They said the drug's real efficacy would be known in the coming months.

Glenmark Pharmaceuticals said it has launched antiviral drug Favipiravir, under the brand name FaviFlu, for the treatment of patients with mild to moderate COVID-19 at a price of about Rs 103 per tablet.

FaviFlu is the first oral Favipiravir-approved medication in India for the treatment of COVID-19, it said in a statement.

"This drug was already being used in Japan for influenza. They have been using it in COVID-19 patients also. Even China was using it and Russia had also given permission in May to use it. Antiviral drugs like Remdesivir and Favipiravir are not specific to COVID-19 but were being used for influenza," said Dr Vikas Maurya, Director, Department of Pulmonology and Sleep Disorders, Fortis Hospital, Shalimar Bagh.

He said studies found that there was some benefit of Favipiravir in COVID-19 treatment and that is why it has now been launched in India as well.

Maurya said with COVID-19 cases rising, the launching of the drug comes as a relief.

"It is not a magic bullet as it is not the only thing we have



to give. This is not a specific drug made for COVID-19 and has been found to be useful, but how much it will be useful we will have to see. Real efficacy will be known when administered on a large scale," he told PTL.

"Best thing is that it is an oral drug, while Remdesivir is an intravenous drug. It (Favipiravir) can be even taken at home. So even if it is giving some benefit, it will be quite useful," Maurya said.

Dr Rommel Tickoo, Associate Director, Internal Medicine, Max Healthcare, said the drug could be a "potential game-changer".

"We don't have much data, but whatever data we have

shows that it is promising. We will have clearer information about the efficacy of the drug in the next two months. The preliminary report is promising which means that they (Glenmark) know that it works," he told PTL.

"It has to be given at an early stage and is a potential game changer as it can be given in tablet form and thus is easy to administer, and is relatively inexpensive," he said.

Tickoo said the drug could reduce the viral load when given at an early stage and also has the potential to prevent stage progression so it could reduce the hospitalisation rate which in turn could reduce the burden on the health infrastructure. "With cases rising, at least we have something in hand," he told PTL.

Noted city-based lung surgeon Dr Arvind Kumar said

he does not believe that any of these antiviral drugs like Remdesivir or Favipiravir will be game changers.

"If at all 'game changer' can be used, it is for dexamethasone which has shown a significant reduction in mortality and is available cheaply," he said.

There are so many medications available and Favipiravir will also help some patients, added Kumar, who works at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital here.

The Favipiravir drug will be available as a 200 mg tablet at a maximum retail price (MRP) of Rs 3,500 for a strip of 34 tablets, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals said.

It is a prescription-based medication with recommended dose being 1,800 mg twice daily on day one, followed by 800 mg twice daily up to day 14, it added. **AGENCIES**

Generic remdesivir out for COVID-19 patients



NEW DELHI: Homegrown pharma major Cipla Ltd announced the launch of its generic version of remdesivir, which has been authorised for emergency use in treatment of COVID-19 patients by the USFDA, under its brand name Cipremi.

The USFDA had issued an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) to Gilead Sciences Inc for emergency use of remdesivir for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Remdesivir is the only USFDA approved Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) treatment for adult and paediatric patients hospitalised with suspected or laboratory confirmed COVID-19 infection.

In May, Gilead Sciences Inc extended a voluntary non-exclusive license to Cipla to manufacture and market generic version of remdesivir called Cipremi. Cipla said it has been granted regulatory approval by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for restricted emergency use in the country as part of the accelerated approval process considering the urgent and unmet medical need.

"As part of a risk management plan, Cipla will provide training on use of the drug, informed patient consent documents, conduct post marketing surveillance as well as conduct a Phase IV clinical trial on Indian patients," the company said in a statement. To enable speedy and equitable access to this treatment and in anticipation of demand, Cipla will be commercialising remdesivir through its own facilities and partnered sites, it added. The drug will be supplied through the government and open market channels to ensure equitable distribution, the company said. Commenting on the launch, Cipla Ltd MD and Global CEO Umang Vohra said, "Cipla appreciates the strong partnership with Gilead to bring remdesivir to patients in India. We have been deeply invested in exploring all possible avenues to save millions of lives impacted by COVID-19 pandemic, and this launch is a significant milestone in that direction". The company will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders in the healthcare ecosystem towards providing access to such promising treatments in furtherance with the belief that no patient should be denied access to life-saving treatments, he added.

Helpline set to find jobs for lockdown-hit workers

NEW DELHI: A group of students from IITs, IIMs and other reputed institutions on Sunday launched a pilot project and a helpline number to help workers, who lost their jobs during the coronavirus-necessitated lockdown, find work.

The students, who have created Students For Involved Governance and Mutual Action (SIGMA), are being assisted by Deputy Commissioner, Delhi, Abhishek Singh and bureaucrat Durga Shakti Nagpal in their endeavour.

The helpline -- 8800883323 -- "ekatra" was conceptualized by the students to help the hiring of the unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers across Delhi-NCR, Singh said during the online launch of the pilot project and the helpline number. The helpline will be operational from 10 am to 7 pm everyday. Student volunteers will attend calls from potential employers and workers and take note of their requirements.

The lockdown has had a serious impact on the livelihoods of workers, many have been rendered jobless. The pilot project and the helpline



The helpline will be operational from 10 am to 7 pm everyday. Student volunteers will attend calls from potential employers and workers and take note of their requirements

number is an attempt by the student-led think-tank to help locals and migrant workers find employment, Nagpal, who is also part of the PMO's COVID-19 Response Task Force, said during the online launch.

India witnessed a mass exodus of migrant workers from cities during the lockdown due to their sudden unemployment. Since India's

rural economy is not capable of this scale of labour absorption, millions of workers will have to move back to cities in search of livelihood, the think-tank said.

There is a need to have a mechanism to help locals and migrant workers find work conveniently. It will also solve the problem of worker shortage in many industries, it said. **AGENCIES**

Aurobindo Pharma eyes US for launch

HYDERABAD: Aurobindo Pharma is expected to launch 50 to 60 new products during the current year, N Govindarajan, managing director of the city-based drug maker has said.

"We are expecting to launch around 50 to 60 products this year including injectables... Out of the 50 to 60 products that we are talking about, 25 products have already been approved," he said during the latest earnings call earlier this month. Aurobindo Pharma's US

business posted a growth of 27 per cent year-on-year to Rs 11,484 crore in FY20.

On a constant currency basis, it increased by 26 per cent year-on-year to around USD 1.62 billion led by improvement in volumes and new product launches.

The company has received final approval for six ANDAs (abbreviated new drug application) and launched four products in the fourth quarter of last fiscal.

For the full year, it has received approval for 22

ANDAs and launched 34 products across oral, injectable and OTC segments, Govindarajan said.

Replying to a query, he said the drug maker is planning to spend USD 150 to USD 200 million on capex in the current year.

Aurobindo spent Rs 958 crore towards research and development in FY 20 which was 4.1 per cent of its total revenues. Govindarajan said the R&D spend would be 5.5 per cent of the revenues for the current year. **AGENCIES**

Bridgestone offers contactless tyre servicing

NEW DELHI: Tyre maker Bridgestone India on Wednesday launched its contactless tyre servicing platform keeping in tune with the requirements of social distancing norms in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Customers can now take an online appointment through "Bridgestone Bookmyservice" and spend less time in outlets with pre-planned visits. Contactless servicing ensures minimum waiting and a sanitised environment at the Bridgestone outlets, the company said in a statement. "With the country unlocking gradually, tyre servicing will be a need for many,



due to the prolonged parking of vehicles. However, safety concerns may prevent customers from availing this necessary service, as they recommence the usage of their vehicles,"

Bridgestone India said. The company has developed this service to ensure that the safety of its customers and partners is not compromised, while they purchase or get the servicing of

tyres done, it added.

The platform will also allow Bridgestone channel partners to implement appropriate social distancing measures at the outlets, which are necessary in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the company said.

"As the economy reopens, our customers would be more reliant on personal mobility, and therefore, this becomes an essential service for them. The safety of our consumers and channel partners is our top priority, and we aim to provide the right solutions, with the utmost ease," Bridgestone India Managing Director Parag Satpute said. **AGENCIES**

NEWS BRIEF

IndiGo offers flexible payment option

NEW DELHI: IndiGo has announced a flexible payment scheme called 'Flex Pay' under which passengers will have to pay only 10 per cent of the total fare amount at the time of booking. Passengers can defer the 90 per cent remaining payment "for a period of up to 15 days either from the date of bookings or before the date of departure" under this scheme, IndiGo said in a press release. If a passenger has paid 10 per cent of the fare amount to get a ticket, and if he or she cancels the booking without paying the remaining 90 per cent, he or she will not be refunded this 10 per cent amount. **AGENCIES**

IHCL launches home delivery platform

NEW DELHI: Hospitality major Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) on Thursday announced the launch of its home delivery platform Qmin to address a growing consumer demand for on-line gourmet food delivery service. Initially, the service has been rolled out from eight restaurants in Mumbai. It will cover the top 10 markets in the country, including Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru, over a period of five weeks, the hospitality arm of the Tata group said in a statement. The Qmin mobile application will be launched on July 25, followed by gourmet Qmin Shop in August and a loyalty platform in September, IHCL added. **AGENCIES**

Growthcode launches 4 e-learning apps

NEW DELHI: E-learning platform Growthcode on Sunday launched four apps for training and skill development of workforce across sectors. Prolear, Prolear Institution, Prolear Tutor and Opportunity Triangle are the four apps launched by the company. "We have launched four learning applications under Growthcode. Our aim is to make a purposeful, strategic and a long-term industry-academy-individual partnership possible through our virtual platforms," Growthcode Technology Solutions co-founder Ravi Krishnamurthy said in a statement. The Bengaluru-based education technology company provides virtual platforms to individuals and companies to train its employees. **AGENCIES**

Diageo programme to support bars, pubs

NEW DELHI: Liquor maker Diageo India on Wednesday announced a Rs 75-crore programme "Raising the Bar" to support bars, pubs and restaurants serving alcohol to help them recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Raising the Bar" is a two-year programme to support the revival and recovery of bars, pubs and restaurants across cities including Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, Diageo India said in a statement.

Diageo designed this programme following a global survey of bar owners to identify key priorities to support reopening.

Their top priorities included hygiene measures, digital support and practical equipment and training to transform how their outlets will work when they reopen, Diageo said.

Following resumption of business operations and the sale of alcohol in bars, pubs and restaurants, outlets will be able to register their interest



'Raising the Bar' is a two-year programme to support the revival and recovery of bars, pubs and restaurants across cities

for the programme, it said. It will provide hygiene kit, sanitiser and personal protection equipment and also help bars, pubs and restaurants serving alcohol to establish partnerships with online reservations and cashless systems.

Diageo India Managing Director Anand Kripalulu said: "The revival of this sector is vital to the economy and to the success of our business. 'Raising the Bar' is our commitment to qualifying pubs, bars and restaurants that serve alcohol." **AGENCIES**

IOC sets up battery swapping unit for recharge of EVs

NEW DELHI: India's top oil firm IOC on Friday launched a battery swapping facility for electric vehicles (EVs) at its petrol pumps, offering to replace discharged batteries with fully charged ones in just couple of minutes.

Indian Oil Corp (IOC) will begin with a pilot of battery swapping at one of its outlets in Chandigarh and gradually scale it up to 20 stations, company chairman Sanjiv Singh said at the launch.

Battery swapping technology offers the best alternative to slow charging and helps the drivers make optimum use of the operational hours, he said adding the battery swapping model is initially targeted at the commercial vehicles such as electric autos, rickshaws and electric two-wheelers and EVs that are either factory fitted or retrofitted.

IOC is the country's top fuel retailer, controlling close to half of the market. But, it is now making a foray into EV charging.



It has partnered with Sun Mobility for setting up battery swapping facility, called Quick Interchange Station (QIS). Any EV can drive into IOC's QIS pumps, insert fully discharged battery into a dispensing station and get a fully charged one in just 1-2 minutes, he said. All three/four batteries of EVs can be replaced with fully charged ones at the QIS.

At the end of the process, a bill for charging the batteries will be generated. The Pilot QIS

has 14 batteries, a touch screen for swapping preloaded cards, and an electricity sub-meter. These QIS will play a pivotal role in providing an alternative energy solution to the 3-wheeler segment, he said. Singh said only 4,000 out of 35 lakh vehicles sold last year were EVs. And time taken to charge batteries is one of the reasons for low sales.

"While users may be receptive to switching to EV, they may not want to struggle through

the cumbersome recharging process. This is where battery swapping comes into the picture," he said. "Not only will battery swapping eliminate the unnecessary waiting time for battery recharging, but it will also help with better land use, reduce the size of batteries in vehicles, and ensure an increased run time." IOC has signed a non-binding strategic cooperation document with Sun Mobility to explore setting up energy infrastructure for EVs through a battery swapping model across its petrol pumps in select cities. Three more QIS - one each in Chandigarh, Amritsar, and Bengaluru - will be set up under the pilot project.

New Delhi, Gurugram, and other cities will also be covered under the pilot. Speaking at the launch, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan called for scaling up the EV ecosystem. "We must leverage modern technology to enable electric mobility to scale up in India and make it more affordable." **AGENCIES**

Bajaj Finance starts online fixed deposit facility for clients

PUNE: Bajaj Finance Limited, the lending & investment arm of Bajaj Finserv and one of the most diversified NBFCs in the Indian market, has now launched online Fixed Deposit facility for customers. Using this convenience, new and existing customers can invest in Bajaj Finance FD from the comfort of their homes.

Servicing more than 2.5 lakh happy FD customers with a deposit book of more than 20,000 crores, Bajaj Finance Fixed Deposit is a preferred investment option, owing to its assurance of lucrative returns.

Despite recent repo rate cuts and reduction in interest rates, Bajaj Finance is offering lucrative FD interest rates of up to 7.85%, which are one of the highest in the market. These high returns don't come at the cost of stability or convenience, as deposits by Bajaj Finance are accredited with the highest ratings of FAAA by CRISIL and MAAA by ICRA. Along with these high ratings, Bajaj Finance is also one of the only NBFCs to have '0 unclaimed deposits' - which indicates the measures taken by this company to ensure safety of

depositors' money. In today's times of high market volatility and falling interest rate regime, customers can lock into the prevailing high FD interest rates by filling Bajaj Finance online FD form and reap these benefits: Quick online process: When investing in this online FD, investors need not worry about visiting Bajaj Finance branches, as this end-to-end online process enables them to book an FD immediately, without any hassle.

Easy online and paperless process: With this online FD



facility, customers can carry out the entire process online, from start to finish. This saves them the trouble of multiple

The lending & investment arm of Bajaj Finserv and one of the most diversified NBFCs in the Indian market is servicing more than 2.5 lakh FD customers with a deposit book of more than Rs 20,000 crores

visits to branches or the need to submit documentation. While existing FD customers need not even submit their documents again, new customers can verify themselves through the eKYC repository, and complete the documentation process without any has-

le. Invest anytime, anywhere: Bajaj Finance online FD facility also enables investors to invest from any device with an internet connection. This offers them with the flexibility to invest in a Fixed Deposit from their office desk, or from their homes. **AGENCIES**



Living with 'sexy' tag of at young age felt horrible: Riya

“I FOUND MYSELF VERY UNEASY, VERY UNCOMFORTABLE. IT WASN'T ME. I COULDN'T GO ON SET EVERYDAY, GET MY HAIR CURLED FOR HOURS AND SIT WITH ALL THAT MAKE-UP”

fit into that,” Riya told PTI in an interview.

The 39-year-old actor said that labels such as “sexy” and “bold” made her feel terrible. “Getting those tags, it was just terrible, horrible. Living with that... I was in school when the tag of ‘sexy’ started coming way. There was so much pressure to always look perfect, a certain way. “Even when I went out, people had this perception that ‘Oh Riya Sen’ because they feel what you’re on screen, you’re the same in real life.”

With time, the discomfort of fitting in the stereotype of a ‘Hindi film heroine’ started to get on her nerves. So, despite featuring in multi-starrers, including ‘Apna Sapna Money Money’, ‘Shaadi No 1’ and ‘Love Khichdi’ between 2005-2010, the roles and the overarching emphasis on “looking glamorous” became increasingly tough to handle.

“Everyone wants to be glamorous, no doubt, but I

was so young when I came here. I was doing all these roles, wearing a mini skirt, running around and acting ‘cute’. When I’d watch myself on screen I’d be like ‘eeks, I can’t believe that’s me.’ “I found myself very uneasy, very uncomfortable. It wasn’t me. I couldn’t go on set everyday, get my hair curled for hours and sit with all that make-up. It just didn’t do it for me. I took a conscious decision to stop working in Bollywood movies at that time.”

But what was a loss for Bollywood, turned out to be a gain for Bengali cinema. The actor found acclaim in filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh’s 2011 period drama ‘Noukadubi’, based on Rabindranath Tagore’s 1906 novel of the same name. She went on to work in other Bengali films, including Srijit Mukherji’s musical drama ‘Jaatishwar’ and the romance-action ‘Hero 420’ in 2016. **AGENCIES**

Actor Riya Sen says being sexualised in films and music videos at a young age made her so uncomfortable that she decided to stop working in Hindi movies.

Riya hails from a family of artistes that includes her grandmother Suchitra Sen, mother Moon Moon Sen and sister Raima Sen. She was just 16 when she got her breakthrough in 1998 after she featured in the music video of Falguni Pathak’s song ‘Yaad Piya Ki Aane Lagi’.

Films naturally followed, with director Bharathiraja’s Tamil romantic drama ‘Taj Mahal’ in 1999 marking her big screen debut. Riya went on to star in Hindi films, including the 2001

sleepers hit comedy ‘Style’, Sujoy Ghosh’s musical drama ‘Jhankaar Beats’ (2003) and Ajay Devgn’s ‘Qayamat: City Under Threat’ (2003).

The actor said when she began her Bollywood journey, she was excited how her choices were paying off at the box office. But with commercial success, the tag of being “bold” caught up. “I realised some of the films I did, after a few hits that I did, they weren’t working for me because I wasn’t comfortable in the roles I was playing. That’s why probably people thought I was a bad actress and I don’t blame them.

At that point when I did a lot of Bollywood movies, it was about being sexy, the clothes that you wear, the makeup that you do. I didn’t

Always wanted to show strong, independent women through cinema: Anushka

Actor Anushka Sharma says as a producer she will continue to champion stories like ‘Bulbbul’ that show strong and independent women on the screen.

“Bulbbul”, which started streaming on Netflix from June 24, is Anushka and brother Karnesh Ssharma’s second production to garner rave reviews after the success of ‘Paatal Lok’ on Amazon Prime Video last month.

The film marks the directorial debut of lyricist-dialogue writer Anvita Dutt and also completes her trilogy of supernatural stories with female protagonists in central roles after ‘Pari’ and ‘Phillouri’.

“The idea that Clean Slate Filmz would one day create a genre of our own was never an intentional move by us. We, however, always wanted to create a style of story-telling that celebrates women and their spirit.

“We always wanted to show strong, independent women to audiences through cinema and ‘Bulbbul’ is our new offering in this regard. Portrayal of women in our cinema has always been skewed and lopsided. I felt

I felt that as an actress and I decided that I will correct this as much as I can through my productions

that as an actress and I decided that I will correct this as much as I can through my productions,” Anushka said in a statement here.

The 32-year-old actor, who decided to turn producer at the age of 25, said she is happy with all the love for ‘Bulbbul’ as she and her brother “really put our necks on the line to make projects that we hope will be clutter-breaking”. To be called “daring and adventurous” for their efforts has been a real validation as producers, said Anushka.

“Karnesh and I aren’t scared storytellers. We make each project thinking we have nothing to lose. We are non-conformists and that’s what has really, really helped us to explore and create. It is a huge milestone moment for us at Clean Slate



Filmz because both ‘Paatal Lok’ and now ‘Bulbbul’ have got great reviews and janta ka (public) appreciation,” she said. Anushka, whose credits as an actor include films like ‘Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi’, ‘Band Baaja Baaraat’,

‘NH10’, ‘Sultan’ and ‘PK’, said she will continue to back talented filmmakers like Anvita, Sudip Sharma, Prosit Roy, Avinash Arun, Anshai Lal as their “bold cinematic voices need to be heard.” **AGENCIES**

Shruti Haasan misses being on the stage

Amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, actress Shruti Haasan is missing being on stage and performing. “I miss this,” she wrote on Instagram while sharing a clip that captures her giving an intense performance on stage.

Recently, Shruti also shared that she is a fan of glitches. The actress took to Instagram, where she shared two hazy photographs of herself. She is seen posing with the camera. “Glitches are good,” Shruti, who scored a following of 14 million on the photo-sharing web-site.

Shruti recently made a “weirdo checklist” and has ticked off all the boxes. In a post on social media, Shruti shared a photograph where she turns up in a black ensemble and red lipstick.

“WEIRDO CHECKLIST Midnight make up experiments (tick mark

emoji) random red goth palette Access (tick mark emoji) insomnia (tick mark emoji) share on socials for no real reason (tick mark emoji) chocolate cravings (tick mark emoji)

#mustbetheclipse #capricorn #blameitontheplanets,” she wrote. Recently, Shruti shared that she is missing performing on stage.

Amid lockdown, Shruti, who is the daughter of veteran actors Kamal Haasan and Sarika, has been cooking, cleaning and spending time with her pet cat, going by her social media posts. Shruti made her debut in Bollywood in 2000 with the film ‘Luck’. She was later seen in Hindi films like ‘Dil Toh Baccha Hai Ji’, ‘Ramayya Vasthavayya’ and ‘Behen Hogi Teri’.

In South, she has worked in hits like ‘Gabbar Singh’, ‘Yevadu’ and ‘Puli’ among others films. She will next be seen in Telugu movie ‘Krack’ and ‘Laabam’, a Tamil film. **AGENCIES**



“I miss this,” she wrote on Instagram while sharing a clip that captures her giving an intense performance on stage”

Manushi Chhillar: Proud that Yoga is India’s gift to world

Actress and former Miss World Manushi Chhillar says she feels extremely proud that Yoga is India’s gift to the world and that it is benefitting people worldwide.

“Yoga has invaluable and innumerable health benefits and I’m proud that it is India’s gift to the world. Yoga has become a sanctuary for so many people across the world and helped them in so many ways,” Manushi said

on International Yoga Day.

She urged everyone to include Yoga into their daily life. “I recommend everyone should add yoga to their routines to understand the benefits that one can unlock for themselves,” says the former Miss World.

Manushi credits Yoga for her svelte figure.

“Yoga has been a part of my life since school. More than what it does physically, I feel it has made me more aware, more conscious and

I can say, in a way, yoga has made me stronger. I’ve enjoyed adding it to my rest days as it helps me maintain my flexibility,” she said.

The actress added that it has enhanced her sense of focus. “Yoga has taught me patience, taught me to discard things from my mind that’s unimportant. It’s helped my outlook towards life, made my focus sharper and helped me take better life decisions.” On the work front, Manushi is all set to make her Bol-

lywood debut opposite superstar Akshay Kumar in the upcoming film ‘Prithviraj’. Directed by Chandraprakash Dwivedi, ‘Prithviraj’ is based on the life of king Prithviraj Chauhan. It stars Akshay as Prithviraj, while Manushi will play the role of the Sanyogita, the love of his life. **AGENCIES**



Sreelekha claims superstars govern casting in Bengali film industry

Bengali actor Sreelekha Mitra has claimed to have suffered professional setbacks due to the power play in the Bengali film industry.

Mitra’s allegations come in the wake of the untimely demise of actor Sushant Singh Rajput, which brought Bollywood under radar for making it tough for “outsiders” to survive.

In a video shared on her YouTube channel, Mitra claimed that during the ‘90s and early 2000s she was denied lead roles in Bengali films at the behest of a superstar.

“I was asked to play second lead or feature in the role of sister of big hero but was overlooked for playing the female



lead despite having all qualities,” she said in the video.

Mitra, best known for her performance in film like ‘Kaanatar’, ‘Hotath Bristi’ and ‘Aschorjo Prodig’, claimed that

the superstar was adamant on working with another female actor. The 44-year-old actor said she had struggled with a lot of negativity and has tried hard to not lose her sanity. “There have been difficult times, but I have been fighting it out. I have been struggling against injustice for many years,” she added. When it comes to casting a female lead, Mitra said heroes in Bengali film industry always have their preferences set and don’t let any other actor get a chance to perform opposite them.

“As a female actor with lots of potential, I regret I was never considered a contender for a lead role. I was never given the chance,” she said. **AGENCIES**

BE ORIGINAL, NO ONE’S COPY: KAJOL’S ADVICE TO BUDDING ACTORS



Bollywood actress Kajol has shared some tips for new actors, saying that they should be original. Kajol treated her fans and followers with a chat session on her Instagram Stories, where a user asked her “a tip for upcoming actors”.

The actress replied: “Please be original and no ones copy!” A fan asked Kajol about how she deals with hate. “Hate cannot be dealt with. You can only keep shining brighter! And be more positive,” Kajol said. “DDLJ (Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge)” or “Dilwale”, a user asked Kajol to choose one. She chose: “DDLJ (Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge)”.

Kajol agreed, when a user said superstar Shah Rukh Khan is the best. Does she plan on launching her daughter Nysa in Bollywood? Or does Nysa want to be a part of the industry, asked another. Kajol simply wrote: “No.” The “Fanaa” actress described late actor Sushant Singh Rajput’s death as “Tragic”, when she was questioned about him. Asked if she likes actress Rani Mukerji as an actor, Kajol said: “I think she is a very very fine actor.” A fan of Ajay Devgn and Kajol asked about the best dish she has prepared for her actor husband. She replied: “Kichda.” On the work front, Kajol will be seen making her digital debut with the film ‘Tribhanga’, which is directed by Renuka Shahane. **AGENCIES**

Online searches for ‘Nepotism in Bollywood’ rise 1993%

The death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput has initiated a wide discussion on ‘nepotism in Bollywood amongst people. A recent study has revealed that on June 14, the day Sushant died by suicide, and June 15, searches with keywords “nepotism in Bollywood” spiked by almost 2000 per cent.

The study by SEMrush tracked how often the word “nepotism” was searched from May 2019 to June 2020. It shows that during this period, it was searched an average of 62,458 times each month.

Those who search for the word “nepotism” may not be looking for results that link their search to the film industry. Nepotism is a widely used word, and the practice of favouring insiders is standard in every industry. However, those who do searches using

IT WAS SEARCHED AN AVERAGE OF 62,458 TIMES EACH MONTH

the keywords “nepotism in Bollywood” are trying to link nepotism to the film industry.

The study shows these searches spiked dramatically with Sushant’s sudden death. Following the spike, there was a dramatic fall in the number of times the keyword “nepotism in Bollywood” was searched. On the June 15, 16, the number of times this keyword was searched fell to only 153 per cent higher than average.

It also tracked data on Twitter to understand what impact Sushant’s suicide had on the microblogging site. It found a massive surge in the number of

times tweets were added to #NepotismBollywood, #BollywoodBlockedSushant, #JusticeForSushantRajput, and #KaranJoharIsBULLY.

By the end of the June 17, the total number of tweets on #NepotismBollywood, #BollywoodBlockedSushant, #JusticeForSushantRajput, and #KaranJoharIsBULLY stood at 3,961, 10,520, 36,292, and 10,230 respectively.

In contrast, on June 14, the number of tweets made under each hashtag was just 1, 0, 32, and 0, respectively. The study highlights that many feel the film industry is tilted in favour of insiders.

Speaking about the results of the study Fernando

Angulo, Head of Communications, SEMrush said: “Our study should serve as a caution to Bollywood. Many who love its movies secretly aspire to stardom, when these aspiring stars feel they have no chance of realising their hidden ambitions, their enthusiasm for Bollywood’s fare may

wane. For Bollywood to be seen in the best possible light, it must not allow for a repeat of what happened to Sushant. It should give outsiders

who are talented the same chance as that given to insiders. When the masses see that outsiders with no links to the movie industry are making it big, they will view Bollywood’s productions in a more favourable light. As a result, the receipts earned by the box office will increase.” **AGENCIES**

