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**DELHI'S COVID-19 TALLY SURGES TO 1.09 LAKH, WHILE DEATH TOLL MOUNTS TO 3,300**

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## 'India sees green shoots of recovery'

**REAL ACTIVITY INDICATORS LIKE ELECTRICITY AND FUEL CONSUMPTION, INTER AND INTRA-STATE MOVEMENT OF GOODS, RETAIL FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS PICK UP**

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said Indian economy has started seeing "green shoots" of recovery and that the country remains one of the most open economies in the world. He said that in these times when the world is battling the COVID-19 pandemic, it is natural to talk about revival and there is faith that the story of global revival will have India playing a leading role. "Indians have the spirit to achieve what is believed to be impossible. No wonder that in India, we are already seeing green shoots when it comes to economic recovery," Modi said while addressing the India Global Week 2020. He said that India remains one of the most open economies in the world.



"We are laying the red carpet for all global companies to come and establish their presence in India. Very few countries will offer the kind of opportunities India does today," he added. Modi also said that there are many possibilities and opportunities in various sunrise sectors in India. "Our reforms in agriculture provide a very attractive investment opportunity to invest in storage and logistics,"

Modi said. Earlier in the week, the government had said green shoots have emerged and will grow further on the back of a conducive policy environment, nudging the coronavirus-hit economy to move on the path of recovery and growth. India's growth has been forecast at (-) 4.5 per cent in 2020, a 6.4 percentage points downward revision compared to the April 2020 forecast as per the World Economic Out-

look (June 2020) report of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Given the immense uncertainty associated with infection and macroeconomic recession curves of countries across the world, the IMF has revised downward global growth to (-) 4.9 per cent in 2020, 1.9 percentage points lower than its April 2020 forecast, the Macroeconomic Report for June released by the Economic Affairs Department said.

**PM ALSO SAID**

- It is natural to talk about revival and there is faith that the story of global revival will have India playing a leading role
- Indians have the spirit to achieve what is believed to be impossible
- No wonder that in India, we are already seeing green shoots when it comes to economic recovery
- India remains one of the most open economies in the world.

However, the report said, "early green shoots of economic revival have emerged in May and June with real activity indicators like electricity and fuel consumption, inter and intra-state movement of goods, retail financial transactions witnessing pick up." Last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that the economy is showing "green shoots" as the country emerges from the coronavirus lockdown and underscored the importance of being focussed on both life and livelihood. While addressing chief ministers and Lt Governors of 21

states and union territories, Modi had said danger of the virus is not over yet, and there was need to remain vigilant while opening up the economy. The report further said that India's forex reserves at USD 505.6 billion as on June 19 continue to provide a crucial cushion to external shocks on the back of higher FDI, portfolio flows and low oil prices. This recovery is also evident in the Goods & Services Tax (GST) collections for June 2020 that clocked Rs 90,917 crore at gross levels, 46 per cent higher than May and 181 per cent over April, it noted. **AGENCIES**

## Gangster Vikas Dubey killed



**POLICE CLAIM DUBEY TRIED TO ESCAPE AFTER ONE OF THE VEHICLES ESCORTING HIM TO KANPUR OVERTURNED**  
**KANPUR:** Gangster Vikas Dubey, who was arrested in connection with the murder of eight policemen in Kanpur, was killed in police custody on Friday morning, the Uttar Pradesh Police told ANI. The police claimed that one of their vehicles escorting Dubey back to the state from Madhya Pradesh overturned on a highway early in the morning. He then tried to escape, the police alleged. "Vikas Dubey attempted to flee by snatching pistol of the injured policemen after car overturned," Kanpur Superintendent of Police Anil Kumar said. "The police [personnel] tried to make him surrender, during which he fired at the policemen. He was injured in retaliatory firing by police. He was later rushed to the hospital." Six policemen, including two from the Special Task Force, were also injured, an official told PTI. Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Prashant Kumar said so far six accused in the case have been killed, seven have been sent to jail and 12 criminals are still absconding. Dubey sustained four bullet injuries, three in the chest and one in the hand, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi Medical College Principal Dr RB Kamal told reporters. Dubey's postmortem will be conducted by a panel of doctors. Kamal added that the accused had tested negative for coronavirus. Dubey, who was arrested in Ujjain on Thursday, was handed over to a Special Task Force team of the Uttar Pradesh Police in the evening. "He was handed over to the UP police, who took him to their state by road," an unidentified police official said. A deputy superintendent of police, three sub inspectors and four constables were shot dead while trying to arrest Dubey, who has 60 criminal cases against him, in Bikru village, Kanpur, early on July 3. Four others were critically injured. Several of Dubey's aides have either been arrested or killed in encounters over the past week. The gangster escaped after the shootout on July 3, following which there were reports of him being seen in Faridabad. **AGENCIES**

## 800,000 Indians may be forced to leave Kuwait



**DUBAI:** Some 8 lakh Indians could be forced to leave Kuwait after a parliamentary committee approved a draft expat quota bill seeking to gradually slash the number of foreign workers in the Gulf country, according to media reports. The National Assembly's legal and legislative committee has determined that the expat quota bill is constitutional. According to the bill, Indians should not exceed 15 per

cent of Kuwait's population. This could result in 800,000 Indians leaving Kuwait, as the Indian community constitutes the largest expat community in the country, totalling 1.45 million, the Gulf News reported, citing a leading Kuwaiti newspaper. The current population of Kuwait is 4.3 million, with Kuwaitis making up 1.3 million of the population, and expats accounting for 3 million. Amid a slump in oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic, there has been a spike in anti-expat rhetoric as lawmakers and government officials call for reducing the number of foreigners in Kuwait. Last month, Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Khalid Al Sabah proposed reducing the number of expats from 70 per cent to 30 per cent of the population, the report said. An official in the Indian embassy in Kuwait told PTI that the Kuwait government is yet to inform the embassy about any such measure being taken to drastically reduce the number of Indians in the country. "There is a lot of talk in the media but we haven't officially received anything," he said on condition of anonymity. The official said the move is easier said than done as a large proportion of Indians living and working in the country can be categorised as essential services personnel. **AGENCIES**

## India, China agree on complete disengagement of troops



**NEW DELHI:** India and China on Friday held a fresh round of diplomatic talks on the border row in eastern Ladakh and reaffirmed to ensure "complete disengagement" of the troops in the region for "full restoration" of peace and tranquillity along Line of Actual Control. The Ministry of External Affairs said the talks were held under the framework of Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC). It said the two sides reaffirmed to ensure complete disengagement of the troops along the LAC for "full restoration" of peace and tranquillity in the border areas in accordance with bilateral agreements and protocols. "They also agreed that for the overall development of bilateral relations it was essential to maintain enduring peace and tranquillity in the border areas," the MEA said in a statement. The Indian delegation at the online talks was led by the Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the Ministry of External Affairs while the Chinese side was headed by the Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Department in China's foreign ministry. "They reviewed the situation in the India-China border areas including the progress made in ongoing disengagement process along the LAC in the Western Sector," the MEA said. It said both sides agreed that it was necessary to sincerely implement the understandings reached between senior commanders. The Indian and Chinese armies were locked in a bitter standoff in multiple locations in eastern Ladakh for the last eight weeks. The tension escalated manifold after a violent clash in Galwan Valley in which 20 Indian Army personnel were killed. In the last five days, Chinese military has withdrawn troops from three friction points in line with a disengagement understanding with Indian Army. Both sides have held several rounds of diplomatic and military talks in the last few weeks to ease tension in the region. **AGENCIES**

## Cipla's pricing for Remdesivir among lowest

**BENGALURU:** Drugmaker Cipla Ltd. has priced its generic version of Remdesivir, Cipremi, at 4,000 rupees per 100 mg vial, according to several sources, making it among the lowest priced versions of the COVID-19 treatment available so far globally. Cipla had earlier said pricing would not exceed 5,000.

Sovereign Pharma, which is manufacturing and packaging the drug, which will be available only through government and hospitals, said it had dispatched the first batch. "We are pleased to commercially launch Cipremi today; one of the lowest priced globally, and goal to supply over 80,000 vials within the first month itself," Cipla Executive VP and CEO (India Business) Nikhil Chopra said in an emailed announcement. To further guarantee equitable distribution, the drug will be available through hospital and government channels only, he added. **AGENCIES**



## Demand for work under MGNREGA surges

**NEW DELHI:** Demand for work under the MGNREGA has more than doubled in this fiscal, so far, due to the COVID-19 lockdown and about 42 per cent of the total allocation of Rs 1.01 lakh crore for the employment scheme has already been distributed among states, sources said on Tuesday. The way demand for work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has "sharply" increased this year, it seems a sizeable amount will be required to meet demand, they said. To provide relief to migrant workers who returned to their villages from across the country during the lockdown, the Centre has expanded the ambit work offered under the scheme. It now includes toilet construction and dragon fruit plantation, sources in the government said. They said only the labour cost for construction of toilets, part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, will be paid under the MGNREGA. Besides this, dragon fruit plantation, which is mostly done in northeastern states, has also been included in the list of works, the sources said. Officials in the Rural Development Ministry said the ambit of work has been expanded to provide as many opportunities as possible to engage migrant workers who have returned to their native states. **AGENCIES**

## No need to panic even if Covid-19 is airborne!

**NEW DELHI:** There is panic after the World Health Organisation (WHO) when a group of scientists approached it, with their finding, supporting the possibility of COVID-19 being airborne. However, experts say that there is no need to panic. The finding could mean that the pathogen can be at least temporarily in the air. The director for the CSIR-Centre for Cellular Molecular Biology, Rakesh Mishra told PTI that these are good studies. "Based on that, what is being communicated to WHO is that the virus can be at least temporarily airborne, which means it can travel in droplets of smaller size less than



five micron which will mean that it will be hanging in the air for longer than bigger droplet which settles down in a few minutes." It meant, small droplets released when a person speaks or breathes would be in the air for some time. Hence, people have to wear a mask for a longer period of time, even if a person has left (a room) or when they go to a place, as someone

**In an open letter to the WHO, 239 scientists in 32 countries have outlined the evidence showing that smaller particles can infect people, and are calling for the agency to revise its recommendations**

there may have been potentially infected, he said. "But, at the moment, there will not be, as far as I see, any major change in guidelines except a few modifications like this and there is no particular need to be stressed or panic that the virus is flying all over the place and it will be infecting everyone," Mishra said. He also called on people to continue to take the same precautions and avoid close contact with people and large gatherings. Social distancing must be maintained at all costs and people should avoid rooms where many people are present, especially those lacking aeration such as AC rooms. More than 200 scientists from 32 nations have written to the World Health Organization (WHO), saying there is evidence that the novel coronavirus is airborne and even smaller particles can infect people, a significant departure from the UN health agency's claims so far that Covid-19 is spread primarily through coughs and sneezes. "...in an open letter to the WHO, 239 scientists in 32 countries have outlined the evidence showing that smaller particles can infect people, and are calling for the agency to revise its recommendations," the report said, adding that the researchers plan to publish their letter in a scientific journal next week. The WHO has long held that the coronavirus is spread primarily by large respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. **AGENCIES**

particles can infect people, a significant departure from the UN health agency's claims so far that Covid-19 is spread primarily through coughs and sneezes. "...in an open letter to the WHO, 239 scientists in 32 countries have outlined the evidence showing that smaller particles can infect people, and are calling for the agency to revise its recommendations," the report said, adding that the researchers plan to publish their letter in a scientific journal next week. The WHO has long held that the coronavirus is spread primarily by large respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. **AGENCIES**

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# Covid-19 cases hit 109,140; 3,300 die

ORDERS FOR STRICT IMPLEMENTATION OF ALL PARAMETERS IN CONTAINMENT ZONES HAVE BEEN ISSUED

**NEW DELHI:** Delhi recorded 2,089 novel coronavirus cases on Friday, taking the tally in the city to over 1.09 lakh, while the death toll from the disease mounted to 3,300 with 42 fatalities in the last 24 hours, authorities said.

On June 23, the national capital had reported 3,947 infections, which is the highest single-day spike in Covid-19 cases till date.

From June 27 to July 3, the average fresh cases per day was 2,494 compared to 3,446 cases the previous week. The trend has continued -- July 4 (2,505), July 5 (2,244), July 6 (1,379), July 7 (2,008), July 8 (2,033) and July 9 (2,187). The Covid-19 death toll in Delhi stood at 3,258, as of Thursday.

The death toll from the coronavirus has risen to 3,300 and the total number of cases



mounted to 1,09,140, the Delhi health department said in a bulletin on Friday.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday reviewed the analysis of deaths due to Covid-19 in the national capital, an official said.

Delhi Chief Secretary Vijay Dev on Friday directed district magistrates and DCs to continue with strict implementa-

tion of all parameters in the Covid-19 containment zones, sources said.

The chief secretary also asked DMs to keep up their efforts to arrest the spread of the novel coronavirus as steps being taken by authorities are yielding good results.

According to the Friday's bulletin, an order has been issued to all healthcare facilities for updating status of availability of Covid-19 beds, ICU beds and ventilators on a real-time basis.

An order has also been issued to set up the rapid antigen testing camps to ensure that the special surveillance groups are tested on priority for their

Covid-19 infection status.

Besides, an order has been issued that rapid antigen detection test will be offered by all Delhi government dispensaries and polyclinics from 9 am to 12 noon on all working days to all eligible individuals.

According to the bulletin, 84,694 patients have recovered, been discharged or migrated so far, while number of active cases stood at 21,146, while 7,47,109 Covid-19 tests have been conducted.

On Friday, a total of 22,961 tests were conducted, including 10,129 RT-PCR tests and 12,832 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said.

The number of tests per million in Delhi stands at 39,321, the bulletin said.

The number of containment zones in the city on Tuesday stood at 633. **AGENCIES**

## Air pollution caused around 24,000 deaths



**NEW DELHI:** Air pollution in Delhi is linked to the loss of around 24,000 lives and 5.8% of its GDP in the first half of 2020, despite a strict Covid-19 lockdown since March 25, a report said.

According to a new online tool by IQAir AirVisual and Greenpeace Southeast Asia, Delhi lost 26,230 crore, equivalent to 5.8% of its annual GDP, over the last six months due to air pollution.

It is also the highest economic cost of air pollution in terms of GDP across 28 major cities in the world.

"Air pollution in the city is linked to the loss of an estimated 24,000 lives in the first half of 2020," a

Greenpeace statement said. In Mumbai, air pollution from PM2.5 -- particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter -- and nitrogen dioxide is responsible for the loss of around 14,000 lives and 15,750 crore in GDP since January 1. The Greenpeace Southeast Asia/IQAir AirVisual counter applies an algorithm to ground-level air quality data to calculate the projected cost of air pollution due to PM2.5 and NO2.

Despite having comparatively better air quality because of a strict COVID-related lockdown, air pollution continues to be a serious public health crisis as well as threat to our economy, Avinash Chanchal, climate campaigner at Greenpeace India, said.

"As governments look to rebuild economies, it is more important than ever that investments are directed towards green, just and sustainable sectors of society," he said. **AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIEF

### 3 hotels serving as Covid-19 units not linked to hospitals

**NEW DELHI:** District authorities in South West Delhi have delinked three hotels from the hospitals they were attached to serve as Covid-19 care facilities due to low-occupancy, and some other districts may follow suit, officials have said. Four hotels -- Piccadilly at Janakpuri district Centre, Taj Vivanta in Dwarka, Pride Plaza in Aerocity, and Welcome in Dwarka Sector 10 -- were attached to hospitals closest to them, in mid-June, to serve as facilities for coronavirus patients with moderate symptoms. However, only 25 of the total 900 rooms of the four hotels were occupied over the past fortnight, the officials said. In an order issued on Saturday, SDM (Dwarka) said Piccadilly, Pride Plaza and Taj Vivanta have been delinked from the hospitals they were attached to. Now, only Welcome hotel in Dwarka Sector 10 will serve as an extended Covid-19 care facility for Mata Chanan Devi, Akash Healthcare, Venkanteshwara and Manipal hospitals, the order said. **AGENCIES**

### Delhi court grants bail to 82 Bangladeshis

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court Friday granted bail to 82 foreign nationals from Bangladesh who were charge sheeted for attending Tablighi Jamaat congregation here allegedly in violation of visa norms, indulging in missionary activities illegally and violating government guidelines issued in the wake of Covid-19 outbreak. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gurmohina Kaur granted the relief to the foreigners on furnishing a personal bond of Rs 10,000 each. Till date, 371 foreign nationals from 31 different countries, who were charge sheeted in the case, have been granted bail by the court. The police had in June filed 59 charge sheets, including supplementaries, against 956 foreigners belonging to 36 different countries in the case. **AGENCIES**

## HC seeks Delhi govt reply on helpline for nurses

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi High Court Monday sought the AAP government's reply on suggestions for setting up a helpline for nurses to complain against private hospitals for failing to provide N-95 masks and PPE kits as also considering ex-gratia to those who die attending to Covid-19 patients.

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Prateek Jalan asked the Delhi government to also respond to the suggestion that private hospitals and nursing homes must file an undertaking before the concerned authorities for providing PPE kits, N95 masks to the nurses.

The high court directed the Delhi government, represented



through advocate Anupam Srivastava, to file a precise reply to the 6 points suggested by the counsel for an NGO which has filed a PIL alleging that

nurses in private hospitals and nursing homes were not being provided proper personal protection equipment (PPE) kits and masks to guard against

Covid-19 infection.

Besides helpline, ex-gratia and undertaking, the Delhi government will also respond to the suggestions of extending the benefit of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) of insurance protection to nurses working in private hospitals and nursing homes and that the insurance premium be paid by the authorities at least for the limited period during the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

Nurses must be provided with a quarantine facility and a nodal officer be appointed so that nurses can ventilate their grievances before and he can take up the issues with the government, the advocate

of the NGO, Distress Management Collective, Manoj V George suggested. As the Delhi government's counsel sought time to file reply to the suggestions, the court listed the matter for July 17.

The Centre, represented by its standing counsel Anil Soni, told the court that he will seek instruction on the suggestion of extending the benefit of PMGKP of insurance protection to nurses. The NGO has alleged that nurses in private hospitals and clinics were being given used PPE kits. It sought that all the private sector nurses be covered under the PMGKP of insurance protection and provided proper psycho-social support. **AGENCIES**

## Court seeks police reply on Pinjra Tod's plea

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court Thursday sought reply of the police on an application filed by Pinjra Tod members and JNU students Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal, booked under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, seeking court monitored investigation in a case related to communal violence in north east Delhi in February.

Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana directed the investigating officer to file the reply on the plea by July 14.

Kalita and Narwal have been arrested in the case under the anti-terror law for allegedly being part of a "premeditated conspiracy" in connection to the riots in north east Delhi during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in February.

Besides Kalita and Narwal, Jamia Millia Islamia students Asif Tanha and Gulfisha Khatoon, former Congress Councillor Ishrat Jahan, Jamia Coordination Committee members Safoora Zargar, Meeran Haider, President of Jamia Alumni Association Shifa-Ur-Rehman, suspended AAP Councillor Tahir Husain, activist Khalid Saifi, and former JNU student leader Umar Khalid have also been booked under the anti-terror law in the case. Umar Khalid has not been arrested in the case yet. The police alleged in



the FIR that Umar and his associates had instigated people to start riots in the area and it was a "premeditated conspiracy". Communal clashes had broken out in northeast Delhi on February 24 after violence between citizenship law supporters and protesters spiralled out of control leaving at least 53 people dead and around 200 injured.

Pinjra Tod (Break the Cage) was founded in 2015 with an aim to make hostels and paying guest accommodations less restrictive for women students. In 2015, Jamia Millia Islamia University had issued a notice restricting female students to stay out after 8 pm.

When the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) questioned the Jamia administration on it, a group of women students decided to protest against the restrictions not only in Jamia but other universities in Delhi. **AGENCIES**

## Bail granted to 91 foreigners from 21 nations

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court Wednesday granted bail to 91 foreigners from 21 countries who were charge sheeted for attending Markaz at Nizamuddin here allegedly in violation of visa conditions, indulging in missionary activities illegally and violating government guidelines issued after the Covid-19 outbreak.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gurmohina Kaur granted the relief to the foreigners on furnishing a personal bond of Rs 10,000 each.

The accused will file their plea bargaining applications on Thursday, said advocate Ashima Mandla, appearing for some of the foreign nationals.

Under plea bargaining, the accused plead guilty to the offence, praying for a lesser punishment. The Criminal Procedure Code allows for plea bargaining in cases where the maximum punishment is 7-year imprisonment; offences don't affect the socio-economic conditions of the society and the offence is not committed against a woman or a child below 14 years.

During the hearing, all the foreign nationals who were staying at a hotel, were produced before the court through video conferencing.

They were identified by the concerned officials of the High Commissions/embassies of the respective countries as well as the investigating officer.

The foreigners belong to Afghanistan, Brazil, China, USA, Ukraine, Australia, Egypt, Russia, Algeria, Belgium, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, France, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Tunisia, UK, Fiji, Sudan, Philippines and Ethiopia, said advocates Mandakini Singh, Fahim Khan and Ahmad Khan, appearing for the accused.

The court had on Tuesday granted bail to 122 Malaysian nationals booked in the case. **AGENCIES**

## ASI monuments reopen



**NEW DELHI:** Qutub Minar, Humayun's Tomb and a host of other centrally-protected monuments in Delhi were reopened for visitors on Monday after being shut for over three months due to the Covid-19 crisis, officials said.

All guidelines, including social distancing and sanitisation measures, will be followed at these heritage sites. Wearing of masks will be mandatory and no one will be allowed to enter without it, an official said.

There are 173 monuments in Delhi protected under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). It includes three UNESCO World Heritage Sites -- Red Fort, Humayun's Tomb and Qutub Minar -- and Safdarjung Tomb, Purana Quila, Tughlaqabad Fort and Feroz Shah Kotla.

"Delhi's ASI-protected monuments have been reopened for the public as per the directions of the Culture Ministry. However, Red Fort, which is closed every Monday on regular days, will remain closed today," the official said.

Visitors can book tickets in either of the two slots -- forenoon slot, which starts in the morning and ends at noon; and afternoon slot from noon to 6 pm. In each slot, a maximum of 1,500 visitors will be allowed, according to the official. On regular days, the official said, Red Fort gets an average daily footfall in the range of 8,000-12,000; Humayun's Tomb gets 6,000-10,000 and Qutub Minar gets 8,000-10,000. However, Humayun's Tomb attracts more foreign visitors, they said.

As many as 3,691 centrally-protected monuments and archaeological sites maintained by the ASI were shut from March 17 due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. **AGENCIES**

## Strategy being set to screen daily wagers, auto drivers

**NEW DELHI:** Authorities in several districts were busy chalking out a strategy on Thursday to screen daily wagers, domestic helps, auto drivers, and food suppliers for Covid-19, even as the East Delhi administration decided to use its existing 26 dispensaries for the exercise.

In central Delhi, sub-divisional magistrates have been asked to prepare a database of such people in their respective areas with the help of municipal corporations and traders associations, an official said.

A strategy is expected to be chalked out by Friday in districts like North, North-west and South. On Wednesday, the Delhi government revised its "Covid Response Plan" and will now enlist and screen daily wagers, domestic helps, auto drivers, and food suppliers for the disease.

It will also enlist and screen people in high-risk groups (HRGs) -- those aged above 60 or having co-morbid conditions -- through house-to-house surveys in containment zones, buffer zones and areas with isolated cases. "There are 26 dispensaries in East Delhi and we will use them to screen daily wagers, food suppliers, auto drivers. **AGENCIES**

## Petrol pump owners call for VAT reduction

**NEW DELHI:** Petrol pump owners in the national capital on Monday urged Delhi government to reduce VAT on petroleum products, citing lower rates in neighbouring states.

The increase in value added tax (VAT) on diesel is resulting in heavy loss of sales at petrol pumps in Delhi and making it unviable to operate them, the Delhi Petrol Dealers Association (DPDA), which has around 400 petrol pump owners as members, said in a statement. The Delhi government had increased VAT on petrol to 30 per cent from 27 per cent on May 5. For diesel, VAT has been almost doubled to 30 per cent from 16.75 per cent, it said.

"This increase in VAT has

resulted in price difference of more than Rs 8 per litre in diesel with neighbouring states, which is resulting in heavy loss of sales and more than 200 petrol pumps have become unviable," DPDA President Anil Bijlani said.

The rate difference of more than Rs 8 per litre is resulting in sales shifting to neighbouring states and smuggling from these states, Nischal Singhania, former president of the Association, said. "VAT on petroleum products contribute a big percentage to the total revenue of the state. By sales shifting to neighbouring states due to this massive rate difference, Delhi government is losing revenue and it is killing the goose which lays golden eggs," he added. **AGENCIES**

## 106-year-old Delhi man survives Covid-19

THE PATIENT, A RESIDENT OF OLD DELHI, WAS DISCHARGED FROM THE RAJIV GANDHI SUPER SPECIALITY HOSPITAL RECENTLY AFTER RECOVERING

**NEW DELHI:** A centenarian man from Delhi, who was four years old during the 1918 Spanish Flu, has survived Covid-19 and recovered faster than his son, in his 70s, at a dedicated coronavirus facility here, doctors said.

The 106-year-old patient (name withheld), a resident of Old Delhi, was discharged from the Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital (RGSSH) recently after recovering, they said.

His wife, son and another family member, who were also infected by the novel coronavirus, have recuperated, the doctors said.

The man was brought to the RGSSH, a dedicated Covid-19 facility of the city government in east Delhi, in mid-April and discharged early May, a senior doctor said.



When asked about the details of his wife and the other family member, the doctor only said, "The 106-year-old man and his son, in his 70s, had recovered at our hospital, but the rest two recuperated at another Covid facility".

Another senior doctor told PTI: "Perhaps, he is the first reported case of Covid-19 in Delhi who also went through

the dreaded Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 which like Covid-19 had also ravaged the world."

"And, he not only recovered from Covid-19, he recovered faster than his son, who is also very old," the doctor said.

orders and use of masks bring prescribed.

In the US, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918. It is estimated that about 6,75,000 deaths occurred in America, the CDC said. According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) report, the pandemic of 1918-1919 called the Spanish Flu was particularly virulent, and killed an estimated 40 million people worldwide.

In India, the disease is believed to have been brought in by the soldiers returning from World War I conflicts.

The first cases of Spanish Flu were reported in areas which are major ports of entry, such as Mumbai (then Bombay), Kolkata (Calcutta), Delhi and Chennai (Madras), where a large number of people returned from abroad. **AGENCIES**

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## NEWSBRIEF

Former bureaucrat floats political outfit

**NEW DELHI:** A former bureaucrat has floated a political party -- Rashtravadi Vikas Party -- and decided to contest the assembly polls in Bihar due later this year. It is an initiative to bring back social harmony and inclusive growth in the society, party's founder Anup Srivastava, a retired Indian Revenue Service (customs and central excise) officer, said on Sunday. "This political organisation is going to be a different entity. It will not indulge in petty politics but will work for the welfare of all sections of society. We want to ensure better education and jobs for our youngsters," he said. Srivastava, former president of all India IRS (customs and central excise) officers' association, said the party has decided to contest all 243 assembly seats in Bihar.

AGENCIES

## Congress slammed for questioning syllabus change

**JAIPUR:** Former Rajasthan education minister Vasudev Devnani on Friday termed as "condemnable" the questions raised by the Congress over the move to rationalise school syllabus by dropping certain chapters to reduce course load on students in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. The BJP leader said the decision to reduce 30 per cent school syllabus was taken due to the coronavirus crisis and keeping in mind the interest of students.

AGENCIES

## RJD celebrates foundation day sans Lalu Prasad

**PATNA:** Lalu Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal, once the numero uno political force in Bihar, observed its 24th foundation day on Sunday as Yadav's sons led party workers in a bicycle rally aimed at targeting the ruling NDA over spiralling petroleum prices. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) was floated on this date in 1997. The party came into being as a result of a split caused in the Janata Dal by Yadav, who was then its acting president and feared a defeat at the hands of challenger Sharad Yadav in organisational polls. The move helped the wily former chief minister to pass the baton to his wife Rabri Devi -- a demure homemaker who had till then stayed away from politics -- when he faced imminent arrest on account of a charge sheet filed against him in the infamous fodder scam.

AGENCIES

## Panel set to probe into Gandhi trusts

THE COMMITTEE WILL COORDINATE INVESTIGATION AGAINST THREE GANDHI FAMILY TRUSTS

**NEW DELHI:** The Ministry of Home Affairs said on Wednesday that it has set up an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate investigations into alleged violations of the law by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, PTI reported. On June 26, the Bharatiya Janata Party had accused the Congress of having received funds from the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi for the foundation, and asked whether this was a bribe for a free trade agreement between India and China.

Officials of the home ministry said on Wednesday that the investigation will cover alleged violation of legal provisions of several laws, including the Income Tax Act, the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, by the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust, the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust and the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. A special director of the Enforcement Directorate will conduct the investigation.

The BJP had alleged that donations to the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation were made in 2005-06, adding that Congress

## Haryana Congress mulls shadow cabinet to corner BJP-led govt

**CHANDIGARH:** The Haryana Congress has mooted forming a "shadow cabinet" to keep a watch on the performance of the state's BJP-led government.

Mullana Congress MLA Varun Chaudhary said on Wednesday that at a meeting of the Haryana Congress Legislature Party here on Monday, the party MLAs had agreed to his suggestion on forming a "shadow cabinet".

"The legislators while agreeing to my suggestion said this will enable public to know better about the failures of the government. I said it will also help opposition pinpoint issues and keep the government on its toes," he said. The CLP meeting was presided over by former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, who is also the Leader of the Opposition.

The CLP meeting was called to discuss the state's political scenario and to devise the party strategy for the bypoll to the Baroda assembly seat in Sonapat district.

The seat fell vacant in April



**"While the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation has made public its source of funds, the same may not be said for the BJP and its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh," says Congress**

chief Sonia Gandhi was the chairperson then. However, the Congress dismissed the charges and said it was an attempt to divert the attention of the country from matters of national security.

In a tweet, BJP National President JP Nadra had released documents that he claimed revealed how money from the Prime Minister's

Relief Fund was diverted and donated to the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation during Manmohan Singh's tenure as the prime minister.

While addressing a virtual rally for party workers in Madhya Pradesh, Nadra asked why the foundation had received money from China. Nadra said former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Congress

**"Those who fight for truth can't be intimidated"**

**NEW DELHI:** Hours after the government initiated a probe into the funding of three Nehru-Gandhi family linked trusts including the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF), Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said those who fight for the truth cannot be intimidated.

"Mr Modi believes the world is like him. He thinks every one has a price or can be intimidated. He will never understand that those who fight for the truth have no price and cannot be intimidated," Gandhi said in a tweet.

leaders Rahul Gandhi and P Chidambaram were members of the board when the donation was made.

On June 28, the Congress hit back at the government, alleging that Chinese companies had contributed to the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations, or PM-CARES, Fund. Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi wondered why Modi had accepted funds from these Chinese firms, amid tensions between the two countries.

Indian and Chinese troops engaged in a violent clash in Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control on June 15, leading to the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers

and injuries to 76. The Chinese also lost an unidentified number of soldiers. Tensions skyrocketed between the two countries following the incident, and India banned 59 Chinese-linked apps citing security reasons.

Singhvi said that while the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation has made public its source of funds, the same may not be said for the BJP and its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The Congress wondered why RSS leaders went to China in January at the invitation of the Chinese Communist Party, and what discussions were held on the Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh disputes.

AGENCIES

## PM praises UP govt, BJP unit for welfare work

**LUCKNOW:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday heaped praise on the Uttar Pradesh government and the BJP state unit for their welfare activities during the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

At a review of the BJP's "Seva hi Sangathan" campaign in seven states via video conference, Modi said the state government and the party unit need to be congratulated for their work.

"Being the MP from Kashi (Varanasi), I have been talking to the people of Kashi regularly. Because of this I continuously get information about what type of work (is being done) and how it is being done. I am also in touch with the people in the government," he said.

Suggesting that a digital booklet with details of the work done, people's experience and their interviews be brought out at the divisional level, he said people have composed songs during this time and



written poetry.

"Later we can bring out a digital booklet of every district, then of every state and subsequently of the entire country," he said.

"These are the things which would inspire people in future. Let us decide that by September 25, on the birth anniversary of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay, we launch a digital booklet of divisions, districts, states and the entire country," he said.

"I would like that at the centre and state levels, an editorial board be set up and things are collected very minutely. This is a very major happening in the history of mankind," he said.

AGENCIES

## Raut targets Oppn over issue of MLCs from Guv quota

**MUMBAI:** Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut has hit out at the BJP over the issue of appointment of 12 Maharashtra Legislative Council members from the governor's quota, saying delay in their nomination would amount to violation of the Constitution and suppression of freedom.

In his weekly column "Rokthok" in Sena mouthpiece "Saamana", Raut said despite the COVID-19 pandemic, "politicising hasn't stopped", be it over the border standoff with China or handling of the coronavirus situation.

The Rajya Sabha member said there were speculations that the appointment of 12 Legislative Council members from the governor's quota may be put on hold and the "new government" (after ousting the Sena-led Maha Vikas Aghadi) would make its own appointments after October.

"This is just a dream as there is no threat to the MVA government. The governor should stop any attempt of politics being played using the constitutional post," Raut said.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government is yet to recommend 12 names to the governor for nomination in the Legislative Council. The term of the 12 governor-nominated appointees ended last month.

Raut also hit out at Leader of the Opposition Devendra



Fadnavis over his comments that the BJP is not interested in pulling down the MVA government, which would fall "because of its own internal contradictions". "He (Fadnavis) has realised this after all attempts to topple the government have failed. But new experiments to create hurdles before the government would continue," he said.

Raut alleged that the opposition party does not want MVA-recommended members to be nominated to 12 seats under the governor's quota in the Upper House of Legislature. "The 12 governor-nominated members will be from the Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena. The question is whether the governor would make the appointments," he said.

Raut said the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi is still remembered. Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the "greed for power of one family led to the imposition of Emergency and it was violation of the Constitution and suppression of freedom," Raut claimed.

AGENCIES

## UP Congress leaders, workers held

**LUCKNOW:** Several Congress leaders and workers, including UPCC president Ajay Kumar Lallu, were on Tuesday arrested while heading to hand over a memorandum to Governor Anandiben Patel here over the alleged dismal law and order situation in Uttar Pradesh.

The arrested leaders and workers, however, were released shortly later after which Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee chief Lallu reiterated his allegation that there is a "complete jungle raj" in the state. Those arrested included Congress Legislative Council leader Aradhana Mishra, former state minister Nas-eemuddin Siddiqui, UPCC SC



department in-charge Pradeep Narwal, besides several workers. They were taken to the Eco Garden where the police released them later in the evening, party's media convener Lalan Kumar said.

"The constitutional set-up has collapsed across the state. Criminals and goons are hav-

ing the institutional patronage of the Yogi government.

"Their close proximity with ministers and officers is out in the public domain. Viral videos have left no scope for any doubt in this regard," said Lallu in his statement after being released, said Lallu.

He also expressed outrage over being prevented from submitting the memorandum to the governor.

"It has never happened that leaders going to submit a memorandum to a governor were arrested in an illegal manner. The dictatorship and tyranny of the Yogi government in the state is at its height," he said. "Is it a crime for a state unit chief of a na-

tionary party to submit a memorandum to the Constitutional head of the state?" he asked.

Addressing newsmen earlier in the day, Lallu alleged that Uttar Pradesh has become a hub of crime against Dalit and OBC during the last three years of the Yogi government.

"There is a constant increase in atrocities against Dalit-OBCs in the state, but OBC-Dalit leaders of the BJP and those who are in the Yogi government do not have the guts to raise their voice against the oppressors of their own community people," said Lallu in a press conference organised by the UPCC's SC Wing.

AGENCIES

## Majoritarian politics shouldn't undermine India's soft power

*We need both soft power and hard power. I do want to stress on the importance of preserving these qualities in India that make us appealing to the world,' says Shashi Tharoor*

**NEW DELHI:** The "precious pluralism" that has been a civilisational asset to India in the globalised world is "sadly" under threat today and religious intolerance and majoritarian politics should not be allowed to undermine the country's soft power, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said on Monday.

Speaking on India's Soft Power: Contours of Cultural Diplomacy at an event organised by FICCI, Tharoor said India must remain the land of the "better story" as a society with free press and thriving mass media.

"We need both soft power and hard power. I do want to stress on the importance of preserving these qualities in India



that make us appealing to the world. The precious pluralism that has been a civilisational asset for India in the globalised world and is sadly under threat in our country today," he said.

"Our democracy and dissent, our thriving free media, our contentious civil society forums, our energetic human rights groups, our free elections and our fractious political par-

## Cong won't let BJP silence Opposition: Ashok Gehlot



**JAIPUR:** The Congress will not let the BJP succeed in its ploy to silence the opposition, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said on Monday, asking why the saffron party's leaders are rattled when Rahul Gandhi questions government policies.

The Congress is in power in Rajasthan but in opposition at the Centre.

"Gandhi is doing what a responsible opposition leader should do, seek answers, advise and offer cooperation on matters of national importance," Gehlot said.

"Why are the BJP leaders so much rattled whenever Rahul Gandhi questions the government's wrong policies? What kind of democracy does BJP want- one where nobody sees their mistakes and asks nothing," he asked. "The INC will not let the BJP succeed in its ploy to silence the opposition" Gehlot tweeted.

Gehlot said Gandhi had questioned the quality of ventilators purchased by the government from the PM CARES fund based on objections raised by hospitals and doctors.

"The central government is putting the lives at risk by purchasing sub-standard ventilators in this fight against coronavirus. NDA govt should not compromise with the health of lakhs of patients and all care should

**"NDA govt should not compromise with the health of lakhs of patients and all care should be taken in purchasing critical equipment"**

be taken in purchasing critical equipment," he said.

Targeting the central government over its policies, Gehlot said the BJP-led NDA government would always be remembered for its "monumental" failures, which, he said, include demonetisation, "erroneous" GST implementation, and mismanagement during the COVID-19 crisis.

"And we still have four more years of this government," Gehlot said.

The chief minister also expressed concerns over the rising number of COVID-19 cases in the country and suggested that the Centre run a special awareness campaign like what Rajasthan did.

"It is most worrying that India has now overtaken Russia as the third worst-hit country in the world by the coronavirus. The government of India should launch an awareness campaign like the state government has done in Rajasthan," he said in another tweet.

AGENCIES

## MP CM works on portfolio allocation

**BHOPAL:** Amid reports of heartburn in the BJP over recent expansion of Madhya Pradesh cabinet, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday refused to commit any timeline for allocation of portfolios to 28 new ministers, who took oath on July 2.

Chouhan had recently visited New Delhi to meet top BJP brass apparently to discuss the political intricacies pertaining to the issue.

"I am working on it...distribution will take place soon," said the chief minister, who reached here from Delhi, when asked by reporters on the timeline for allocation of ministries. Speculation was that allocation of portfolios would take place on Tuesday. The induction of 28 ministers, including a dozen loyalists of Jyotiraditya Scindia, whose exit from the Congress in March led to the fall of the 15-month-old Kamal Nath-led regime in the state, had apparently caused heartburn among a section of senior BJP leaders, who were left out of the new ministry.

BJP MLA Ajay Vishnoi had last week shot off a letter to the chief minister stating that there was resentment among the people of Jabalpur and Rewa divisions. The new ministers include 20 of cabinet rank and eight ministers of state. The Chouhan ministry's strength is now 34.

Reacting to the development, former chief minister Kamal Nath said in Ujjain, "the government and the Cabinet were formed through bargaining. Now portfolios too will be allocated through bargaining". Nath visited the famous temple of Lord Mahakal in Ujjain before leaving for Badnawar to launch the Congress' campaign for the 24 assembly bypolls.

The bypolls were necessitated due to resignation of 22 MLAs of the Congress who joined the BJP along with Jyotiraditya Scindia. Two more seats are vacant due to death of sitting legislators. The Election Commission is yet to announce schedule for the byelections. The initial mini expansion of the state cabinet had taken place on April 21 with the induction of five ministers, almost a month after Chouhan took oath as the CM for a record fourth term.

AGENCIES

**"It is essential that India does not allow 'spectre of religious intolerance and majoritarian politics to undermine our soft power which remains our greatest asset in the world of the 21st century"**

ties all of this show India in a very positive light in the eyes of the world so the kinds of things the government likes to delegitimize -- dissent is bad, you are anti-national -- actually these

are the things that strengthen our image abroad," he said.

He further said it is essential that India does not allow "spectre of religious intolerance and majoritarian politics to undermine our soft power which remains our greatest asset in the world of the 21st century".

"These assets (soft power) may not directly persuade others to support India but it goes a long way in enhancing India's intangible standing in the world's eyes and that is why I am talking about soft power in this context as one of actually promoting the assets and products of our society and culture that the world would find attractive," he said.

AGENCIES

# 'Work from home' set to be norm

GOVT URGED TO ALLOW CERTAIN WFH RELAXATIONS TO CONTINUE ON PERMANENT BASIS

NEW DELHI: IT companies have approached the information technology ministry to allow certain relaxations on work from home (WFH) to continue on a permanent basis, as the industry moves towards a blended working model in the post-COVID-19 era.

Nasscom has written to an inter-ministerial committee under the IT ministry that is looking into the matter, Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) and some states on this, Nasscom Senior Vice-President and Chief Strategy Officer Sangeeta Gupta told PTI.

The IT industry body, in its letter to STPI, said allowing these relaxations on a permanent basis will help "companies plan their operations from a long-term perspective and undertake flexi policies to provide WFH to their employees based on their requirements".

"While the current permissions have served the need well in the temporary context, the industry is now looking at enabling WFH on a permanent basis for certain percentage of employees especially in the post COVID-19 era. Therefore, it is needed that the current



**"As per provision...STPI units can take out laptops, computers and projections systems outside of STPI units for the purpose of use of authorised employees. However, such permissions are given for temporary period"**

regulation should be amended to support such working models," Nasscom said in its letter dated June 26.

When contacted, STPI Di-

rector General Omkar Rai told PTI, "We are considering representation made by the industry and we will soon issue a clarification. We will make

sure that the IT industry continues to work from wherever they wish without affecting any of their operations."

STPI is an autonomous society set up by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in 1991, with the objective of encouraging, promoting and boosting the software exports from India. As many as 4,300 units operate under STPI, most of them involved in software exports.

STPI had issued a notification on March 11 enabling work-from-home provisions for STPI-registered units.

Nasscom, in its letter, noted that about 90 per cent of the workforce employed in the IT-BPM sector is working from home. Given the available technologies and an impetus from the COVID-19 pandemic, IT-ITeS companies are now looking at a blended working model with both work from office and work from home as a permanent feature, it said.

Nasscom has also suggested allowing units to take-out duty-free assets on permanent basis for the purpose of WFH subject to conditions.

"As per provision...STPI units can take out laptops, computers and projections systems outside of STPI units for the purpose of use of authorised employees. However, such permissions are given for temporary period," it said.

The association noted that as companies look to adopt WFH on a long-term basis, the flexibility of taking out IT assets out of STPI on a temporary basis should be extended for such withdrawal on a permanent basis. **AGENCIES**

# Zoom plans significant investment in India

NEW DELHI: Popular video conferencing app Zoom is planning to make a significant investment in India over the next five years and ramp up hiring, a top company executive said and sought to dispel misconceptions that the app has links with China, ahead of competition from billionaire Mukesh Ambani's just launched JioMeet.

"Some of the misconceptions are disheartening, especially those about Zoom and China," Zoom's president of product and engineering Velchamy Sankarlingam said in a blog post. "We do recognise that as we continue to introduce ourselves to the Indian market, there has been some confusion about the facts as it relates to Zoom. We want to work through these". Zoom, he said, is a US company that is publicly traded on the NASDAQ.

Zoom had seen spurt in users since COVID-19 lockdown but now faces competition from JioMeet, which has already seen about one million downloads within a week of launch on its promise of providing unlimited free video calling. Zoom's platform offers



**"We do recognise that as we continue to introduce ourselves to the Indian market, there has been some confusion about the facts as it relates to Zoom. We want to work through these"**

40 minutes of video calling for free. In a blog on Medium, Sankarlingam said India is and will continue to be an important market for Zoom, and that the company is excited to build

on the exciting opportunities it sees in the region.

"We also have plans for significant investment in the country over the next five years and beyond, including expanding our footprint and hiring more top talent in the region," he said. He added that Zoom is helping Indian businesses, government agencies, communities, school teachers, and other users stay connected.

Sankarlingam emphasised that the company is keen to engage with stakeholders in India in the coming months to support key priorities such as Digital India, StartUp India and Skills India, as well as introducing them to Zoom. **AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIEF

### Praj Industries forays into RCM space

MUMBAI: Bio energy company Praj Industries on Thursday announced its foray into the global renewable chemicals and materials (RCM) segment. Praj Industries is developing technologies to produce bio-based renewable chemicals and materials (RCM) as a part of its newly launched Bio-Prism portfolio, the company said in a statement. "We are now into a league of select companies worldwide that are configuring the RCM landscape, with the launch of the Bio-Prism portfolio. Together with Bio-mobility, Bio-Prism becomes another mainstay of our contribution to the global bio economy," the company said. RCM produced from bio-based feedstocks are sustainable alternatives to products made from fossil resources. **AGENCIES**

### 15 lakh visit Hyundai's online sales platform

NEW DELHI: Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) on Monday said its online car buying platform has recorded over 15 lakh visitors and over 20,000 enquiries since its launch in March this year. With the "Click To Buy" online sales platform, that integrates over 600 dealerships, the auto major is offering a complete end-to-end online car buying solution that enables customers to purchase cars from the convenience and safety of their homes, HMIL said in a statement. The company said it has also partnered with the leading banks HDFC and ICICI, in order to facilitate application of loans online without the need to visit any bank branch for approval. **AGENCIES**

### Kia Motors crosses 50,000 unit sales

NEW DELHI: Kia Motors India on Tuesday said it has crossed the 50,000-mark in sales for connected cars within 10 months of its first product launch in the country. The company has surpassed figure of 50,000 activated connected cars on road which includes Seltos and Carnival models, Kia Motors India said in a statement. The automaker is the only manufacturer to secure this feat within just over 10 months of its first product introduction in the country, it added. "We have attained this landmark figure due to our strong determination and continuous efforts to bring innovation and next-gen technology to our customers," Kia Motors India MD and CEO Kookhyun Shim said. **AGENCIES**

## Lamborghini India eyes healthy order book to prevent sales decline

NEW DELHI: Italian super sports car maker Lamborghini is banking on a healthy order book to prevent huge sales dip in India this year due to the coronavirus pandemic as it resumes deliveries of vehicles from this month after restarting operations following lockdown relaxations, according to a senior company official.

While new orders are slow to come by, Lamborghini India is not witnessing any cancellations of bookings, although some customers have asked for delayed deliveries due to the health crisis. "We still have a strong order bank for Urus and also we launched the new Evo RWD in the beginning of the year. This helped us to build the order bank for the year, which will be acting as a



big support in terms of getting some decent numbers this year," Lamborghini India Head Sharad Agarwal told PTI. The company, which sold 52 units of its super luxury vehicles that are priced above Rs 2.5 crore in India last year, feels that its sales this year will not match that figure. "Definitely, we may not hit

the same number as last year but this order bank will definitely support us in (preventing) a decline, which is not as bad as the industry," he said, adding "the good thing is whatever order bank we have we have not seen any cancellations and the customers are still committed with us." **AGENCIES**

## Slowdown, weak sentiment hurt auto

MUMBAI: Slow economic growth coupled with dull consumer sentiment will be "extremely challenging" for the domestic automotive industry, which was already reeling under a sales slump even before the COVID-19 crisis, electric vehicle maker Kinetic Green said.

At the same time, the company remains bullish on the electric vehicle (EV) segment in the long-term and expects demand to be strong. However, it is looking to push back some of its investment plans for the next one-two quarters to assess demand.

Automakers reported zero sales in April amid the coronavirus lockdown, while it dropped by a whopping 89 per cent in May. Though there was some recovery in June, sales were still lower on a year-on-year basis.

"The Indian automotive sector was already struggling in the previous fiscal before the COVID-19 crisis. It saw an overall de-growth



of nearly 18 per cent during 2019. This situation has further worsened due to the pandemic, and the resultant lockdown and its impact on the economy.

"The coming year will be extremely challenging for the Indian automotive sector on account of slow economic growth and dull consumer sentiment," Sulajja Firodia Motwani, founder and CEO, Kinetic Green, told PTI in an interaction.

She said demand is returning, though slowly, post-lockdown and automakers across segments have reported improved performance in June compared to May. **AGENCIES**

## 'Diagnostics' outlook favourable for growth

**THE INDUSTRY IS FRAGMENTED, AND WHILE UNORGANISED PLAYERS MAKE UP FOR MAJORITY OF THE PIE, THE ORGANISED SECTOR IS CONTINUOUSLY RAISING ITS SHARE OF THE MARKET, ESPECIALLY AFTER THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

NEW DELHI: The outlook for diagnostics industry in India is favourable for growth with rapid technological advancements in healthcare industry, and doctors increasingly relying on evidence-based treatment, Dr Lal PathLabs said.

The company, in its Annual Report for 2019-20, stated that instances and situations like the COVID-19 outbreak further boost the importance of diagnostics as an integral part of healthcare system.

"Therefore, sustainable growth in the industry is likely," Dr Lal PathLabs noted.

With emphasis on providing quality services and compliance, the organised players will benefit from such developments,



the company said.

The Indian diagnostics market, including radiology, is estimated to be around Rs 80,000 crore, and private players are estimated to constitute around Rs 45,000 crore of this market, the company said.

The diagnostics industry is fragmented, and while unorganised players make up for majority of the pie, the organised sector is continuously increasing its share of the market, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak, it added.

The unorganised sector constitutes around 48 per cent of the market, while the organised national branded and regional chains constitute around 15 per

opportunities in the western and southern geographies, Lal said.

Dr Lal PathLabs Managing Director Om Prakash Manchanda said the company has been judiciously working on enhancing its product mix, geographic mix and channel mix, which has resulted in reduced dependence on its dominant Delhi-NCR market.

"Just to share some statistics, revenue contribution from rest of India market with double-digit growth of 15 per cent in FY20. This complements our cluster city approach where we develop important pockets outside our core markets to drive volumes," he added.

The company has concurrently undertaken small-sized acquisitions in order to extend its offerings in high-potential territories and as a strategy this approach will continue, Manchanda noted.

"With a clear belief in the potential of the industry we maintain our long-term vision for growth and will resume multiple initiatives actively towards further expanding operations as the situation allows," he added. **AGENCIES**

# Affordable housing demand may be back to normal by Dec-Jan

NEW DELHI: Aadhar Housing Finance is hopeful of the affordable housing market getting back to normal levels by January 2021 as demand is reviving for small-ticket loans, the company's top executive said.

The firm, which caters to the home financing needs of the low-income segment, did very well during the last fiscal except for March-end due to the coronavirus lockdown, its Managing Director and CEO Deo Shankar Tripathi said. "We had a profit growth of 17 per cent after providing hugely for COVID... and

provisions for builder loan. Precisely Rs 90 crore provision was made after the profit. The idea behind making this additional provision is to insulate the company against any contingency which may arise this fiscal," Tripathi told PTI in an interview.

The housing finance company posted a net profit of Rs 189.38 crore in FY20, up 16.6 per cent from Rs 162.37 crore in the previous fiscal year.

The overall growth was fine for 2019-20 except for the last 10 days, he said, referring to the nation-wide lockdown imposed to curb the spread of



coronavirus infections.

The lockdown restrictions have been gradually eased

since June, aiding economic recovery. "Economy is just now showing the improvement. In

**"Economy is just now showing the improvement. In housing finance sector, 40 per cent of the pre-COVID level has come back and I expect that if further lockdown is not brought up and situation continues... then by December we can reach the pre-COVID level"**

housing finance sector, 40 per cent of the pre-COVID level has come back and I expect that if further lockdown is not brought up and situation continues... then by December we can reach the pre-COVID

level," Tripathi said. By October, the sector can see revival by 65-70 per cent, he said. "After that, by December-January, we will see (demand) going back to the pre-COVID level. That is what I feel, but

the caveat is that there should not be any further lockdown or harsh measures because of the coronavirus spread," he added. Even as demand is coming back in the affordable and low-cost housing sector, the major challenge remains that the borrowers, mostly belonging to the informal and low-income segment, are still in a "survival mode", he noted.

Once they come to revival mode, then demand will definitely come back to normal, he said, adding currently loan demand is broadly coming from the self-construction housing space. **AGENCIES**

**NEWSBRIEF**

**Modification in group insurance policies**

**NEW DELHI:** Regulator Irdai on Friday permitted life insurers to modify the terms of "Group Credit Life Master Policies" of entities who have availed moratorium on repayment of loans announced by the Reserve Bank in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. The life insurers, according to the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai), are allowed to "suitably modify the term and sum assured under the schemes, against the additional premium as may be required, so that they may continue to be covered as per the revised loan repayment schedule." This facility, however, will be available to only those entities which have opted for moratorium in terms of RBI's announcement with regard to repayment of loans.

**AGENCIES**

**Bank of Maharashtra sanctions Rs 2,779 cr**

**MUMBAI:** State-owned Bank of Maharashtra on Wednesday said it has sanctioned Rs 2,779 crore to its micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) under various schemes since March. Of this, the lender has sanctioned Rs 2,327 crore to MSME players, according to a release. The loans to MSMEs were offered majorly under the government's Rs 3-lakh crore Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) and the lender's emergency credit line for COVID-19. Since the declaration of lockdown, the bank has sanctioned additional loans to its customers, including MSMEs, agriculture and personal borrowers, over their regular limits, to overcome their liquidity mismatches.

**AGENCIES**

**Union Bank reduces MCLR by 20 bps**

**MUMBAI:** State-owned Union Bank of India on Friday announced reduction in its marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR) by 20 basis points across tenors. The new rates are applicable from July 11. The revised one-year MCLR stands at 7.40 per cent as against 7.60 per cent earlier, the bank said in a release. The three-month and six-month MCLR have been cut to 7.10 per cent and 7.25 per cent, respectively. This is the thirteenth consecutive rate cut by the lender since July last year. Another public sector lender Bank of Baroda (BoB) has announced to reduce its MCLR by five basis points across tenors from July 12.

**AGENCIES**

**Rs 12 450 cr capital infusion in 3 insurers**

**NEW DELHI:** The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved capital infusion of Rs 12,450 crore in three state-owned general insurance companies to strengthen their capital base and make them more stable. The National Insurance Company, Oriental Insurance Company and United Insurance Company will get the additional capital. Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar told reporters after the cabinet meeting. "Cabinet approves capital infusion of Rs 12,450 crore for three public sector general insurance companies - Oriental Insurance Company Limited, National Insurance Company Limited and United India Insurance Company Limited (including Rs 2,500 crore infused in FY2019-20)," an official spokesperson said in a tweet.

**AGENCIES**

**Karur Vysya Bank, Bajaj Allianz Life ally**

**COIMBATORE:** Karur Vysya Bank (KVB) on Wednesday entered into a corporate agency partnership with Bajaj Allianz Life, one of India's leading life insurance companies, to offer life insurance solutions to the bank's customers. Through this partnership, the bank will provide Bajaj Allianz Life's value-packed life insurance solutions to its customers and enable them to achieve their life goals in a planned manner.

**AGENCIES**

**₹2,203 crore assets linked in Yes Bank PMLA case**

**IT INCLUDES PROPERTIES OF YES BANK CO-FOUNDER RANA KAPOOR AND OTHERS**

**NEW DELHI:** Assets worth about Rs 2,203 crore of Yes Bank co-founder Rana Kapoor and others have been attached by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under the anti-money laundering law, officials said on Thursday.

They said properties of DHFL promoter brothers Kapil and Dheeraj Wadhawan have also been attached as part of a provisional order issued by it under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Some foreign assets of Kapoor have also been frozen by the central agency, they said.

The ED has accused Kapoor, his family members and others of laundering proceeds of crime worth Rs 4,300 crore by receiving alleged kickbacks in lieu of extending big loans through their bank that later turned into non-performing assets (NPA).

Kapoor was arrested by the central probe agency in March and he is at present in judicial custody.

Yes Bank, meanwhile, will auction properties of Thapar Group's Avantha Holdings



**Kapoor was arrested by the central probe agency in March and he is at present in judicial custody.**

and Oscar Investments Ltd of Singh brothers alongside those of some individuals later this month to recover loan dues of over Rs 1,000 crore.

The sale of immovable assets will take place through e-auction on various dates in July under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

In a sale notice to the public

in general and in particular to Avantha Holdings Ltd (the borrower) and Avantha Realty (mortgager), Yes Bank said it took constructive possession of the property mortgaged to it on February 10, 2020 for recovery of Rs 548.30 crore.

"All that office premises bearing Municipal No. B-14 to B-19 on the third (3rd) floor of B-wing of Shangrila Apartment, Bund Garden

Road, Pune - 411 001, admeasuring approx. about 123.56 sq. mtrs. Built-up area, bearing Survey No. 362, Hissa No.3/A and Hissa No. 4(pt), situated at 31 Bund Garden Road, Pune under the name of Shangrila," the auction notice said describing the mortgaged assets.

The loan amount is due since October 31, 2019, along with further interest and cost due to the secured creditor (Yes Bank) from the borrower and mortgager, Yes Bank said.

Those interested can inspect the properties from July 10-23. The last date of submitting the earnest money deposit (EMD) is July 24, while the auction will take place on July 27, it said.

Separately, it said notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to Oscar Investments Ltd (borrower) and RHC Holding Pvt. Ltd (mortgager) that immovable assets mortgaged to the bank will be sold on July 20, 2020 for recovery of Rs 465.29 crore which is due as on June 29, 2020.

**AGENCIES**

**PMC Bank: Wadhawans bail rejected; offence grave, says court**

**MUMBAI:** Economic offence is committed with "cool calculations" for personal profit regardless of consequences to community and need to be viewed seriously, observed a court here while refusing bail to HDIL promoters Rakesh and Sarang Wadhawan.

The Wadhawan duo are accused in the multi-crore rupee Punjab & Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank scam case.

They had sought bail claiming no particular section of banking regulations was violated by them, contending that allegations of misdoings were against PMC officials and not them.

The prosecution opposed the plea, saying the Wadhawans and other top officials of the bank were "masterminds" and key beneficiaries of the fraud at PMC Bank, and the accused duo also commanded control over the bank.

Accepting the prosecution's arguments and perusing evidence on record, Judge SN Yadav rejected their bail on Thursday.

"A murder may be committed in the heat of moment upon passion being aroused. An economic offence is committed with cool calculation



**'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'**

and deliberate design with an eye on personal profit regardless of the consequences to the community," he observed.

He further said economic offences having deeprooted conspiracies and involving huge loss of public funds need to be viewed seriously and be considered grave offence affecting the economy of the country.

Housing Development and Infrastructure Ltd (HDIL)

promoters Rakesh Wadhawan and his son Sarang are accused, besides several others, in the Rs 4,355-crore PMC Bank scam which surfaced in September last year.

The case is being probed by Enforcement Directorate, along with Economic Offences Wing of Mumbai police. The case stems from massive loans given by PMC Bank to the now bankrupt HDIL.

**AGENCIES**

**Irdai panel to look into 'Pandemic Risk Pool'**

**NEW DELHI:** Insurance regulator Irdai on Wednesday set up a working group to examine the possibility of setting up a "Pandemic Risk Pool" to deal with the risks associated with disruption in economic activity following an outbreak of coronavirus-like health emergencies.



which started as a public health emergency, has led to significant disruption in economic activity mainly due to the measures taken by the government to limit the spread of the disease. The government had to impose a lockdown to check spread of the virus. It also provided huge fiscal packages to support the economy.

The pandemic has affected not only health but all sectors of the economy including manufacturing, aviation, tourism, transportation, construction, services, and agriculture, the regulator said.

"Some of the risks like business interruption losses

without concurrent material damage loss; loss of employment would result in huge losses much beyond the capacity of government/insurers/reinsurers," Irdai said while announcing its decision to set up a working group on "Pandemic Risk Pool".

The regulator has taken several steps, including asking insurers to come out with specific policies for COVID-19, to provide relief to policyholders. The nationwide lockdown imposed on March 25 has since been relaxed and economic activities have started picking up.

As per the terms of reference given to the working group, it will study the need for setting up "Pandemic Risk Pool" giving rationale for the same, recommend the structure and operating model for the pool and examine any other matter relevant to the matter. The working group shall submit its report within eight weeks, Irdai added.

**AGENCIES**

**Firm, directors booked for cheating SBI**

**NEW DELHI:** The CBI has booked Chennai-based Thangam Steels Ltd and its promoter directors for allegedly cheating the State Bank of India to the tune of over Rs 88 crore, officials said on Monday.

Besides the 30-year old company manufacturing ingots, the CBI has also named in the FIR its directors P S Krishnamurthy, P K Vadiambal and P K Srinivasan for alleged criminal conspiracy, cheating and forgery among other charges for the alleged fraud between 2008-13 on a complaint from SBI, they said. It is alleged that Thangam Steel was acquired by PSK group in 2007, they said. Besides manufacturing ingots at its plant near Chennai, it also traded in steel products of manufacturers like Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd, Steel Authority of India Ltd, JSW, Essar Steels and other producers, the FIR said.

Due to continued irregularity, the account turned into a Non-Performing Asset (NPA) on May 30, 2013 with an outstanding of Rs 93.31



**'The closing stock, as per the balance sheet submitted to the bank, was short by Rs 9.35 cr than the balance sheet registered with ROC, which implies manipulation of balance sheet by the company to defraud the bank'**

crore, the FIR alleged. SBI had sanctioned fund based and non fund based limits of Rs 109 crore to the directors of the company who also executed guarantee agreement in favour of the bank guaranteeing prompt repayment of the loan. It is alleged that the accounts became NPA due to diversion and siphoning off

funds, manipulation in the books of accounts resulting in a loss to the tune of Rs 88.27 crore to the bank.

The bank did an investigation on the fraud between 2008-13 which shows that the company valued the stocks at cost price only and did not follow the bank's laid down instructions. These statements itself ad-

mitting fudging of balances, circular trading involving their associates and outside firms to book higher sales turnover to enjoy higher credit limits and incorrect stock valuation, the fraud report alleged.

"It is observed that the Company was maintaining an account with UBI (without SBI knowledge/permission) with cheque collection and discounting facility and routed Rs 116.21 crore during 2009 to 2013 which implies diversion of funds. Company had resorted to large scale diversion of funds," the report alleged. It was also found in the SBI probe that the balance sheet submitted by the company was different from the one filed with Registrar of Companies (ROC) and both the balance sheets were audited by different audit firms.

"The closing stock as per the balance sheet submitted to the bank was short by Rs 9.35 cr than the balance sheet registered with ROC which implies manipulation of balance sheet by the company to defraud the bank," it said.

**AGENCIES**

**'Arogya Sanjeevani Policy' norms modified**

**NEW DELHI:** Regulator Irdai on Tuesday modified the norms of "Arogya Sanjeevani Policy" by allowing health insurers to offer minimum sum insured of less than Rs 1 lakh and maximum of greater than Rs 5 lakh.

As per the guidelines on "Standard Individual Health Insurance Product", general and health insurers were allowed to offer sum insured options ranging from minimum Rs 1 lakh to maximum of Rs 5 lakh (in the multiples of Rs 50,000) for Arogya San-



jeevani Policy. The norms have been modified to facilitate the general public, the Insurance Regulatory and Development

Authority of India (Irdai) said in a circular.

"...insurers are hereby allowed to offer minimum sum

insured less than Rs 1 lakh and maximum sum insured greater than Rs 5 lakh subject to the underwriting policy of the insurers. The sum insured options shall be offered in the multiples of Rs 50,000 only," it said.

Irdai further said insurers can launch the modified policy with immediate effect.

The popular Arogya Sanjeevani Policy covers hospitalisation, pre- and post-hospitalisation, AYUSH treatment, and cataract treatment.

**No plan to merge CBDT, CBIC: Ministry**

**NEW DELHI:** The government is not considering any proposal to merge the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), the Finance Ministry said on Monday.

The said merger was one of the recommendations of the Tax Administration Reforms Commission (TARC), headed by Parthasarathi Shome, which submitted its report in 2016.

Reacting to a media report which suggested that a merger of policy making bodies of direct and indirect taxes - CBDT and

CBIC - is on cards, the ministry in a statement said, "The government has no proposal to merge the two Boards created under the Central Boards of Revenue Act, 1963." The ministry said that the report of TARC was examined in detail by the government and this recommendation of TARC was not accepted by the government.

"As a part on an assurance made by the government in Parliament in response to a Parliamentary question, the government has also placed this fact in 2018 before the Committee

on Government Assurances. The action taken report on the recommendations of the TARC is placed even on the website of Department of Revenue, which clearly shows that this recommendation was not accepted," it added. The Tax Administration Reforms Commission (TARC) was constituted with a view to review the application of tax Policies and Laws in context of global best practices and recommend measure for reforms required in Tax Administration to enhance its effectiveness and efficiency.

**AGENCIES**

**Bankers say borrowers opting out of loan moratorium**

**ONLY 30% OF BORROWERS UTILISED MORATORIUM FACILITY WHILE 70% CONTINUED TO SERVICE THEIR LOANS**

**NEW DELHI:** The government imposed the lockdown on March 25 to contain coronavirus infection and later extended it till May-end. The country started reopening the economy under unlock 1.0 from June with restrictions remaining in containment zones.

With improvement in cash flow owing to unlock process, some borrowers are opting out of the moratorium on EMI payments offered by banks to deal with income disruption caused due to outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. The Reserve Bank in March first announced a three-month loan moratorium facility which was further extended by another three months till August. The government imposed the lockdown on March 25 to contain coronavirus infection and later extended it till May-end. The country started reopening the economy under unlock 1.0 from June with restrictions remaining in containment zones.

According to Punjab Nation-



al Bank Managing Director S S Mallikarjuna Rao, only 30 per cent of borrowers utilised moratorium facility while 70 per cent continued to service their loans. The bank had given the option of availing the option of loan moratorium to all its customers, he had said last month. Some of the customers who had exercised the moratorium option are now coming back and have requested the bank to opt out of this, a senior official of a public sector bank said. This phenomenon was witnessed towards the second half of the

last month when some clients got some idea about the cash flow, the official added. Micro borrowers with cash flow are gradually coming forward and opting out of moratorium. "Broadly the moratorium is till August but slowly some of the customers are coming back and paying their installments," Suryoday Small Finance Bank managing director R Baskar Babu told PTI.

For example, he said, 80 per cent of home loan customers are not exercising moratorium. He said 54 per cent of its

customers had availed moratorium, he said, adding the number is expected to come down this month because confidence is coming back. Experts and banks have been advising borrowers against availing the moratorium facility due to the likely extended payouts and higher interest burden.

Explaining the financial burden with the help of an example, SBI had said for a home loan of Rs 30 lakh with a remaining maturity of 15 years, the net additional interest would be approx Rs 2.34 lakh equal to eight EMIs for those borrowers who opt for the moratorium.

For an auto loan of Rs 6 lakh with a remaining maturity of 54 months the additional interest payable would be Rs 19,000 approx equal to additional 1.5 EMIs, it had said. According to the frequently asked questions (FAQ) of Indian Banks' Association (IBA), borrowers whose incomes have not been impacted should pay their

EMIs in time.

"You may take the benefits under this (RBI) package if there is a disruption in your cash flows or there is loss of income. However, you must take into account that the interest on the loans, though not mandatorily payable immediately and gets postponed by three months, continues to accrue on your account and results in higher cost," IBA, an association of banks, said.

To give you a perspective, it said, "suppose your loan outstanding is Rs 1,00,000 and you are charged 12 per cent rate of interest on your loan, then every month you are liable to pay Rs 1,000 as interest. In case you opt not to service the interest every month, you are liable to pay interest at 12 per cent per annum, and accordingly you will pay Rs 3,030.10 at the end of 3rd month". Similarly, in case the interest rate is 10 per cent, you are required to pay Rs 833 per month, or Rs 2,521 after three months, it had said.

**AGENCIES**

# An inclusive criminal law reforms needed

The formation of a 'Committee for the Reform of Criminal Laws' by the Union Home Ministry with an apparently short time frame and limited scope for public consultation is bothering jurists, lawyers and those concerned with the state of criminal justice in the country. Few would disagree with the idea that the current laws governing crime, investigation and trial require meaningful reform. There have been several attempts in recent decades to overhaul the body of criminal law, comprising the Indian Penal Code of 1860 vintage, the Code of Criminal Procedure that was rewritten in 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act that dates back to 1872. However, comprehensive legal reform is something that requires careful consideration and a good deal of deliberation. One criticism against the latest Committee is that it has begun its work in the midst of a pandemic. This may not be the ideal time for wide consultations. Activists and lawyers functioning in the hinterland may be at a particular disadvantage in formulating their opinions. The panel's mandate appears quite broad: "to recommend reforms in the criminal laws of the country in a principled, effective, and efficient manner which ensures the safety and security of the individual, the community and the nation; and which prioritises the constitutional values of justice, dignity and the inherent worth of the individual." This is vague and open to multiple interpretations. It is also not clear why the Law Commission has not been vested with this task. If at all criminal law is to be reformed, there should be a genuine attempt to reach a wide consensus on ways to speed up trials, protect witnesses, address the travails of victims, improve investigative mechanisms and, most importantly, eliminate torture. The Centre must understand that reforms are best achieved through inclusive approach.

## FIVE OBSERVATIONS

ON THE CBSE'S DECISION TO RATIONALISE SYLLABUS

- 1 NEW SITUATION INVITES NEW RULES**  
Directed by the Union ministry of human resource development (HRD), this move is on account of the Covid-19-induced lockdown that forced schools to shut and shift classes online.
- 2 QUALITY EDUCATION IS THE GOAL**  
CBSE's move will lift a burden off the shoulders of students and teachers in the immediate term, allowing them to pay more attention on the quality of learning, rather than the quantum of course work.
- 3 OTHER BOARDS MUST FOLLOW SUIT**  
It will also ease the strain on teachers who have been scrambling to ensure course completion, exam schedules and virtual class attendance. Other boards must follow suit and reduce the syllabus too.
- 4 MISSING TOPICS MUST BE COVERED**  
Removing topics such as democratic rights, gender, federalism, citizenship, religion, nationalism and secularism from the curriculum shall not stop students from reading about them at personal level.
- 5 A CONDENSED VERSION NEEDED**  
For future, the government should prepare a condensed version of critical themes to ensure that students pick up the basics, without getting overburdened. And all key topics are covered.

### LETTERBOX

Readers' feedback adds value to the newspaper. Please email comments on reports, features and columns to fwletters@gmail.com. We will publish them on this page.

## THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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HAMID ANSARI BELIEVES THE PLAN TO RATIONALISE THE SYLLABUS WILL HELP IN MAKING GOOD CITIZENS

# Nurturing citizens in social studies

The list of jettisoned subjects is comprehensive; the apprehension that it is purposeful is unavoidable; the conclusion that a 'happening' has been converted into a 'penalty goal' is inescapable. These thoughts cross the mind while reading about the decision of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to exclude certain subjects from the list of topics of study in the social science curriculum for Classes 9 to 12 with the objective of reducing by 30% the "load" while retaining "core concepts". The stated rationale of the move is the disruption caused by COVID-19 to the academic year. The exercise covers other subjects too, but the focus of this analysis is on the social sciences only for reasons that will become evident in this essay.

The argument for disruption and the resultant load is self-evident and valid. The phenomenon is universal and applies to all stages of education and to all lands across the globe. Not all have reacted the same way and pedagogues would argue that there could be more than one method of lightening the academic load that in any case predates the pandemic. Democratic societies the world over have developed methodologies of nurturing young citizens in essential values and procedures and none have so far abandoned them on account of the pandemic. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on its website indicates nine salient features of the senior secondary school curriculum for Classes 11 and 12 for the years 2020-2021. It mentions that the curriculum strives to "provide ample scope for physical, intellectual and social development of students". The curriculum also strives to "uphold Constitutional values such as Socialism, Secularism, Democracy, Republican character, Justice, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Human Dignity of Individual and Unity and integrity of the Nation by encouraging value-based learning activities." With some abridgements, therefore, the features reiterate the values mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution of India. Item 4 of the salient features says the curriculum strives to "nurture Life-Skills by prescribing curricular and co-curricular activities to help improve self-esteem, empathy towards different cultures etc." There is, however, no mention of Fundamental Duties (Article 51A of the Constitution); of the duty "to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture" and of the duty "to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of enquiry and reform". The wording here is curious. Are "different cultures" synonymous with our "composite culture"? Is it



an admission that ours is a land of "different cultures"? It would be argued in defence of abridgements that the CBSE curriculum for Classes 9 and 10 has identical wording for items 3 and 4 and that the themes are therefore covered at an earlier stage of school education. This is to presume that levels of student comprehension between Classes 9 and 11 or 10 and 12 remain static and do not need upgradation either in teaching or in understanding. Our system of democratic governance is based on the Constitution that prescribes universal adult suffrage with the voting age now being 18, after the 61st Amendment of 1988. It was then argued formally in Parliament that "the present-day youth are literate and enlightened and the lowering of the voting age would provide to the unrepresented youth of the country an opportunity to give vent to their feelings and help them become a part of the political process. The present-day youth are very much politically conscious. It is, therefore, proposed to reduce the voting age from 21 years to 18 years." In other words, and since the general average school-leaving age after Class 12 is 16-17 years, this objective of being "politically conscious" is to be attained suddenly at the age of 17 and without the benefit of formal instruction on fundamental principles of our polity. And if this formal instruction on the principles of the Constitution is not available to the young person at that age, she or he has no option but to resort to informal knowledge acquired through hearsay and media or social media with all the tilt or prejudice of demagoguery and propaganda that go with it. Would the young person exercising franchise for the first time then be an informed voter?

In this context, it is useful to examine the relevant portions of the Draft National Education Policy 2019 with a Message from the Minister of Human Resource Development. It has on page 96 a section on 'Development of Constitutional Values'. It states that "the process and the content of education at all levels will also aim to develop Constitutional values in all students, and the capacities for their practice... Some of these Constitutional values are: democratic outlook and commitment to liberty and freedom; equality, justice, and fairness; embracing diversity, plurality, and inclusion; humanness and fraternal spirit; social responsibility and the spirit of service; ethics of integrity and honesty; scientific temper and commitment to rational and public dialogue; peace; social action through Constitutional means; unity and integrity of the nation, and a true rootedness and pride in India with a forward-looking spirit to continuously improve as a nation." The same document, on page 231, reiterates the objective of developing "an understanding of our Constitutional values, and the disposition and capacities for their practice, amongst all their students." The other objectives mentioned in this section are diversity, plurality humanness, fraternal spirit, scientific temper and commitment to rational dialogue.

Will these virtues and constitutional values and capacities for their practice be developed without formal instruction? Would this necessarily be the best training for citizenship? Could the objective be to lessen the instruction in constitutional values and their impact on perceptions and practices of the next generation?

The BJP's Sankalp Patra for the 2019 general election mentions in several places the objective of good governance and of putting in place for it "a framework of governance which will yield rich dividends over the next generation". This focus on the next generation requires good citizens who in turn need to be educated in good governance. This is precisely what the objective of the jettisoned items of the curriculum was intended to be. The proposed move of load-shedding goes counter to this and strikes at the target of training good citizens and teaching them civility. Would a sceptic be justified in suspecting that the objective may be to have a less literate young voter?

Hamid Ansari is the former Vice-President of India, 2007-2017



SHAIKH MUJIBUR REHMAN SAYS NO SINGLE EVENT OR COMMUNITY CAN BE BLAMED FOR THE VIRUS SPREAD

# Covid-19 doesn't care about religion

India has the third highest number of Covid-19 cases in the world. Since the first reported case in Kerala on January 30, the virus has spread to every State in the country. While cities such as Mumbai and Chennai are continuing to bear the brunt of the cases, Covid-19 cases are also rapidly rising in Tier-II and Tier-III districts. Given this, no single person, event or community can be blamed for the spread of the virus.

Though leaders such as the Chief Ministers of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra appealed to the people not to communalise the virus or blame any religion for it, in the initial days of its spread there was a sustained campaign against Muslims, especially on social media, following the Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi in March. The Jamaat congregation emerged as India's first largest hotspot. This is not to suggest that the Tablighi Jamaat and its organisers were not at fault. But failures at multiple levels, including at the level of the government and the police, were ignored and only the Markaz's decision to hold the gathering, also a major failure, became the focus.

The intensity of that communal campaign, though deeply disturbing, was not entirely surprising, especially given the rise of the Hindu Right and its electoral dominance. It is a fact that many Muslim leaders and organisations unequivocally condemned the Jamaat episode. Many from the community, including well-known industrialists, donated money to the government to tackle the unprecedented health crisis caused by the pandemic. Sadly, while



the good deeds of Muslims are seen as exceptions or are ignored, a mistake or fault of any Muslim invariably leads to a backlash against the entire community. Why is this the case?

This is partly because of the rising communal polarisation in India since the late 1980s. Furthermore, the propaganda machinery of organisations of the Hindu Right has become more efficient and sophisticated in recent years. Prejudices against the community are so deeply ingrained that no amount of reasoning can

help differentiate fact from myth. Just as Jews were the targets in Europe in the 1930s, Muslims are the favourite targets of bigots in India today. We saw how the Delhi riots of 2020 and the preceding anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) protests were handled by the state. We heard the statement, "Those indulging in arson can be identified by their clothes". From the lynching of Muslims by 'cow-protection' vigilantes to the anti-CAA protests, a climate has been created which has caused a massive trust deficit

between some sections of Muslims and the Indian state, particularly the police. This was seen, for instance, when some Tablighi Jamaat members wrongly refused to cooperate with the state after the congregation. Consequently, a completely well-intentioned request by the state that they should identify themselves so that they can be quarantined was understood as a hidden agenda.

While the government came out with an advisory stating that the pandemic should not be linked to any religion, it would have been more useful if this advisory was more specific in its citation of Muslims and the Markaz. Muslims have been victims of the virus as much as people of other religions.

Muslims comprise not only India's largest religious minority but also one of the poorest in the modern world. They remain educationally backward. The Indian state, both in its secular and nationalist avatar, has played its part in perpetuating this backwardness. The community has produced some fine talent in different walks of life, whether in sports, music, art, cinema, or governance, from Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam to M.F. Husain, Bismillah Khan and Sania Mirza. Those who participated in the Tablighi Jamaat event are also part of the community, but they are not the only representatives of Islam. Today, as cases continue to rise in India, it is crucial to be objective and reasonable before we single out Muslims for the challenges we face.

Shaikh Mujibur Rehman teaches at Jamia Millia Central University, New Delhi. Views expressed are his own

## BOOKS: REVIEW

VISHNU MAKHIJANI

# Former RBI chief pens book on dealing with NPA issue

Urjit Patel, whose stint as the head of the central bank was one of the most tumultuous in recent times that ended with the rare event of an RBI Governor resigning, will be releasing a book later this month, his publishers have said.

Titled 'Overdraft: Saving the Indian Saver', the book focuses on the non-performing assets (NPAs) issue that has afflicted Indian banking in recent years, its causes and Patel's efforts as the RBI Governor in dealing with it. "Urjit Patel invests his thirty years of macroeconomic experience in building strategies to protect our banks from unscrupulous racketeers, ultimately aimed at saving our savings..." publisher HarperCollins India tweeted.

sovereigns do not need to earn or save before spending money. They can either print or borrow.

"in our country, where they own banks, they can use our deposits to lend and splurge for goals that may not always be economic in nature. Many rulers have succumbed to the temptation, with dire results - inflation, debased currency, payments crises, bankrupt banks, economic stagnation, loss of public confidence.

"After centuries of ruinous experiences, some governments learnt, others haven't, to control themselves, create self-governing Central banks and let them manage money and regulate banks," it says. The issue of unsustainable bad debts started as a trickle in 2015 and then became a "flood", it said. "In the forefront were some of India's largest government banks,

After centuries of ruinous experiences, some governments learnt, others haven't, to control themselves, create self-governing Central banks and let them manage money and regulate banks

and a series of tycoons who were running their empires on unpaid debts." Patel worked with a '9R' strategy which would protect depositors' savings, rescue the banks and protect them from "unscrupulous racketeers", it says. Books or memoirs written by two of his immediate predecessors --



Overdraft: Saving the Indian Saver By Urjit Patel HarperCollins 248 pages; Rs499

Raghuram Rajan and D Subbarao -- had shed light on various subjects like the RBI's autonomy, interest rates or its stance on demonetisation. Patel, under whose governorship the note ban was carried out, surprised all by resigning from the RBI in December 2018.

The resignation came at a time when relations between the government and the RBI had soured, with the former threatening to invoke a never-before used clause to give directions to the central bank.

The RBI under Patel was reportedly averse to the government's wishes on getting extra capital held by the central bank, restructuring loans to small businesses and

providing liquidity support to the troubled non-bank lenders.

Patel's resignation was followed by a long period of absence from public gaze. However last month, in a surprise move, he was appointed as the chairman of the Ministry of Finance-run think-tank NIPFP.

Deputy governor Viral Acharya, who gave a strong speech asserting RBI's autonomy and warned the government of the "wrath of markets", also quit ahead of the completion of his term.

Patel was seen as very strict on the issue of NPAs and governance at banks, especially the private sector ones, where the RBI replaced the heads of ICICI Bank and Axis Bank, and started probing Yes Bank more closely.

The RBI had begun a thorough asset quality review (AQR) to find out the hidden stress on banks' books when Patel was a deputy governor and he carried forward the same work.

Patel's book will be released by the end of July, as per a book selling website.

NEWSBRIEF

**Street vendors can't resume business: Maha**  
**MUMBAI:** The Maharashtra government on Tuesday told the Bombay High Court that at present it does not have any intention of allowing street vendors to resume their business in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni told a division bench of Justices A A Seyed and M S Karnik that the state government does not have a policy for street vendors and it is also not contemplating framing any as of now. **AGENCIES**

**4.27 crore e-way bills generated in June**  
**NEW DELHI:** The Indian economy is gathering pace with the movement of goods rebounding close to pre-lockdown levels and GST collections rising sharply. GSTN said an average of 14.26 lakh e-way bills, which are required for transportation of goods valued at over ₹50,000, were generated each day in the month of June, which is 77 per cent of the average number of bills generated per day in the pre-lockdown phase. GST Network said on Sunday. **AGENCIES**

**Two rounds of hikes likely in telecom tariffs**  
**NEW DELHI:** Tariff hike in the telecom sector is "inevitable" as the current structure does not allow reasonable returns for operators, although a lot would depend on the timing given the "unprecedented" scale of the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant affordability crisis, according to EY. Acknowledging that an immediate tariff increase may not be feasible in the current setting, Prashant Singh, emerging markets Technology, Media & Entertainment and Telecommunications (TMT) Leader at EY said two rounds of tariff hikes can be expected in the next 12-18 months, including one in the next six months. **AGENCIES**

**UP govt approves start-up policy**  
**LUCKNOW:** The Yogi Adityanath cabinet Wednesday gave its approval to the Uttar Pradesh Startup Policy 2020, an official release issued here said. There was no comprehensive startup policy in the state and for encouraging a startup culture and building a strong startup ecosystem, an independent and comprehensive policy was required, the release said. **AGENCIES**

Economy on way to normalcy: RBI

BUILDING BUFFERS AND RAISING CAPITAL CRUCIAL TO ENSURE CREDIT FLOWS



**MUMBAI:** The Indian economy has started showing signs of normalcy with ease in lockdown restrictions across the country, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Saturday. He added that post containment of COVID-19, a very careful trajectory has to be followed in orderly unwinding of countercyclical regulatory measures. The financial sector should return to normal functioning without relying on regulatory relaxation as the new norm, he added. "Indian economy has started showing signs of going back to normalcy after easing of restrictions," Governor Das said at the 7th SBI Banking and Economics Conclave. While the multi-pronged approach of the Reserve Bank has provided a cushion from the immediate impact of the pandemic on banks, the medium-term outlook is uncertain and depends on the COVID-19 curve, he said. "Policy action in medium-

'COVID-19 has caused gigantic disruption of the Indian economy along with dislocation of the supply chain. April was the worst month. Things had slightly improved in May, while the recovery started from June'

term would require a careful assessment of how the crisis unfolds," he said, adding that building buffers and raising capital will be crucial not only to ensure credit flows but also to build resilience in the financial system. The country's banking and financial system is capable of rising to the occasion in meeting this challenge, he

located the supply chain," he added. Asked whether the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will extend the moratorium on loan repayments till end of the year, the SBI chief said there is "no need for extending it across the board beyond August 31, 2020". "Some sectors have been severely affected. I expect the RBI to take a calibrated approach on the issue," Kumar said. He said the banks had been able to absorb the shock due to the moratorium offered to the borrowers in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. He said the SBI data showed that there is a rise in NPAs due to the coronavirus crisis but it can be "manageable". People have been cautious about increasing their liabilities by opting for the moratorium, especially in the retail, agriculture and MSME sectors, he said. "The corporate houses have opted for the moratorium. The intent is to preserve cash. It is not that they were unable to pay," Kumar said. He said the most-affected sectors are aviation, hotel and tourism which need help. **AGENCIES**

economic growth may result in higher non-performing assets and capital erosion of the banks, Das cautioned. A recapitalisation plan for public and private sector banks has therefore become absolutely necessary, he said. Separately, State Bank of India's Chairman Rajnish Kumar said the country's economy, which witnessed a disruption due to the coronavirus outbreak, has started recovering from June. Speaking at the SBI Banking and Economics Conclave, Kumar said there is a need to wait for three to four months to see the trend of the recovery. "COVID-19 has caused gigantic disruption of the Indian economy along with dislocation of the supply chain. April was the worst month. Things had slightly improved in May, while the recovery started from June," Kumar said at the webinar. The industrially advanced states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu were the worst affected due to the pandemic, he said. "The partial lockdown announced intermittently across the country is also dis-

Overall recovery in economy may take 2-3 years: Munjal



**MUMBAI:** Pitching for more fiscal support to revive the economy, Hero Enterprises Chairman Sunil Kant Munjal on Friday said the overall recovery in the economy may take 2-3 years even as some sectors could see a quicker recovery. "The overall recovery in the economy will take between 2-3 years. But, we will see sectors come up very quickly. Some important sectors with large multiplier and large potential for employment, which are still struggling, and without support, they will actually not be able to fully recover in this time," Munjal said.

"We have seen it in motorcycle and bicycle segments, they have in fact upped their target twice within a month. We have seen it across different sectors"

He was speaking at a SBI-hosted virtual banking and economy conclave on the "impact of COVID-19 on business and economy". There is a need for "intervention", some of it as structural and longer-term permanent requirement for the overall system and some for the present times, he said adding that "the government needs to be prepared not just to provide monetary support but at least two more doses of fiscal support, sectorally and may be even at some point of time picking individual entities (as well)". Munjal said the road to recovery is going to be "rocky" and uneven because there will be sectors that will not recover. "That is one negative thing which is worrisome. Some companies will shut

shops and will not even know why they did so and will not be able to recover and a large number of these companies will be small and medium-sized companies," he said. Munjal said some businesses will have a quick recovery partially because of the base effect and partially because of pent-up demand. "We have seen it in motorcycle and bicycle segments, they have in fact upped their target twice within a month. We have seen it across different sectors," he added. Stating that the demand hit and job losses are real, Munjal said the prospect of job losses is "quite scary", and can reach upwards of 20 per cent. "I am not sure we have done enough thinking about the social fallout of that. This is something that we never experienced in our living memory. Small- and mid-sized companies are scared to bring people back. The motto is survival now, recovery sometime away, and then we will thrive," Munjal said. **AGENCIES**

Auction process of coal blocks starts

**NEW DELHI:** The auction process of commercial coal mining witnessed a "very good start" and the response has been the best in domestic coal history, Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi said. A total of 1,140 entities, including international players, participated in the technical session after the launch of sale of blocks, and 26 companies bought tender documents and 10 firms - domestic and foreign - evinced interest in the visit of mines, he added.



Within eight days of the launch of the auction process, there were 329 registrations and 26 tender documents were sold for Rs 5 lakh each, the minister said. Around 10 companies, including the foreign players, have shown interest to visit mines put on sale, he noted. "Within a week" time this is the best in the coal history of India. I am quite confident that in another coming 20-30 days further there will be improvement in this. According to me this is the best response. It is very good start," the minister said. Of the 41 blocks being put for auction for commercial mining, the Centre is withdrawing one mine of Bander

in Maharashtra as it falls under eco-sensitive zone. The Centre is also considering the Chhattisgarh government's request to replace four coal blocks marked for auction for commercial mining. The Jharkhand government has moved the Supreme Court challenging the Centre's ambitious project launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 18 for virtual auction of coal blocks for commercial mining. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led government in its plea sought a direction to the Coal Ministry to postpone the proposed commercial auction of mines. **AGENCIES**

FM asks CPSEs to speed up capex to spur growth

**NEW DELHI:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday held a meeting with CMDs of 23 CPSEs and asked them to speed up their capital expenditure (capex) plans to boost economic growth. The combined capex target of these 23 Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) for the year 2020-21 is Rs 1,65,510 crore. The meeting was held through video conferencing with secretaries of Ministries of Petroleum, Power, Coal, Mines, and Department of Atomic Energy, and CMDs of 23 CPSEs under the ministries.



In FY 2019-20, the actual spending by the 23 CPSEs stood at Rs 1,66,029 crore against the capex target of Rs 1,64,822 crore. CPSEs have a very important role in giving a push to the growth of the Indian economy, the finance minister said. She encouraged CPSEs to perform better to achieve targets and to ensure that the capital outlay provided to them for the year 2020-21 is spent properly and within time. The finance minister said better performance by CPSEs can help the economy in a big way to recover from the impact of COVID-19, the statement added. **AGENCIES**

"The Finance Minister asked the secretaries to closely monitor the performance of CPSEs in order to ensure capital expenditure to the tune of 50 per cent of capital outlay by Q2 2020-21 and make plan for it. She stated that unresolved issues should be flagged immediately to the DEA/DPE for immediate solution," the finance ministry said in a statement.

Eco package, opening up of economy start showing results: Survey

**NEW DELHI:** The opening up of India's economy post lockdown and implementation of the economic package unveiled by the government have started showing results on the ground with initial signs of improvement in the performance of businesses now visible, says a survey. The Ficci-Dhruva Advisors industry survey was conducted in June 2020 and saw participation of over 100 top corporate executives (CxOs) from across sectors. "While the green shoots of recovery are being seen, it is important to emphasise that sustaining this improvement in the operational parameters of businesses will require continuous support

from the government. "The support is particularly needed in the realm of strengthening market demand in the absence of which this initial recovery may fizzle out," Ficci emphasised. The results of the survey show that presently close to 30 per cent of the firms are operating at 70 per cent plus capacity utilisation, while nearly 45 per cent expect capacity utilisation to be above 70 per cent in the near term. In terms of the challenges that firms foresee they will continue to face even during the unlocking phase, managing costs, weak demand and financial liquidity remain the top three items with 60 per cent, 59 per cent and 57 per

cent reporting the same. "Some of the survey respondents have also alluded to the second wave of COVID-19 as a challenge they foresee that could affect businesses going ahead. A sudden stop on the imports from China, given the most recent developments, also figured in the feedback received as part of the survey on challenges that could impact businesses," said Ficci on the survey. On the jobs front, nearly 32 per cent of the firms have reported that they see a job loss of over 10 per cent from their company's perspective. In April edition of this survey, this figure was close to 40 per cent. **AGENCIES**

Indian economy needs additional reforms: Expert

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian economy needs major reforms in areas like land, labour and banking, in addition to the measures already undertaken like the GST and bankruptcy law, KKR Global Institute chief David Petraeus said on Friday. "I think there is...really a need for additional reforms in addition to the GST, bankruptcy law, banking for the unbanked. "Other reforms that have been made and have been impressive and did propel India's growth for a number of years until the gradual slowdown after a year or two prior to the pandemic," he said during a virtual session of the In-

dia Global Week 2020. Petraeus, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), added there is also a question of how India can implement some of its reforms like GST effectively. "But then what about these other areas -- we are talking about labour and land reforms. And then again, the bad bank (loan) problem is not a trivial issue," he said. "India has to figure out what to do about these structures that are essentially where various degrees of insolvency separates the bad banks from the good banks. It needs to take another variety of measures in the financial arena," he added.



If India can do all of that, given the demographics, market size, advantages and skills, it can pull itself forward very impressively, he emphasised.

The IMF on June 24 projected a sharp contraction of 4.5 per cent for the Indian economy in 2020, a "historic low", citing the unprecedented coronavirus

pandemic, but said the country is expected to bounce back in 2021 with a robust 6 per cent growth rate. Meanwhile, a top IMF official on Friday said there is room for more fiscal support in India in the near term, particularly for vulnerable households and small and medium enterprises, given the severity of the country's economic situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Vitor Gaspar, Director of the International Monetary Fund's Fiscal Affairs Department, told PTI that a complete and successful implementation of the existing support measures (in particular, food provision to households) is of paramount importance. **AGENCIES**

Oilseeds export likely to cross Rs 10,000 crore this fiscal

**SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN ACREAGE WILL HELP IN BOOSTING PRODUCTION THIS YEAR AND THIS MEANS WE WILL BE ABLE TO EXPORT MORE. WE ARE EXPECTING TO CROSS RS 10,000 CRORE IN 2020-21 AS AGAINST RS 9,497 CRORE IN 2019-20**

**NEW DELHI:** India's oilseed exports may rise to over Rs 10,000 crore in the current financial year as increase in sown area will boost production, exporters body IOPEPC said on Wednesday. The main oilseeds exported by the country are soyabean, groundnut, sesame, castor, niger, and sunflower. Indian Oilseeds and Produce Export Promotion Council (IOPEPC) Chairman Khushwant Jain said as of July 2, planting of total oil seeds in the country has significantly increased to 109.225 lakh hectares as compared with 33.656 lakh hectares by the same period

a year ago. Soyabean and groundnut occupy 61 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively of the total kharif oilseeds area, he said adding the planting of sunflower stands at 19.7 per cent and sesame at 12.4 per cent. He said Madhya Pradesh alone has one-third (34.64 per cent) of the national oilseeds area followed by Maharashtra (22 per cent), Gujarat (13.53 per cent) Rajasthan (11.43 per cent), Karnataka (5.04 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (5.02), Uttar Pradesh (2.66 per cent), Telangana (1.74 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (1.21 per cent). "Significant increase in



acreage will help in boosting production this year and this

means we will be able to export more. We are expecting to

**'The farmers could take up early sowing of soyabean in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and that of groundnut in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra'**

cross Rs 10,000 crore in 2020-21 as against Rs 9,497 crore in 2019-20," Jain told PTI. He added that the pandemic has impacted the exports in April, and May, but "we are

expecting that it will gain momentum from September". The key export destinations for India are Indonesia, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, and the European Union. The major oilseeds growing states are Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Jain said the availability of underground water as well as timely monsoon have encouraged the farmers and this year, till now the rainfall has been more or less normal in the major oilseeds growing states. "Hence, the farmers could take up early sowing of soyabean in Madhya Pradesh

and Maharashtra and that of groundnut in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra," he added. Jain also said the new agricultural marketing policy will not only enable farmers to sell their produce anywhere in India but also fetch them premium prices for their quality produce. "In addition, the new policy will brighten the prospects of contract farming and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). I hope that the practice of fixing minimum support prices (MSP) and procurement would continue in the larger interest of the farmers," he said. **AGENCIES**

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**NEWSBRIEF**

**SAIL net profit rises multi-fold**

NEWDELHI: State-owned SAIL on Friday said its consolidated net profit jumped multi-fold to Rs 2,647.52 crore during the quarter ended March 31, helped by reduced expenses. The firm had posted a net profit of Rs 548.20 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year, the company said in a BSE filing. Its total income during the March 2020 quarter stood at Rs 16,574.71 crore, against Rs 18,719.29 crore in the year-ago period. Total expenses during the quarter fell to Rs 11,682.12 crore as compared with Rs 17,964.25 crore a year ago. The firm produced 16.15 MT of crude steel in 2019-20, it said. **AGENCIES**

**Iron International's net profit up 16%**

NEW DELHI: State-owned engineering and construction firm Iron International Ltd on Friday reported a 15.73 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 115.40 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2020. The company had clocked a consolidated net profit of Rs 99.71 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, it said in a regulatory filing to the BSE. Its income during the March 2020 quarter was marginally up at Rs 1,896.53 crore, against Rs 1,852.96 crore in the year-ago quarter. The firm's expenditure rose to Rs 1,745.34 crore, compared with Rs 1,632.38 crore in the year-ago period. **AGENCIES**

**Future Consumer net loss at Rs 175.46 cr**

NEW DELHI: Future Consumer Ltd on Friday reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 175.46 crore for the quarter ended March 2020. The company had reported a net profit of Rs 7.53 crore in the January-March period of the preceding fiscal. Revenue from operations slipped 8.70 per cent to Rs 947.07 crore, as against Rs 1,037.37 crore earlier. **AGENCIES**

**NBCC Q4 net down 41 pc at Rs 83.77 cr**

NEW DELHI: State-owned NBCC Ltd on Monday reported a 41 per cent decline in net profit at Rs 83.77 crore for the quarter ended March. Its net profit stood at Rs 142.45 crore in the year-ago period, the company said in a regulatory filing. Total income also fell to Rs 2,651.43 crore in the fourth quarter of 2019-20 from Rs 3,194.06 crore in the year-ago period. **AGENCIES**

**TCS net falls 14% to Rs 7,008 cr**

**THE SOFTWARE SERVICES FIRM BELIEVES THE COVID-19 IMPACT HAS 'BOTTOMED OUT'**

MUMBAI: The country's largest software services firm Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) on Thursday reported a 13.8 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 7,008 crore in the three months ended June.

It had a consolidated net profit of Rs 8,131 crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing.

Revenue of the company rose marginally in the first quarter of the current fiscal to Rs 38,322 crore. In the year-ago period, the same stood at Rs 38,172 crore.

Globally, businesses have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While Indian IT firms had seen some impact in March, this is the first full quarter factoring in the impact of disruption and lockdowns in various parts of the world, including India.

"The revenue impact of the pandemic played out broadly along the lines we had anticipated at the start of the quarter. It affected all verticals, with the exception of Life Sciences and Healthcare,



"The revenue impact of the pandemic played out broadly along the lines we had anticipated at the start of the quarter. It affected all verticals, with the exception of Life Sciences and Healthcare, with varying levels of impact," TCS CEO and MD Rajesh Gopinathan said.

He said the company believes the impact has "bottomed out" and that TCS should now start tracing its path to growth. After an initial period of disruption, customers have

now stabilised their operations, and the company is seeing many customers focus on front-end transformation, resulting in significant traction for its products and services, he noted.

"The other big investment themes are around driving operational resilience, adaptability and optimisation. We signed several large core transformation programs encompassing operations, applications, cloud and cyber security," he said.

The company said despite the continued uncertainty and weakness in all major economies, it has had very healthy deal closures and a strong pipeline. At the beginning of the first quarter, TCS had said it expects recovery from the third quarter of FY21.

In another development, TCS on Thursday said deportation of foreign students from the US poses a long-term challenge for tech majors who rely on the varsities for talent, and warned that such a move could impact

technology development.

It also said that US President Donald Trump's move to stop H1-B visas, widely used by software professionals, is "unfortunate and unfair".

These numbers reflect openings at employers that are actively looking for people and accepting applications. Job openings: No freeze, but firms cautious on hiring amid covid pandemic. Even before the pandemic made things worse, the economy was slowing with GDP growth in FY20 clocking in at an anaemic 4.2%. India Inc's credit profile continues to worsen; 21 firms being downgraded every day on average.

The US has issued new guidelines barring foreign students from remaining in America if their universities switched to online-only classes in the Fall, which prompted Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to sue the Department of Homeland Security and the federal immigration agency. **AGENCIES**

**Arvind Fashions reports Q4 net loss of Rs 208 cr**

NEW DELHI: Arvind Fashions Ltd (AFL) on Thursday reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 208.12 crore for the quarter ended March, 2020, impacted by COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent disruptions in the market.

The company had reported a net profit of Rs 21.30 crore in January-March quarter a year ago. AFL said in a regulatory filing to the BSE.

Revenue from operations fell 39.22 per cent to Rs 710.46 crore during the quarter under review as against Rs 1,168.96 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago. "During January and February, the company was on track to meet its internal plan. However, revenue was severely hit in March as COVID-19 impacted sales across the channels. This has adversely impacted the reported Q4 FY20 revenues and profitability," AFL said in a post-earnings statement.

The company's total expenses declined 22.98 per cent to Rs 895.58 crore as against Rs 1,162.89 crore in Q4 of 2018-19.

For fiscal year 2019-20,



"During January and February, the company was on track to meet its internal plan. However, revenue was severely hit in March as COVID-19 impacted sales across the channels"

the company reported a net loss of Rs 399.36 crore. It had posted a net profit of Rs 21.48 crore in the previous fiscal.

Its revenue from operations in FY20 declined 16.74 per cent to Rs 3,866.30 crore as compared with Rs 4,643.86 crore in 2018-19.

"Completion of key strategic steps during the year have lent fundamental strength to our business. While COVID has been an unprecedented event which

has significantly impacted the entire retail industry, as a leading casual wear company with a portfolio of brands with leading market positions and key capabilities in digital and omnichannel, we expect to gain market share as business gets back to normal," AFL MD & CEO J Suresh said,

The company said it is "well-positioned to resume full operations" at the earliest as market reopens post lockdown. **AGENCIES**

**MCX to hold mock trading for bullion, base metals futures till month-end**

MUMBAI: Ahead of the commercial launch of futures trading in bullion and base metals, the country's largest commodity exchange MCX will conduct mock trading of the same beginning Thursday till July 31.

Consequently, futures trading in underlying constituents of the index will also be conducted, the exchange said in a statement on Wednesday.

The exchange will conduct mock trading on indices constituents of gold, gold mini, silver, silver mini, copper, and zinc between July 9 and 30, it said, adding trades resulting from mock trading will not attract any obligation for pay-in and pay-outs.

The exchange will launch MCX iComdex bullion index futures and MCX iComdex base metals index futures after the mock trading is

completed. The mock trading sessions will be held during 3.30-6.30 pm on all weekdays, except Fridays. The exchange has set a base price limit of 4 per cent and whenever the limit is breached, the relaxation will be allowed up to 6 per cent without any cooling off period in the trade.

In case the daily price limit of 6 per cent is also breached, then after a cooling off period of 15 minutes, the daily price limit will be hiked to 9 per cent. And in case this is also breached, the price limit may be further relaxed in steps of 3 per cent and an initial margin minimum 5 per cent will be kicked in.

The bourse also announced a daily prize of Rs 5,000 for investors who punch in maximum trades during mock trading sessions. **AGENCIES**

**Sensex sheds 143 points on weak global cues**



MUMBAI: Equity benchmark Sensex dropped 143 points on Friday, dragged by losses in financial stocks and negative cues from Asian peers.

The 30-share index ended 143.36 points, or 0.39 per cent, lower at 36,594.33. The NSE Nifty shed 45.40 points, or 0.42 per cent, to close at 10,768.05. Axis Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack, skidding over 3 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, Titan, HDFC, ICICI Bank, ONGC and HDFC Bank.

On the other hand, Reliance Industries, Sun Pharma, HUL, Bharti Airtel and TCS were among the gainers. According to traders, domestic benchmarks followed the negative trend in other Asian equities as concerns over a fresh spike in COVID-19 cases and its impact on economic recovery weighed on investor sentiment.

The number of cases around the world linked to the disease has crossed 1.22 crore and the death toll has topped 5.54 lakh. In India, the number of infections has spiked to 7.93 lakh, with 21,604 fatalities. Bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended with significant losses, while stock exchanges in Europe started on a positive note. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude futures slipped 2.08 per cent to USD 41.47 per barrel. **AGENCIES**

**Rossari Biotech plans ₹500cr IPO**

NEW DELHI: After a lull of nearly four months, IPO market is likely to see some buzz next week with the launch of specialty chemicals manufacturer Rossari Biotech's Rs 500-crore initial share-sale, market sources said.

This would be the first company to brave the current volatile markets. There has been a lull in the IPO market since the initial share-sale of SBI Cards & Payment Services which closed on March 5. In fact, many companies that had received Sebi's go-ahead deferred their issue to a later date. Going by the draft

papers, Rossari Biotech's IPO comprises fresh issuance of shares to the tune of Rs 150 crore and sale of more than 1 crore equity shares by the company's promoters through offer-for-sale route. It raised Rs 100 crore in a pre-IPO placement in March, sources said. The shares were offered at Rs 425 apiece and the IPO price is expected to be in the same range. At this price, the company will have a market capitalization of Rs 2,200 crore, they added. Net proceeds from the issue are proposed to be utilised for funding working capital requirements, repaying certain indebtedness availed by the company and for general corporate purposes. **AGENCIES**

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**NSE to accept gold bars against gold futures contract**

NEW DELHI: Leading stock exchange NSE on Friday said it will accept gold bars produced by the domestic refiners for settlement of the gold futures contracts traded on its platform.

For this, the exchange launched NSE Refiner Standards (NRS) for BIS - Standard Gold - which will be effective from Friday, July 10.

"The NSE Refiner Standards for BIS - Standard Gold would enable the acceptance of gold bars produced by the domestic refiners in India, for settlement of the gold futures contracts traded on the NSE platform," the exchange said in a statement.

Until Thursday, NSE accepted serially numbered gold bars produced by London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) approved refiners for settlement of the gold contracts traded on the commod-



ity derivatives segment of the exchange.

The introduction of NRS for BIS - Standard Gold will facilitate greater participation from the domestic market players in the exchange traded deliverable bullion commodity derivatives by widening the scope of acceptable bullion

"With the launch of NRS for BIS - Standard Gold, NSE aims to offer a fair chance to the Indian refiners, adhering to the BIS notified standards, to be a part of the exchange settlement framework. This initiative demonstrates NSE's vision and commitment towards inclusive growth of all market participants," said Ravi Varanasi, Chief Business Development Officer at NSE.

The move is aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the physical settlement framework for the commodity derivatives contracts in the country by including the Indian refiners in the exchange settlement framework.

It will also help widen the array of acceptable gold which can be provided by the members for the physical settlement of gold contracts traded on the commodity derivatives segment of NSE. **AGENCIES**

**Shareholding limit revised for exchanges operating in IFSC**

NEW DELHI: Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday revised the eligibility and shareholding limit for stock exchanges desirous of operating in international financial services centres to streamline operations at IFSCs.

The decision has been taken based on the internal discussions and consultations with the stakeholders, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular.

Under the framework, any Indian or foreign stock exchange may form a subsidiary to provide the services of bourse in an IFSC, wherein at least 51 one per cent

of stake is held by the exchange and remaining share capital may be offered to any other person (whether Indian or of foreign jurisdiction).

Also, such person will not at any time, directly or indirectly, either individually or together with persons acting in concert (PAC), acquire or hold over 5 per cent in the exchange, subject to applicable laws, Sebi said.

It further said stock exchanges, depositories, banking company, insurance company, commodity derivatives exchange of Indian or foreign jurisdiction have been allowed to acquire 15 per cent



stake in such bourse operating in an IFSC.

Among others, public financial institutions of Indian jurisdiction, and bilateral or multilateral financial institutions approved by the central government "may acquire or hold, either directly or indirectly, either individually or

together with persons acting in concert, up to 15 per cent of the paid up equity share capital of a recognised stock exchange with prior approval of the board."

To give effect to this, Sebi has amended IFSC guidelines. At present, a recognised bourse or any exchange of a foreign jurisdiction may form a subsidiary to provide the services of an exchange in an IFSC where at least 51 per cent of paid up equity share capital is held by such exchange and remaining shares may be offered to any other recognised bourse, whether Indian or of foreign jurisdiction. **AGENCIES**

NEW DELHI: Capital markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday said it has signed a pact with the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) for facilitating regular exchange of data and information.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which marks the beginning of enhanced cooperation between Sebi and CBDT, comes into force from July 8, the markets watchdog said in a press release. A Data Exchange Steering Group has been constituted for the initiative which will meet periodically to review the data exchange status and

take steps to further improve the effectiveness of data sharing mechanism, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said.

The MoU is an ongoing initiative of CBDT and Sebi, who are already collaborating through various existing mechanisms, it added.

"The MoU will facilitate the sharing of data and information between CBDT and Sebi on an automatic and regular basis. The MoU will ensure that both CBDT and Sebi have seamless linkage for data exchange," the regulator said. CBDT and Sebi will also



exchange any information available in their respective databases on request and suo moto basis for carrying out scrutiny, inspection, investigation and prosecution, it added.

In another development, Sebi is looking to hire an agency to revamp its IT infrastructure network and communication systems.

Besides, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is planning to have a centralised control over its network and IP (internet protocol) telephony infrastructure. In a notice, the regulator has

invited Expression of Interest (EOI) from solution providers for "upgrade and revamp of IT network, IP telephony and video conferencing set-up of Sebi".

"The proposed solution should be robust, secure, stable, efficient and easy to manage and should have latest collaborative features," Sebi said. It further said security of the entire system will be of paramount importance and should conform to the latest standards as at the time of implementation.

Spelling out the eligibility criteria, Sebi said the bidder

should be a registered entity, in operation for at least three years and should have successfully implemented similar projects. Moreover, the interested party should be "fit and proper" as it should not be a "going concern". Other eligibility criterion is the bidder should not be a blacklisted firm due to unsatisfactory performance, breach of instructions, corrupt or fraudulent or any other unethical business practices, Sebi said. The interested bidders have been asked to submit their applications by July 29. **AGENCIES**



## NEWSBRIEF

## Appeal to reverse decision on international students

**WASHINGTON:** A group of 136 U.S. Democratic congressmen and 30 senators, including Indian-origin Kamala Harris, has urged the Trump administration to reverse its “cruel” order that bars international students from staying in the country if they do not have in-person classes to attend. The lawmakers, in separate letters to Acting Secretary, Department of Homeland Security, Chad Wolf and Acting Secretary, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Matthew Albence on July 9, expressed concern over the ICE’s recently announced modifications to the Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP).

AGENCIES

## China, US in new spat over Uighur crackdown

**BEIJING:** China said on Friday it will impose tit-for-tat measures after the U.S. slapped sanctions on Chinese officials for their involvement in a crackdown on Muslim minorities, raising tensions between the superpowers. The two countries have traded barbs and sanctions on a slew of issues since President Donald Trump took office, from trade to more recent spats over the coronavirus pandemic, a security law in Hong Kong, and Chinese policies in the far west regions of Tibet and Xinjiang.

AGENCIES

## Eradication of virus unlikely, says WHO

**GENEVA:** Dr Mike Ryan, head of the World Health Organisation’s emergency programme, said on Friday it was unlikely that the coronavirus would be eliminated. “In the current situation it is unlikely we can eradicate this virus,” he told an online briefing from Geneva. He said that, by extinguishing clusters of infection, the world could “potentially avoid the worst of having second peaks and having to move backwards in terms of lockdown”.

AGENCIES

## Hagia Sophia becomes a mosque

ROW ERUPTS AS TURKISH PRESIDENT ERDOGAN DECLARES IT OPEN FOR MUSLIM WORSHIP

**ANKARA:** Ankara The President of Turkey on Friday formally converted Istanbul’s sixth-century Hagia Sophia back into a mosque and declared it open for Muslim worship, hours after a High Court annulled a 1934 decision that had made the religious landmark a museum.

The decision sparked deep dismay among Orthodox Christians. Originally a cathedral, Hagia Sophia was turned into a mosque after Istanbul’s conquest by the Ottoman Empire but had been a museum for the last 86 years, drawing millions of tourists annually.

There was jubilation outside the terracotta-hued structure with its cascading domes and four minarets. Dozens of people awaiting the court’s ruling chanted Allah is great! when the news broke. A large crowd later prayed outside it.

In the capital of Ankara, legislators stood and applauded as the decision was read in Parliament.

Turkey’s high administrative court threw its weight behind a petition brought by a religious group and annulled



the 1934 Cabinet decision that turned the site into a museum. Within hours, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed a decree handing over Hagia Sophia to Turkey’s Religious Affairs Presidency. In a televised address to the nation, Mr. Erdogan said the first prayers inside Hagia Sophia would be held on July 24, and he urged respect for the decision.

I underline that we will open Hagia Sophia to worship

as a mosque by preserving its character of humanity’s common cultural heritage,” he said, adding: It is Turkey’s sovereign right to decide for which purpose Hagia Sofia will be used. He rejected the idea that the decision ends Hagia Sophia’s status as a structure that brings faiths together.

Like all of our other mosques, the doors of Hagia Sophia will be open to all, locals or foreigners, Muslims and

non-Muslims, Erdogan said.

Mr. Erdogan had spoken in favour of turning the hugely symbolic UNESCO World Heritage site back into a mosque despite widespread international criticism, including from U.S. and Orthodox Christian leaders, who had urged Turkey to keep its status as a museum symbolizing solidarity among faiths and cultures.

The move threatens to deepen tensions with neighbouring Greece, whose prime

“We will open Hagia Sophia to worship as a mosque by preserving its character of humanity’s common cultural heritage”

minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, condemned the decision as an affront to Hagia Sophia’s ecumenical character.

It is a decision that offends all those who recognize Hagia Sophia as an indispensable part of world cultural heritage Mitsotakis said.

This decision clearly affects not only Turkey’s relations with Greece but also its relations with the European Union, UNESCO and the world community as a whole.

In Greece’s second-largest city, Thessaloniki, protesters gathered outside a church that is modeled on Hagia Sophia and bears the same name. They chanted, We’ll light candles in Hagia Sophia! and held Greek flags and Byzantine banners.

AGENCIES

## Latin America, Caribbean are COVID-19 ‘hot spot’



**UNITED NATION:** Latin America and the Caribbean have become a hot spot for the COVID-19 pandemic, with several countries now having one of the highest per capita infection rates and absolute number of cases in the world, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Thursday.

The U.N. chief said in a video and briefing report that a 9.1% contraction in GDP is expected this year in the region, which would be the largest in a century. COVID-19 represents a massive health, social and economic shock with an immense human toll for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the report said. It is expected to result in the deepest recession in living memory.

According to the report, unemployment in the region is expected to rise to 13.5% from 8.1% last year, affecting more than 44 million people, compared to over 18 million in 2019. The poverty rate is expected to rise to 37.2% from 30.2%, meaning 230 million people will be affected compared to 185 million last year, it said.

Mr. Guterres said Latin America and the Caribbean already face gaping inequalities, high levels of informal labour and fragmented health services — and the region’s most vulnerable people are once again being hit the hardest by COVID-19.

Women, who make up the

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

majority of the workforce in economic sectors being most affected, now must also bear the brunt of additional caregiving, Mr. Guterres said.

Older persons and persons with disabilities are at much higher risk of death from the virus. He said Indigenous peoples, those of African descent, migrants and refugees are also suffering disproportionately.

Urban transmission of COVID-19 is of special concern to Latin America and the Caribbean as the world’s most urbanised developing region, the report said. Some 80% of the region’s population lives in cities, the U.N. chief said, pointing to slums especially in the largest ones as potential breeding grounds.

With fragmented and unequal health systems, countries most affected by the pandemic — which Mr. Guterres didn’t name — are ill-prepared to handle a health and human crisis of this scale, his report said.

AGENCIES

## Singapore’s ruling PAP wins general election

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) has returned to power, winning 83 of the 93 seats contested in Friday’s General Election, even as the Opposition registered minor gains.

Mr. Lee, 68, was re-elected from his Group Representation Constituency (GRC) of Ang Mo Kio. The Prime Minister led his party’s GRC team of Gan Thiam Poh, Darryl David, Ng Ling Ling and Nadia Ahmad Samdin.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat was also re-elected. His team included Maliki Osman, Jessica Tan, Cheryl Chan and Tan Kia How of the East Coast GRC.

The Opposition Workers’ Party — led by Indian-origin leader Pritam Singh — won



10 seats, including the GRC of Sengkang where it defeated the PAP’s team led by Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office, Mr. Ng Chee Meng. Mr. Meng is also the Secretary-General of the National Trades Union Congress.

Mr. Singh and his team retained the Aljunied GRC.

Party member Dennis Tan retained the single member constituency seat of Hougang, defeating the PAP’s Lee Hong Chuang. The Workers’ Party had secured six seats in the last general election in 2015.

Some 2.65 million Singaporeans donning face masks and gloves voted in the elec-

The PAP has ruled Singapore since independence with absolute majority. Eleven political parties, including the PAP, campaigned for nine days amid the unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 that has pushed the city-state’s economy towards the worst-ever recession in nearly two decades

tions for selecting 93 members of Parliament out of 192 candidates contesting for seats through 17 GRCs which groups together candidates in four or five, and 14 Single Member Constituencies.

The PAP has ruled Singapore since independence with absolute majority. Eleven political parties, including the PAP, campaigned for nine days amid the unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 that has pushed the city-state’s economy

towards the worst-ever recession in nearly two decades. In a bid to enhance the safety of voting amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of polling stations was increased from 880 to 1,100.

Prime Minister Lee last month called for general elections 10 months ahead of schedule to “clear the decks” and give the new government a fresh five-year mandate to focus on the national agenda.

AGENCIES

## Ivory Coast PM and presidential candidate Amadou Coulibaly dies

**ABIDJAN:** Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly, the presidential candidate of Ivory Coast’s ruling party, died Wednesday just days after returning from two months of medical treatment in France, where he previously had undergone a heart transplant.

Mr. Coulibaly’s death throws the upcoming presidential election into disarray, raising concerns about who now will represent the party of President Alassane Ouattara, who is required to step down after his second term.

Mr. Coulibaly, 61, had not spoken publicly about why he went to France back in May. Many speculated that his health problems were related to his 2012 heart transplant.

Mr. Ouattara’s party has been in power since post-election violence a decade ago left some 3,000 people



dead after then-President Laurent Gbagbo refused to acknowledge his defeat in a runoff vote.

Initially, there was speculation that Mr. Ouattara would try to extend his rule, but he eventually said he would not run and threw his support behind Mr. Coulibaly.

Mr. Coulibaly’s death was announced Wednesday on national television, and the president issued a statement calling him my younger brother, my son” and his closest political ally for 30 years.

I salute the memory of a statesman of great loyalty, devotion and love for his country, Mr. Ouattara said.

Mr. Coulibaly, who had been allowed to travel to France despite airport closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, had returned to Ivory Coast six days ago.

He attended a ministerial meeting at the presidential palace in Abidjan on Wednesday, but later fell ill, officials said.

AGENCIES

## Seoul Mayor found dead amid impropriety allegation

**SEOUL:** One of South Korea’s most prominent elected officials, the longtime mayor of the capital Seoul, was found dead on Friday after he was reported missing by his daughter amid a criminal probe and media reports of alleged sexual harassment.

Mayor Park Won-soon’s body was found at Mt Bugak in northern Seoul around midnight after a search involving hundreds of police, the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency said.

It did not give a cause of death. There was no sign of foul play although a detailed investigation would be needed, police official Choi Ik-soo told reporters. The Yonhap news agency said a former secretary of Park had filed a complaint on Wednesday over alleged incidents of sexual harassment.

Choi said an investigation was under way after a



criminal complaint had been lodged against Park, without elaborating.

Park’s daughter reported the mayor missing at 5:17 p.m. (0817 GMT) on Thursday, police said. Yonhap news agency reported that she also told police he had left a message “like a will”.

The former human rights activist and lawyer left the mayor’s official residence at around 10:40 a.m. on Thursday, wearing a black hat and

a backpack, having cancelled meetings scheduled for the day, police said.

Police found his body after an hours-long search involving hundreds of officers using drones and dogs in one of the most mountainous parts of Seoul, just a few minutes from the heart of the city of nearly 10 million people.

About three hours later, his body was brought out of the woods by forensic officers, according to a Reuters photographer at the scene. Media gathered later outside Seoul National University Hospital, where his funeral was expected to begin.

As Seoul mayor since 2011, Park was instrumental in its response to the coronavirus pandemic. He also played a vocal role in massive candlelight demonstrations that contributed to the ousting of former President Park Geun-hye in 2017.

AGENCIES

## 150 artists, writers and activists oppose threat to free speech

**THE OPEN LETTER ACKNOWLEDGES THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT AND OTHER POWERFUL PROTESTS FOR RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE, WHICH ARE LEADING TO OVERDUE DEMANDS FOR POLICE REFORM. IT ALSO CALLS FOR GREATER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION ACROSS THE SOCIETY.**

**LONDON:** Acclaimed authors such as Salman Rushdie, J.K. Rowling and Margaret Atwood are among around 150 writers,

artists and activists to sign an open letter, warning against the rise of “forces of illiberalism” impacting free speech.

The group, which also includes American activist Naom Chomsky and Indian historian Meera Nanda, warns that the spread of censoriousness is leading to an intolerance of opposing views and a vogue for public shaming and ostracism.

The open letter, published in Tuesday’s Harper’s Magazine, acknowledges the Black Lives Matter movement and other powerful protests for racial and social justice, which are leading to overdue demands

for police reform, along with wider calls for greater equality and inclusion across our society. But this needed reckoning has also intensified a new set of moral attitudes and political commitments that tend to weaken our norms of open debate and toleration of differences in favour of ideological conformity, it notes.

“As we applaud the first development, we also raise our voices against the second. The forces of illiberalism are gaining strength throughout the world and have a powerful ally in (U.S. President) Donald Trump, who represents a real



“We are already paying the price in greater risk aversion among writers, artists, and journalists who fear for their livelihoods if they depart from the consensus, or even lack sufficient zeal in agreement”

threat to democracy,” it reads. The letter warns that the “free exchange of information and ideas”, the lifeblood of a liberal society, is daily becoming more constricted.

“While we have come to expect this on the radical right, censoriousness is also spreading more widely in our culture:

an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for public shaming and ostracism, and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty,” it adds.

The letter also condemns “disproportionate punishments” meted out to targets of public shaming by insti-

tutional leaders conducting “panicked damage control”. It goes on to warn of fear spreading through arts and media. “We are already paying the price in greater risk aversion among writers, artists, and journalists who fear for their livelihoods if they depart from the consensus, or even lack sufficient zeal in agreement,” it says.

There has been a big online response to the letter, with the Index on Censorship calling it an “important letter on open debate”, but it has also been criticised as an overreaction in some quarters.

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ALSO READ | MY FAMILY HAS LAUNCHED MORE NEW TALENT THAN ENTIRE BOLLYWOOD: POOJA BHATT \* P12 | VETERAN ACTOR JAGDEEP PASSES AWAY AT 81 \* P12

## NEWSBRIEF

Lockdown to affect rhythm: Shami

NEW DELHI: The COVID-19 lockdown is a double-edged sword for India's craftiest pacer Mohammed Shami. While it gives an exhausted body enough time to "heal" and get stronger, he fears the prolonged break can also have ruinous implications on rhythm. In an exclusive interview with PTI, the 29-year-old Shami said that he certainly enjoys an "advantage" over other Indian players living in metros, having constantly trained inside his sprawling ancestral home in Sahaspur, which comprises a mini-cricket ground with full facility for net practice. "There are two ways to look at it. The Indian team always has a packed schedule and it was a good break which allowed a tired body to heal," Shami said.

AGENCIES

Mohun Bagan clear dues ahead of ATK merger

KOLKATA: City giants Mohun Bagan on Tuesday said it has cleared the dues of players, coaches and support staff, just three days ahead of its official merger with Indian Super League side ATK. ATK-Mohun Bagan will have their first Board meeting, to be attended by seven directors, on Friday, signalling the launch of the joint venture. The meeting is also likely to finalise the club's name, logo and jersey. "We are pleased to inform that Mohun Bagan Football Club (India) Pvt. Ltd has already cleared the due salaries of Indian coaches, players and support staff on Tuesday," the club said in a statement.

AGENCIES

Good for tennis it can compete with others sports financially, says Federer

ZURICH: Tennis legend Roger Federer feels it is good for the sport that players are getting financially stronger and can compete in that aspect with other disciplines. The 20-time Grand Slam champion recently was in the top spot on the annual Forbes list of the highest-paid athletes for the first time this year with \$106.3 million in pre-tax earnings. The Swiss ace is the first tennis player to take the No. 1 rank since the list debuted in 1990, as per Forbes official website. "Maybe it's good for tennis that we can compete with football, boxing, Formula 1 and basketball, where the wages are incredible. But I'm rather embarrassed when it's in the papers," Federer was quoted as saying in an interview with Zeit.

AGENCIES

Every state should adopt one sport, says minister

NEW DELHI: Sports Minister Kiren Rijju on Wednesday said the government has asked every state to adopt one sport each and focus on its development in a bid to achieve more medals at the Olympics. Rijju, who was speaking at a webinar on the "Role of Coporate India for Fit India" organised by Assocham, said the corporate sector will also be told to do the same.

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## Kohli in 'conflict of interest' row

BESIDES BEING THE TEAM'S CAPTAIN, HE IS ALLEGEDLY DIRECTOR OF A COMMERCIAL VENTURE

NEW DELHI: BCCI ethics officer D K Jain on Sunday said he is examining a conflict of interest complaint against India captain Virat Kohli from Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association life member Sanjeev Gupta, who has levelled similar charges against other players in the past which were deemed "infructuous".

In his latest complaint, Gupta has alleged that Kohli is conflicted as he occupies two posts -- captain of the Indian team and director of a venture which has co-directors linked to a talent management company that has on board, several of his teammates.

Gupta has alleged that it is a violation of the BCCI constitution which bars one individual from holding multiple positions.

"I have received a complaint. I will examine it and then see if the case is made out or not. If yes, then I have to afford an opportunity to him (Kohli) to respond," Jain told PTI.



Gupta claims that Kohli, who is one of the directors at Cornerstone Venture Partners LLP and Virat Kohli Sports LLP, is conflicted as his co-directors -- Amit Arun Sajdeh (better known as Bunty Sajdeh in Indian cricket circle) and Binoy Bharat Khimji --, are also a part of the talent management company Cornerstone Sport and Entertainment Private Limited.

Kohli does not have a role

in Cornerstone Sport and Entertainment Private Limited.

The company manages the commercial interests of the India skipper and his many other teammates including K L Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja, Umesh Yadav and Kuldeep Yadav.

"In view of the above, Shri Virat Kohli is occupying two posts at a time in blatant violation to BCCI Rule 38 (4) approved by Supreme Court

"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,"

Of India. As such, he must relinquish his one post at once in compliance...." wrote Gupta in his complaint. It is the first high profile complaint Jain has received since he got a one-year extension last month.

In the first year of his job, Jain had dealt with the conflict of interest complaints against Indian cricketing greats Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly, VVS Laxman and Kapil Dev. All of these came from Gupta and the iconic former players had to resign from one position before the complaints were rendered "infructuous"

BCCI President Sourav Ganguly has already stated that the conflict of interest norms as prescribed by the Lodha

Committee are unrealistic.

In a mail, Sanjeev Gupta expressed his thoughts about Kohli's business ventures and claimed that it comes across that it does violate the Lodha Panel recommendations which were passed by the Supreme Court while the new BCCI Constitution was brought in.

"Virat Kohli is occupying two posts at a time in blatant violation to BCCI Rule 38(4) approved by Supreme Court Of India. As such, he must relinquish his one post at once in compliance, his two posts are covered as under - A - 38(4)(a) - Player. B - 38(4) (o) - Contractual Entity, to be read with BCCI Rule 38(1) (iii)," he wrote.

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## No salary cap of Rs 2 lakhs for Indian coaches



NEW DELHI: The Sports Ministry on Saturday removed the Rs 2 lakh cap on the salary given to Indian coaches for training elite athletes in a bid to encourage them to produce better results.

The move is also aimed at attracting former players to become high performance trainers. The announcement came after the ministry's decision to extend the contracts of all foreign coaches till September 30 next year. "Several Indian coaches are showing very good results and need to be rewarded for their hard work. The government is also keen to attract the best coaching talent from across the country to train elite athletes and we do not want the cap on compensation to be a deterrent for good coaches to join," Sports Minister Kiren Rijju said in a release. The ministry release said the increased remuneration and longer contract period "is to attract ex-elite athletes into the high performance sporting ecosystem, and to use their experience and skill to train athletes bound for major international competitions, including the Olympics". The future hiring -- both Indian and foreign -- will be for a four-year cycle in sync with the Olympics to ensure continuity.

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) welcomed the move,

saying it will encourage domestic coaches to produce better results as they have been put on par with their foreign counterparts.

"IOA and National Sports Federations wholeheartedly appreciate the decision of the Sports Ministry to remove salary cap of domestic coaches. The cap was limiting our coaches who have been producing high-performance international medallists," IOA

"IOA and National Sports Federations wholeheartedly appreciate the decision of the Sports Ministry to remove salary cap of domestic coaches"

Secretary General Rajeev Mehta said. "This decision is also encouraging for more sportspersons to choose coaching as a profession now. With new steps to improve the coaching education, domestic coaches would be on par with international coaches in the future." The ministry said eminent coaches already working in various Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) would also be allowed to join on deputation and be eligible for the 4-year contract as well as the higher salary structure.

The remuneration will be decided on the basis of their performance as an athlete as well as his or her success as a coach. "All new coaches and existing coaches who are given the new contract will be imparting training at National Camps and SAI's National Center of Excellence (NCOEs), and will be selected jointly by the Sports Ministry and the National Sports Federations," a ministry release said.

Welcoming the move, chief national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand said: "This is a long standing request of the sporting fraternity. I am very happy with the decision because it will give a great boost to the overall sporting ecosystem by attracting many talented coaches and eminent ex-athletes to join the profession."

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## Need for basketball league in India: Bhriugvanshi

NEW DELHI: There is no dearth of talent in India according to men's basketball captain Vishesh Bhriugvanshi, who feels the advent of a professional league will give the national players an opportunity to prosper in the sport. With the unprecedented success of the Indian Premier League (IPL) in cricket, professional leagues have mushroomed in different sports including badminton, wrestling and kabaddi.

Many of these domestic leagues have made the game popular and arguably improved the quality of sport in India, offering national players a chance to go shoulder to shoulder with international recruits.

"There is definitely a need for a league in our sport," Bhriugvanshi, who has been leading the Indian team for a decade, told PTI. "In the league, foreign players will also be there, when we play with them we will get to learn a lot," he said.

The 29-year-old, who hails from Varanasi, believes the exchange of ideas and strategy will give Indians some sort of exposure to the foreign mindset.

AGENCIES



"We'll get to know how they go about it. Our federation is trying to start a league. Hopefully, it will happen soon," he added.

Over the years, top Indian basketball players like Satnam Singh, Amjot Singh and Amritpal Singh have moved out of the country to ply their trade in foreign leagues. Bhriugvanshi prefers to look at the positive side to this exodus of talent.

"Players prefer to go out and play because it is once in a lifetime opportunity. But even if they are playing in leagues outside India they always come back to play for India. And when they do, they bring with them a lot experience," he said.

## Football players may take a knee in FA Cup final

LONDON: English football's governing body Football Association (FA) won't discipline players for taking a knee in the FA Cup final which is currently scheduled to be played next month.

Footballers across the Premier League have been taking a knee before matches in the support of 'Black Lives Matter' movement that has been going on around the world following the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police personnel in May.

According to a report published in Sky Sports, the FA believes it is up to the players if and when they choose to take a knee and will be allowed to do so during the final at Wembley Stadium on August 1.

Four teams are currently in contention for a place in the championship clash. Manchester United will take on Chelsea in the first semi-final on July 18 while Manchester City will lock horns against Arsenal on July 19.

Moreover, this year's FA Cup final has been named as



"We're going to really use the final as a moment to promote good, positive mental health for everyone"

'Heads Up FA Cup final' as Prince Williams continues to spread message with respect to mental health.

The Duke of Cambridge recently came up with a documentary that starred few footballers as well and the idea was to create awareness as to how to deal with mental pressures that tags along with playing sports on different levels.

"We're going to really use the final as a moment to pro-

motate good, positive mental health for everyone," Prince Williams was quoted as saying by Sky Sports.

"It's quite timely bearing in mind what we've all been through with this pandemic. I think there's going to be, sadly, a lot of repercussions from this in society, not just in football, in terms of people's mental health. "Hopefully the FA Cup can be a bit of a pivot that people can rally around," he added.

AGENCIES

## Online betting likely for horse racing

BENGALURU: With the COVID-19 induced lockdown stalling horse races since March 25, the Karnataka government is in favour of allowing punters betting on their favourite stallions online, a top official said on Saturday.

"The state government has positively responded to our request to allow betting online, as punters and fans are banned from attending horse races if resumed as per the lockdown guidelines in the race course grounds in the city centre," Bangalore Turf Club (BTC) Chairman D. Vinod Shivappa told IANS here.

Admitting that suspension of horse racing over the last three months had badly disrupted the peak turf season for stallions and stakeholders, Shivappa said the state gov-



ernment had agreed in principle to permit racing without the presence of punters and spectators in the stands to prevent the virus spread.

"As we have already lost one racing season during the summer vacation and in the process of losing race events in the monsoon period, with no let-up in the virus spread, legalising on-

line betting will enable us to resume races sans punters and spectators," asserted Shivappa.

A ban on all sport activities, including horse racing has disrupted normal life and livelihood of all stakeholders since the lockdown was suddenly enforced and extended, with restrictions on many outdoor sports.

AGENCIES

## Star athletes to inspire kids through videos

NEW DELHI: Star Indian athletes like Neeraj Chopra and Hima Das are set to inspire children across the country to remain fit and active at home through workout videos.

Athletics Federation of India's (AFI) premier junior athletics talent hunt "MILO National Inter District Junior Athletics Meet" (NIDJAM) and Nestle MILO are behind this latest initiative called "#MILOHOMEGROUND".

Under this initiative, workout videos by leading athletes such as Hima, Neeraj, KT Irfan, Mohammed Anas Yahiyah, MR Poovama and many more, will be rolled out to inspire kids to enjoy effective and easy exercises.

"Sports in the life of a growing child is most fundamental. An active lifestyle



leads to healthier families and this kind of lifestyle begins at home. The partnership with Milo is going to help us to spread this message to the country at large," AFI President, Adille Sumariwalla said.

Commenting on the launch of the campaign, Vineet Singh, Director - Dairy, Nestle India, said,

"In more than 50 countries, MILO inspires parents on the importance of sports in helping their kids achieve everyday victories that instill values to help them succeed in life.

"In collaboration with the Athletics Federation of India and the AFI athletes as part of MILO NIDJAM, we are excited to offer fun exercise

routines that children can do at home -- by themselves or with parents."

The videos will be available for free on the social media handles of MILO (@MiloIndia) and MILO NIDJAM (@MiloNidjam).

The campaign has been created and executed by 'Meraki Sport & Entertainment', the commercial and marketing rights holders of Milo Nidjam and marketing partners to the AFI.

Namrata Parekh, Co-founder & Director, Meraki said: "While MILO-NIDJAM actively engaged over 65K kids across the country last year, our endeavor with MILO-HOMEGROUND, in 2020, will be to significantly increase reach, whilst simultaneously building brand affinity within the primary target group."

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## Former India captain MS Dhoni not thinking about retirement

KOLKATA: Never the one to walk the beaten path, former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni has decided not to do any commercial endorsements amid the COVID-19 pandemic and is instead busy with organic farming, gearing up to launch his own brand of environment-friendly fertilisers soon.

The World Cup-winning swashbuckler, on a sabbatical from cricket for the past one year, turned 39 on Tuesday.

His manager and child-

hood friend Mihir Diwakar, while speaking to PTI, gave a peek into the trailblazer's reclusive life at his home in Ranchi.

"Patriotism is in his blood, he is serving for the country (in defence) or (farming) the land, he's very passionate about it. He has about 40-50 acres of farm land and he is busy growing organic crops like papaya, banana there," Diwakar said.

"He has stopped brand endorsements and has said that till life comes to normal, he won't do any commer-



The wicketkeeper-batsman was expected to be back in action at the IPL but that has been postponed indefinitely due to the COVID-19 pandemic

cial activity," Diwakar, who runs the MS Dhoni Cricket Academy under the name of Aarka Sports, added.

The wicketkeeper-batsman was expected to be back in action at the IPL but that has been postponed indefinitely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He was recently seen driving a tractor during the lockdown. Diwakar said they are soon going to launch their organic fertiliser under their company's name Neo Global. He said the fertiliser is being tested at Dhoni's farm. Dhoni recently spoke about the harmful impact

of pesticides in a video to promote organic farming.

"We have a team of experts and scientists and they have developed the fertiliser and it should be launched within two-three months," Diwakar said.

"I spoke to him past midnight. It was a normal business talk. As usual, Dhoni would be at home with his family, with a quiet birthday celebration."

Asked whether retirement has crossed Dhoni's mind, Diwakar said: "Being friends, we don't talk about

his cricket. But looking at him, he's not all thinking about retirement."

"He is very determined to play the IPL. He has worked really hard for this. If you remember he was there in Chennai one month in advance before everything was shut down," he pointed out.

"He has maintained his fitness regimen at his farmhouse and will start practice after the lockdown is lifted. Everything now depends on how fast the situation returns to normalcy," he concluded.

AGENCIES

# Puravankara plans 11 residential projects

**THE TOTAL SALEABLE AREA OF AROUND 10.23 MILLION SQFT WILL BE UP FOR GRAB, SAYS BENGALURU REALTOR**

**MUMBAI:** Bengaluru-based realtor Puravankara Group, plans to launch 11 residential projects with a total saleable area of around 10.23 million sqft this fiscal, even as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the sector.

The company, which already launched two projects in the first quarter of the fiscal, plans to launch a total of six projects under the Purvankara luxury brand and five under the Provident affordable housing brand.

"Real estate sector has been reeling under stress since the last few years and it has hit all the developers. However, there is demand for projects that offer the right size, right price and right location, and we are seeing a good response for that," company's managing director Ashish Puravankara told PTI.

The company is expecting revenue of over Rs 6,000 crore from these 11 projects with an average realisation of Rs 7,500 per sqft from Purvankara projects (2.67 million sqft) and Rs 5,500 per sqft from Provident projects (7.56 million sqft).

Puravankara launched two projects, one each in Pune and Bengaluru, in the first quarter of the fiscal year through digital platform, and plans to continue with the "new normal" at least for the next few months.

Besides, the company also launched Purvankara Atmosphere in Bengaluru during the June quarter, which it has not included in plans for FY2021 as the project was planned to be launched in March quarter, but had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



"Last quarter of FY2019 saw some good launches, but the same was insignificant in Q4 of FY2020 due to the Covid situation. Since we couldn't launch Atmosphere in Q4, we had to push it to the first quarter of this fiscal," Puravankara said.

"Also, since we received a good response for our digital

launch, we plan to continue with the trend at least for next few months," he added.

A total of four projects would be launched in Bengaluru, two in Mumbai, three in Pune, and one each in Chennai and Cochin.

When asked about the investments the company would make during the year for the

proposed projects, Puravankara said, "These projects are coming up on land parcels which we bought in the past, while some are joint developments, and the financial closures have already being done in the past. So for the fiscal we would incur construction cost of around Rs 3,000 crore, which would be funded through a combination of debt and internal accruals."

When asked if the company had reduced property prices to attract buyers, Puravankara said, "So far we have not resorted to any heavy discounts for any of our projects. However, we have offered price protection to the buyers for six months saying that if the company reduces its prices in future, they would get the benefit of the reduced prices."

Speaking about the industry, he noted that since the

total number of launches in the country have reduced significantly, the supply has also been affected to that extent, and therefore, there won't be huge pricing pressure on developers.

"At the end of the day, law of economics will prevail. However, when we see from the point of view of cities and the micro markets within these cities, I feel there would be price correction, especially where the prices are unreasonably high," Puravankara added.

Replying to a question on impact of shortage of migrant labourers on projects, he said, "Even though RERA has granted extension of deadlines for project completion, lack of skilled workers for specific jobs is a serious challenge. We are taking initiatives to bring them back." **AGENCIES**

# Launchpad to help tech startups explore US market



**NEW DELHI:** IT industry's apex body Nasscom on Wednesday announced the virtual launch of its Launchpad in New Jersey in the US that will provide a platform for member companies to explore opportunities to do business in New Jersey and the greater New York area.

Launched in the partnership with the startup hub and coworking space VentureLink@NJIT and non-profit Choose New Jersey, the Nasscom Launchpad will promote technology-based foreign direct investment (FDI), along with amplifying global competitiveness between the companies operating in both geographies.

"While things normalise, it is imperative that business interactions continue in the new normal. Through this virtual platform, Nasscom is enabling member companies to develop partnerships with US-based companies," said Shivendra Singh, Vice President, Nasscom.

Member companies will gain a hands-on understanding of market opportunities within the New Jersey tech ecosystem, assistance with site selection, government regulations, incentives, and tax planning to establish permanent operations in the region while operating out of their home location in India.

The partnership will also facilitate business partner matchmaking and assistance with introductions with prospective clients. "VentureLink@NJIT provides a unique opportunity for member companies of Nasscom to be part of New Jersey's largest startup incubator and co-working space. These companies gain access to expert guidance and mentoring, unique networking opportunities and the vast resources of a top polytechnic university," said Simon Nynens, CEO of the New Jersey Innovation Institute (NJII) which oversees VentureLink@NJIT.

The initial companies participating in the Launchpad are Batoi Systems Pvt Ltd, Eminenture Pvt Ltd, Muecho, NeoNOpal Inc and ITSYS Solutions. It is expected that during the course of a year, around 20 companies will utilise the Launchpad, said Nasscom. **AGENCIES**

# Takeda brings Vedolizumab to India

**NEW DELHI:** Drug firm Takeda India on Wednesday said it has launched biological drug Vedolizumab under the brand name 'Kynteles' used for the treatment of adult patients with moderate-to-severely active ulcerative colitis and Crohn's Disease, at a price of Rs 71,310 per vial in India.

The launch is a part of the company's gastrointestinal (GI) portfolio, which is its second therapeutic area in India after rare diseases (haematology, genetic diseases, and immunology), Takeda India said in a statement.

Kynteles has shown favourable safety and efficacy results in treating patients suffering from moderate-to-severe inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD), it added.

"The launch of our highly innovative GI portfolio is a testimony of our commitment to India and patients living with diseases like ulcerative colitis (UC) and Crohn's Disease (CD)," Takeda India Country Head Koki Sato said.

Patient access to Kynteles will further augment the company's vision of providing additional and innovative treatment options to health-



"The launch of our highly innovative GI portfolio is a testimony of our commitment to India and patients living with diseases like ulcerative colitis (UC) and Crohn's Disease (CD)"

care professionals treating UC and CD, he added.

When asked about the price of the drug in India, Sato told PTI: "Takeda is committed to bringing access to innovative therapies with the right value positions including fair pricing strategies based on the country environment... We continue to optimise our prices from patient access perspective and it is currently priced at Rs 71,310 per vial".

The recommended dose

regimen of Kynteles is 300 mg administered by intravenous infusion at zero, two and six weeks and then every eight weeks thereafter in both UC and CD, he added. The product is manufactured by Takeda Austria GmbH, Sato said.

It is estimated around 1.4 million patients who have IBD in India and this is "something which is very much important to us to launch this product," he added. **AGENCIES**

# WHO to help 1.3bn quit smoking

**GENEVA:** The World Health Organization (WHO) announced that it was launching an initiative to help 1.3 billion global tobacco-users quit the habit during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Access Initiative for Quitting Tobacco will help people freely access the resources they need to quit tobacco, like nicotine replacement therapy and access to a digital health worker for advice, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a briefing on Friday.

According to the UN health body, smoking kills 8 million people a year, and evidence reveals that smokers are more vulnerable than non-smokers to developing a severe case of COVID-19, reports Xinhua news agency.

"But if users need more motivation to kick the habit, the pandemic provides the right incentive," said Tedros. The initiative is led by WHO, together with the UN Interagency Task Force on Non-communicable Dis-

eases (NCD). The initiative brings together tech industry, pharmaceutical, and NGO partners like PATH and the Coalition for Access to NCD Medicines and Products.

As the first manufacturing partner of the initiative, Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health said Friday that it has donated nearly 40,000 nicotine patches. Tedros said the WHO is in the final stages of adding more partners and encourages pharmaceutical and tech companies to join the initiative. **AGENCIES**

# Road logistics platform eTrucknow launched

**NEW DELHI:** Global freight logistics provider Kuehne+Nagel on Thursday launched its AI-enabled road logistics platform eTrucknow in India.

The platform helps bridge the supply and demand of road logistics via a digital marketplace, bringing a faster way for customers to book trucks and an easier way for carriers to unlock business opportunities. With eTrucknow, shippers get access to a simplified quotation and booking process for domestic road logistics shipments.

"The easy-to-use digital solution has been developed based



on our customers' needs and market trends. The platform's functionalities are continuously evolving to create an optimal customer experience from an ad-hoc shipment to the regular

large volume of shipments," Kuehne+Nagel Asia Pacific Senior Vice President of Road Logistics Chellan Ganesan said.

The platform helps overcome challenges of long waiting time

# NEWSBRIEF

## Chat series on coconut ventures

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) has joined hands with the Agri Business Incubator of the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) to launch an online chat series on leveraging technology to tap agribusiness opportunities in coconut sector. The programme - YAWA (You Ask We Answer), is part of the ongoing Kalpa Green Chat that focuses on technologies developed by CPCRI. The chat series will continue for the next three Saturdays. Dr K Muraliedharan, Head, Social Science Department, CPCRI, will hold a class on entrepreneurship and technology-based enterprises. a pressrelease said. **AGENCIES**

## HARMAN launches JBL desktop monitors

**NEW DELHI:** HARMAN Professional Solutions, the global leader in audio, video, lighting and control systems, on Friday said it has launched new JBL desktop reference monitors with Bluetooth in India priced at Rs 11,499. The JBL Professional One Series 104-BT and 104-BTW desktop reference monitors enable content creators and audio professionals to stream accurate, studio-quality audio via Bluetooth or play-back audio using a standard wired connection, HARMAN Professional Solution said in a statement. **AGENCIES**

## Airtel introduces 'Priority 4G Network'

**NEW DELHI:** Bharti Airtel on Monday announced the launch of "Priority 4G Network" for its "Platinum" mobile customers. Airtel has deployed advanced technologies that give its Platinum mobile customers preference on the network. As a result, all these customers will experience faster 4G speeds, the company said in a statement. As part of the Airtel Thanks programme, all postpaid mobile customers on Rs 499 and above plans are designated as Platinum and enjoy a range of exclusive benefits, including a customised Platinum UI on Airtel Thanks app. In addition, Airtel Platinum customers get red carpet customer care with preferential service at call centres and retail stores. All Airtel call centres and retail stores have dedicated staff to attend to Platinum customers on priority and cut down on their waiting time. **AGENCIES**

# Piaggio Vehicles starts online sales facility for commercial vehicles

**MUMBAI:** Piaggio Vehicles on Tuesday launched online sales facility for its commercial vehicles to enable customers to book vehicle online by paying an initial amount of Rs 1,000, check ex-showroom and on-road prices for their cities and apply for loan, among others.

The new sales initiative, which the company claims is first-of-its-kind in the CV sales space, comes nearly a month after Piaggio Vehicles Private Limited (PVPL) rolled out a digital platform for its Vespa and Aprilia brands of scooters.

PVPL is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Piaggio Group of Italy and has presence in small commercial vehicles and premium scooter segments in India.

Piaggio had already launched the e-commerce website for its two-wheeler range of products last month and now a new e-commerce



platform is being launched for its three-wheeler brand Ape", keeping in mind the requirement of CV customers, the company said in a release.

This new e-commerce platform integrates all Piaggio commercial vehicle dealerships across India for local connect and a standardised delivery experience, it said.

"The launch of this unique

platform in the commercial vehicle space will enable our customers to book their selected model from the comfort of their homes without visiting the showroom. We feel that this one-of-its-kind offering in the Indian CV space will benefit our customers in many ways," said Diego Graffi, Chairman and Managing Director, Piaggio Vehicles. **AGENCIES**

# Renault unveils new RXL variant of Kwid

**MUMBAI:** French automaker Renault on Monday announced the launch of new RXL variant of its entry level hatchback Kwid with BS-VI engine at a starting price of Rs 4.16 lakh in the domestic market.

The car maker also announced that Kwid sales have crossed 3.5 lakh units in the country. The new RXL variant comes in two versions, MT and AMT, priced at Rs 4.16 lakh and Rs 4.48 lakh, respectively, Renault India said in a release.

"The global launch of Renault Kwid was in India and showcased the important role of this country in Groupe Renault's growth ambitions. It has been an important contributor to our progress in India.

"With more than 3.5 lakh Kwid families, we are overwhelmed and grateful for the faith that our customers have bestowed in brand Renault. The model continues to be a game changer for us," said Venkatesh Mamillapalle, Country CEO and Managing Director,



Renault India Operations. Renault claims Kwid offers low cost of ownership owing to 98 per cent localisation of the car. The car maker also rolled out a slew of offers, which include an EMI-based "buy now pay later" scheme, which can be availed either at the dealership or through the company's website or its mobile app, according to the release. There are also offers across the product range including cash offers, exchange benefits and finance at a special

rate of 8.25 per cent. These are complemented by additional loyalty offers for its existing customers. Renault India has also rolled out additional benefits for doctors and police personnel, under its "Care for Caregivers" programme, as a gesture to thank the efforts of the COVID warriors in the country, the company said.

The digital capabilities and portfolios have been significantly enhanced with online

booking options and other interventions wherein customers can book cars from home on the Renault India website or the MyRenault App at a nominal booking amount, and can also get loan approvals remotely from Renault Finance, it said.

"In the post lockdown scenario, there may be a considerable demand shift from public transport to customers considering the mini car segment, due to the new normal norms anticipated. We are making our products and financial offerings even more accessible to new car aspirers," added Mamillapalle.

The new Kwid offers a host of equipment and features such as the 20.32 cm touchscreen MediaNAV Evolution, first-in-class LED digital instrument cluster, a floor console mounted AMT dial, one-touch lane change indicator with top variants having an additional rear-view camera assist through sound warning and colour guidelines, the release said. **AGENCIES**

# TikTok's ad launch faces challenges from US ban threat, hoaxes

**BEIJING:** TikTok's launch on Wednesday of a new platform to court small business advertisers is fraught with challenges, especially after the Trump administration's threat this week to impose a ban on China-based social media apps.

The new self-service ad platform, which lets companies purchase ads without needing to speak with a sales team, is key to TikTok's ability to turn its red hot short video sharing app into a viable advertising business.

But the possible ban float-

ed by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo late on Monday, and new questions about the Chinese-owned company's ability to control hate speech and misinformation, cloud the launch, ad buyers said.

"The trust issues are there because it's a new app," said an executive at a major ad agency, adding TikTok needs to make clear to advertisers what it will do "if the chance is more than zero," that ads could show up next to harmful content.

The launch coincides with an international backlash against hate speech and misin-

formation that has proliferated on other services including Facebook Inc and Twitter Inc, prompting an unprecedented advertising boycott of some of these social media platforms.

In recent months, the debunked "PizzaGate" conspiracy theory about a child sex ring run out of a Washington pizza parlor by Democratic elites resurfaced on TikTok for a new generation of users, the New York Times reported.

TikTok said it is committed to protecting brands from appearing next to objection-



able content through content moderation technology and

human moderators. It also said it has never provided user data

The new self-service ad platform, which lets companies purchase ads without needing to speak with a sales team, is key to TikTok's ability to turn its red hot short video sharing app into a viable advertising business

to the Chinese government and would not do so if asked, when asked about Pompeo's statements.

These issues, along with confusion over TikTok's benefit for smaller advertisers will need to be resolved if TikTok wants to attract more advertis-

ers, ad agency executives said. Wednesday's global launch of the self-serve ad platform, which had previously been in beta testing, will include a music library and video-editing tools to help brands make ads that match the style of TikTok videos. **AGENCIES**

# My family has launched more new talent than entire Bollywood: POOJA BHATT

“THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE BHATTS WERE ACCUSED OF HAVING SOMETHING AGAINST ESTABLISHED ACTORS AND MADE TO FEEL INFERIOR FOR ONLY WORKING WITH/LAUNCHING NEWCOMERS AND NOT CHASING STARS”



Actor Pooja Bhatt on Wednesday said her home banner Vishesh Films, under father Mahesh and uncle Mukesh Bhatt, has done far more than the combined efforts of Bollywood in launching new talent across the board in the film industry. The actor's comments came as a response to the nepotism debate that has intensified after the death of Sushant Singh Rajput. Her family has been

at the receiving end of the divided social media discourse, with both her filmmaker father and her half-sister, actor Alia Bhatt being criticised for riding on the privileges of an insider. Taking to Twitter, Pooja Bhatt said it was funny how family production house, which launched one of the famous outsiders Kangana Ranaut in Anurag Basu's 2006 "Gangster", is now being dragged into the debate.

"Have been asked to comment on the hot topic Nepotism that people are raging about. As someone who hails from a 'family' that has launched more new talent - actors, musicians and technicians than the entire film industry combined, I can only laugh. Facts don't find takers. Fiction does," the actor-filmmaker wrote. Pooja Bhatt, 48, said her family always tries to scout new talent so much so that the banner was "accused" of harbouring bias against established names. "There was a time when the Bhattas were accused of having something against established actors and made to feel inferior for only working with/launching newcomers and not chasing stars. "And now the same peo-

ple play the nepotism card? Google and tweet guys and won't even say think and speak," she said. Citing the example of Ranaut, who in 2017 famously called filmmaker Karan Johar 'the flag-bearer of nepotism' on his chat show, Pooja Bhatt said Basu may have "discovered" the National Award winner "but Vishesh Films backed his vision" and invested in the film". Basu has previously directed "Saaya" (2003) and "Murder" (2004) for the banner. Pooja Bhatt, who will next be seen in the Mahesh Bhatt-directed "Sadak 2", said the upcoming film gave a new music composer, Suniljeet, a chance to board the project after her father heard his tunes. "Even #Sadak2 gives birth

to a brand new talent in the form of @Suniljeet72. A music teacher from Chandigarh who came to our office with no prior appointment, a dream, a harmonium & a brilliant song called 'Ishq Kamaal' that was absorbed into the film on first hearing by my father," she further argued. "Sadak 2", a sequel to her 1991 film directed by Mahesh Bhatt, also features returning cast member Sanjay Dutt, and new entrants Alia Bhatt and Aditya Roy Kapur. Pooja Bhatt said nepotism can't be used to malign her family. "The people who have found their way into the movies through the springboard we provided over the decades know what we stand for. And if they have forgotten, it's their tragedy. Not ours," she added. The actor has also featured in her father's films including "Dil Hai Ki Manta Nahin", "Daddy", "Zakhm" and "Tamanna". Pooja Bhatt has directed 2007 film "Dhokha" for her home banner. AGENCIES



## TAAPSEE PANNU sees 'countless UPS AND DOWNS'

'HAVE SEEN COUNTLESS UPS AND DOWNS IN EVERYTHING I TRIED TO ATTEMPT IN LIFE BUT TRUST ME THE SUCCESS TASTES SWEETEST AFTER YOU HAVE HAD A TASTE OF FAILURE,' SHE SAYS

Actress Taapsee Pannu says she has seen numerous ups and downs in everything she has tried to attempt in life. Taapsee took to Instagram, where she shared a throwback image from the time when her team Pune Seven Aces won the Premier Badminton League (PBL). "Getting back to what I started..... 2020 has been very disturbing. For many reasons but the fact remains that time waits for nobody. Or a better way to look at it is, this too shall pass," she wrote alongside the image. "Remembering this moment when my team won its first tie in PBL after almost everybody thought we r done. Loving back to back was obviously not how any of us imagined it to be. This victory definitely brought that smile on my face but also reassured that bad times don't last n if you hang on to hope and positivity you are bound to see a successful tomorrow." She added: "Have seen countless ups and downs in everything I tried to attempt in life but trust me the success tastes sweetest after you have had a taste of failure. Big hug n a bigger smile to sail through this time. #Throwback." Taapsee made her acting debut with the 2010 Telugu film "Jhummandi Naadam". She was later seen in films like "Chashme Baddoor", "Pink", "The Ghazi Attack", "Judwaa 2" and "Badla" among many others. After giving a stellar performance in "Thappad", she will be seen in "Haseen Dill-ruba", "Rashmi Rocket" and "Shabaash Mithu" over the coming months. AGENCIES

## Yoga helps JACQUELINE deal with anxiety

Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez has admitted that she has been "dealing with some major anxiety" lately. Even though, the actress did not disclose the reason, she did confess that regularly performing yoga has helped her combat the stress. "I have been dealing with some major anxiety these past few weeks.. however being consistent with yoga has taught me the valuable lesson of being in the moment and what's even more important.. gratitude.. for life and being alive.. have a great day everyone!" Jacqueline shared on Instagram on Wednesday.

The actress also shared a video where she can be seen performing a few asanas. Jacqueline is a yoga enthusiast and keeps sharing her videos for fans on social media. In the past, she has shared videos of her performing asanas like Surya Namaskar, stretching of the spine and deep breathing. On the work front, Jacqueline recently made her digital debut with the web series "Mrs Serial Killer" and launched an online dance competition titled "Home Dancer". She also featured in the video of Salman Khan's song "Tere bina", shot in the actor's Panvel farmhouse where she has spent the lockdown. AGENCIES



## Hina Khan: TV ACTORS DON'T GET A FAIR CHANCE IN BOLLYWOOD

From starring in the TV show "Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai" for eight years to foray into Bollywood and the digital space, actress Hina Khan has carved a space in the entertainment industry. She feels it is not easy for a TV star to make it big in films. "What we lack is equality. Nepotism exists everywhere and it does exist in our industry, too. If you are a star and you want to launch your kid, it's absolutely okay. But, it is not fair when you don't give an equal chance to outsiders. TV actors hardly make it big in Bollywood, just because we don't get a fair chance. At least, give us a chance to prove ourselves," Hina told IANS. "Sushant Singh Rajput's journey inspired me a lot. I look up to him for so many things. He made a place for himself in Indian cinema with his hard work. We outsiders do not have

godfathers, what we want is a little bit of respect and recognition. So, a proper balance should prevail," she said. She also recalled how big Indian designers looked down upon her when she was about to make her debut at the Cannes Film Festival a year ago. "I don't know why people in India look down upon TV actors. I remember how international designers helped me instead of Indian designers, during my Cannes debut. In the West, TV actors are treated with dignity, but here, many people do not work with us. I don't understand the reason behind it. Are we beneath them or are they insecure of our talent? I hope things change in our industry as soon as possible," Hina emphasised. She says it is high time to appreciate talented artistes irrespective of their medium. "Discrimination on the basis of medium should be stopped. An actor is an actor. It does not matter whether he or she works in a daily soap or a film or a digital show. AGENCIES



## I DON'T KNOW WHY PEOPLE IN INDIA LOOK DOWN UPON TV ACTORS. I REMEMBER HOW INTERNATIONAL DESIGNERS HELPED ME INSTEAD OF INDIAN DESIGNERS, DURING MY CANNES DEBUT

understand the reason behind it. Are we beneath them or are they insecure of our talent? I hope things change in our industry as soon as possible," Hina emphasised. She says it is high time to appreciate talented artistes irrespective of their medium. "Discrimination on the basis of medium should be stopped. An actor is an actor. It does not matter whether he or she works in a daily soap or a film or a digital show. AGENCIES

## My father was defeated at the box office by hunks with six pack abs: Irrfan's son Babil

Actor Irrfan Khan's son Babil on Wednesday said he doesn't like the political debates around Sushant Singh Rajput's death, but there is now a wind of change in cinema, something his father kept fighting for throughout his life. Babil said his father constantly tried to challenge the existing ecosystem in the Hindi film industry, but he would be defeated at the

box office by hunks with six pack abs delivering formulaic dialogues. Irrfan passed away in April at the age of 54 following his battle with a rare form of cancer. "My father gave his life trying to elevate the art of acting in the adverse conditions of noughties Bollywood and alas, for almost all of his journey, was defeated in the box office by hunks with six pack abs delivering theatrical one-liners and defying

the laws of physics and reality," Babil wrote in a long Instagram post recalling his father's struggle. "Photoshopped item songs, just blatant sexism and same-old conventional representations of patriarchy (and you must understand, to be defeated at the box office means that majority of the investment in Bollywood would be going to the winners, engulfing us in a vicious circle)," he added. AGENCIES



## Veteran actor Jagdeep passes away at 81

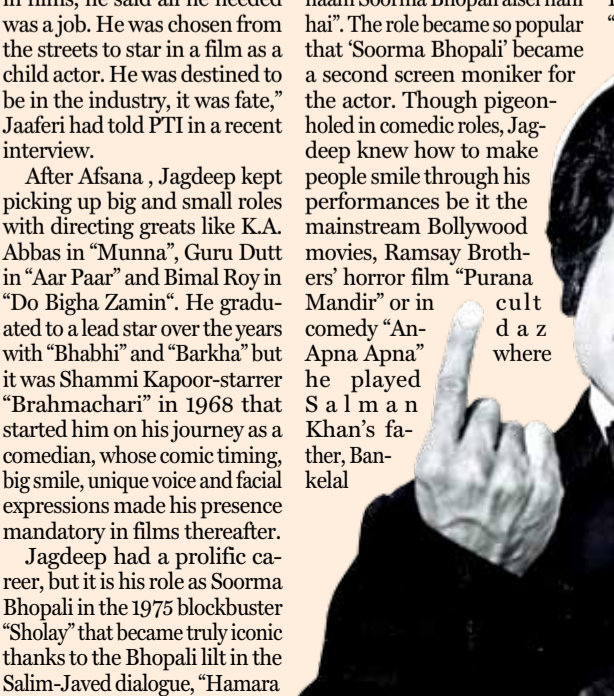
Veteran actor Jagdeep, whose paan-stained grin and mischievous eyes as Soorma Bhopali in Sholay made him popular across generations, died on Wednesday at his residence. He was 81. The actor had not been keeping well, producer Mehmood Ali, a family friend, told PTI. "He passed away at 8.30 p.m. at his residence in Bandra. He was not keeping well because of age related issues," Ali said. Jagdeep will be laid to rest at a cemetery in south Mumbai around 11.30 a.m. on Thursday, he added. The last of the comic icons in the tradition of seniors Johnny Walker and Mehmood, the actor had a prolific career that lasted beyond 400 films and many memorable roles. Jagdeep, whose real name was Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Jafri, started his journey in cinema with the 1951 film "Afsana",

which marked filmmaker B.R. Chopra's directorial debut. It was a riches-to-rags story for child Jagdeep, whose family's fortunes declined after his father's death and the Partition. In interviews, he recalled how his mother, once used to servants and other luxuries, raised him while working as a cook in an orphanage. Young Jagdeep was eager to help her and at the age of six or seven, he landed on the sets of

"Afsana" after being spotted on the streets of Mumbai. The role promised him three rupees as fee, which was doubled when the young actor got to mouth a dialogue. Recalling his father's journey in cinema, his actor son Jaaved Jafri once said Jagdeep was destined to be a part of show business. "My father was a child when he was looking for a job after Partition. When someone asked him if he wanted to work

in films, he said all he needed was a job. He was chosen from the streets to star in a film as a child actor. He was destined to be in the industry, it was fate," Jafri had told PTI in a recent interview. After Afsana, Jagdeep kept picking up big and small roles with directing greats like K.A. Abbas in "Munna", Guru Dutt in "Aar Paar" and Bimal Roy in "Do Bigha Zamin". He graduated to a lead star over the years with "Bhabhi" and "Barkha" but it was Shamma Kapoor-starrer "Brahmachari" in 1968 that started him on his journey as a comedian, whose comic timing, big smile, unique voice and facial expressions made his presence mandatory in films thereafter. Jagdeep had a prolific career, but it is his role as Soorma Bhopali in the 1975 blockbuster "Sholay" that became truly iconic thanks to the Bhopali lilt in the Salim-Javed dialogue, "Hamara

naam Soorma Bhopali aisei nahi hai". The role became so popular that 'Soorma Bhopali' became a second screen moniker for the actor. Though pigeon-holed in comedic roles, Jagdeep knew how to make people smile through his performances be it the mainstream Bollywood movies, Ramsay Brothers' horror film "Purana Mandir" or in comedy "An Apna Apna" where he played a cult da z where Bhopali, perhaps a hat-tip to his "Sholay" role. AGENCIES



## My competition is just me: RYSA SAUJANI

Rysa Saujani, who gained recognition with her role of younger Sunny Leone in in ZEE5's show "Karenjit Kaur - The Untold Story of Sunny Leone", has been selected as a wild card entry to the Miss England beauty pageant. IANSLife spoke to the winner of the "Face of The Globe Pageant 2014 - People's choice award" to know how she is preparing for the contest which is going virtual this year and live streamed on July 31. Excerpts

**How did you get the wild card entry?** SAUJANI: The age limit to enter Miss England pageant is 16 years old. And I have just turned 16. My mum applied to the pageant and completely forgot about it. And hold behold I get an email from them not only accepting my application but offering me a wild card entry. I was ecstatic on receiving this offer. **How do you see your competitors?** SAUJANI: Really speaking, my competition is just me. I need to keep improving my skills and work towards my passions and goals to the best of my ability. I have to keep becoming better today than what I was yesterday. **But they have been preparing for long?** SAUJANI: Good question, I have lots and lots of work to do. I have started online coaching. Due to the current situation, I can't attend classes. I need to start working on my outfits, hair, have to be working out regularly. Since first and foremost it's a pageant so I need to take care of myself but at the same time I am more excited to have a platform where by I can express and bring awareness to the topics that is very close to my heart -- mental health awareness. AGENCIES



## Singer Nikitaa unveils 'Goddess'

Singer-songwriter Nikitaa has come up with a new song "Goddess". "I wanted the song to have some tribal elements, which is why you hear gong-like instrumentation, tablas, and other percussion elements to compliment this idea. I wanted the song to have this sense of wildness - wild as in tribal, earthy - but at the same time be confident and composed. "I started writing this song about 2 years ago, and it has changed at least 5 to 6 times since then (mostly musically) because I kept feeling like I hadn't done the song justice. As we refined the song I introduced more tribal melodies to accentuate the main vocals," Nikitaa shared. Shot on her phone, video of "Goddess" was created during the lockdown. "I wanted to write a song about who a Goddess is, and what she commands from those who wish to be in her life. A Goddess is fierce, a Goddess is multidimensional, a Goddess demands truth and devotion, a Goddess asks for a person who will put in the effort! These demands are clearly set out in the song," Nikitaa added. AGENCIES

