

CITY TALKS



2
BJP ACCUSES AAP GOVT OF GIVING RATION CARDS TO ROHINGYAS AND BANGLADESHIS

CORPORATE & INDUSTRY



4
TECHNOLOGY, PHARMA, E-COMMERCE AND MANUFACTURING TO LEAD INDIA'S GROWTH

LIFESTYLE & ENTERTAINMENT



12
ACTRESS VIDYA BALAN SAYS IT IS HUMAN TO DOUBT YOURSELF

Economic revival key to survival

GOVT OPEN TO ANNOUNCING ADDITIONAL MEASURES TO BOOST GROWTH, SAYS FM

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has promised more policy interventions to revive the economy, and emphasised that green shoots are visible and the agriculture sector is driving growth. Indicators like electricity and fuel consumption, inter and intra-state movement of goods, PMI data and retail financial transactions are witnessing a pick-up, she said. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi too had said the Indian economy has started seeing "green shoots" of recovery and the country remains one of the most open economies in the world. Speaking at the India Ideas Summit, Sitharaman said the government has announced a



stimulus package totalling 10 per cent of the GDP which was having its impact on economic revival. "All options are open... interventions will happen in future," Sitharaman said, assuring the industry that the government will not shy away from taking more steps to ensure early revival of the economy. The minister further said the "agriculture sector is driving the growth."

In a separate development, experts said that India's debt-to-GDP ratio will shoot up to 87.6% at the end of the current financial year from 72.2% in FY20 on the back of extra borrowing by the government in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over four percentage points of the increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio is attributable to the fall in growth, which is going to result in GDP contraction during the year, they

said, insisting on measures to address growth rather than adopting fiscal conservatism, economists at SBI pointed out. This higher debt amount will also lead to the shifting of the FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Act, 2003, target of combined debt to 60% of the GDP by seven years to FY30, they said in the note. It said the moot point is whether the debt is sustainable, and added that over \$500

FM ALSO SAID
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billion in forex reserves can take care of the external debt while servicing the internal one is also not an issue. "In the current situation our nominal GDP growth is likely to contract significantly and based on this our interest-growth differential will turn positive in FY21, thus raising serious questions on debt sustainability," it added. According to a foreign brokerage, economic activity continues to remain weak and will lead to a 6.1% contraction in India's GDP in the current fiscal. The Reserve Bank is likely to pause at the upcoming policy review in August and cut rates by 25 basis points each in the October and December reviews, Japanese brokerage Nomura said in a report.

All the analysts expect a contraction in the GDP due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted both supply and demand forces in the economy since March. Official data also suggests a surge in inflation, which will further drag down the GDP in real terms. Nomura said the June quarter will be the 'nadir' from a growth perspective and the economy will contract by 15.2% and the GDP will never come into the positive territory in the remaining part of this fiscal. It estimated contractions of 5.6% in September quarter, 2.8% for December quarter and 1.4% in the March quarter, which will give a full fiscal GDP at negative 6.1%. Overall, aggregate demand continues to lag aggregate supply, especially due to weak services activity and subdued urban consumption demand, it said. Demand has taken a larger hit from the lockdown, likely reflecting higher precautionary savings by consumers amid rising income uncertainty. In contrast, the supply side is constrained only to the extent mandated by the rules, it said. **AGENCIES**

India, China plan 'complete' disengagement of troops



THE TWO SIDES AGREE THAT ANOTHER MEETING OF THEIR SENIOR ARMY COMMANDERS MAY BE HELD SOON TO WORK OUT FURTHER STEPS TO ENSURE COMPLETE DISENGAGEMENT

NEW DELHI: India and China have agreed for an "early and complete" disengagement of the troops from the friction points in eastern Ladakh, holding that full restoration of peace and tranquility in border areas was essential for the overall development of bilateral relations. The two countries reviewed the situation in the region during a fresh round of online diplomatic talks under the framework of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on border affairs. The parleys took place against the backdrop of reports that the disengagement process has not moved forward as expected following the last round of marathon Corps Commander-level talks on July 14. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the two sides agreed at the Friday talks that another meeting of their senior army commanders may be held soon

to work out further steps to ensure complete disengagement "expeditiously". "They agreed that early and complete disengagement of the troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and de-escalation from India-China border areas in accordance with bilateral agreement and protocols and full restoration of peace and tranquility was essential for smooth overall development of bilateral relations," it said in a statement. The MEA said the two sides noted that this was in accordance with the agreement reached between the two Special Representatives during their telephonic conversation on July 5. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a nearly two-hour-long telephonic conversation on July 5 to bring down tension between the armies of the two countries in eastern Ladakh. Both sides commenced the disengagement process from July 6 following talks between Doval and Wang who are Special Representatives of the boundary question. In Friday's talks, the MEA said both sides agreed that it was necessary to "sincerely" implement the understandings reached between senior commanders in their meetings till date. **AGENCIES**

Advani records statement in Babri demolition case



NEW DELHI: Veteran BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani recorded his statement in the 1992 Babri mosque demolition case before a special CBI court on Friday. The 92-year-old appeared before the special CBI court in Lucknow via video link. The statement of the former deputy prime minister was recorded in the presence of his counsel Vimal Kumar Srivastava, KK Mishra, and Abhishek Ranjan, who were also present in the court through video-conferencing.

On Thursday, the Court had recorded the statement of another BJP veteran leader Murlu Manohar Joshi in the case. Dubbing prosecution witnesses in the Babri mosque demolition case as "liars", Joshi had asserted that he was innocent and implicated in the case by the then Congress government at the Centre. On Wednesday, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP veteran L K Advani spoke for around 30 minutes. The Babri demolition case

hearing took place just days before a mega groundbreaking event is scheduled on August 5 for Ram temple at Ayodhya which is expected to be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a host of other VIPs. The Babri mosque demolition trial is presently at the stage of recording the statements of 32 accused in the case under Section 313 of CrPC during which they get an opportunity to refute the prosecution evidence against them. The court has to complete the trial through day-to-day hearing in the case and deliver its verdict by August 31 as directed by the Supreme Court. The 16th-century mosque in Ayodhya was demolished on December 6, 1992, by 'kar sevaks' who claimed that an ancient Ram temple stood at the same site marking the birthplace of Lord Ram. Advani and Joshi were among those leading the Ram temple movement at that time. **AGENCIES**

NTPC eyes 1 GW solar projects



NEW DELHI: State-run power giant NTPC has floated a tender to acquire 1 GW operational solar projects, which entails an investment of around Rs 5,000 crore. In a tender or request for proposal (RFP) issued on Friday, NTPC has invited bids from the promoters or lenders, authorised financial intermediaries of power generation companies, independent power producers or developers for offering operational solar based assets located in India. The tender is expected to be finalised by October this year. The document stated that in line with its long-term corporate plan, NTPC is taking various steps to make its energy portfolio greener by adding significant capacities of renewable energy (RE) sources.

By 2032, the company plans to have a minimum of 32 GW capacity through RE sources constituting nearly 25 per cent of its overall power generation capacity. The RE portfolio of NTPC has ongoing capacity addition projects with around 2,298 MW projects under construction. The company is also contemplating to increase its renewable generation capacity through acquisition of operation solar-based power assets located in India for a minimum capacity of 1 GW, it stated in the RFP. The company can increase its power generation capacity instantly by going for inorganic growth or acquiring existing operational projects. Setting up a solar project takes up to two years as per industry standards.

The company has a capital expenditure plan of Rs 21,000 crore for the current fiscal year, and most of it would be spent on adding new power generation capacities, it said. For acquiring about 1 GW of operational solar power capacity, the company would have to shell out around Rs 5,000 crore as per back of the envelope calculations. NTPC, formerly known as National Thermal Power Corporation, plans to be a 130 GW-company by 2032 with diversified fuel mix. With a total installed capacity of 62,910 MW, the NTPC group has 70 power stations comprising of 24 coal, 7 combined cycle gas/liquid fuel, 1 hydro, 13 renewables along with 25 subsidiary and JV power stations. **AGENCIES**

UK can't set timeline for Mallya's extradition

LONDON: The United Kingdom government can not set a timeline for extradition of liquor baron Vijay Mallya, the British High Commissioner Sir Philip Barton told news agency PTI today. "The extradition of Vijay Mallya is an ongoing legal case and I can't comment any further on it. I can't say anything at all about timescales," Barton said.

Barton further said, "The UK government and the courts, which are independent of the government, are absolutely clear about their roles in preventing people avoid justice by moving to another country. We are all determined to play our part in any case, and to make sure that we are working together to ensure that criminals

can't escape justice by crossing national borders." Citing unresolved legal issues, the UK government earlier indicated that Mallya is unlikely to be extradited to India anytime soon. **AGENCIES**

Made in India iPhone 11 now available in market

NEW DELHI: The US technology giant Apple has begun manufacturing iPhone 11 at Foxconn's facility in Tamil Nadu, according to official sources. This is the fifth model of the iPhone that Apple is manufacturing in the country. Industry sources aware of the development told PTI that "Foxconn has been assembling iPhone 11 at the Sriperumbudur facility for a few months and the devices have been available in the market since last month. Foxconn also makes the iPhone XR for Apple. Wistron makes iPhone 7." Apple and Foxconn did not comment on the matter.

According to Counterpoint research, Apple leads the ultra-premium smartphone segment—devices priced above Rs 45,000 a unit—driven by iPhone 11 shipments in the second quarter of 2020. The iPhone 11 is available in India at a starting price of around Rs 68,000 a unit. "The Indian market is about 5-5.5 per cent of the global market. Global companies such as Apple, Samsung, Oppo, Vivo, Xiaomi and others will be exporting in large volumes and value from India," mobile devices industry body ICEA chairman Pankaj Mohindroo said. **AGENCIES**

Green Card waitlist for Indian is more than 195 years

WASHINGTON: The backlog for an Indian national to get permanent residency or Green Card is more than 195 years, a top Republican senator has said, urging his Senate colleagues to come out with a legislative resolution to address this problem. A Green Card, known officially as a Permanent Resident Card, is a document issued to immigrants to the U.S. as evidence that the bearer has been granted the privilege of residing permanently. Senator Mike Lee said on Wednesday that the current Green Card policy did nothing for the child of an immigrant whose dead parent's Green Card application was ultimately denied because his or her job was no longer available.



"Someone from India entering the backlog today would have to wait 195 years to receive an EB-3 green card. Even if we give their children this limbo status, none of them will have a prayer of becoming a

U.S. citizen," Lee said on the Senator floor. In fiscal year 2019, Indian nationals received 9,008 category 1 (EB1), 2,908 category 2 (EB2), and 5,083 category 3 (EB3) Green Cards. EB1-3

"Someone from India entering the backlog today would have to wait 195 years to receive an EB-3 green card. Even if we give their children this limbo status, none of them will have a prayer of becoming a U.S. citizen," Lee said on the Senator floor. In fiscal year 2019, Indian nationals received 9,008 category 1 (EB1), 2,908 category 2 (EB2), and 5,083 category 3 (EB3) Green Cards. EB1-3 are different categories of employment-based Green Cards. Mr. Lee, the senator from Utah, was speaking on the legislation moved by Senator Dick Durbin that seeks to protect immigrant workers and their children who are stuck in the green card backlog. "Green cards are critical in the lives of so many who are here on temporary work visas. The backlog puts families at risk of losing their immigration status as they wait year

after weary year to finally make it through this green card backlog," Mr. Durbin said. "Our bipartisan agreement would add critical protections that were not in the original bill for immigrant workers and their immediate family members who are stuck in the backlog. They would be able to switch jobs and travel without losing immigration status. And children of immigrant workers would be protected from ageing out so they will not face

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Row erupts over ration cards

BJP ACCUSES AAP GOVERNMENT OF FAVOURING BANGLADESHIS, ROHINGYAS IN RATION CARD DISTRIBUTION

NEW DELHI: BJP MP Gautam Gambhir on Thursday said Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is doing in Delhi what Mamata Banerjee did in West Bengal, and alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) favoured Bangladeshis and Rohingyas while issuing ration cards for vote-bank politics.



The East Delhi MP also questioned the "seriousness" of the AAP government in tackling the problems of the city, alleging that officials of the Public Works Department (PWD) were absent from a meeting of the Committee on Urban Development that discussed the issue of waterlogging in the national capital.

Senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh termed Gambhir's remarks "nonsense" and also alleged

change of the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.

Gambhir alleged that in the past six years "not a single deserving" person was issued a ration card and added that migrant workers left the city during pandemic as they did not get ration.

"When ration cards are to be issued to illegal migrants Bangladeshi and Rohingyas, the AAP is ahead of everyone because they want to do vote bank politics. What Mamata Banerjee is doing in Bengal, Kejriwal is doing in Delhi," he alleged.

Raising the issue of waterlogging, the cricketer-turned-politician said the Delhi Chief Minister should be serious about issues plaguing the city. "I am just coming from an Urban Development com-

mittee meeting where the waterlogging in Delhi was discussed. The PWD was not there, this is how serious Kejriwal and his agency are," he charged.

Singh, replying to Gautam on Twitter, said he was lying as PWD was not called for the meeting. "Gautam Gambhir ji issuing any statement about parliamentary standing committee meeting beyond it is contempt, only the chairman has power to do so. Still I did not expect you to lie. The truth is the PWD was not invited. Should it have reached there on its own?" he tweeted in Hindi.

The BJP leaders said the party will launch an agitation if people are not issued ration cards in Delhi.

"The Delhi government

should immediately start providing ration cards to the 10 lakh poor people in the capital. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal himself had said on April 6 this year said that 10 lakh non-ration card holders of Delhi would be given free ration," Bidhuri said.

The Delhi government had earlier said that it will provide free ration to people including over 17 lakh card holders till November. The government has also been providing free ration to nearly 30 lakh people not having ration cards during the pandemic, it had said. The Chief Minister announced Mukhya Mantri Ghar Ghar Ration Yojna earlier this week, for doorstep delivery of ration to card-holders. The scheme will come into effect in next 6-7 months, he said. **AGENCIES**

DELHI RIOTS

Kejriwal gets 7 days to decide on lawyer request



NEW DELHI: Citing difference of opinion with the AAP dispensation, Lt Governor Anil Bajjal has written to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asking him to decide within a week on the Delhi Police's proposal to appoint six senior advocates for arguing on its behalf in cases related to riots and anti-CAA protests.

Bajjal, in his letter to Kejriwal, said that acting Home Minister Manish Sisodia did not agree to the Delhi Police proposal despite the force providing detailed justification for it.

The Delhi Police has proposed to appoint six senior advocates to argue on its behalf in 85 cases of riots in Northeast Delhi and assign 24 cases of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to special public prosecutors, sources said.

The lieutenant governor said that he had called the file pertaining to the matter for perusal on July 14 under Rule of 19 (5) of the Transaction of Business Rules (TBR), the sources said. Bajjal said that he had requested the home minister to reconsider his decision and agree to the proposal of the Delhi Police.

Sources said that there was a meeting between Bajjal and Sisodia through video conference on Friday to settle the difference of opinion, but the matter could not be resolved.

"Since the difference of opinion still persists, I would request the chief minister to expeditiously refer the matter to the Council of Ministers under Rule 49 of TBR of GNCTD, 1992 with Section 45 (c) of the Government of NCT Act, 1991.

"In view of urgency and sensitivity of matter, it is requested that the decision of Cabinet be communicated expeditiously, preferably within a week," a source quoted Bajjal as having said in the letter. **AGENCIES**

NEWSBRIEF

10 houses collapse in heavy rains

NEW DELHI: Several residents of a slum area in Anna Nagar were displaced as over 10 houses collapsed following heavy rains that lashed the national capital on Sunday morning. The colony is located behind the under-construction WHO headquarters in ITO and is next to a drain. Delhi Police, Delhi Fire Service and National Disaster Response Force teams rushed to the spot. According to the Delhi Fire Service, a call was received about a house collapse around 8 am. As heavy rains started lashing the area on Saturday night, some of the people started vacating their houses. There were no reports of any casualty in the area. **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**

Delhi zoo installs CCTV cameras

NEW DELHI: The Delhi zoo has started installing CCTV cameras on its premises, including in the animal enclosures, for a round-the-clock monitoring of animal behaviour and to prevent the visitors from violating rules. Around 230 CCTV cameras will be installed in the first phase. The number may go up, a zoo official said. He said a server room has been set up and the work of installing hubs and laying wires is going on. According to zoo Director Ramesh Pandey, the CCTV cameras will be used to monitor animal behaviour round the clock and sort out issues, if any, immediately. **AGENCIES**

Kawasaki-like syndrome in Delhi children

NEW DELHI: Some Delhi hospitals are treating young patients, mostly children, who have been exhibiting symptoms of Kawasaki-like syndrome and there is presumably a link with COVID-19, doctors have said. Pediatric experts at a leading hospital here said in nearly fifty percent of these cases, patients become "more serious" than those suffering from regular Kawasaki disease. Kawasaki disease is an illness with an unknown cause that leads blood vessels to become inflamed. It affects children, mostly aged below five. **AGENCIES**

Police opposes in HC plea of Ishrat Jahan in UAPA case

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police Monday opposed in the Delhi High Court a plea by former Congress municipal councillor Ishrat Jahan, booked under anti-terror law UAPA in a case related to communal violence in northeast Delhi in February, challenging a trial court order extending the time for completing the investigation by 60 more days.

The case came up for hearing through video conferencing before Justice Suresh Kait, who reserved the order on the plea of the accused challenging the trial court order extending time for completing the probe beyond 90 days.

Jahan was arrested on February 26. Advocate Lalit Valecha, who appeared for her, sought setting aside the trial court's order, saying it was "erroneous, bad in law and wrong on facts" and it was against the democratic and fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

However, Delhi Police counsel contended that the high court should not intervene in the matter as far as the order of the additional sessions judge, extending the time to probe the case, is concerned as there was no infirmity in it. Jahan's advocate contended



that the prosecutor had not applied his mind while filing the application in the trial court.

While Delhi Government standing counsel (criminal) Rahul Mehra said he was authorised to represent the state and Delhi Police, advocate Amit Prasad claimed that he was appointed as Special Public Prosecutor by the LG to represent the police in riots cases.

The high court allowed both the counsel to argue and submit their respective status reports in the matter as it had made clear in an earlier hearing that it was not going to enter into the controversy of which lawyer will represent the police.

The high court has already reserved its order on the issue of who is authorised to represent police in another riots matter involving a school principal Faisal Farooq. **AGENCIES**

Social media told to remove posts on IAS officer

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court has directed US-based Google LLC, Facebook and Twitter to take down or disable certain objectionable posts and tweets on their platforms, which level allegations against a suspended civil servant by a woman.

The court has also restrained the woman from publishing or disseminating any news relating to the man in any manner on any website/ newspaper/ TV channels including YouTube/ Facebook/ Instagram till further orders.

"Considering the averments made in the plaint (by the man) and the application as also the documents filed therewith, this court finds that the plaintiff (man) has made out a prima facie case in his favour and in case no ad-interim ex parte injunction is granted, the plaintiff would suffer an irreparable loss. The balance of convenience also lies in favour of the plaintiff," Justice Mukta Gupta said in an order passed on July 15.

The court also issued summons to the woman, social media giants Google, Facebook and Twitter Plaintiff in the suit and listed

the matter for further hearing on August 31.

"Issue summons in the suit and notice in the application to the defendants," the order said.

The suspended IAS officer, in his plaint, has sought damages from the woman for defaming him, besides permanent and mandatory injunction.



According to the man, he came in contact with the woman, who was already married, through Facebook in 2017 when he was in Mexico as a part of the Indian Government's delegation and thereafter, she sent him a number of friend requests which he finally accepted.

The man claimed that he informed the woman that he was married, however, at her instance, he met her at a hospital where he was staying and alleged that since February 2018, she started asking money from him. **AGENCIES**

NHM doctor to get 'Corona Warrior' status



NEW DELHI: The Delhi government will accord the "Corona Warrior" status to a National Health Mission (NHM) doctor who succumbed to COVID-19, and grant his family Rs 1 crore compensation, Health Minister Satyendar Jain said on Wednesday.

Dr Javed Ali, 42, had contracted the infection in the line of duty and died on Tuesday, he said. His wife had been appealing to authorities to provide help to the family.

"Dr Javed Ali working as a doctor with Delhi Govt NRHM, had succumbed to Covid. Hon CM @ArvindKejriwal has announced that he will be given Corona Warrior status. Delhi govt will give 1 cr compensation to the family," Jain tweeted.

Hundreds of healthcare workers in the national capital have contracted COVID-19 till date. Earlier in the day,

interacting with reporters, Jain had said, "We know that contractual doctor Javed Ali, who was working with Delhi government's National Health Mission, died yesterday of coronavirus. The Delhi government will provide financial compensation to his family because he was a frontline worker who died during COVID-19 duty".

The ex gratia of Rs 1 crore is being given by the Delhi government to all its employees who succumb to coronavirus while discharging their duties as frontline warriors in the fight against the pandemic.

Earlier this month, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had met the family members of Dr Aseem Gupta (52), who died in June fighting COVID-19, and handed over a cheque of Rs 1 crore as an ex-gratia payment to them. **AGENCIES**

Delhi's COVID-19 recovery rate improves to 86%

NEW DELHI: Delhi's COVID-19 recovery rate improved to over 86 per cent and active cases dipped to 13,681, lowest in the last seven weeks, even as 1,025 fresh instances were recorded on Friday, the health bulletin said.

With 32 fresh fatalities, the death toll climbed to 3,777 in the national capital. The Friday bulletin said 1,866 patients recovered from the deadly virus. The number of people recovered from the infection now stand at 1,10,931. The coronavirus count in the city now stands at 1,28,389. The recovery rate has improved to 86.4 per cent, said a tweet by the Chief Minister's Office. The national recovery rate stands at 63.45 per cent.

The active cases have been lowest since June 4, which had recorded 14,456 active cases. Of the 15,475 dedicated beds in the city for coronavirus patients, 12,265 are vacant. Similarly, of the 9,554 beds in dedicated COVID Care Centres, 8,032 are vacant. The number of containment zones in the city stand at 702. In related developments, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain took a meeting with senior officers of the Health department to discuss the serosurveillance, enhancement of ICU beds, and other issues related to the management of COVID-19. **AGENCIES**

Jamia politician gets bail in two cases

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court has granted bail to local leader Ashu Khan, arrested in two cases for allegedly rioting and instigating a mob during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in December last year which resulted in damage to public property and injuries to police near Jamia Millia Islamia University.

Additional District Judge Lalit Kumar granted the relief to Ashu on furnishing a personal bond of Rs 25,000 with a surety of like amount in each of the two cases.

He was arrested in April in two separate cases of violence in Jamia Nagar and New Friends Colony during anti-CAA protests on December 15 last year.

The court granted bail to him on the ground of parity as four other co-accused were enlarged on bail. The court said in its July 17 order that since the investigation was complete and the chargesheet has been filed in the case, he was no longer required for further custodial interrogation.

It said no useful purpose would be served by keeping him in custody. The court said Ashu should scrupulously appear at each and every stage of the proceedings before it so as not to cause any obstruction or delay to its progress. It directed him to not engage in any criminal activity and not to tamper the evidence or threaten the witnesses in the case. **AGENCIES**

Nearly 23% of Delhi could be affected by coronavirus

THE REMAINING 77 PER CENT ARE STILL VULNERABLE AND THE CONTAINMENT MEASURES NEED TO CONTINUE WITH THE SAME RIGOUR, SAYS NATIONAL CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL DIRECTOR DR SUJEET KUMAR SINGH

NEW DELHI: Nearly a quarter of people surveyed for seroprevalence in Delhi have been infected by the coronavirus, the Union Health Ministry said Tuesday, while a top official said the study also showed the remaining three-fourth population were still vulnerable and called for continuing strict containment measures.

The sero-survey results came on a day the daily cases again surpassed the 1,000-mark. On Monday, Delhi reported less than 1,000 COVID-19 cases for the first time in seven weeks.

The survey showed nearly 23 per cent people had developed anti-bodies for the infection, said National Centre for Disease Control Director Dr Sujeet Kumar Singh.

However, the remaining 77 per cent are still vulnerable and the containment mea-



sures need to continue with the same rigour, Singh told a press briefing. The survey was done to estimate the proportion of people exposed to coronavirus infection in the total population of Delhi and the number of people selected from each district for the survey is proportionate to the population of that area, Singh said. Delhi has a population of

nearly 2 crore. Eight out of Delhi's 11 districts have more than 20 per cent of sero prevalence, Singh said. A senior Delhi government official said the survey captured the state of recovery from COVID-19 infection in mid-June, which was a month ago. "We will consult with public health experts and epidemiologists to determine if the future course of Delhi's strategy against

COVID-19 should change in light of these survey results or not," the official said.

Delhi recorded 1,349 fresh COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, taking the caseload in the city to over 1.25 lakh, while the death toll mounted to 3,690 after 27 fatalities were recorded, authorities said. The number of active cases stood at 15,288, marginally up from 15,166 on Monday.

The sero survey was conducted from June 27 to July 10, during which a total of 21,387 samples were tested by the NCDC in collaboration with the Delhi government.

"The results of the sero-prevalence study show that on an average, across Delhi, the prevalence of IgG antibodies is 23.48 per cent. The study also indicates that a large number of infected persons remain asymptomatic," the ministry said

in a statement. NCDC Director Singh said, "When the prevalence was adjusted against the sensitivity and specificity of the ELISA test kits, the prevalence in Delhi was found to be 22.86 per cent and this is an adjusted figure... Eight of the total 11 districts have more than 20 per cent sero-prevalence."

"Nearly six months into the epidemic, only 22.86 pc of the people are affected. Eight of the total 11 districts have more than 20 per cent of the sero-prevalence," Singh explained.

South-east district was found to have a prevalence of 22.12 per cent, Shahadra 27.61 per cent, North-west (23.31 pc), New Delhi 22.87 per cent, Central 27.86 pc, South-west 12.95 pc, North-east 27.7 pc, East 23.9 pc, North 25.26 pc, South 18.61 pc and West 19.13 pc. **AGENCIES**

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NEWS BRIEF

Congress won't be scared by 'raid raj', says Surjewala

JAIPUR: The Centre has created a "raid raj" but the Congress won't be scared, the party's chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said on Wednesday after the Enforcement Directorate conducted searches at the home of Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's brother. The Congress leader also reacted to the killing of a journalist in Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh and said there was "gunda raj" and "jungle raj" in the state. "It is clear there is no law and order in Uttar Pradesh. Becoming a journalist in Uttar Pradesh has become a sin," he said.

AGENCIES

Shiv Sena removed roadblocks in temple construction: Raut

MUMBAI: Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Monday claimed his party paved the way to the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and removed roadblocks in the temple construction for the cause of Hindutva and not for politics. It needs to be seen how many people will be invited for the temple's ground-breaking ceremony next month and what social distancing measures will be taken at the event (in view of the COVID-19 outbreak), he said. "What 'political social distancing' they will observe remains to be seen," Raut told reporters.

AGENCIES

Former SAD MLA joins Dhindsa's faction

CHANDIGARH: Former SAD legislator Ranjit Singh Talwandi on Thursday joined the splinter Akali group led by Rajya Sabha MP Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa here. Talwandi, who is son of ex-SAD chief Jagdev Singh Talwandi, joined the faction in the presence of Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa at Mohali here. Addressing the media here, Talwandi slammed Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal, accusing him of trying to "run the party like a corporate". "Sukhbir has no experience, he has no vision. He is a businessman. SAD is a party of martyrs and he tried to run it like a corporate," Talwandi alleged.

AGENCIES

Status quo on notice to rebel MLAs

19 CONGRESS MLAs, INCLUDING SACHIN PILOT, WERE DISQUALIFIED FROM RAJASTHAN ASSEMBLY

JAIPUR: The Rajasthan High Court on Friday ordered maintaining status quo on disqualification notice issued by the state assembly speaker to 19 dissident Congress MLAs, including Sachin Pilot.

The assembly speaker issued the notice to the MLAs on July 14 after the ruling Congress complained to him that the legislators had defied a whip to attend two legislative party meetings last week.

"The writ petition has been admitted and the court has ordered for status quo on the notices dated July 14. The matter will be heard in due course now," a counsel for the speaker said.

The bench, in its order, said the writ petition is maintainable and is admitted on the ground of three pleas of the petitioners. "After completion of filing of pleadings of the parties and the intervenors, Counsel for the parties shall be at liberty to file an application for early hearing of the writ petition. Till then, the 'status quo', as exists today viz-a-viz impugned notices dated 14.07.2020, shall be



"This is happening due to a growing perception that as the Congress wont return to power (at the Centre) shortly, so the party wont be able to satisfy all their demands"

maintained," the order stated. Prior to this, the court allowed an application for implementation of the Union of India in the list of respondents.

The court also rejected two pleas which sought an order declaring that alleged actions of the petitioners as the members of Rajasthan Legislative Assembly do not come within the purview of disqualification envisaged under Para (2)

of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, and declaring Clause 2 (1) (a) of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution ultra vires.

Rejecting the petitions, the court said they are beyond its jurisdiction. The Congress had sought action against Pilot and the other dissidents under paragraph 2 (1) (a) of the 10th Schedule of the Constitution. The provision disqualifies

MLAs if they "voluntarily" give up the membership of the party which they represent in the House. The Pilot camp, however, argued that a party whip applies only when the assembly is in session.

The disqualification notice was challenged by the dissident MLAs through the writ petition which was taken up by the bench on Friday last week and arguments were held. The arguments continued on Monday and concluded on Tuesday. The court had on Tuesday said it would give appropriate order on the writ petition on Friday.

Meanwhile, the assembly speaker moved the Supreme Court and filed a special leave petition (SLP) on Wednesday. Pilot was sacked as the deputy chief minister and the president of the Congress state unit after he rebelled against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot.

Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury separately said a section of young "overambitious" leaders is becoming increasingly restless and deserting the party due to the

growing perception that it is not going to return to power at the Centre anytime soon.

Conceding that their exit might adversely impact the party "temporarily", the veteran Congress MP, however, said party "discipline and ideology can't be compromised to satisfy the individual aspirations of leaders who lack ideological commitment."

The Congress leader hinted at the possibility of some more young leaders quitting the party after the high-profile desertion of Jyotiradiya Scindia and rebellion by Sachin Pilot.

"There is a certain section of overambitious young leaders.... they are becoming restless and feeling they are not getting their due in the party and are looking for other options to satisfy their individual ambitions. "This is happening due to a growing perception that as the Congress wont return to power (at the Centre) shortly, so the party wont be able to satisfy all their demands. So they are either jumping the ship or are planning to do so, Chowdhury told PTI in an interview.

AGENCIES

'Cong won't be hit by Scindia, Pilot episodes'



NEW DELHI: Congress will not be impacted by Jyotiradiya Scindia's exit and Sachin Pilot's rebellion, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has said, as he attacked the BJP alleging it is no more a party of ethics and character and "can do anything, anywhere".

Mr. Baghel said Mr. Pilot became an MP at 26 years of age, then a Union Minister and state Congress Committee chief. "What more can a party give," he asked.

He was referring to the political turmoil in Rajasthan after Mr. Pilot and 18 other MLAs revolted against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, who alleged that the rebels had along with the BJP conspired to topple his government.

The BJP has dismissed the allegations and claimed that the trouble in the Congress was due to the Gehlot-Pilot power struggle.

"The BJP is power hungry to such an extent that it can do anything, anywhere. Where they had one or two MLAs they have made government. They can go to any level. The era of Atal and Advani (former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and veteran BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani) has gone and there are no ethics and character in the party," Mr. Baghel alleged.

"We are also young leaders. We have not grown old. We don't need to contemplate. Congress will not be affected due to this (party leaders leaving it or revolting)"

Without taking any names, the chief minister said there were attempts at blackmailing by some opportunists in the party.

"These opportunists or those indulging in the politics of blackmailing should remember that it is not good for the country's democracy. 'Scindia ke saath bhi kuch to majboori rahi hogi, yun hi koi bewafa nahin hota' (there must have been some compulsion with Scindia else nobody turns disloyal)," the Congress leader told PTI.

Asked whether the Congress needed to contemplate over the young leaders quitting or taking to revolt, he quipped, "We are also young leaders. We have not grown old. We don't need to contemplate. Congress will not be affected due to this (party leaders leaving it or revolting)," the 58-year-old leader said.

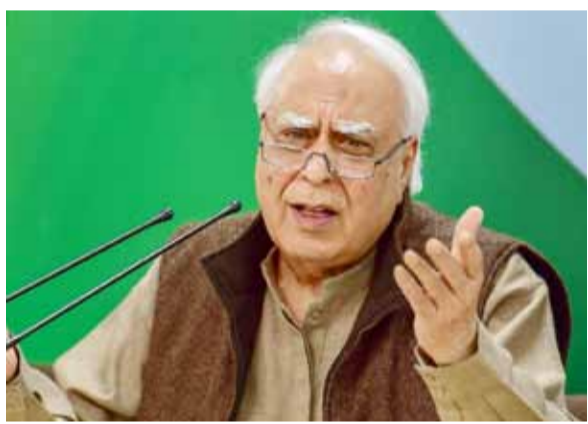
AGENCIES

'Javadekar must not pollute politics with harsh words'

NEW DELHI: Congress leader Kapil Sibal on Tuesday hit back at Union minister Prakash Javadekar for his attack on Rahul Gandhi and said the environment minister should stop polluting the country's politics with his harsh words and instead focus on better governance.

Sibal said the BJP does not know how to govern but knows how to attack and use harsh words. "Mr Javadekar, why are you causing pollution in the country's politics. Being the environment minister, you should be stopping pollution, but in each statement you are using harsh words. Instead of criticising Rahul ji, you should tackle the challenges the country is facing currently in the times of the (coronavirus) pandemic," Sibal said in a video message. About the Shaheen Bagh protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act, Sibal said, "You talked about Shaheen Bagh where there were reports of police, which is under your government, breaking CCTV cameras."

He said there were peti-



tions before the high court that claimed investigation into the Delhi riots was not done properly and added it would be better if Javadekar didn't speak about these things.

"As far as China is concerned, I suggest that you tell the truth and reality to the country. The prime minister said that the pandemic would be over in 21 days like the Mahabharata ended in 18 days. But, it did not and the 21 days are yet not over. Instead of speaking about other things, you should focus more on the problems before

the country," the former Union minister said.

On China, Sibal said Chinese President Xi Jinping is saying that they have not occupied any Indian land and the prime minister is saying the same on June 19 in an all-party meeting.

"But, your foreign and defence ministers are negating this and saying something else. The problem is that in your government we do not know who is telling the truth. But, you should at least tell the truth to the country," he said.

AGENCIES

Ex-footballer quits politics within 24 hrs of joining BJP

KOLKATA: A day after joining the BJP, former Indian footballer Mehtab Hossain on Wednesday said he was not associated with any political party.

Hossain, known as the "Midfield General" in the Kolkata Maidan, said it was a personal decision to quit politics as he was left shattered by the pain and feelings of his family and well-wishers over his sudden move to join a political party.

The former East Bengal captain was handed the BJP flag by the party's state president Dilip Ghosh on Tuesday at its Muralidhar Sen Lane office amid chants of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai".

"I am not associated with any political party from today. I apologise to all my well-wishers for this decision of mine," Hossain said in a Facebook post.

"No one has forced me to take this decision. This is completely my personal decision to stay away from politics," he added.

Hossain, who has played

"I am not associated with any political party from today. I apologise to all my well-wishers for this decision of mine"

30 matches for India and scored two goals, said he joined politics as he wanted to reach more people.

"In these trying times, I wanted to be with the people. Those helpless faces have taken away my sleep. That is why I suddenly joined politics."

"But the people for whom I wanted to serve as a politician said I should not have joined politics. They did not want to see me as a politician," he said. Hossain, who quit football after playing for Mohunbagan in the 2018-19 season, said even his wife and children were hurt as he joined politics.

AGENCIES

'No politics in panchayat administrator appointments'

MUMBAI: Maharashtra Minister Hasan Mushrif has written to social activist Anna Hazare saying the state government's decision on appointment of administrators of gram panchayats whose terms have ended or will expire this year was not taken with any political motive.

Mushrif said the decision to appoint administrators on the advice of guardian ministers was taken considering 73rd amendment of the Constitution, High Court and Supreme Court decisions and the COVID-19 situation.

Rural Development Minister Mushrif made the remarks in the letter sent to Hazare on Monday.

According to an official state-



ment, Mushrif wrote to Hazare in response to the latter's letter to the minister over the issue of appointments of administrators.

The terms of 1,566 gram panchayats in 19 districts ended between April and June this year, while that of 12,668 gram

panchayats will end between this month and December.

"The government had to take the decision of appointing the right persons as the administrators of gram panchayats considering the 73rd amendment of the Constitution, High Court

and Supreme Court decisions and the coronavirus-induced situation in which elections cannot be held.

"There is no political motive behind this and it is expected that zilla parishad chief executive officers will appoint right persons as the administrators on the advice of guardian ministers in a democratic manner," Mushrif told Hazare in the letter, as per an official statement issued on Tuesday.

Mushrif also said he will discuss the decision in detail when he meets Hazare. According to media reports, Hazare on Monday hit out at the state government, saying the decision is not in line with the Constitution.

AGENCIES

Lalji Tandon, who dominated UP political landscape, is no more

BHOPAL: A seasoned politician, Madhya Pradesh Governor Lalji Tandon had a dominating presence in Uttar Pradesh where he served as cabinet minister and was elected to the assembly and council multiple times.

Belonging to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L K Advani era of BJP leaders, Tandon (85), who died at a hospital in Lucknow early Tuesday, proved himself as an able administrator during his decades-long political career in Uttar Pradesh.

A former Lok Sabha MP, he was later given gubernatorial responsibility.

Fondly known as "Babuji" among his supporters, Tandon was known for his proximity to Vajpayee.

Tandon represented the Lucknow Lok Sabha seat (2009-14) when the former prime minister did not contest from the high-profile constituency on account of his poor health.

He took oath as Madhya Pradesh governor on July 29, 2019, when the Congress was in power in the state, after serving in the same post in Bihar for nearly 11 months. His tenure in the Raj Bhavan here, too, lasted for nearly 11 months.

After taking charge as governor during the Congress government, Tandon ensured his presence was felt in the administration.

His gubernatorial skills were put to test when the



Congress government of Chief Minister Kamal Nath faced an internal revolt when 22 party MLAs, including six ministers—all supporters of former Union minister Jyotiradiya Scindia—resigned in March this year.

When the Nath administration delayed taking the floor test, Tandon, a seasoned politician and administrator, intervened and directed the Congress government to prove its majority on the floor of the assembly, triggering a "letter war" between the CM and the governor.

Then came a bitter legal battle between the Congress government, the governor and the BJP which was finally settled by the Supreme Court that ruled in favour of Tandon's directive on the matter.

Reduced to minority post the resignation of 22 MLAs, the 15-month-old Nath regime collapsed, paving the way for the BJP to form its government under Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

AGENCIES

NCERT drops portion on separatist politics in J&K

NEW DELHI: The NCERT has revised a chapter in its Class 12 political science textbook to drop a paragraph on separatist politics in Jammu and Kashmir and to add a brief mention of scrapping of its special status last year.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has revised the chapter in the textbook "Politics in India since Independence" for the academic session 2020-21.

While the topic "Separatism and Beyond" has been deleted from the chapter, the scrapping of Article 370, which gave the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir special status, has been included under the topic

"Regional Aspirations". On August 5 last year, the Centre had scrapped the state's special status and divided it into union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

"One strand of separatists who want a separate Kashmiri nation, independent of India and Pakistan. Then there are groups that want Kashmir to merge with Pakistan. Besides these, there is a third strand, which wants greater autonomy for the people of the state within the Indian union," the deleted portion read.

The chapter then talks about the President's Rule imposed in June 2018 after the BJP withdrew its support to the Mehbooba Mufti government



and towards the end mentions the withdrawal of Article 370.

The revised portion, where the chapter talks about Jammu and Kashmir, says, "Jammu and Kashmir had a special status under Article 370 of the

Indian Constitution. However, in spite of it, the region witnessed violence, cross-border terrorism and political instability with internal and external ramifications".

"The Article resulted in the

"One strand of separatists who want a separate Kashmiri nation, independent of India and Pakistan. Then there are groups that want Kashmir to merge with Pakistan"

loss of many lives, including that of innocent civilians, security personnel and militants. Besides, there was also a large scale displacement of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley," it read.

"On August 5, 2019, Parlia-

ment had approved a resolution abrogating special status to J and K under Article 370 of the Constitution. The state was also bifurcated into two Union territories — Ladakh with no Legislative Assembly and Jammu and Kashmir with one," the revised portion read. The revised textbook takes into account the developments that took place in Jammu and Kashmir from 2002 onward. Earlier this month, a controversy had erupted over the reduction of syllabus by the CBSE due to the COVID-19 situation, with the Opposition alleging that chapters on India's democracy and plurality are being "dropped" to propagate a particular ideology.

AGENCIES

Key sectors to grow in next 10 years

TECHNOLOGY, PHARMA, E-COMMERCE AND MANUFACTURING TO LEAD INDIA'S GROWTH

WASHINGTON: The next 10 years is going to be India's "golden moment" in key sectors like technology, pharmaceutical, e-commerce and manufacturing, said a top venture capitalist from Silicon Valley, pointing at the USD 20 billion foreign direct investment in the country amidst the coronavirus outbreak.

"Coronavirus is sweeping the world, especially the US and India. In spite of that, the amount of investment going into India is mind-boggling," Silicon Valley's top venture capitalist, entrepreneur and philanthropist M R Rangaswami told PTI in an interview.

India has received foreign direct investment of over USD 20 billion in the last few months during the coronavirus pandemic, which has had an adverse affect on businesses across the world apart from the over-6-lakh lives the infection has claimed so far.

"I think the next 10 years is the golden moment for India to shine; using digital and technology -- whether it's medicine, telemedicine, e-commerce, logistics -- in every segment of the market. Whether it's a kirana (local



"I think the next 10 years is the golden moment for India to shine; using digital and technology -- whether it's medicine, telemedicine, e-commerce, logistics -- in every segment of the market"

grocery) shop, everything is going to be digital. It is the golden moment that India should seize," Rangaswami, the software business expert

said. Referring to the series of FDI into India post-COVID-19 outbreak, Rangaswami said it is unprecedented by any

standards. Prominent investments include USD 10 billion from Google, USD 5.7 billion from Facebook, USD 1.2 billion from Walmart and USD 1 billion from Foxconn.

"I think there will be many, many more deals this year. You'll see a lot more companies coming in, a lot more money coming in. A lot more investments," he said. "Amazon (e-commerce company) continues to invest in India.

Other companies are looking at India now. Private equity guys are looking at India. Sovereign funds will be looking at India. Definitely India is going to be the hot destination for technology money," Rangaswami said, in response to a question.

He noted that the current President Donald Trump-led administration's anti-China sentiment is also helping India bag big investment.

Relations between the US and China have spiralled downward after Washington criticised the Asian power's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The US has questioned a new national security law in Hong Kong, treatment of Uyghurs Muslims and security measures in Tibet.

"This gives India an opportunity for an economic game-changer. I think it's predicated by two things. The number of smartphone users (in India) is over 500 million, maybe even close to a billion. Second, the government's push for digital combined with COVID-19 outbreak, which has taken (number of) digital transactions through the roof," said Rangaswami, a keen observer of the Indian market. **AGENCIES**

70% decline in orders for winter garments

CHANDIGARH: The famous garment industry of Punjab is staring at massive losses on account of almost 70 per cent drop in orders for winter wear in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Unlike previous years when garment manufacturing units would work at full steam during this time of year, most factories are running at just 30-35 per cent capacities, Ludhiana-based garment makers said on Wednesday.

The industry manufactures winter wear during June, July and August. The sharp fall in orders for winter garments is a double blow for the industry, which already suffered a setback with buyers cancelling or putting on hold orders for summer wear because of COVID-19 pandemic, they said.

"Buyers have placed just 30 per cent orders for winter wear this season as compared to last year," Ludhiana-based garment maker Ajit Lakra said. Besides, there is uncertainty about demand for winter wear after September month. "If winter items are not sold at retail shops, there



"People do not have money. They will spend only on essential items rather than purchasing non-essential fashion wear"

are chances that payments may get stuck," Lakra told PTI.

"What will you do with just 30 per cent orders? How will you bear your fixed expenses like interest, etc," he said while urging the govern-

ment to step in to rescue the industry.

Industry representatives further pointed out that fashion products or garments manufacturing units would bear the maximum brunt.

"People do not have money. They will spend only on essential items rather than purchasing non-essential fashion wear," Knitwear Club President Vinod Thapar said.

"People are buying just casual dresses or inner wear which is essential. Nobody is purchasing new shirts etc," another industrialist pointed out. **AGENCIES**

NEWSBRIEF

Lockdown drags CocaCola volumes

NEW DELHI: Global soft drink major The Coca-Cola Company on Tuesday reported a 16 per cent decline in its unit case volume for the second quarter dragged by markets such as India and Western Europe. The Atlanta-headquartered company has reported a 28 per cent drop in its net revenues to USD 7.2 billion and its operating income declined by 34 per cent. "Sparkling soft drinks declined 12 per cent, led by a decline in India, Western Europe and the fountain business in North America due to pressure in away-from-home channels," said CocaCola in an earnings statement. **AGENCIES**

HIL supplies 20.60 tonne of DDT to South Africa

NEW DELHI: State-owned HIL (India) Ltd has supplied 20.60 tonne of organochlorine insecticide DDT to South Africa for a malaria control programme, the Union Fertiliser and Chemicals Ministry said on Tuesday. The company has supplied DDT with 75 per cent water-dispersible powder to South Africa. It is in the process of supplying 128 tonne of DDT to Zimbabwe and 113 tonne to Zambia in the current 2020-21 fiscal, it said. It may be noted that HIL is the sole manufacturer of DDT globally. The company was incorporated in the year 1954 to manufacture and supply DDT for the government's malaria control programme. "HIL (India) Limited, a PSU under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, supplied 20.60 tonne of DDT to South Africa for its Malaria control program yesterday," the ministry said in a statement. South Africa's Health department will be utilising DDT in three provinces adjoining Mozambique. **AGENCIES**

Registered firms hit 20.14 lakh by June-end

NEW DELHI: The count of registered companies in the country stood at over 20 lakh at the end of June, while more than 7.4 lakh have been closed due to various reasons, according to official data. The latest data from the corporate affairs ministry also showed that there were little over 12.15 lakh active companies as on June 30. Generally, active companies are those which are regular in making requisite filings to the ministry. The ministry is implementing the Companies Act as well as the Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act. In June alone, a total of 10,954 companies were registered with collective authorised capital of Rs 1,318.89 crore. **AGENCIES**

Only 10 pc manufacturing units report higher output

NEW DELHI: The proportion of manufacturing units reporting an increase in output dropped to 10 per cent during April-June 2020 from 15 per cent in the previous quarter, according to a quarterly poll by industry body Ficci.

The survey, which drew responses from over 300 manufacturing units from both large and SME segments with a combined annual turnover of over Rs 2.5 lakh crore, revealed that the automotive sector is the worst hit in terms of ongoing operations in the factories as per the demand and current orders post easing out of lockdown restrictions. Other sectors where operations remain abysmally low are leather and footwear, electronics and electricals &



textiles machinery.

Moreover, the percentage of respondents expecting low or same production is 90 per cent in April-June 2020-21 which was 85 per cent in the last quarter of 2019-20. Hiring outlook for the manufacturing sector shows a bleak picture as 85 per cent of the respondents men-

tioned that they are not likely to hire additional workforce in the next three months. "This presents a worrisome situation in the hiring scenario as compared to the previous quarter Q-4 of 2019-20, where 78 per cent of the respondents were not in favour of hiring additional workforce," Ficci said. **AGENCIES**

Finances of Hindustan Copper in 'dire straits'

NEW DELHI: The financial condition of Hindustan Copper is in "dire straits" primarily due to the dismal performance of the PSU in 2019-20, a top company official said while asking the employees to brace up for tough times ahead. The Chairman and Managing Director of the PSU, Arun Kumar Shukla, in an article published in the house journal of Hindustan Copper, exhorted company employees to focus on making up for the production shortfall in 2020-21 for the survival of the PSU.

"As you are aware, the financial condition of the company is in dire straits primarily due to the dismal performance during the fiscal year 2019-20. The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the situation. Under such compelling circumstances, we need



to brace ourselves for tough times ahead," Shukla said.

The company has to focus on making up for the production shortfall in FY 2020-21, come what may, for the survival of the PSU, he said.

"We need to put our minds together and think outside the box to explore all possibilities for production movement and alternative revenue generation. Optimisation and reduction of costs on all fronts, both operational and non-operational, is crucial to stay afloat," he said in the article. Quality assurance is

essential to boost the company's brand credibility and customer satisfaction, he said. "The need of the hour is to...put in our best efforts and be ready to make sacrifices. The company has survived tough times and with unified efforts stunned everyone with a spectacular turnaround," he said.

Shukla told PTI that the company is planning to increase its production capacity up to 20.2 million tonnes (MT) in a phased manner. "The company has sought all clearances for 12 MT of capacity, which is the first phase," he said. The company produced around four million tonnes of copper ore during the last fiscal, he said. The PSU had reported a loss of Rs 95.61 crore for the third quarter of 2019-20 from continuing and discontinued operations. **AGENCIES**

Madame expects 40% fall in revenue this fiscal

NEW DELHI: Apparel retailer Madame is expecting a 40 per cent decline in revenue in the current financial year due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The company may also end up giving up to 20 per cent of retail space (shut stores) if the situation does not improve in the current September quarter.

"There is a slow rise in business number post lockdown. With uncertainty and ad-hoc restrictions being imposed every day across major cities, the impact is fairly visible with the consumer preferring to stay inside... We expect a 40 per cent reduction in business numbers seeing how the market has behaved in the first quarter and 2 weeks of the second quarter," Madame Executive Director Akhil Jain told PTI.

Madame has reported a turnover of Rs 275 crore for 2019-20.

Jain said, at present Madame has over 150 standalone stores and 600 multi-brand stores and about 85 per cent of its standalone retail stores are now operational.

"We are trying to maintain the retail space by liaising with landlords. Most of them have supported the brand so far in terms of reduction in... rentals or change to revenue share models." If the second quarter doesn't show considerable numbers, then we may end up giving up to 20 per cent retail space," he added.

Jain said prior to the disruptions caused by COVID-19, the company had planned to open 20 new stores in the current fiscal, out of which 7 are already under fit-outs. Jain said consumer preference has changed significantly and hi-fashion isn't in demand today. "Comfort wear, loungewear, and athleisure that were smaller categories for any fashion brand have significantly gained momentum. We have introduced a range for work-from-home fashion to elevate some numbers," he added. **AGENCIES**

Flipkart to launch Wholesale, buys Walmart India biz

BENGALURU: The Flipkart Group on Thursday announced the launch of Flipkart Wholesale, a new digital marketplace, and the acquisition of 100 per cent interest in Wal-Mart India Private Limited, which operates the Best Price cash-and-carry business.

Kiranas and MSMEs are central to India's retail ecosystem and Flipkart Wholesale will focus on meeting their needs by providing small businesses a wide selection at significant value, the company said in a statement.

"Whether in grocery, general merchandise or fashion, these businesses will have one-stop access to an extensive selection of products with attractive schemes and incentives, supplemented with data-driven recommendations for stock selection, delivered through a fast and reliable network to drive greater efficiencies and better margins," it said.

Best Price currently sup-



ports more than 1.5 million members, including kiranas and other MSMEs.

Top Indian brands, local manufacturers and sellers have partnered with Flipkart Wholesale to ensure the availability of an exhaustive range of products and merchandise for kiranas and MSMEs, the statement said.

Kalyan Krishnamurthy, Chief Executive Officer, Flipkart Group, said, "The acquisition of Walmart India adds a strong talent pool with deep expertise in the wholesale business that will strengthen our position to address the needs of kiranas and MSMEs uniquely." **AGENCIES**

TI Cycles adopts aggressive market penetration & branding strategy

THE NEW BUSINESS MODEL HAS SEEN A 17 PER CENT IMPROVEMENT IN RETURN ON CAPITAL EMPLOYED (ROCE) IN FY20 AGAINST SIX PER CENT FOR THE LAST YEAR. PREDOMINANTLY DRIVEN BY REDUCTION IN WORKING CAPITAL AND OVERALL CAPITAL EMPLOYED

CHENNAI: Unveiling a slew of models across the kids, standard and MTB segments, TI Cycles has embarked on an aggressive market penetration and branding strategy to drive growth, tap overseas markets and explore the fitness, spares and accessories markets, a top company official said.

This was part of the restructuring exercise after the company made a strategic exit from institutional business, which led to a drop in sales volumes and revenue at Rs 781 crore (FY20) as compared to



Rs 1,238 crore in the 2018-19 fiscal, company Managing Director Vellayan Subbiah said.

The new business model has seen a 17 per cent improvement in Return on Capital Employed (ROCE) in FY20 against six per cent for the last year, predominantly driven by reduction in working capital and overall capital employed, he said.

The new range of 70 cycles and 53 refreshed models was in line with the company's

ambitious road map for growth and resurgence, he said.

Subbiah said the business has been restructured in three phases -- with focused cost management and efficiency initiatives, lean and flexible manufacturing schedules and revamping entire logistics infrastructure across locations.

TI Cycles also "recalibrated" the working capital, besides bringing down inventories which improved cash flow and profit before tax despite

a major dip in sales volume due to exit from the institutional segment and industry slowdown, he said.

Company chairman M M Murugappan said the bicycles division "reinvented" itself and despite the strategic exit from the (capital intensive) institutional segment, it managed to emerge stronger and more resilient with a road map for growth going forward.

In 2019 the bicycle segment continued to ride in slow track with overall trade volume impacted due to "low secondary demand" by registering a de-growth of 17 per cent over the previous year, the company said in its annual report. The market for premium cycles dropped significantly due to the economic slowdown and poor customer sentiment, it said. In the geared cycles segment, margins were "further eroded" with an over run of low priced, poor quality alternatives in the unorganised space. **AGENCIES**

Two-wheeler industry remains intact: Hero MotoCorp

NEW DELHI: Two-wheeler industry faces short-term challenges due to the COVID-19 situation but the overall India growth story remained intact, Hero MotoCorp said in its Annual Report for 2019-20.

Sharing information with company shareholders, Hero MotoCorp Chairman Pawan Munjal noted that there remains ample growth opportunities for the company in domestic as well international markets.

"The short-term business outlook remains uncertain due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the long-term

story of India and that of the two-wheeler industry remains intact, strong and positive," Munjal said.

There are ample growth opportunities in India, as well as in the global markets to grow company's business to new heights, he added.

"The continuous expansion of our geographic footprint over the past five years to more than 40 countries now creates a platform to build scale beyond India," Munjal said.

The company's investments in R&D over the past five years have been twice of that of other players in the industry, Munjal



noted.

"We are on the cusp of creating yet another world re-

cord, a historic milestone of 100 million motorcycles and scooters in cumulative sales

"The short-term business outlook remains uncertain due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the long-term story of India and that of the two-wheeler industry remains intact, strong and positive"

in FY21," he added. Munjal said the company continues to remain debt-free and maintains a strong balance sheet.

The company's cash reserves have now reached Rs 14,096 crore, he added. "The financial strength of the company augurs well and will help it to successfully navigate itself into

the future despite these trying times," Munjal said.

The two-wheeler major said it expects demand to be robust this fiscal with people expected to opt for personal mobility amid coronavirus pandemic.

The company expects the domestic two-wheeler segment to stabilise in the next two three

months, it added. "For FY21, we expect that the industry will witness greater two-wheeler demand due to the customer's need for personal mobility to maintain safety standards," Hero MotoCorp said.

The industry would stabilise by the festive season and the pent-up demand will provide the much-anticipated boost to the industry, it added. "Being a market leader, we should be well placed to capitalise on market shift. Whenever business picks up, we will be ready and have the right products to meet demand," the company said. **AGENCIES**

ALSO READ | GREEN SHOOTS VISIBLE, 6% GROWTH LIKELY: NITI * P7 | INFLATIONARY PRESSURES SEEN IN NEAR TERM * P7

NEWSBRIEF

'Corona Kavach' available as group insurance policy

NEW DELHI: Amid a spurt in coronavirus cases in the country, regulator Irdai on Tuesday allowed health insurers to offer 'Corona Kavach' as a standard group insurance policy to help public, private sector companies and other business entities to provide insurance cover to their employees. As per insurance companies, the individual short-term Corona Kavach health indemnity policy has evoked good response after its launch on July 10. All 30 insurers have started offering the policy. **AGENCIES**

Bharti AXA gets ₹800 cr crop insurance mandate

MUMBAI: Private non-life insurer Bharti AXA General Insurance on Thursday said it has received Rs 800 crore worth crop insurance mandate from Maharashtra and Karnataka governments to insure farmers in both the states under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY). The company has secured authorisation for three years from both the state governments to implement the PMFBY in six districts of Maharashtra and three districts of Karnataka, a release said. The PMFBY offers insurance cover to farmers against losses of crops during the entire cycle, from preparation of sowing to harvesting and post-harvest, due to poor yield. **PTI**

FIU to get PAN data from I-T dept to check large, suspicious cash deals

NEW DELHI: The Income Tax Department has been allowed to share the PAN data of an individual of entity with the Financial Intelligence Unit to dig deeper into suspicious and large cash transactions at banks, according to the Central Board of Direct Taxes. The CBDT, which frames policy for the tax department, issued an order on July 16 allowing the two agencies under the Union Finance Ministry to share the data. The Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) is the nodal central agency that is authorised to obtain cash transaction reports (CTRs) from public and private sector banks every month and after analysing these, it forwards the suspicious or intriguing such reports to various law enforcement, investigative and intelligence agencies so that they can launch their individual probes to check possible instances of money laundering, tax evasion and terror financing that could have been perpetrated using the dubious cash. **AGENCIES**

General insurance industry logs 8% growth in June

MUMBAI: A tepid 1 per cent growth in motor -- the first growth since April -- coupled with a massive spike in health and fire insurance sales, helped the general insurance industry to clock a full 8 per cent growth in June, says a report. Motor cover has been the mainstay of the industry but has been down in the dumps for many a quarter due to the pains in the automobile industry driven by a rash of issues, including regulatory as well as shy customers. The pandemic driven lockdowns have only added more salt to the wounds of the industry. The general insurance industry as a whole clocked an 8 per cent growth in premium income in June, excluding crop cover sales. This was driven by a 47 per cent growth in fire, robust 9 per cent growth in health and revival in motor premium to 1 per cent in the month. The motor cover sales had fallen 23-49 per cent over the past two months, Kotak Securities said in a report on Monday, adding the overall growth was also aided by a 42 per cent growth in retail health and a 61 per cent growth in standalone health insurers sales. **AGENCIES**

NPAs may rise to 12.5%

RBI WARNS AGAINST EXCESSIVE RISK AVERSION BY LENDERS AMID PANDEMIC

MUMBAI: Gross non-performing assets are likely spike to 12.5 per cent in the current financial year from 8.5 per cent at the end of March 2020, the Reserve Bank said on Friday even as it warned against excessive risk aversion by lenders in a "sound" financial system.

In the half-yearly Financial Stability Report (FSR), Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das said the top priority for lenders should be to raise capital proactively and maintain resilience in the COVID-19 scenario.

In the report, which comes amid the pandemic is yet to play out, the RBI said its stress tests indicate that the GNPA (Gross Non-Performing Assets) ratio of all scheduled commercial banks may shoot-up to 12.5 per cent in March 2021 from 8.5 per cent in March 2020 under the baseline scenario.

However, if the macroeconomic environment worsens further, the ratio of dud assets may escalate to 14.7 per cent under the very severely stressed scenario, it added.

Under baseline scenarios, state-owned banks' GNPA ratio may increase to 15.2 per cent by March 2021 from 11.3



'The challenges that lie ahead have to be addressed with the overarching objective of preserving long term stability of the financial system, which is critical for nurturing the recovery'

per cent in March 2020. The GNPA ratio of private banks and foreign banks may increase from 4.2 per cent and 2.3 per cent to 7.3 per cent and 3.9 per cent, respectively, over the same period.

The system level capital adequacy is projected to drop from 14.6 per cent in March 2020 to 13.3 per cent in March 2021 under the baseline scenario and to 11.8 per cent under the very severe

stress scenario, it said.

Das said the pandemic hit India amid a moderation in growth and added that the policy responses since the onset of the crisis have stabilised the financial system and markets, although the outlook remains "highly uncertain".

"The challenges that lie ahead have to be addressed with the overarching objective of preserving long term

stability of the financial system, which is critical for nurturing the recovery. Going forward, once we enter the post-pandemic phase, the focus would be on calibrated unwinding of regulatory and other dispensations," he said.

According to him, the financial system is "sound" but in the "evolving milieu, while risk management has to be prudent, extreme risk aversion would have adverse outcomes for all".

Revealing initial numbers of what has become a six-month moratorium or a voluntary loan repayment holiday, the RBI said over half of the borrowers by value have opted for the facility as of April.

"Given the fact that impact of moratorium is still uncertain and evolving, the exact nature of how the same will play out on the quality of banking assets is difficult to ascertain accurately," it said.

Even as fears are being expressed by experts about a spike in NPAs once the moratoriums are lifted, the FSR warned that the deferral of loan repayments may have implications for the financial health of banks going forward. **AGENCIES**

Banks sanction Rs 1.27 lakh crore worth loans to MSMEs

NEW DELHI: The finance ministry on Tuesday said banks have sanctioned loans worth about Rs 1,27,582 crore under the Rs 3-lakh crore Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for the MSME sector impacted by the economic slowdown triggered by COVID-19. However, disbursements against this stood at Rs 77,613 crore till July 20 under the 100 per cent ECLGS for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

The scheme is the biggest fiscal component of the Rs 20-lakh crore Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in May. The latest numbers on ECLGS, as released by the finance ministry, comprise disbursements by all 12 public sector banks (PSBs), 22 private sector banks and 21 non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

"As of 20 July 2020, the total amount sanctioned under the 100% Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme by #PSBs and private banks stands at Rs 1,27,582.60 crore, of which Rs 77,613.06 crore has already been disbursed," the finance minister said in a tweet. Under ECLGS, the loan amounts



'As of 20 July 2020, the total amount sanctioned under the 100% Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme by #PSBs and private banks stands at Rs 1,27,582.60 crore, of which Rs 77,613.06 crore has already been disbursed'

sanctioned by PSBs increased to Rs 70,894.59 crore, of which Rs 45,797.29 crore has been disbursed as of July 20, she said. At the same time, private sector banks have sanctioned Rs 56,688 crore and disbursed Rs 31,815 crore.

"Compared to 15 July 2020, there is an increase of Rs 4,237.44 crore in the cumulative amount of loans sanctioned & an increase of Rs

9,301.51 crore in the cumulative amount of loans disbursed, by both #PSBs and private sector banks combined as on 20 July 2020," Sitharaman said.

Market leader SBI has sanctioned loans worth Rs 20,988 crore and disbursed Rs 14,811 crore. It is followed by Punjab National Bank, which has sanctioned Rs 9,372 crore. Its disbursements stood at Rs 5,047 crore as of July 20. **AGENCIES**

Amazon joins hands with Acko to offer auto insurance in India

NEW DELHI: Amazon Pay on Thursday said it has tied up with Acko General Insurance Ltd to offer two- and four-wheeler insurance policies in India.

Amazon Pay, which is the payments unit of Amazon India, will help customers purchase insurance effortlessly, and Amazon Prime members will get extra benefits including additional discounts, a statement said. Customers can buy auto insurance from Amazon Pay page, Amazon app or mobile website and they can get a quote for their car or bike's insurance by providing basic details, it said. In this quick paperless insurance plan, customers can get hassle-free claims with zero paperwork, one-hour pick-up, and three-day assured claim servicing and one-year repair warranty in select cities.

Policyholders will also have an option for instant cash settlements for low value claims, making it beneficial for customers. Additionally,



customers can select from a list of add-ons like zero-depreciation and engine protection and they will be able to pay for the insurance using Amazon Pay balance, UPI, or cards, the statement said.

"Our vision is to make Amazon Pay the most trusted, convenient and rewarding way to pay for our customers. Delighted by this experience, there has been a growing demand for more services. In line with this need, we are excited to launch an auto insurance product that is affordable, convenient, and

provides a seamless claims experience," Amazon Pay India Director and Head of Financial Services Vikas Bansal said. Varun Dua, CEO of Acko General Insurance, said the company aims to deliver a superior consumer experience right from purchase to claims by making it more affordable, accessible and seamless through the partnership. Acko, which has raised funding from Amazon, Accel, SAIF and Binny Bansal, has catered to over 55 million unique customers over the last 24 months. **AGENCIES**

I-T dept to share PAN, bank account data with 10 agencies

NEW DELHI: The Income Tax Department will share PAN and bank account details of any entity with 10 investigative and intelligence agencies, including the CBI and the NIA, under the integrated counter-terrorism platform NATGRID, according to an official order.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes, which frames policy for the I-T Department, said in a July 21 order that information like permanent account number (PAN), Tax Deduction and Collection Account Number (TAN), bank account details, summary of IT Returns and tax deducted at source (TDS) and "any other information as mutually agreed" will be shared with the 10 agencies.

The "furnishing and receiving of information to and from" these central agencies will be done through the National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), a robust mechanism envisaged to track suspects and prevent



terrorist attacks with real-time data and access to classified information like immigration, banking, individual taxpayers, air and train travels.

The 10 agencies are: the Central Bureau of Investigation, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Enforcement Directorate, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, Cabinet Secretariat, Intelligence Bureau, Directorate General of GST Intelligence, Narcotics Control Bureau, Financial Intelligence Unit and the National Investiga-

tion Agency.

These agencies are already authorised to obtain real-time NATGRID data as part of a legal arrangement made in the past. "While furnishing the information, the specified income-tax authority shall form an opinion that sharing of such information is necessary for the purposes of enabling these agencies/bodies to perform its functions under their respective laws," the CBDT order said.

The CBDT and the NAT-GRID will sign a Memorandum of Understanding to

finalise the latest information-sharing mechanism, it said. The tax department and the NATGRID already have an agreement for sharing PAN-related information since 2017 and the new measure is a step forward for better and confidential sharing of the data between all the probe and intelligence agencies so that they are better enabled to analyse and counter any armed, financial or cyber threat to the country, a senior officer said.

The necessity for the NATGRID came after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks exposed the deficiency that security agencies had no mechanism to look for vital information on a real-time basis.

Lack of quick information was considered to be one of the major hurdles in detecting US terror suspect David Headley's movement across the country during his multiple visits between 2006 and 2009. **AGENCIES**

Bandhan Bank seeks to serve underbanked areas

NEW DELHI: Bandhan Bank said it will continue expanding its geographical reach to underbanked areas, leverage its micro-financing skills and make inroads into affordable housing segment with the amalgamation of Gruh Finance as part of its strategies for the next five years amid the coronavirus crisis.

Containment of the ongoing outbreak, implementation of effective financial tools, adoption of digital means and maintaining sig-



nificant economic productivity may help the economy recover from the present crisis and build upon a stable

financial system, Bandhan Bank said in its Annual Report for 2019-20.

As part of its strategy,

Bandhan Bank has laid out its aspirations to be an "affordable financial institution by providing simple, cost-effective and innovative financial solutions", the Kolkata-headquartered private sector lender said.

Key focus areas in the next five years would be diversification of asset portfolio with modern underwriting and collection capabilities and strengthening people capabilities, including by hiring fresh talent, for growth. **AGENCIES**

Bank staff seek 5 day-working week

NEW DELHI: Bank employee unions have again raised their demand for a five-day working week, stating that reducing the number of working days would help bankers who are at high risk of contracting the coronavirus disease due to their exposure to public.

The Indian Banks' Association (IBA) in January had rejected the unions' proposal for a five-day working week but offered a 19 per cent pay hike to employees. At present, banks have holidays on the second and fourth Saturdays every month

and on every Sunday. The All India Bank Employees Association in a statement said that the coronavirus threat is haunting bankers, where they are highly exposed to the general public dealing and now a five-day week is the requirement of the hour.

The association noted that while whole world is carving for four-day working, the country is still looking for a way to opt for five-days banking. Talking to PTI, the president of All India State Bank Officers Federation, Deepak Sharma, said, "Moreover, it

will also be a positive step in the direction of Digital India in conformity with PM's vision.

"The working conditions in the Banks have been strenuous. Poor infrastructure, lack of adequate staff has made the officers work till late in the night, resulting in poor health, huge pressure on the officers, which culminates in serious work-leisure mismatches, life style diseases and of late, repeated acts of suicides being committed by the officers of the Banks." **AGENCIES**

Faceless assessment to reduce taxmen's discretion

ALL THE COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE TAXPAYERS ARE BEING DONE ELECTRONICALLY BY A CENTRAL CELL IN DELHI AND IDENTITY OF ASSESSING OFFICERS REMAINS UNKNOWN TO TAXPAYERS AND VICE VERSA

NEW DELHI: In a bid to ease taxpayer hardships, the tax department has ended individual discretion by bringing in faceless assessment of income tax returns that does not require the taxpayer to visit any office or meet any official, top tax officer P C Mody said on Monday.

A central computer picks up tax returns for scrutiny based on risk parameters and mismatch and then allots them randomly to a team of officers. This allocation is reviewed by officers at another randomly selected location and only if concurred, a notice is sent by the centralised computer system.

All such notices need to be responded to electronically without the requirement of visiting a tax office or meeting any official, Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) Chairman Mody told PTI in an interview here.

Since its launch on October 7, 2019, a total of 58,319



cases have been assigned in an automated way randomly and these were kept away from the geographical jurisdiction of the case, based on computer algorithms.

Out of these, around 8,000 cases have been disposed of until now with assessment orders issued without any additions and 291 cases wherein additions are proposed to be made, have been submitted to the risk management unit.

Mody said the new system provides for assessment of income tax in electronic mode

and "taxpayers need not see face-to-face any tax officer or visit an I-T office and need not run pillar-to-post on receiving income tax scrutiny assessment notice."

"The target is to complete assessment of these 58,319 cases by October-end. So far, we have done close to 8,000 cases. So far, the experience has been good," Mody said.

The cases selected for scrutiny assessment include all categories of taxpayers like companies, trusts, small business and salaried.

He said all the communications with the taxpayers are being done electronically by a central cell in Delhi and identity of assessing officers remains unknown to taxpayers and vice versa.

The department has moved from assessment by an individual tax officer to a team-based assessment wherein an Assessing Officer will be assigned a case for scrutiny, which will be overseen by an Additional Commissioner rank officer followed by a Principal Commissioner.

"In team-based assessment there is objectivity. So the individual discretion of tax officers will end, as it is a team-based decision. With the elimination of bias, vested interest and subjective discretion, we hope litigation will be reduced going forward," Mody added.

Earlier during assessment proceedings in scrutiny cases, taxpayers or tax professionals were required to make

multiple visits to the income tax office. There were allegations and some incidence of discretion and subjective approach, which often resulted in high-pitched assessments.

"Ultimately taxpayer does not know who the assessing officer is. This will improve the confidence of taxpayers as their compliance burden of visiting tax offices is reduced," Mody said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the faceless assessment scheme in her Budget speech on July 5, 2019 and it was subsequently inaugurated on October 7, 2019.

The government had in May this year notified revised Form 26AS which would have additional details on taxpayers' high-value financial transactions, like cash deposit/withdrawal and property purchases, undertaken during a financial year. This would facilitate voluntary compliance and ease of e-filing of I-T returns. **AGENCIES**

Policy retreat on student visas will cost the US dear

The US will no longer issue visas to university students in programmes involving a substantial online component, starting in the fall 2020 semester. Had this policy withstood the legal challenge that was immediately mounted by Harvard University, the MIT, and over 200 other universities, it might have led to large numbers of students enrolled in such courses facing the risk of deportation and those intending to enter the U.S. for higher studies stranded abroad without options. The universities joining the case against the decision of the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement argued in court that this policy, described as “cruel” and “illegal”, undermined their efforts to create a safe, online-based learning system amidst the raging pandemic. The administration has clarified that newly enrolling international students, possibly up to 200,000 across the US, will be barred from taking purely online courses while living in the country. Yet the battle will continue from the other side too — the judge in the legal case brought by the universities is keeping the case open, implying that arguments could be made against additional restrictions. For Trump, his administration’s immigration sagas will only ratchet up the pressure on him to perform and deliver during what he probably considers the hardest year, politically, of his first term. On the one hand, he is facing a sharp legal backlash in the realm of immigration policy, not only in the case of students taking online courses but also on his ban on the issuance of H-1B visas for skilled workers and several other worker visas. Second, his job approval ratings are on the decline in the face of his government’s mismanagement of policy to contain the spread of COVID-19, the ineffective steps it has taken to bolster the economy, and a surge in racial violence.



DEREK O'BRIEN HIGHLIGHTS A HUGE GAP BETWEEN WHAT WAS PROMISED TO STATES AND WHAT THEY GOT

In the name of ‘cooperative federalism’

India is in the midst of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)’s decade of governance. The previous time one party dominated for nearly 10 years was four decades ago, when the Congress had brute majorities between 1980 and 1989. In that period, the tussle for the rights of States was focused on Article 356. Using pliant Governors, regional party governments were politically destabilised. There was lip service paid to the report of the Justice R.S. Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations, but its spirit was twisted.

History is repeating itself but much more crippling. The principal tool of combating State governments is no longer Article 356. Once more a well-meaning report, the report of the 14th Finance Commission, is being cited, but it is also being sabotaged step by step. And all this is being done while supposedly upholding “cooperative federalism”. This began well before COVID-19, but the pandemic and its economic disruption have brought things to an edge.

The 14th Finance Commission report was accepted in 2015 with the promise that it would devolve more finances to the States. As part of the process, States would have new responsibilities, especially in the social sector. Two years later, the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime was also justified as a grand bargain that would eventually leave all States better off.

In reality, tax devolution to States has been consistently below 14th Finance Commission projections. One reason for this has been the economic slowdown, caused primarily by the Central government, and lower-than-expected GST collections. The shortfall in GST collection for 2018-2019 was 22% when compared to projections. Payments have been delayed as well. For example, Centre owed States about ₹35,000 crore as GST compensation for December 2019 and January 2020, which was only paid in June 2020 after a delay of more than five months.

The Centre has imposed a series of cesses, which are not part of the divisible pool and not shared with the States. There are now rumours of a COVID-19 cess as well. According to a study by the Centre for Policy Research, there is a ₹6.84 lakh crore gap between what the 14th Finance Commission promised to States and what they have received. And while this has happened, the nature of public spending in India has undergone a massive shift. In 2014-2015, States undertook programmes and projects spending 46% more than the Central Government; today the figure is 64%. Despite this, the Centre’s



fiscal deficit exceeds the consolidated State deficit by 14%! India is paying for a profligate Centre.

The COVID-19 situation has deepened the crisis. According to a State Bank of India report, the collective loss to GSDP due to the pandemic is ₹30.3 lakh crore or 13.5% of GSDP. States are being required to spend more to help common citizens and save livelihoods. The Centre is providing almost negligible support. In West Bengal, as of June 30, the State government had spent ₹1,200 crore in fighting COVID-19. The Centre has given ₹400 crore under the National Health Mission and to the State Disaster Response Mitigation Fund, but absolutely nothing specifically for the pandemic.

Cyclone Amphan, the worst cyclone in Bengali memory, devastated 2.8 million houses and 1.7 million hectares of farm land. The loss was estimated at ₹1.02 lakh crore. The Mamata Banerjee government in Kolkata immediately released ₹6,250 crore; the Centre has offered just ₹1,000 crore. Following the pandemic, the Ministry of Finance has asked all Union Ministries to cut expenditure. The immediate impact is being felt by States, and grants-in-aid are drying up. Crucial rural development programmes have come to a standstill.

The Union Rural Development Ministry is supposed to transfer Rs. 4,900 crore to West Bengal in 2020-21 for projects to be undertaken by panchayati raj institutions. A quarter of the financial year has passed but not a single paisa has come. Around 70% of this money is meant for gram panchayats and 30% for panchayat samitis and zilla parishads. This formula came after a recommendation from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, which the Prime Minister

accepted. The funds are meant for building roads, culverts and bridges, local drinking water projects and similar schemes that create jobs and help village economies. All this has come to a halt.

Overall if one considers dues for Centrally-supported schemes (₹36,000 crore); the cut in devolution of funds (₹11,000 crore); outstanding GST receipts (₹3,000 crore); and dues for food subsidies and other heads (₹3,000 crore), the Centre owes West Bengal ₹53,000 crore. I can’t speak for all States but for West Bengal this is a huge burden, especially in a calamity-hit year such as 2020.

As they put more money into people’s hands, governments across the world are struggling to meet fiscal deficit targets this year. In India, even States that have maintained fiscal discipline in recent times have had to cope with needs of suffering citizens and spend more under essential, social sector heads. The fiscal deficit for States, collectively, is inevitably going to breach the projection of 2.04%.

As per provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) can actually accommodate a fiscal deficit of 3%. The States have respected the limit for years and the projection for 2020-21 reflected this. Now, post-pandemic, this limit will be crossed. The FRBM has an “escape clause” that allows for a one-time relaxation of the fiscal deficit threshold upto 0.5% in a time of exigency. The escape clause has been utilised by the Centre but it has proven woefully insufficient in addressing the current crisis.

Fiscal policymakers and technocrats agree that the rigidity of the FRBM has to be revisited. It should allow for greater flexibility and consultation as to when and how the “escape clause” can be applied. This goes beyond the current COVID-19 situation, but has come to light because of it — and because the Centre has gone in for subjective interpretation, imposing conditions that are outside the scope of the FRBM.

In theory, the Centre has raised the fiscal deficit limit for States, under the FRBM, from 3% to 5%. But only 0.5% of this rise is unconditional. The remaining 1.5% is dependent on fulfilling certain unrealistic and impractical measures — including privatisation of power distribution, and enhancing revenues of urban local bodies.

States are being set up for failure. This is the true picture of the BJP’s “cooperative federalism”.

Derek O'Brien leads Trinamool Congress in the Rajya Sabha. Views expressed are his own

FIVE OBSERVATIONS

ON THE POWER DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA

- CHINA REMAINS ECONOMY-FOCUSED**
While the two countries had similar economic trajectories and growth rates in 1988, when Rajiv Gandhi made his historic visit to Beijing, China has leapfrogged since then — by focusing on economy.
- INDIA IS COMPARATIVELY SLOW**
India, by contrast, grew too, but it wasn’t able to industrialise to the extent it should have; manufacturing remained a weak spot; embrace of the world has also been somewhat limited.
- RECOGNISING DIFFERENTIAL IS GOOD**
India’s recognition of the power differential is significant. It shows a realistic appraisal of the challenge at hand, and underlines what India has to do to compete more effectively.
- AIM FOR HIGH GROWTH RATE**
For India, the best foreign policy is a high growth rate. Unless India is able to get its economy right — and what is visible is a slump — its global ambitions will never be met.
- START WORKING ON WEAKNESSES**
Unless India starts working on its weaknesses, it will become less attractive to its western partners and global businesses. It will also not be able to modernise its military. And gradually lose its say.

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LAKHVINDER SINGH BELIEVES PEOPLE FROM THE TWO COUNTRIES NEED TO OVERCOME CULTURAL BIASES

Deepening India-South Korea relations

India and South Korea have signed numerous bilateral agreements with the aim of taking their ties to the next level. However, the economic partnership is struck at \$22 billion annually, and their defence partnership appears to have receded from great all-round promise to the mere sale and purchase of weapon systems.

At the heart of this bilateral stasis is the fact that, despite the best efforts of many well-intended leaders, Indians and South Koreans are failing to touch a mutually meaningful chord of empathy and move closer to each other as people. This is at least in part due to cultural prejudices on both sides, which stands in the way of a relationship based on openness, curiosity and warmth.

It is not that efforts to correct distortions in such perception have been wanting. Yet, clearly, whatever bilateral progress has been made, say in the realm of trade and investment, has not lent sufficient momentum that people start building bridges in other areas. So, for example, there may be a widespread perception among South Koreans of India as a third world country, rife with poverty and hunger. While it is true that India is far from eradicating these deprivations, their extent may be exaggerated in the minds of some. On the flip side, it is often the case that Indians are unable to distinguish between the cultural and social characteristics of South Koreans and people of other East Asian nations.



Indians in South Korea

Within South Korea, the integration of Indians in the local population is far from complete. There have been some instances of what appears to be racial prejudice or discrimination, including toward Indians in work settings in South Korea.

As in any relationship, mutual respect regarding cultural values is the key to building a robust partnership between two countries. The means to achieving that respect is often filling the information gap that creates a chasm between

two strong cultures. How much do Indians based in South Korea know about how Korean culture contributed to the growth of a broader Asian view of the world? It is more likely that to the average Indian mind, the defining traits of Japan’s and China’s cultures are better identified than those of Korean culture. All this is to say nothing of the hostility that some visiting South Koreans have faced in India.

This trajectory of India’s engagement with a strategically important Asian nation suggests that an urgent course

correction is required. The establishment of the Indian Culture Centre (ICC) in Seoul 10 years ago was a step in the right direction. Its mission was to promote people-to-people contacts. Yet, given the current focus on diplomatic initiatives — an important but not the only component of a potentially rich bilateral space — it can sometimes be complicated for the average South Korean to access to its offices and services. The ICC’s attempts to broad-base an appreciation of Indian culture by, for example, teaching south Indian dances to elementary school students in South Korea, or organising experiential sessions centred on Indian cuisine, are commendable. Yet, it may reach an exponentially wider audience if the focus of such efforts was the common man of South Korea, beyond the urban, English-speaking elite of Seoul. The same may be applicable to South Korean culture centres in India.

As the balance of power in the region continues to shift fast, India and South Korea may need each like never before, to protect their ways of life. However, both countries will be able to help each other only if they can fill the cultural gaps. A regional hegemon is already pushing hard into the ambit of the Indian Ocean. The sooner these bonds are renewed the better it would be for all Asian democracies.

Lakhvinder Singh is a Seoul-based geostrategist. Views expressed are his own

BOOKS: REVIEW

Tribal communities resist dilution of their identities

It is the tendency of popular media and culture to homogenise our ways of life. Movies show a single India that speaks Hindi and dances at lavish weddings. Newspapers barely distinguish between an Indian city and village life.

Amidst all of this, cultures that did not adapt and move into the mainstream risk being ignored, or worse, turned into objects of ridicule. In *White as Milk and Rice*, Nidhi Dugar Kundalia takes us to the tribal communities in India that have resisted dilution of their identity, while maintaining their old ways of life.

The book focuses on six communities from across the country, from distinct landscapes such as coastal, central and north-east India — although these communities have a culture that’s differ-

ent even from other groups in their neighbourhood (or even the state-level mainstream).

Often, they are limited to a small geographical area, away from the cities or even the villages, and their interactions with the larger world are limited to essential commerce. For one reason or another, each of these communities stretches the boundaries of “civilised behaviour” as the mainstream defines it. The Kanjar community’s members have traditionally been dacoits, not hesitating to murder their victims if the need arises.

Warriors in the Konyak community have been headhunters during inter-clan battles. Teenagers from the Maria tribe live in a sexually permissive “common house”, allowing them to explore their urges before they finally

The book focuses on six communities from across the country, from distinct landscapes such as coastal, central and north-east India.

settle down into a household. A tribe in Andhra Pradesh is traditionally comprised of shamans who give out charms for various magical purposes. It is instructive to realise the breadth and varieties of cultures within India itself.

But let’s not make the mistake of expecting a dry ethnographical account. Most such



White as Milk and Rice
By: Nidhi Dugar Kundalia
Publisher: Penguin
Pages: 256
Price: Rs 399

books tend to look down upon the communities they chronicle, implicitly treating them as oddities and “inferior people”. There may also be the hidden eurocentrism in the discipline that drives such an attitude. Kundalia, in this respect, is extremely empathetic.

She treats the tribals’ way of life as something that has evolved over time to cope with their environment — sometimes their coping strategy contains elements that the modern world would do well to learn from. Most of the studied cases, for example, understand the resources of their environment intimately — edible

and medicinal herbs, unknown to medical science, or animals that we would not think of eating. In so doing, they place as low a burden on Earth’s resources as possible.

There’s another aspect of Kundalia’s empathy with her subject. As a mechanism to walk us through the community’s ethos, she selects one or two people from the community and walks us through their life story.

For the Halakki community, for example, she selects Sukri, a woman who sings her way through life. We see Sukri first as a young girl, then follow her as she gets older, marries, wins a widow, and finally is welcomed to the wider world as an ambassador for her culture.

For the headhunting Konyak tribe, we start with Pangshong, a young man from the tribe who has actually grown up in Delhi, but is drawn back to Nagaland to learn about his culture from his grand-uncle Wangloi, a once-fearsome warrior.

NEWSBRIEF

India best destination for investment: Gadkari

NEW DELHI: Terming India as the best destination for foreign investment with high returns, Union Minister Niti Gadkari on Friday urged European investors to invest in India. He also said that the government is promoting clean fuel and working towards running long-distance buses and trucks on LNG, Gadkari said. Apart from LNG, the government's focus is to take ethanol economy from the present Rs 20,000 crore to Rs 1 lakh crore, Road Transport, Highways and MSME Minister Gadkari said while addressing the members from European Economic Group on "Sustainable Transport and MSMEs" through video conference.

AGENCIES

India, UK eye 'Early Harvest' trade pacts

LONDON: India and the UK are committed to a free trade agreement (FTA) and will kick off that process with "Early Harvest Agreements" as a start, the Indian government said following the first-ever virtual India-UK Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) on Friday. Minister of Commerce and Industry and Railways Piyush Goyal and UK Secretary of State for International Trade Liz Truss agreed to intensify the work of joint Working Groups through frequent meetings in order to achieve some of the Early Harvest Agreements.

AGENCIES

India needs further economic reforms: IMF

NEW DELHI: India's concerted efforts to strengthen the business climate and encourage investment in trade have helped attract investment, but the country needs further economic reforms to ensure sustainable and more inclusive growth, according to the IMF. The remarks by International Monetary Fund's Chief Spokesperson Gerry Rice on Thursday came in response to a question on the recent FDI announcements made by global giants like Facebook and Google in India. In recent weeks, several international companies have pledged \$20 billion FDI in India, and a whopping \$40 billion this year so far.

AGENCIES

Green shoots visible, 6% growth likely: Niti

'ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN METROS WILL IMPROVE IN THE COMING QUARTER'

NEW DELHI: The Indian economy will start recovering completely by the fourth quarter of the current fiscal and could grow by 6 per cent in the next financial year as green shoots are visible in many sectors where business is back to pre-COVID levels, Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar said on Friday.

Kumar also expressed hope that COVID-19 will begin to taper off from the metros and their economic activity will be normal in the coming quarter. "I expect the economy to start recovering completely by the fourth quarter.... and achieve a positive growth."

"And next (fiscal) year, it will be about 6 per cent on a low base," he said in a Twitter live session. Several economists, brokerages and multi-lateral agencies have forecast a deep contraction in India's economic growth, triggered



'Government holding in land can be brought in as equity and private players can be roped in to do projects in PPP (public private partnership) mode'

by the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdowns.

The Niti Aayog vice chairman noted that green shoots of recovery are already visible in multiple sectors. "If you notice, in 15-16 sectors, businesses are coming back to pre-COVID levels," he said.

Kumar pointed out that for India, the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic was very

unfortunate as the economy was bottoming out in the last quarter of 2019-20.

"Our economy was bottoming out in the fourth quarter of 2019-20 after seeing a low of 4.5 per cent growth but the outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in significant negative impact in the first quarter of this fiscal."

And that downward mo-

mentum could not be reversed because of COVID-19," he observed.

Quoting the finance minister, Kumar said there is always a possibility of another stimulus from the government to boost demand.

"The finance minister has said there is always the possibility of the government coming up with another round of stimulus. Problem is going to be on the demand side. The government may look at a stimulus again to revive investment spirit and boost demand," he said.

Kumar also pitched for asset monetisation of public sector undertakings (PSUs) as a large number of them are either under-utilised or unutilised.

"Government holding in land can be brought in as equity and private players can be roped in to do projects in PPP (public private partnership) mode," he noted.

Kumar also said states can mobilise resources by either borrowing from international agencies or internally through effective tax collection.

He said the RBI has done a

commendable job by providing liquidity and regulatory support to banks and other financial institutions.

"The problem is now in demand and the private sector will have to expand capacity," Kumar emphasised.

Responding to a query about the challenges before India in the post-COVID-19 period, Kumar said the country will have to design and implement necessary structural reforms to ensure recovery is as sharp and sustained as possible.

Besides, India will have to collaborate with the rest of the world to redesign some global institutions and regulations as some of them have reached the expiry date, he said.

India will also have to collaborate on the technological front as post-COVID technology turbulence can have major unforeseen impact on many countries, he added.

Kumar further said a portable health card is very much called for and the Niti Aayog is working towards that. He said the think-tank is also working on a 15-year vision document.

AGENCIES

Downside risks for FY21 significant: RBI



MUMBAI: The exact duration of how long COVID-19 pandemic will last is still uncertain and resulting in significant downside risks to growth in FY21, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.

The RBI had earlier said the country's GDP will contract in FY21, but did not give any number on the same, even as analysts are pegging a negative growth of up to 9.5 per cent.

"For the fiscal year as a whole, there is still heightened uncertainty about the duration of the pandemic. As such, the downside risks to growth remain significant," the RBI said in the half-yearly Financial Stability Report (FSR) released on Friday. A full restoration in economic activity would be contingent upon the support for robust health infrastructure, recovery in demand conditions and fixing of supply dislocations, it said.

Additionally, the state of global factors like trade and financial conditions will also have a bearing on the recovery, the central bank said.

"The near-term economic prospects appear severely impacted by lockdown induced disruptions to both supply and demand side factors, diminished consumer confidence and risk aversion," it noted.

Despite the steps taken by financial sector regulators and the government to ensure financial inter-mediation functions normally, and distress faced by disadvantaged sections of society is mitigated, the

"The near-term economic prospects appear severely impacted by lockdown induced disruptions to both supply and demand side factors, diminished consumer confidence and risk aversion"

downside risks to short term economic prospects were classified as high.

Even though borrowing costs have ebbed and illiquidity premia have shrunk, risk aversion and lackluster demand have impeded the fuller flow of finance from both banks and non-banks into the economy, the RBI said.

It can be noted that India has been put under lockdown from March 25 and is yet to be unlocked fully. The lockdowns have restricted economic activities, affecting the overall GDP.

The RBI has cut rates by 1.15 per cent in two moves and the government has announced a Rs 21 lakh crore stimulus package to help reverse the pains.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented in its pan global impact and the toll it is taking on life and livelihood," the FSR said, adding the financial markets have broadly stabilised in response to fiscal and monetary stimulus in India.

AGENCIES

'India can benefit as US-China conflict impairs global trade'

NEW YORK: As the US presidential election draws near, the conflict between America and China will escalate, impairing global trade which is "extremely important" for emerging markets like India and Brazil that are re-opening amidst COVID-19 pandemic, according to former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan.

Cautioning that there will be "deeply damaged firms" in the economy, Rajan said the post-pandemic recovery has to be accompanied by a process of repair.

"There's going to be enormous bankruptcies in the United States certainly and quite possibly in Europe also as we repair the economy, reallocate resources, restructure capital structures," he said on Thursday at the PanIT USA virtual conference titled 'The New Global Economic Norm: Post CoVID-19'.

"Certainly as we get closer to the US election, the conflict between the US and China is going to increase and that impairs global trade, which...is going to be extremely important going forward, especially for emerging markets like India, Brazil, Mexico, which



are going to be significantly impaired by the virus and need some source of demand to pull them out as they start opening up again," he said. Former Chairperson of the State Bank of India and Salesforce India CEO Arundhati Bhattacharya also addressed the event.

"Global trade is going to be an important factor if they can jump on to it, whether it's trade in goods and services or trade in digital services, it's going to be very important and our countries desperately need an open world," Rajan said.

Rajan, an IIT Delhi graduate and the Katherine Dusak Miller Distinguished Service Professor of Finance at University of Chicago Booth

School of Business, said that containment of the coronavirus in countries like the US and India has not happened despite lockdowns, while in some countries containment has been a 2-2.5 month process and virus cases have been brought down to the single digits leading to re-openings.

"There are countries, of course the United States being a prime example, but also India as well as Brazil, Mexico where the containment has not happened despite lockdowns, despite enormous costs. As a result, the cost of the virus is going to be significantly greater than for the countries that have been successful," he said.

AGENCIES

Need to think of economic revival: Sharad Pawar

NASHIK: Amid the coronavirus-induced lockdown, there is need to look into economic revival by resuming activities in Maharashtra's industrial centres, NCP chief and former Union minister Sharad Pawar said on Friday.

He added that a decision on extension of lockdown, in force till July 31, must be made after assessing the ground situation and taking people into confidence, adding that care must be taken to ensure cases don't rise.

"Like the health crisis prevailing now, the country and the state may face a financial crisis too. Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad and Nagpur are important centres of industries in the state. Revival of industries needs to be thought about," Pawar told reporters here after reviewing the outbreak situation in the district.

He said migrant workers, who had returned to their native states during the lockdown, are desirous of coming back to Maharashtra, and how they can return must be given a thought.

"There is a need to take care of reviving the state's



economy by resuming industrial activities in full capacity in the time to come. We are trying to understand these issues," Pawar said.

The NCP supremo said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had concentrated for the past few months on tackling the COVID-19 situation in Mumbai, which was necessary as it was a big city, and the situation had improved in the metropolis. However, Thackeray will come to Nashik and he also wants to visit other parts of the state, Pawar added.

Queried on whether Maharashtra had got benefits from the Centre's Rs 20 lakh crore economic package to fight the downturn due to the outbreak, Pawar said ventilators and PPE kits had been received by the state to some extent.

AGENCIES

Inflationary pressures seen in near term

NEW DELHI: The Indian economy is likely to face inflationary pressures in the near term, as factors like supply chain disruption and lack of low-wage workers are expected to offset the deflationary pressures from subdued demand in the economy, says a report.

According to Dun & Bradstreet's latest Economy Forecast, inflationary pressures are building up both from the demand and the supply side.

Dun & Bradstreet expects the Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) to have increased from 5.7 per cent to 5.9 per cent during July 2020.

As per government data, retail inflation had increased to 6.09 per cent in

June, mainly on account of higher prices of food items.

"Unanticipated localised lockdowns across the country is likely to raise uncertainty amongst the manufacturers and various other stakeholders in the supply chain who had planned to resume their operations. This has consequences not only for growth, but also for the underlying inflation dynamics in the economy," Dun & Bradstreet Global Chief Economist Arun Singh said.

According to the report, inflationary pressures from supply disruptions, less availability of low wage labour, high tariffs on some imported commodities, and larger than adequate

liquidity in the banking system might offset the deflationary pressures from subdued demand in the economy.

"It will be difficult for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), as well as the government, to manage inflationary pressures while trying to generate growth impulses in the economy," Singh said, adding that "more stimulus measures are thus warranted as the financial health of firms remains weak". As per Dun & Bradstreet's business credit scores derived from the 2019 financial performance, 71 per cent of Indian businesses fall under the "slightly greater than average risk" category.

AGENCIES

NE plays key role in trading with ASEAN

NEW DELHI: Union minister Jitendra Singh on Friday said the Northeastern region has a special role to play in the promotion of trade and business with ASEAN countries as it is the gateway to the growing economies of South East Asian nations.

Singh also said that India and ASEAN will have a major role in the post-COVID-19 world and its economy and the future belongs to them due to common traits of grit, courage and determination to scale newer heights. Delivering the keynote address on cross-border conversations with entrepreneurs from the ASEAN organised by India ASEAN Women's Busi-

ness Forum and FICCI, Singh said due to close business and cultural ties between India and ASEAN, the region will take a lead in the economic recovery in the post-COVID-19 era.

Singh, the Union minister for the development of north eastern region (DoNER), said the Northeastern region has a special role to play in the promotion of trade and business relations with ASEAN as it is the gateway to the growing economies of South East Asian nations.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has changed the policy of "Look East" to "Act East" to take the bilateral cooperation to newer heights.

Referring to the connectivity



issues, Singh said in the last six years, there has been a significant development in terms of road, rail and air connectivity, helping facilitate the movement of goods and persons not only

across the region but also across the country. The minister recalled that the Indo-Bangladesh treaty for exchange of enclaves, which was accomplished under the leadership of Modi, has

cleared the decks for ease of business, ease of movement and ease of commuting, which was earlier a tedious task.

He said very soon a train will run to Bangladesh from Tripura heralding a new chapter and opening new vistas in the development of this region by providing the entire region access to seaports. The minister also underlined the continued focus of the Indian government to explore alternate modes of transport that is inland waterways (from Brahmaputra to Bay of Bengal) connecting with other countries of the region as a cheaper option for trade, business and transportation.

AGENCIES

Narasimha Rao was father of economic reforms in India: Ex-PM

NEW DELHI: Former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao was a "great son of the soil" and he can truly be called the father of economic reforms in India as he had both the vision and the courage to push them forward, Manmohan Singh, who was finance minister in his cabinet, said on Friday.

Singh, while addressing the inaugural function of the year-long birth centenary celebrations of the late prime minister organised by the Congress's Telangana unit, said he is particularly happy that the programme coincides with the presentation of the first budget of Rao's government by him in 1991.

The 1991 budget is hailed by many as one that laid the foundations of a modern India and the roadmap for pushing economic reforms in the country. Recalling that he as finance minister in the Narasimha Rao cabinet had dedicated his first budget to the memory of Rajiv Gandhi, Singh said the 1991 budget changed India in many ways as it ushered in economic reforms and liberalisation.

"It was a hard choice and a bold decision and it was possible because prime minister Narasimha Rao gave me the freedom to roll out things, after he fully understood what was ailing India's economy at that time," Singh, a former prime

minister, said online.

"On this day, while inaugurating his birth centenary celebrations, I pay my humble respects to the man who had the vision and the courage to push these reforms," the Congress leader said, adding that Rao, like former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, had great concern for the country's poor.

Singh also said that Rao was a "friend, philosopher and guide" to him in many ways. Real tough decisions had to be urgently taken in 1991 as India was faced with a foreign exchange crisis, and with foreign exchange reserves down to about two weeks' imports, it brought the nation to the



edge of a precipice, he said. "But then, politically, it was

a big question if one could take hard decisions to meet the

'It was a precariously placed minority government, which was dependent on outside support for stability'

challenging situation. It was a precariously placed minority government, which was dependent on outside support for stability. Yet Narasimha Rao ji was able to carry everyone along, convincing them with his conviction. Enjoying his confidence, I went about my

job to carry forward his vision," Singh said.

Quoting French poet and novelist Victor Hugo, Singh said he had once said that "no power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come". India's emergence as a major economic power was one such idea, he said. "There was an arduous journey ahead but it was time to let the whole world know loud and clear that India was wide awake. The rest is history. Looking back, Narasimha Rao can truly be called the father of economic reforms in India," the former prime minister said.

Singh also recalled the

political journey of Rao that started from the days of the freedom struggle. Rao as a Union cabinet minister had held important portfolios of human resource development and external affairs, and was an important member of the Congress, who had worked very closely with late Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, he said.

Singh said Rao was chosen to become the Congress president after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and became the automatic choice to become prime minister on June 21, 1991. "It was on this day that he made me his finance minister," he said.

AGENCIES

NEWSBRIEF

Biocon Q1 net profit declines 26 pc to ₹167.8 cr

NEW DELHI: Biotechnology major Biocon has reported a 26.30 per cent decline in its consolidated net profit at Rs 167.8 crore for the quarter ended June 30, 2020 mainly on account of higher R&D spend and lower profitability in the Research Services segment. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 227.7 crore for the corresponding period of the previous fiscal, Biocon said in a late night filing to the BSE. Consolidated revenue from operations of the company stood at Rs 1,671.3 crore for the quarter under consideration, as against Rs 1,458.9 crore for the same period year ago, it added. **AGENCIES**

Dish TV Q4 net loss at Rs 1,456.25 cr

NEW DELHI: Essel Group direct-to-home arm Dish TV India Ltd has reported widening of its consolidated net loss to Rs 1,456.25 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2020. The company had reported a net loss of Rs 1,361.30 crore in the January-March quarter of the previous year, Dish TV said in a BSE filing. Its revenue from operation was down 37.86 per cent to Rs 869.06 crore during the quarter under review, as against Rs 1,398.75 crore of the corresponding quarter a year ago. According to the company, its results are not comparable because of the implementation of the new tariff regime in the broadcast sector. "With programming cost becoming a pass-through item in the new tariff regime, subscription and operating revenues for the quarter and fiscal are not comparable with the corresponding period last year," the company said in its earnings statement. **AGENCIES**

SEBI chief moots real-time settlement of trades in market

NEW DELHI: SEBI chief Ajay Tyagi has proposed to the stock exchanges to gradually move towards real-time settlement of trades in the share market. Speaking at a FICCI conference, Tyagi said he would like the exchanges to start with a trial or a pilot project for the same. He also proposed demat of G-Secs (Government Securities) to encourage retail participation in them. "Exchanges, through the use of blockchain, should try real-time settlement in the stock market more seriously. They should go for it at least on a pilot or trial basis," Tyagi said. He said the market has come a long way from the 45-day settlement of trades. **AGENCIES**

L&T profit falls 68 per cent to Rs 537 cr

NEW DELHI: Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Wednesday posted 68.37 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 536.88 crore for the first quarter ended June 30, mainly due to COVID-19 and resultant lockdowns. The company had clocked a net profit of Rs 1,697.62 crore in the year-ago period, the engineering and construction conglomerate said in a regulatory filing. Its total income fell 27.19 per cent to Rs 22,037.37 crore in April-June quarter, against Rs 30,270.94 crore in the year-ago period, the filing said. Total expenses slipped to

Insider trading norms amended

SEBI ADVISES LISTED ENTITIES TO MAINTAIN STRUCTURED DIGITAL DATABASE ON UPSI

MUMBAI: Markets regulator Sebi has amended insider trading norms, wherein listed entities will have to maintain a structured digital database containing nature of unpublished price-sensitive information.

This comes after the board of Sebi approved a proposal in this regard last month.

Infosys co-founder Shibulal's family sells 0.2% stake; earns near Rs 800 crore-Sensex, Nifty rally 50% since March, gain 3% this week; Apr-Jun results by RIL, SBI to drive markets next week

The amendments include providing for maintaining a structured digital database containing nature of unpublished price-sensitive information (UPSI), the names of persons who have shared the information, automation of the process of filing disclosures to stock exchanges, and restriction on trading window.

Further, entities would have to file the non-compliance of code of conduct with the stock exchanges, and the amounts if any collected for



"The board of directors or head(s) of the organisation of every person required to handle UPSI shall ensure that a structured digital database is maintained containing the nature of UPSI and the names of such persons who have shared the information..."

such non-compliances would be credited to the Investor Protection Education Fund administered by Sebi.

In a notification dated July

17, Sebi said, "The board of directors or head(s) of the organisation of every person required to handle UPSI shall ensure that a structured digi-

tal database is maintained containing the nature of UPSI and the names of such persons who have shared the information..."

The database should also contain the names of such persons with whom information is shared under the new insider trading norm along with the PAN or any other identifier authorised by law where PAN is not available, as per the notification.

It, further, said such database will not be outsourced and will be maintained internally with adequate internal controls and checks such as time stamping and audit trails to ensure non-tampering of the database.

Further, the structured digital database will be preserved for a period of at least eight years after completion of the relevant transactions.

In case of receipt of any information from the regulator regarding any investigation or enforcement proceedings, Sebi said the relevant information in the structured digital database will be preserved

till the completion of such proceedings.

The new insider trading regulations have become effective from July 17, 2020.

Earlier, Sebi had reviewed stress testing methodology for commodity derivatives to address the concern regarding high stress loss figures on positions with early pay-in.

The decision has been taken in consultation with clearing corporations (CCs), Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular.

While calculating the residual losses, for positions on which early pay-in are given by the clients/brokers, and margin exemption are granted on such positions, CCs have been permitted to consider the "margin exemption granted" or "value of early paid-in goods", whichever is lower, as "margins supporting those positions, it added. For each client, residual loss will be equal to loss due to client's close-out position minus margin supporting his specific positions. **AGENCIES**

Bajaj Finance Q1 net drops 19% to ₹962 cr on higher provisioning

MUMBAI: Bajaj Finance on Tuesday reported a 19 per cent fall in consolidated net profit at Rs 962.32 crore for the first quarter of the current fiscal on higher provisioning. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 1,195.25 crore during the corresponding April-June period of the previous fiscal 2019-20. Sequentially, the net profit was higher compared to Rs 948.10 crore in the quarter ended March 2020.

Total income (consolidated) rose to Rs 6,649.74 crore in the quarter ended June 2020 from Rs 5,807.76 crore in the same period a year ago, Bajaj Finance said in a regulatory filing. Net interest income for the quarter rose by 12 per cent to Rs 4,152 crore from Rs 3,694 crore. The consolidated financial results include earnings from Bajaj Housing Finance and Bajaj Financial Securities — which are the two fully-owned subsidiaries of the company.

Bajaj Finance said the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdown has considerably impacted the group's business operations for the quarter ended



June 2020. "Apart from other adverse effects, the pandemic has also resulted in a significantly lower business acquisition and put constraints on recovery of overdues from customers during the quarter ended June 2020. Further... the group has offered EMI moratorium to its customers based on requests as well as on a suo-moto basis," it said.

Loan losses and provisions for the quarter rose to Rs 1,686 crore as against Rs 551 crore earlier. The group has recognised an additional contingent expected credit loss provision of Rs 1,450 crore during the quarter, taking the overall contingent expected credit loss provi-

sion to Rs 2,350 crore as on June 30, 2020, it added. Besides, the group has reversed expected uncollectible component of capitalised interest amounting to Rs 219.51 crore charged on loans under moratorium based on the estimates and judgement of the company, it said.

Given the dynamic and evolving nature of the pandemic, these estimates are subject to uncertainty and may be affected by the severity, duration of the pandemic and other variables, it added. The non-banking financial company's consolidated assets under management as on June 2020 rose by 7 per cent to Rs 1.38 lakh crore from Rs 1.29 lakh crore. **AGENCIES**

HUL net rises 5.7 per cent to ₹1,897 crore

NEW DELHI: FMCG major Hindustan Unilever on Tuesday reported an 5.7 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 1,897 crore for the first quarter ended June 30.

The company had posted a net profit of Rs 1,795 crore in April-June quarter of the previous fiscal. ICICI Bank Q1 profit jumps 36% on stake sales; bank makes Rs 5,550 crore Covid-19 provisions

Till now, the vision and navigation advancement of robots has been undertaken along two routes. MIT just took the tech world a step closer to making domestic robot helpers a reality! Details

Its sales during the quarter under review rose 3.65 per cent to Rs 10,570 crore, as against Rs 10,197 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) said in a regulatory filing. "In a challenging context of COVID-19 disrupt-

ing markets and operations, HUL delivered a resilient performance with reported turnover growth of 4 per cent and Profit after tax and before exceptional items growing by 7 per cent," said HUL. Its total expenses increased 5.42 per cent to Rs 8,324 crore in Q1 FY2020-21, compared to Rs 7,896 crore.

"Our performance in the quarter has been resilient and reflective of the intrinsic strength of our portfolio, agility in operations, excellence in execution, purpose-driven leadership and our strong balance sheet. "While constraints continue due to restrictions in several parts of the country and the near-term demand outlook remains uncertain, we remain well positioned to drive competitive, profitable, and responsible growth. The long-term structural opportunity of FMCG in India also remains intact," HUL CMD Sanjiv Mehta said. **AGENCIES**

Sensex, Nifty end flat after see-saw trade; RIL hits fresh peak



MUMBAI: The Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower after a highly volatile session on Friday as a global equity selloff outweighed stock-specific gains on the indices.

After gyrating 487 points during the session, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 11.57 points, or 0.03 per cent, lower at 38,128.90.

Similarly, the NSE Nifty declined 21.30 points, or 0.19 per cent, to 11,194.15.

Axis Bank was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, shedding over 3 per cent, followed by SBI, ICICI Bank, ONGC, HDFC and Kotak Bank.

On the other hand, Reliance Industries' market valuation crossed the 14

lakh crore-mark after its stock rallied over 4 per cent to scale its fresh peak.

HCL Tech, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma, IndusInd Bank and Infosys were among the other gainers.

According to traders, despite the rally in index-heavyweight RIL, domestic markets turned volatile amid a selloff in global equities on escalating tensions between the US and China.

Earlier in the day, China ordered the US to close its consulate in Chengdu in retaliation to Washington's decision to shut the Chinese mission in Houston, further straining the already tense bilateral ties. **AGENCIES**

Reliance market valuation crosses Rs 14-lakh cr

NEW DELHI: Reliance Industries' market valuation crossed the Rs 14-lakh crore mark on Friday as its stock rallied over 4 per cent to scale its fresh peak.

The company's partly paid-up shares, listed separately, have a market capitalisation of Rs 54,262.45 crore. The combined market capitalisation (m-cap) of Reliance Industries now stands at Rs 14,14,825.44 crore.

The stock of the country's most-valued firm jumped 4.15 per cent to close at Rs 2,146.20 on the BSE. During the day, it gained 4.95 per cent to a record high of Rs 2,162.80.

This took its market valuation to Rs 13,60,562.99 crore at the close of trade on the BSE.

On the National Stock Exchange (NSE), shares of the oil-to-telecom conglomerate rose 4.40 per cent to close at Rs 2,148.40.

Shares of Reliance Industries had on Thursday also jumped nearly 3 per cent amid reports that Amazon was eyeing a stake in the conglomerate's retail arm.

The company's partly paid-up shares zoomed 8.77 per cent to close at Rs 1,284.50 on the BSE. **AGENCIES**

OFS deals during trading window closure time

NEW DELHI: Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday allowed offer for sale (OFS) and rights entitlement transactions during the trading window closure period.

Under market norms, listed companies need to use a trading window to monitor transactions by designated persons in a bid to prevent insider trading.

The compliance officer is responsible for closing the trading window, in case the designated persons are expected to be in possession of unpublished price sensitive information.

In a circular, Sebi said "trading window restrictions shall not apply in respect of OFS and RE (rights entitlement) transactions carried out in accordance with the framework specified by the Board from time to time."

Separately, the regulator said listed companies, intermedi-



aries and fiduciaries will have to promptly inform the stock exchange regarding violations relating to code of conduct prescribed under the insider trading norms.

Further, they need to inform the exchanges about the violations in a prescribed format. It said the amount collected

exchanges should move towards real-time settlement of trades through the use of blockchain technology.

The exchanges should start the real-time settlement with a trial or on a pilot basis, Sebi Chairman Ajay Tyagi said at a FICCI event.

Currently, settlement happens in T+2 days. Here, T stands for the day of trade. When asked about allowing "work from home for brokers" permanently, Tyagi said it needs to be examined. He said work from home is a temporary relaxation given to brokers. However, trading from home has worked successfully, so it can be examined and the downsides of this also need to be considered.

In March, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) permitted brokers and traders to take the trading terminals outside the authorised locations. **AGENCIES**

THE IPO WILL SEE SALE OF 1.22 CRORE EQUITY SHARES THROUGH OFFER-FOR-SALE BY GREAT TERRAIN INVESTMENT, NSE INVESTMENTS, ACSYS INVESTMENTS, HDFC AND HDB EMPLOYEES WELFARE TRUST, AS PER THE DRAFT PAPERS FILED WITH SEBI

NEW DELHI: Computer Age Management Services, backed by Warburg Pincus LLC and the National Stock Exchange, has received markets regulator Sebi's go-ahead to raise an estimated Rs 1,500-1,600 crore through an initial share sale.

The IPO will see sale of 1.22 crore equity shares through offer-for-sale by Great Terrain Investment, NSE Investments, Acsys Investments, HDFC and HDB Employees Welfare Trust, as per the draft papers filed with Sebi.

While Great Terrain is an affiliate of Warburg Pincus, NSE Investments is a group firm of the National Stock Exchange (NSE).

Computer Age Management Services (CAMS), which had filed draft papers with Sebi in January, obtained its observations on July 17, the latest update with the capital markets watchdog showed.

Sebi's observations are necessary for any company planning to launch public issues like initial public offer (IPO), follow-on public offer and rights issue.



Last month, the regulator had sought clarification from the lead manager of the public issue.

Market sources estimate the IPO size to be between Rs 1,500 crore and Rs 1,600 crore. CAMS, headquartered in Chennai, is co-owned by NSE Investments, Warburg Pincus, Faering Capital ACSYS Investments and HDFC Group.

The issue is being managed by Kotak Mahindra Capital Co Ltd, HDFC Bank Ltd, ICICI Securities Ltd and Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India)

Pvt Ltd. CAMS claims to be India's largest registrar and transfer agent with a market share of 69.4 per cent, based on mutual funds' average assets under management, as of November 2019.

During 2018-19, it served Rs 18.7 lakh crore of AAUM (average assets under management) of 16 mutual fund clients.

It offers integrated services for receipt, verification and processing of financial and non-financial transactions for the BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance) sector, largely the

mutual fund industry. It also provides services of transaction, payment, settlement and reconciliation, dividend processing, record keeping, report generation, intermediary empanelment and brokerage computation and compliance.

According to the draft IPO papers, CAMS' total income and profit after tax for 2018-19 stood at Rs 711.49 crore and Rs 130.89 crore, respectively.

Apart from this, Likhitha Infrastructure too has received Sebi's go-ahead to float an IPO. **AGENCIES**

ALSO READ | CHINA LAUNCHES MARS MISSION * P11 | IPHONE 12 MAY LAUNCH IN OCTOBER * P11

NEWSBRIEF

Israeli president lashes out at government, talk of election

JERUSALEM: Israel's largely ceremonial president Reuven Rivlin lashed out Thursday at squabbling members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's so-called unity government, beseeching them to quit bickering during a time of national emergency and stop floating the prospect of yet another terrible election campaign. Mr. Rivlin's tweet comes amid a wave of angry protests against Mr. Netanyahu for his perceived mismanagement of the country's deepening public health and economic crisis. After initially bringing the coronavirus under control, Israel is now suffering a peak of some 2,000 new cases a day while unemployment has soared above 20 per cent. **AGENCIES**

No proof that Easter attacker's wife fled to India

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan police on Thursday said that they have not received any "evidence" to confirm the media reports that the wife of one of the Easter suicide bombers may have fled to India to avoid arrest. Police spokesman Jaliya Senarathne made the comments while responding to questions on the media reports that the Presidential Commission of Inquiry on the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings was told that Pulasthini Rajendran alias Sarah, the wife of bomber Achchi Mohammed Muhammadu Hashun, had fled to India by sea in September last. **AGENCIES**

Pope's ex-embassy to be tried in sex assault case

PARIS: Pope Francis's former Ambassador to France, Luigi Ventura, will stand trial for sex assault in Paris in November following complaints by four men, one of whom accused the cleric of inappropriate touching, lawyers said on Thursday. Ventura, an Italian-born archbishop, was stripped of his diplomatic immunity by the Vatican last July after he was questioned by French police, and resigned in December when he reached the 75-year age limit for his post. His trial will open on November 10, the Paris prosecutor's office said Thursday. **AGENCIES**

Jadhav case sparks row in Pakistan

OPPOSITION PARTIES IN ISLAMABAD STAGE WALKOUT FROM PARLIAMENT OVER THE ORDINANCE

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Opposition parties on Thursday staged a walkout from Parliament to protest against an ordinance promulgated by the government in view of the International Court of Justice's ruling in the case of Indian prisoner Kulbhushan Jadhav. The protest started in the National Assembly as the government presented the ordinance called the International Court of Justice Review and Reconsideration Ordinance 2020 under which a petition for the review of a military court's decision can be made to Islamabad High Court through an application within 60 days of its promulgation.

Jadhav, the 50-year-old retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017. India approached the ICJ against Pakistan for denial of consular access to Jadhav and challenging the death sentence.

The Hague-based ICJ ruled in July 2019 that Pakistan must undertake an "effective review and reconsideration" of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav and also to grant consular access to India without further delay. Pakistan enacted the ordinance on May 20. During the discussion on the ordinance on Thursday, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Khawaja Asif said the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan was trying to help Jadhav. He said that the ordinance was unacceptable to the Opposition.

"Who is playing with the honour of Pakistan now Who



is prostrating before them (Indians) today?" he asked. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also alleged that the ordinance was introduced to help the Indian prisoner on death row. The government "tried to get the ordinance approved secretly to facilitate Kulbhushan Jadhav, he claimed. After the speech, he pointed out the lack of quorum and staged a walkout along with

other parties. Later, the head count was made in the house by the Speaker only to find out that the quorum was incomplete and the session was deferred. The development came a day after the Pakistan government in a unilateral move filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court on Wednesday, seeking appointment of a "legal representative" for Jadhav. However, the main parties, including the govern-

ment of India, were consulted ahead of the filing of the application by the Ministry of Law and Justice under the ordinance.

In New Delhi, External affairs ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava on Thursday said Pakistan has once again exposed its "farfetched" approach by denying available legal remedies to Jadhav against his death sentence which is also in contravention of the ICJ verdict, and asserted that it will explore further options in the case. Mr. Srivastava said Pakistan has blocked all the avenues for an effective remedy available to India in the case, while noting that New Delhi has so far requested consular access to Jadhav for 12 times over the past one year.

"The whole exercise of not providing documents related to the case even after repeated requests, not providing an unimpeded consular access and some reported unilateral action of approaching the High Court on part of Pakistan again exposes the farfetched nature of Pakistan's approach," he said. **AGENCIES**

China asks US to shut Chengdu consulate



BEIJING: China on Friday ordered the U.S. consulate in the southwestern city of Chengdu to close in retaliation for one of its missions in the United States being shuttered, capping a furious week of Cold War-style diplomacy. The announcement of the closure followed a torrent of warnings from top American officials about the "tyranny" of China, and Chinese nationals being indicted in the U.S. on various charges.

Ordering the Chengdu consulate to cease operation was a "legitimate and necessary response to the unreasonable measures by the United States", the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "The current situation in China-U.S. relations is not what China desires to see, and the U.S. is responsible for all this," it said without saying when it would have to shut down.

The Ministry emphasised the closure was directly in response to the U.S. ordering the Chinese consulate in Houston to shut down by Friday.

Some consulate staff "were engaged in activities outside of their capacity, interfered in China's internal affairs, and endangered China's security and interests," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said this week

"The current situation in China-US ties is not what China desires to see, and the US is responsible for all this"

the Houston mission was a "hub of spying and intellectual property theft". China described the allegations as "malicious slander".

The order on Houston came a day after the U.S. Justice Department unveiled the indictment of two Chinese nationals for allegedly hacking hundreds of companies and attempting to steal coronavirus vaccine research. The Justice Department then announced on Thursday indictments of four Chinese researchers it said lied about their ties to the People's Liberation Army, with one escaping arrest by taking refuge in China's San Francisco consulate.

In a video call with his German counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China still hopes to have mutually respectful cooperation with the U.S. but stands ready to firmly safeguard its national sovereignty and dignity. "China will not follow the U.S.'s dance, but will also never tolerate the U.S.'s reckless behaviour," he said. **AGENCIES**

UK, EU rule out quick post-Brexit deal

LONDON: Britain and the European Union on Thursday broke up their latest round of post-Brexit trade negotiations by ruling out a quick deal but voicing hope for agreement in the coming months.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson had promised last month to add "a bit of oomph" to the stalled negotiations when he personally joined them last month.

His main goal then was to get a framework deal struck by the end July that could assure U.K. businesses they do not have to start preparing for a messy no-deal breakup when the current transition period ends on December 31. But chief negotiators said this was unlikely because of a fundamental gap on major areas such as fishing rights and fair competition rules. "It is unfortunately clear



that we will not reach in July the 'early understanding on the principles underlying any agreement', Britain's David Frost said.

He accused the EU of failing to recognise Britain's economic and political independence and described the gulf between the sides on

some points as "considerable".

Mr. Frost's counterpart Michel Barnier criticised London for refusing to move on its red lines. "By its current refusal to commit to conditions to open and fair competition, and to a balanced agreement on fisheries, the UK makes the trade agreement at this

point unlikely," he told a news conference. A senior British government official said both sides will try to agree the shape of a potential accord — now more likely to look like one big deal than lots of small ones — at informal talks in London next week. The British side said it expects "textured" talks on the finer details to begin in mid-August and run through September.

Britain followed through on the results of a deeply divisive 2016 referendum and left the

"By its current refusal to commit to conditions to open and fair competition, and to a balanced agreement on fisheries, the UK makes the trade agreement at this point unlikely"

EU after almost half a century of integration on January 31.

It marked a moment of personal triumph for Mr. Johnson — a major player in the "Leave" campaign — after he managed to strike and ram through parliament an EU divorce deal that had painfully evaded his predecessor Theresa May.

Britain remains bound by the bloc's rules until December 31 pending the outcome of negotiations about its future relationship with its largest trading partner. **AGENCIES**

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Erdogan joins thousands to pray at Hagia Sophia for the first time

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday led the first Muslim prayers attended by thousands in Hagia Sophia since the controversial reconversion of the iconic Istanbul cathedral into a mosque.

The UNESCO World Heritage Site was first built as a cathedral in the Christian Byzantine Empire but was converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

The Council of State, the highest administrative court, on July 10 unanimously cancelled a 1934 decision by modern Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to turn it into a museum, saying it was registered as a mosque in its property deeds. Mr. Erdogan then swiftly ordered the building to reopen for Muslim worship, deeply angering the Christian community and further straining relations with NATO ally Greece. He recited a verse from the Koran on Friday after ear-



lier recitations from the holy book in the morning inside Hagia Sophia. The sounds of the call to prayer from its four minarets reverberated around the area and on Turkish television screens.

The head of the state religious affairs agency, Ali Erbas, later delivered the Friday sermon holding a sword as a symbol of conquest. "The reopening of Hagia Sophia... is the return of a sacred place, which had embraced believers for five centuries, to its original function," he told the congregation. Despite

the coronavirus pandemic, tight crowds formed around the landmark. One of those attending the prayer came especially from the Aegean region of Izmir. "We see this as the second conquest of Istanbul," said Selahattin Pamukcu, 33.

Experts say Mr. Erdogan's move to reconvert Hagia Sophia is an attempt to galvanise his conservative and nationalist base amid economic uncertainty exacerbated by the virus outbreak and some polls suggesting his ruling party is losing votes. **AGENCIES**

Turkey rejects Greece accusation of Mediterranean violation

ANKARA: Turkey on Wednesday rejected claims by Greece that its oil-and-gas research vessels were encroaching on Greek waters in the eastern Mediterranean and said it would continue to defend its legitimate rights and interests in the region.

A Foreign Ministry statement, however, also renewed a call by Ankara for dialogue to resolve the dispute between the two NATO allies.

Turkey announced plans on Tuesday to dispatch search vessels into disputed waters in the Mediterranean, raising tensions between the neighbours and ignoring calls from European nations to avoid the action.

Turkish authorities said the research vessel Oruc Reis and two support vessels would carry out operations through August 2 in waters south of the Greek islands of Rhodes, Karpathos and Kastelorizo. State-run television in



Greece said the country's armed forces had been placed on a state of readiness.

NATO allies Greece and Turkey are at odds over drilling rights in the region, with the European Union and the United States increasingly critical of Ankara's plans to expand exploration and drilling operations in the coming weeks into areas Athens claims as its own.

Turkey has accused Greece of trying to exclude it from the benefits of oil and gas finds in

the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, arguing that sea boundaries for commercial exploitation should be divided between the Greek and Turkish mainland and not include the Greek islands on an equal basis.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry denounced what it called a maximalist continental shelf claim, insisting that they were against international law, legal precedent and court decisions.

The ministry statement added that the maritime area where Oruc Reis would conduct research was within the limits of the continental shelf that our country has notified to the United Nations. It said an exploration license was given to the Turkish state-run oil company, TPAO, in 2012.

Greece is pressing other EU member states to prepare crippling sanctions against Turkey if it proceeds with the oil-and-gas exploration plans. **AGENCIES**

Canadian court invalidates asylum deal with the U.S.

TORONTO: A Canadian court on Wednesday invalidated the country's Safe Third Country Agreement with the United States, ruling elements of the law violate Canadian constitutional guarantees of life, liberty and security.

But Federal Court Justice Ann Marie McDonald delayed the implementation of her decision for six months, to give the Canadian Parliament time to respond.

"I conclude that the provisions enacting the (safe third country agreement) infringe the guarantees in section 7 of the Charter," Ms. McDonald wrote in her decision, referring to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, part of Canada's Constitution. "I have also concluded that the infringement is not justified under section 1 of the Charter."

Under the agreement, immigrants who want to seek asylum in Canada and present themselves at ground ports of entry from the United States are returned to the U.S. and told to seek asylum there. But if they request asylum on Canadian soil at a location other than an official crossing, the process is allowed to go forward. In most cases, the refugees are released and allowed to live in Canada, taking advantage of generous social welfare benefits while their asylum applications are reviewed, a process that can take years.

Last fall Amnesty International, the Canadian Council for Refugees and the Canadian Council of Churches sued, arguing that the Canadian government has no guarantee that those returned to the United States will be safe because of the treatment of immigrants by the administration of President Donald Trump. **AGENCIES**



German court convicts former concentration camp guard aged 93

BERLIN: A German court on Thursday convicted a 93-year-old former SS private of being an accessory to murder at the Stutthof concentration camp, where he served as a guard in the final months of World War II. He was given a two-year suspended sentence.

Bruno Dey was convicted of 5,232 counts of accessory to murder by the Hamburg state court, news agency dpa reported. That is equal to the number of people believed to have been killed at Stutthof during his service there in 1944 and 1945. He also was convicted as an accessory to

attempted murder.

"How could you get used to the horror?" presiding judge Anne Meier-Goering asked as she announced the verdict. She said that the fact Dey was taking orders didn't free him from guilt. Because he was 17 and 18 at the time of his alleged crimes, Dey's case was heard in juvenile court. Prosecutors had called for a three-year sentence, while the defense sought acquittal.

The judge said that, while Dey should have tried to avoid service at Stutthof, the sentence was appropriate to his guilt. "You were not yet grown up then, still so young in a time

when a lack of conscience had seized a whole people as never before," Ms. Meier-Goering said. The trial opened in October. Because of Dey's age, court sessions were limited to two, two-hour sessions a week. Additional precautions also were taken to keep the case going through the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

In a closing statement earlier this week, the wheelchair-bound German retiree apologized for his role in the Nazis' machinery of destruction, saying "it must never be repeated." "Today, I want to apologize to all of the people who went



In a closing statement earlier this week, the wheelchair-bound German retiree apologized for his role in the Nazis' machinery of destruction, saying "it must never be repeated"

through this hellish insanity," Dey told the court.

For at least two decades, every trial of a former Nazi has been dubbed "likely Germany's last." But just last week, another ex-guard at Stutthof was charged at age 95. A special prosecutors' office that investigates Nazi-era crimes has

more than a dozen ongoing investigations. That's due in part to a precedent established in 2011 with the conviction of former Ohio autoworker John Demjanjuk as an accessory to murder on allegations that he served as a guard at the Sobibor death camp in German-occupied Poland. **AGENCIES**

Demjanjuk, who steadfastly denied the allegations, died before his appeal could be heard.

German courts previously required prosecutors to justify charges by presenting evidence of a former guard's participation in a specific killing, often near-impossible. A federal court subsequently upheld the 2015 conviction of former Auschwitz guard Oskar Groening, solidifying the precedent. The Dey case extends the argument to apply to a guard at a concentration camp that did not exist for the sole purpose of extermination. **AGENCIES**

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NEWSBRIEF

ISSF to hold video meetings

NEW DELHI: The International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) has decided to hold continental video meetings instead of the 2020 General Assembly considering the extraordinary situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meet was scheduled to be held at the ISSF headquarters here from November 21. The decision was taken by the executive committee of the sport's global body. However, the ISSF said in a statement that the majority of member nations were in favour of video meetings due to the risks involved under the current circumstances.

AGENCIES

₹19 lakh raised for needy sports support staff

NEW DELHI: The "Run to the Moon" initiative to raise funds for the coaches and support staff who are struggling due to COVID-19 pandemic has collected Rs 19 lakh with 14,000 runners from different parts of the world taking part in it. The participants were given a collective target of 3,84,400 kilometres, the distance between the earth and the moon, to be covered by July 21 to mark the 51st anniversary of man's first landing on moon. But together, the runners ended up covering a phenomenal distance of 9,08,800 kilometres over a 30-day span, completing the first leg on July 6 and repeating that feat on July 18.

AGENCIES

AIFF's finances were in a big mess in 2010: Kushal Das

NEW DELHI: All India Football Federation general secretary Kushal Das says the sports body's finances were "in a big mess" when he joined in 2010 but is now "100 times better", thanks to its commercial partners' timely intervention. Das said Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) "played a significant part in helping structure lot more youth development activities and and youth leagues" among others. "Honestly speaking, had FSDL not come in I don't know what would have happened to Indian football. There were no takers left after (previous marketing partners) Zee (Sports).

AGENCIES

Chennai City to play remaining matches in Maldives

NEW DELHI: Chennai City, the 2018-19 I-League champions, will play their remaining AFC Cup group stage matches in Maldives with the island nation being given the hosting rights following the continental body's decision to organise the games in a single venue. The Asian Football Confederation's decision, prompted by the rising COVID-19 case count in many countries, was announced by Maldives Sports Minister Ahmed Mahloof. "Congratulations @MaldivesFA on being awarded to host the centralized @AFCCup group E matches. In this crucial stage of the reopening of our borders, we can show that Maldives is a safe destination through this. Expenses will be covered AFC & FAM," Mahloof tweeted.

AGENCIES

UAE to host IPL from Sept 19

FOCUS REMAINS ON SOPs, BROADCASTERS' DEMAND KEEPING UAE SHIFT, COVID-19 SAFETY IN MIND

NEW DELHI: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has finalised the re-scheduled window for Indian Premier League (IPL) from September 19 to November 8 in United Arab Emirates (UAE), pending government approval.

"In consultation with various stakeholders, we have decided on the same window considering various aspects required. The governing council will be formally convened once we get a formal response from the government, which we hope will happen early next week," Brijesh Patel, Chairman, IPL Governing Council, was quoted as saying.

The eight IPL franchises, meanwhile, are eagerly waiting for the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) from the BCCI to combat the Covid-19 threat and it is set to be a major topic of discussion when the event's Governing Council meets in a few days' time.

With the postponement of



the ICC T20 World Cup, the BCCI is planning aggressively to have an IPL in the United Arab Emirates provided the central government greenlights their request for a shift due to the rising cases of Covid-19.

"There will be three principal points on the agenda and that will primarily be discussed as and when the GC meets," a senior BCCI official told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

The primary points are as follows:

Shifting to UAE, dates, venues, matches: Once they get the necessary approvals from government departments, the BCCI will inform ECB (Emirates Cricket Board).

"As far as I know, they are not curtailing the tournament. We will have all the 60 matches in the old format where teams play 14 games," a senior official of one of the

popular franchise said. The duration of the tournament will be between 44 to 48 days depending on the double headers that the BCCI allots. In the original schedule, there were only five double headers slotted on Sundays. However, under current circumstances, there may be a few more.

SOP for teams, bio-bubble, training facilities: There are three grounds available in the UAE — Dubai International Stadium, Sheikh Zayed Stadium (Abu Dhabi) and the Sharjah ground. It is learnt that the BCCI will be renting the grounds of the ICC Academy for training of the teams. The ICC Academy has two full-sized cricket grounds along with 38

turf pitches, 6 indoor pitches, a 5700 square foot outdoor conditioning area along with physiotherapy and medicine centre.

"The teams that will be stationed in Dubai can practice at the ICC Academy by paying a fee," the senior official said. The teams staying in Abu Dhabi (one and half hours from Dubai) can train there. There won't be too many net bowlers allowed in case teams have sufficient extra players in the squad. In Dubai, as per the current health protocol, if people are carrying a negative Covid-19 test report, there won't be any need for quarantine but if they are not, they will have to undergo a test.

AGENCIES

Harbhajan Singh clarifies on Khel Ratna nomination



NEW DELHI: Veteran Indian cricketer Harbhajan Singh said on Saturday that it was he himself who asked the Punjab government to withdraw his nomination for the prestigious Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award.

In a series of tweets, Harbhajan said that he is not eligible for the award, which is the highest sporting honour in the country.

"1. Dear friends I have been flooded with calls as to why Punjab Govt withdrew my name from Khel Ratna nominations. The truth is I am not eligible for Khel Ratna which primarily considers the international performances in last three years."

"2. The Punjab Govt is not at fault here as they have rightly withdrawn my name. Would urge my friends in media not to speculate. Thank you and regards," he tweeted.

"Lot of confusion & speculation regarding my nomination for Khel Ratna so let me clarify. Yes last year the nomination was sent late but this year I only asked Punjab Govt to withdraw my nomination because I don't fall under the 3-year eligibility criteria. Don't speculate further."

The Sports Ministry, in its document in which it explains

the eligibility for anyone to be nominated for the Khel Ratna, among other points, says "spectacular and outstanding performances in the field of sports by a sports person over a period of four years immediately preceding the year during which the award is to be given shall be honoured with the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award."

Harbhajan's nomination for the award was rejected last year after the Punjab government had sent the documents to the Sports Ministry after the last date for the same had passed. This year, however, the nomination was filed on time, only for the state government to take it back with no explanation.

Harbhajan was part of the Indian teams that won the 2007 T20 World Cup and 2011 World Cup. With 417 wickets, he is India's third-highest wicket-taker in Test cricket after Anil Kumble (619) and Kapil Dev (434).

AGENCIES

WADA extends India's NDTL suspension by 6 months

NEW DELHI: In a massive jolt to India's Olympic preparations, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has extended the suspension of the country's National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL) by another six months citing non-conformity to international standards.

The WADA first suspended NDTL in August last year for a period of six months. A fresh round of inspection by the world body, much to the embarrassment of country's sporting establishment, showed that non-conformities still existed. "The World Anti-Doping Agency has suspended the accreditation of the National Dope Testing Laboratory in New Delhi, India, for a second period of up to six months," WADA said in a statement.

The suspension prohibits the NDTL from carrying out any anti-doping activities, including all analyses of urine and blood samples. The laboratory's non-conformities pertain to the International Standard for Laboratories (ISL) identified during a WADA site visit, including the laboratory's isotope ratio mass spectrometry



"The World Anti-Doping Agency has suspended the accreditation of the National Dope Testing Laboratory in New Delhi, India, for a second period of up to six months"

— the analytical technique of choice for confirmation of prohibited substances. Currently, urine samples collected by National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) are being sent primarily to the WADA-accredited lab in Doha.

The WADA conducted a second inspection of NDTL in February. But corrective measures weren't found to be good enough to revoke the suspension, which is now extended

till January, 2021.

"In February 2020, when the six-month suspension period elapsed and some outstanding non-conformities had not been addressed successfully, WADA's Laboratory Expert Group (LabEG) recommended the initiation of further disciplinary proceedings against the laboratory based on the outstanding non-conformities," the world body said.

AGENCIES

India may organise sporting events in Sept-Oct: Minister

NEW DELHI: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju is hoping India would be able to organise sporting events in a phased manner by September-October, saying it will help in boosting the confidence of people amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Sports Ministry had resumed training camps of some Olympics disciplines in the last week of May and Rijiju said events will also gradually start in the near future.

"The government has allowed some sporting activities with certain restrictions while following a stringent SOP, the guidelines that must be followed by every sporting organisation," Rijiju said while addressing a ministerial forum of Commonwealth countries on Thursday. "I am happy to inform that the training of our elite, Olympic-bound athletes has begun in specialised camps, recently."

During his address, Rijiju shared India's road to resumption of sports activities for the post COVID-19 era.

"I have also spoken to the sports ministers of all states and union territories, as well as the National Sports Fed-



erations and asked them to slowly resume some sporting events. "We need that to boost the confidence of people. I am hopeful India will have sporting events from September or October, even the big leagues in various sports are considering resumption."

The minister also enlightened the Commonwealth leaders about India's efforts in successfully running online training programmes for athletes and skill upgradation courses for coaches. "We have seen participation from thousands of athletes of various levels and coaches who have been hugely benefitted by these knowledge enhancement programmes," he said.

AGENCIES

Contracts of 32 foreign coaches extended

NEW DELHI: The Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Wednesday extended the contract of 32 foreign coaches in 11 disciplines till September end next year to ensure continuity in the training of athletes till Tokyo Olympics.

Top coaches among the 32 included Santiago Nieva and Raffaele Bergamasco in boxing, Graham Reid (men's hockey) and Pavel Smirnov (shooting) among others. The contracts of many of these coaches were to end in September this year.

National football coach Igor Stimac's contract was also extended although it has nothing to do with the Olympics. He was appointed in May last year for a two year tenure.

Earlier this month, the Sports Ministry had said that the contracts of all the foreign coaches will be extended till



the end of September next year.

The SAI said the decision was taken to ensure that athletes bound for Tokyo Games, postponed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have continuity in their training.

"The postponement of Tokyo Olympics by a year makes it imperative that the same coaches be retained so that athletes are not disadvantaged in any way," Sports Minister

Kiren Rijiju said in a release.

"A new coach takes time to understand an athlete and the athlete needs time to understand the training process of a coach. We don't have that kind of time now." A SAI source told PTI that the terms and conditions of the contracts, including the remuneration, remain the same as earlier.

"We have extended the contracts of these foreign coaches on the recommendation of the respective NSFs. All the terms and conditions, including the remunerations, remain the same," the source said.

Rijiju had earlier announced that coaches, both Indians and from abroad, will henceforth be hired for at least four years or one Olympic cycle to ensure continuity. The four-year contract will be handed out with an eye on the 2024 and 2028 Olympics.

AGENCIES

Many discovered chess amid pandemic: Anand

UNITED NATIONS: Chess has attracted many first-timers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the massive reach of the internet has made it a "truly global sport", five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand said to mark the first ever World Chess Day.

"Thanks to the internet, (chess) has become a truly global sport. I believe that it is never more widely disseminated as it is now," Anand said in a virtual commemoration of the World Chess Day at the UN on Monday.

"And of course, during the pandemic, I'm very happy that so many people have discovered the game of chess. Perhaps they didn't have the time or they never got around to it. But this has been a very good chance for chess to spread," he said. The former world champion said "most Indian



parents are right" that chess will help their children do better in school. "I hope that the current positive trajectory of chess that we have experienced recently will continue in the future, without pandemics even," Anand said.

The high-level virtual event Chess for Recovering Better bought together chess players, UN and governments officials,

representatives of civil society and academia.

In December 2019, the UN General Assembly had proclaimed July 20 as World Chess Day to mark the date of the establishment of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) in Paris in 1924.

Over the past few months, the overall interest in chess is reported to have doubled,

with more players than ever coming together to participate in chess events that are being increasingly held through online platforms, the UN said.

Anand told the virtual session that he had learned chess from his mother and highlighted the history and evolution of the game from India to other parts of the world.

He said a lot of families across India played chess with great enthusiasm. "In fact you mentioned to anyone that you played chess, quite often the head of the family will go out and pull out his own chess set and play a game. "So it was part of our culture, even though it had to be rediscovered in a sporting context, he said, adding that while chess spread across Russia and Europe and other parts of the globe, Asia had to rediscover it and India had to come back to it."

AGENCIES

Badminton is the most flourishing sport in India, says Gopichand

NEW DELHI: The inspiring success of P V Sindhu and Saina Nehwal at the global level has made badminton the most flourishing sport in India in the last decade, national chief coach P Gopichand said on Sunday.

Gopichand said when he started coaching in 2004 with 25 trainees, including Sindhu, Saina and K Srikanth in Hyderabad, nobody thought India would produce such world class players. "I can say, this is the sport (badminton) which has developed the most in the country in these past

10 year or so. When I started my coaching career in 2004, there were just 10 good courts in Hyderabad but now there are more than 1000," he said during a webinar.

"There are so many academies coming up in the country, so many kids from all over the country, Punjab, Mizoram and even abroad coming to my academy to train with even one of the parents opting to stay in Hyderabad with the child. So there is enormous interest in the sport now." Assuring that badminton's future is also bright, Gopichand expressed



"I can say, this is the sport (badminton) which has developed the most in the country in these past 10 year or so"

hope that the cost of playing the sport will also reduce in the coming years. "What has been happening in the past some years (India producing world beaters) is one side of it and what is coming up in future is another side. I believe the sport is well poised (for further development) in the future. "Moreover, the cost of

the shuttle is going to go down in the next few years with the introduction of synthetic shuttle. That should make the sport more flourishing in the years to come."

Gopichand said nobody in the country thought that he would be able to produce the Sainas and Sindhus of the world when he started coach-

ing in 2004.

"I had 25 trainees at that time, all young with 16 years as the oldest one. Sindhu was the youngest. Nobody thought these players would become the world beaters of now. People thought our women players will not be able to hit the shuttle so hard."

Asked how he created so many world's best players, Gopichand said, "I had a formula in mind which I could not actually apply to myself during my career due to injuries. "When we grow up most of us think of being classical

players with tossing up the shuttle and playing the strokes. Players like Dinesh Khanna will have this superb defensive play. But I had something different: jumping, running everywhere and stretching yourself all over. "I had many injuries and I could not apply this to me but I was able to do that in my coaching."

He said Prakash Pradukone's All England title in 1980 was one of the defining moments of Indian badminton. He rated his All England triumph in 2001 as his best achievement.

AGENCIES

China launches Mars mission launched

THE FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND PROBE AIMS TO COMPLETE ORBITING, LANDING AND ROVING IN A SINGLE MISSION

BEIJING: China successfully launched its first Mars probe on Thursday, aiming to complete orbiting, landing and roving in a single mission, taking an ambitious step towards planetary exploration of the solar system.

A Long March-5 rocket, China's largest and most powerful launch vehicle, carrying the spacecraft with a mass of about five tonnes, soared into the sky from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site on the coast of southern China's island province of Hainan, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

About 36 minutes after the launch, the spacecraft, including an orbiter and a rover, was sent into the Earth-Mars transfer orbit, embarking on an almost seven-month journey to the red planet, according to the China National

Space Administration (CNSA).

The Chinese Mars probe named Tianwen 1 or Quest for Heavenly Truth 1, will fulfil three scientific objectives: orbiting the red planet for comprehensive observation, landing on Martian soil and sending a rover to roam the landing site.

It will conduct scientific investigations into the planet's soil, geological structure, environment, atmosphere and water, media reports said.

It should arrive in orbit around the red planet in February.

The Long March 5 rocket will transport the robotic probe to the Earth-Mars transfer trajectory before the spacecraft begins its self-propelled flight toward Mars' gravity field.

According to China Aerospace Science and Technology



Corp, a State-owned space conglomerate, the probe will travel for about seven months before it reaches Mars, which at the farthest point of its orbit is about 400 million kilometres from Earth and 55 million kilometres at the nearest point.

It said the probe consists of three parts: the orbiter, the

lander and the rover and they will separate in Mars orbit. The orbiter will remain in the orbit for scientific operations and to relay signals while the lander-rover combination makes an autonomous descent and landing.

The rover has six wheels and four solar panels and carries six scientific instruments. It

weighs over 200 kilograms and will work for about three months on the planet, the designers said.

China aims to catch up with India, the US, Russia and the European Union to reach the red planet.

"The triple-task expedition of Tianwen-1 marks another milestone in China's aerospace science and technology development, as well as a fresh daring adventure in the country's long march of outer space exploration following its lunar program and the endeavour to build a space station," the state-run media commented.

In a paper last week, the scientific team behind Tianwen-1 said the probe is "going to orbit, land and release a rover all on the very first try, and coordinate observations with an orbiter. No planetary

missions have ever been implemented in this way."

By contrast, NASA sent multiple orbiters to Mars before ever attempting a landing. Pulling off the landing is a far more difficult task, CNN reported.

"If successful, it would signify a major technical breakthrough," the Chinese team wrote in the journal Nature.

China in recent years has emerged as a major space power with manned space missions and landing a rover in the dark side of the moon. It is currently building a space station of its own.

China's previous attempt to send an exploratory probe to Mars called Yinghuo-1, in a Russian spacecraft in 2011 failed as shortly after the launch it was declared lost and later burnt during re-entry. **AGENCIES**

Huawei launches FreeBuds 3i with ANC at ₹9,990 in India



NEW DELHI: Huawei on Thursday launched FreeBuds 3i TWS earbuds with Active Noise Cancellation (ANC). These in-ear designed earbuds with a triple mic setup are priced at Rs 9,990 in the Indian market.

"Huawei as a brand constantly aspires to be a leader in the technology innovation space. The FreeBuds 3i offers one of the best ANC experiences in the industry today-giving users an immersive acoustic experience. The three-mic system is the best in enhanced listening and call quality regardless of outside noise and comes with an Aware Mode and offers the user customised controls which makes it a unique device", the company's spokesperson said in a statement.

Freebuds comes fitted with a polymer composite diaphragm that aims to offer professional tuning to deliver balanced audio. It features IPX4 water-resistant technology and also gives a playback of up to 3.5 hours.

It comes with 4 silicone tips in different sizes and the weight of each earbud is about 5.5g and the charging case is about 51g.

The announcement of the launch also comes with an exclusive offer for customers - a Band 4 worth Rs 3,099 that will come at no additional charge with FreeBuds 3i; this offer will be available from August 6 to 7 for Prime Member on Amazon and it will be open till August 12 to all other customers. **AGENCIES**

Mylan's generic version of Remdesivir

NEW DELHI: Pharma major Mylan on Monday said it has commercially launched the generic version of Remdesivir drug under the brand name "Desrem" in India for treatment of coronavirus patients.

The company had earlier said that its Remdesivir will be available in July in India at a price of Rs 4,800 per 100 mg vial.

The drug is approved for the treatment of suspected or laboratory confirmed incidences of COVID-19 in adults and children hospitalised with severe presentations of the disease, Mylan said in a statement.

The company has released the first batch of its generic Remdesivir and will continue to increase its supply across the country in the wake of the rising demand for the drug, it added.

The company has also launched a helpline number for accessing information about the availability of Desrem in India, the statement said.

Mylan will manufacture Desrem in its injectable facility in Bengaluru, which will work to service the demand in India and other export markets where Mylan has received a licence from Gilead



for the commercialisation of Remdesivir, it added.

"With the launch of Desrem and our national 24/7 COVID-19 helpline, we aim to enhance access to this critical medicine, used for treating adults and children with severe presentations of COVID-19," Mylan, India and Emerging Markets, President Rakesh Bamzai said.

In the wake of increasing cases of COVID-19 across India, Mylan remains committed to continue its efforts in the fight against the pandemic, he added.

The previously announced agreement between Mylan and Gilead for manufacturing and distribution of Remdesivir is part of a long-standing history between the

two organisations to tackle key public health issues beginning with expanding access to high quality, affordable HIV/AIDS antiretrovirals, Mylan said.

In May, Mylan and domestic pharma firms Hetero, Cipla and Jubilant Life Sciences had entered into non-exclusive licensing agreements with drug major Gilead Sciences Inc for manufacturing and distribution of Remdesivir.

Hetero and Cipla have already launched their generic versions of Remdesivir in India. The medicine has been issued an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) by the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) to treat COVID-19 patients. **AGENCIES**

GoMore scheme to book adjacent seat

MUMBAI: Budget carrier GoAir on Wednesday launched GoMore scheme, which will allow passengers to book adjacent seat on the same PNR in order to maintain social distancing amid the pandemic.

Besides, the city-based airline also announced the launch "Online Doctor Consultation" facility in association with MFine, an on-demand healthcare platform.

The Wadia Group-promoted GoAir is the third domestic

carrier after Vistara and IndiGo to come out with such an offer, wherein the passenger will have to shell out additional cost for a safe air travel. The Supreme Court on June 26 had ordered that the airlines in the country will not have to keep the middle seat vacant. The apex court held that airlines had followed adequate safety measures to ensure safety of passengers during COVID-19 pandemic.

"GoAir today launched two initiatives that will provide

deep confidence to passengers when they plan their travel. The airline has introduced GoMore wherein passengers can book another adjacent seat on the same PNR in order to provide additional safety.

"Also with the launch of online doctor consultation, GoAir passengers will have instant access to over 3,000 doctors across more than 500 hospitals network on a beck and call by just paying consultation fee of Rs 99," the airline said in a release. **AGENCIES**

iPhone 12 may launch in October

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple is reportedly planning to launch LTE iPhone 12 models in October, while 5G models will follow in November.

According to a new report from Japanese site Mac Otakara that cites sources in the Chinese supply chain, who claim that the ongoing Covid-19 crisis may have pushed back original plans to launch the iPhone 12 in September.

Jon Prosser, a reliable Apple insider, earlier said there is also the possibility that a later iPhone 12 launch event could allow more people to attend in person.



Late announcement will give the Cupertino-based tech giant time to reopen more stores in different markets

that are closed due to pandemic.

Apple is expected to launch four new iPhones under the

iPhone 12 series which would include two premium variants.

iPhone 12 Pro will come in 6.1-inch or 6.7-inch sizes and may feature a high refresh-rate 120Hz ProMotion display, as presently seen on iPad Pro.

The rear camera module on device will house four sensors with a LiDAR scanner which was introduced in the recently launched Apple iPad Pro.

All four iPhone models are expected to feature OLED displays and 5G support, as famed Apple analyst Ming-Chi Kuo previously claimed. **AGENCIES**

NEWSBRIEF

Hyundai's iMT version of SUV Venue is out

NEW DELHI: Hyundai Motor India on Wednesday launched Intelligent Manual Transmission (iMT) equipped version of its compact SUV Venue while also introducing 'Sport' variant of the model priced between Rs 10-11.58 lakh. With the launch of the iMT version, the company said it is offering customers a clutch pedal free drive but with manual gear shift of six-speed transmission. It is being offered on the Kappa 1.0 litre T-GDi petrol BS-VI engine variant. Commenting on the launch, Hyundai Motor India MD and CEO SS Kim said with the launch of iMT equipped Venue and Sport trim "we are once again setting new standards for the industry that will enhance customer delight and revolutionise the way India drives". **AGENCIES**

IHCL's app for home delivery platform Qmin

NEW DELHI: Hospitality major Indian Hotels Company on Friday announced the launch of mobile application for its home delivery platform Qmin in Mumbai. The app will be rolled out in nine other cities, including Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai in the coming weeks, Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) said in a statement. Designed and developed by IHCL in collaboration with Tata Digital, the Qmin app allows guests to personalise their order, curate menus, and track deliveries real-time, it added. It enables users to choose their favourite cuisine from celebrated restaurants in Mumbai, based on their location, IHCL said. **AGENCIES**

Enhanced cleaning protocol from Airbnb

MUMBAI: To support the recovery of tourism industry, Airbnb on Wednesday announced the launch of 'Enhanced Cleaning Protocol' for its local hosts in the country amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative is one of the first overarching standardised protocols for cleaning and sanitisation for homestays in the country, and is aimed at providing guidance to hosts offering small-scale accommodations, which has been reviewed by the Indian Medical Association, the company said in a statement. **AGENCIES**

IIT-M, edtech initiate new programme in next-gen tech

NEW DELHI: Institute of Technology Madras (IIT-M) and ed-tech company, Great Learning on Monday launched a new programme that aims at making technology professionals advance their careers by learning software engineering technologies using cloud computing, Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain.

This nine-month-long 'Advanced Certification Programme' offers 300 hours of robust online video learning sessions, live learning sessions, and a series of practical projects in cloud computing, blockchain and IoT.

This programme focuses on making current and aspiring software developers job-ready and future-proof by teaching them cutting edge technologies.

It is designed to bridge the talent shortage faced by the industry in the areas of cloud



computing, blockchain and IoT.

"We are delighted to collaborate with IIT Madras to offer this program and further our mutual objective of

making high-quality education more accessible through online programme," Mohan Lakshamraju, Founder and CEO, Great Learning said in a statement. **AGENCIES**

SBM Bank plans RuPay credit card for SMEs

NEW DELHI: SBM Bank on Thursday said it has joined hands with fintech firms EnKash and YAP to launch co-branded business credit on RuPay network for small businesses and startups.

SBM Bank India, EnKash, YAP and RuPay joined hands to launch India's most comprehensive business credit card - SBM EnKash RuPay Business Card, SBM Bank said in a release.

The corporate credit card will utilise the RuPay network and will be available upon immediate issuance through digital and paperless on-boarding for SMEs, MSMEs and startups at any SBM Bank touch point.

The card is designed to streamline business expenditure and finances, it said.

It will provide an expense tracking and a 30-day credit period on business purchases, bill payments, travel expenses, automated GST, rental payments, payments to suppliers,



online purchase of software, cloud bills payments, utility bills payments, and online purchase of inventories, among others.

"While the small and medium businesses are the backbone of the Indian economy, liquidity and access to funds remain their biggest concerns. Being a young bank, we have always introduced solutions that can address key issues for the segment, otherwise left untouched by the traditional banks," said Neeraj Sinha,

Head - Retail and Consumer Banking, SBM Bank India.

EnKash founder Yadvendra Tyagi said as a B2B Fintech player the association along with RuPay is a step closer to create value in the corporate credit card ecosystem in India.

Apart from providing the ultimate shopping experience to retail customers with RuPay debit, credit and prepaid versions, RuPay is in the journey of providing a seamless corporate payments experience to businesses, said Praveena Rai,

Nippon launches new Protec range of industrial paints

NEW DELHI: Nippon Paint India, part of the NIPSEA Group, has launched a new range of industrial paints under the Protec brand.

With this launch, Nippon Paint India is now expanding its presence in the industrial coatings segment. The Protec range of products includes Primers, Top Coats and Specialized Coating Products. Nippon Paint India expects the Protec portfolio to meet the requirements of the market and help the company to grow exponentially.

The company is starting this business with key 50 industrial

dealers and will add more partners by the end of the year. The company expects the Protec brand to add Rs 50 crore to its topline in the next two to three years. Nippon Paint is number one paint manufacturer in Asia, and one of the top paint manufacturers of the world. Nippon Paint's Commercial Vehicle & Light Industrial coatings business provides a vast range of paint and consumable products for OEMs, OE affiliates, bus body builders and industrial users.

"At Nippon Paint India, our focus is to offer a comprehen-

sive package of products and solutions and the best value for money to all our customers. We aspire to be paint process specialists and we aim to provide end-to-end solutions that ensure higher productivity, better protection, best quality & overall enhanced performance to our customers. Protec is the result of the efforts made by our R&D team during the lockdown phase in these turbulent times. A completely homegrown effort, Protec is also our salute to the spirit of Atma-Nirbhar Bharat," said Sharad Malhotra, President, Nippon Paint India.

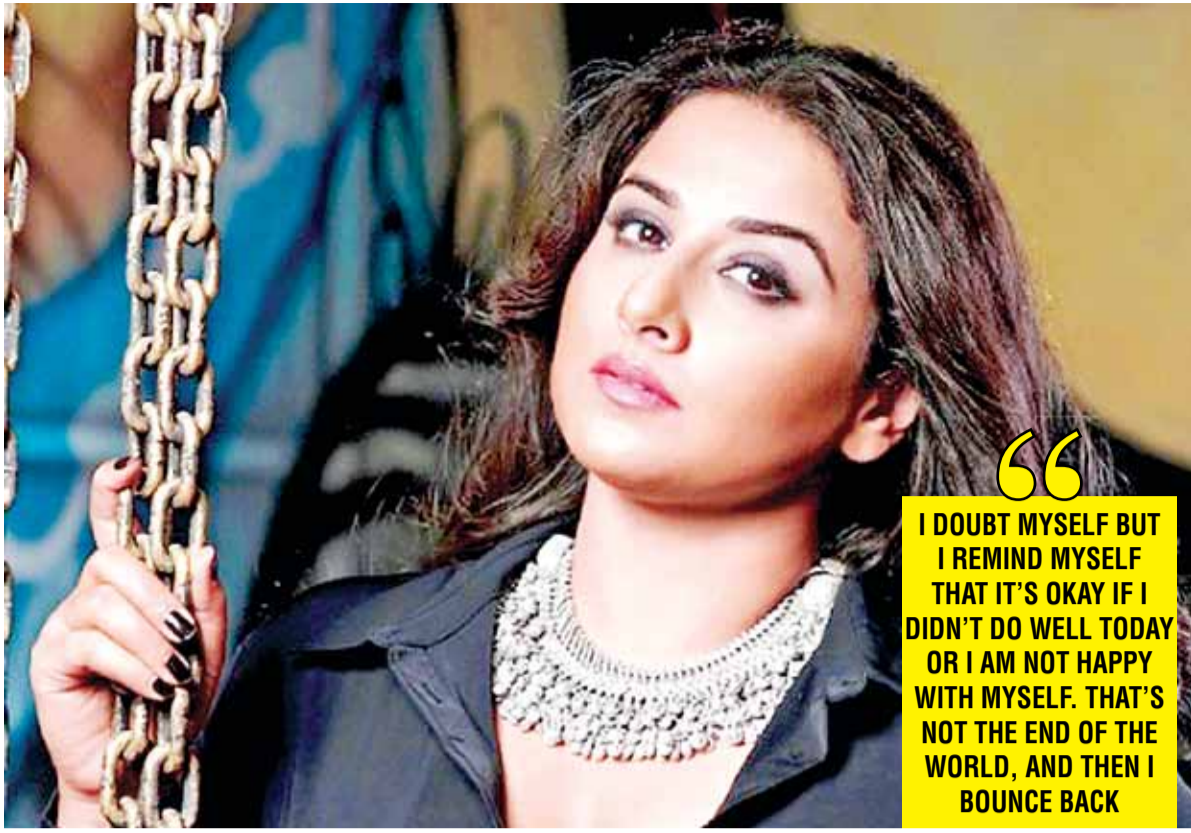


Automotive Refinishes & Wood Coatings, while talking on the

launch. "The new range of products is tailor made for industrial

users who seek optimized painting solutions for protection as well as maintenance purposes. This range required us to develop technology-driven products that can withstand and protect surfaces under extreme weather and chemical environment. The Protec range is designed to meet industrial standards of corrosion protection, chemical resistance, appearance & performance which deliver maximum results & best value for customers," Senior Sales and Marketing Manager, Nippon Paint India Automotive Refinish Siddharth Sharma added.

Nippon Paint is the trusted Paint Process Specialist to leading CV OEMs, State Transport Undertakings, private bus and coach manufacturers and industrial customers in India. Nippon Paint India is a leading producer of high-quality paints and coatings for automotive refinishing, Industrial and the decorative sector. Nippon Paint India is part of the NIPSEA Group which, together with Nippon Paint of Japan, forms the largest coatings group in Asia Pacific and the fourth largest in the world in terms of revenue. **AGENCIES**



“ I DOUBT MYSELF BUT I REMIND MYSELF THAT IT'S OKAY IF I DIDN'T DO WELL TODAY OR I AM NOT HAPPY WITH MYSELF. THAT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD, AND THEN I BOUNCE BACK ”

It's very human to doubt yourself: VIDYA BALAN

She has been in the industry for 15 years and has been feted with a National Award and a Padma Shri. Actress Vidya Balan says it is human to doubt yourself, though she admits there was a time when she would wallow in self-doubt.

Vidya says she used to be too critical and judgemental of herself in the past. But has learnt to accept and love herself after 'working with a healer' for a few years.

"I think it is very human to doubt yourself. Previously I would wallow in that self-doubt," Vidya said.

The actress, who is currently gearing up for the release of her upcoming

film "Shakuntala Devi", says she doesn't doubt herself much anymore.

"I think with maturity, maybe even with age, you are kinder to yourself. So maybe, I doubt myself for a lesser period of time. I doubt myself but I remind myself that it's okay if I didn't do well today or I

am not happy with myself. That's not the end of the world, and then I bounce back," she added.

In an earlier interview, Vidya had said that she has had a long journey and it's not been the easiest. "Its been a long journey and it is work in progress. I am not accepting of myself every

single day, there are days when I get up feeling angry with myself, feel wronged about something, some old rejection shows up, god knows what is the trigger, not feeling good about your body, so I think it is never absolute. The process is never complete," she said.

"But, I think the thing is to realise and to see in those times how far you have come and to realise that it is never too late to start working on yourself. When I say start working on yourself, I don't mean going to the gym, or change diet, but what I mean is just be kind to your self. I think most of us forget that. I have been working

with a healer for a few years now, and that is something I had to learn. I used to be very unkind to my self, there are times when I still slip into being over critical and judgemental of myself, then I remind myself of my various strengths and then the things which bothered me, lose power over me," she said.

Vidya, who has often spoken about being bodyshamed, reportedly said in a recent interview, "The acceptance of self happened around 2008-2009. I realized I had to accept that one person in the mirror, everyone else cannot be depended upon and their expectations will keep on changing."

Vidya will soon be seen in Shakuntala Devi, a biopic based on the late maths genius. The film also stars Sanya Malhotra, Amit Sadh and Jisshu Sengupta, and is scheduled to release on Amazon Prime on July 31. The film will arrive on Amazon Prime on July 31.

"I didn't know much about her other than the fact that she was known as the human computer world over," the actor said about Shakuntala Devi, "But then Anu Menon (director) started sharing details with me and I realized she was such an interesting person. She had a zest for life and loved to cook, eat, dress up, dance and a wicked sense of humour. None of this I would associate with a human computer. She loved like she lived life, with full josh." AGENCIES



JANHVI KAPOOR AT TIMES I FEEL GUILTY OF MY PRIVILEGE

Bollywood actress Janhvi Kapoor has opened up about the biggest lesson she has learnt while playing the role of Gunjan Saxena, the first female Indian Air Force pilot in combat, in an upcoming biopic.

"It all comes down to the effort and the hard work you put into your work," Kapoor said. "Her [Gunjan Saxena's] outlook is very simple. If one keeps working hard, then one will get where one has to get. I am aware of my privilege. I often felt guilty about it. But the best I can do is to earn my place by working even harder."

She is the daughter of late superstar Sridevi and Bollywood producer Boney Kapoor. While working on 'Gunjan Sax-

ena: The Kargil Girl', Kapoor spent a substantial time with the pilot. She noted how Saxena didn't let society's gender bias act as an obstacle.

In a media interaction she attended with Kapoor, Saxena spoke of the toughest things a woman in uniform faces. "Other than infrastructure barriers like no separate washrooms or changing rooms, which were slowing taken care of, the toughest thing was breaking the mental barrier people had, making them accept you as a professional. Being accepted as an officer and not being looked at as a woman officer. I think that was the most challenging and also exciting part," Saxena said. AGENCIES

AMIKA SHAIL Akshay Kumar Is A Hero In The Truest Sense Of The Word

Amika Shail describes the experience of working with superstar Akshay Kumar as a dream come true. Amika features with Akshay in the upcoming horror comedy "Laxmmi Bomb".

"Working with Khiladi Kumar was like a dream come true. Akshay Kumar is a hero in the truest sense of the word. As an actor, he is very down-to-earth and is aiming for constant improvisations. We all are awestruck and proud of his various initiatives and contributions - be it to the government bodies or the people at large during the pandemic," said the "Baal Veer Returns" actress.

Talking about her role in "Laxmmi Bomb", which will directly go to a digital platform, she said: "Although my character in the film has limited presence, it will have a

lasting impact on the audience."

Amika is also a trained singer. At the age of nine, she had participated in a singing-based reality show. She had even sung in the Mahie Gill-Nana Patekar film, "Wedding Anniversary".

"After being a singer, I realised that I could try acting. I was very fascinated by the television industry right from the time I participated in a singing reality show. I admit that I came to Mumbai with the goal of being a singer, but acting drew me towards it. 'Udaan' gave a boost to my confidence and motivated me to go for more," she said. AGENCIES



Demi Lovato GETS ENGAGED TO MAX EHRICH

Singer-actor Demi Lovato has gotten engaged to boyfriend, actor Max Ehrich. Lovato and Ehrich took to social media to share the news and also shared a few photos of the proposal.

In a note on Instagram, the Camp Rock actor wrote, "I knew I loved you the moment I met you. It was something I can't describe to anyone who hasn't experienced it firsthand but luckily you did too.. I've never felt so unconditionally loved by someone in my life (other than my parents) flaws and all. You never pres-

sure me to be anything other than myself. And you make me want to be the best version of myself."

She added, "I'm honored to accept your hand in marriage. I love you more than a caption could express but I'm ecstatic to start a family and life with you. I love you forever my baby. My partner. Here's to our future!!!!"

Max Ehrich also shared a note on Instagram, "You are every love song, every film, every lyric, every poem, everything I could ever dream of and



“ I'M HONORED TO ACCEPT YOUR HAND IN MARRIAGE. I LOVE YOU MORE THAN A CAPTION COULD EXPRESS BUT I'M ECSTATIC TO START A FAMILY AND LIFE WITH YOU. I LOVE YOU FOREVER MY BABY. MY PARTNER. HERE'S TO OUR FUTURE!!!! ”

my wife. here's to forever baby."

It was earlier reported that the couple quarantined together during the onset of coronavirus in Los Angeles.

In 2018, Demi Lovato had described her sexuality as "fluid" and that she was open to dating men and women. AGENCIES

Anubhav Sinha 'resigns from Bollywood'

Temper has been flaring in the Hindi film industry lately on social media, and in a latest burst of obvious emotional rage, filmmaker Anubhav Sinha has tweeted to declare he is resigning from Bollywood.

Sinha, who has garnered a lot of fame and adulation directing "Mulk", "Article 15" and "Thappad" in recent years, is known for his straightforward posts on social media. Never one to shy from even getting abusive oc-



asionally, the filmmaker has not minced words to declare

that he his calling it quits.

"ENOUGH!!! I hereby resign from Bollywood. Whatever the f**k that means," he wrote on his verified Twitter handle.

For the records, he has even changed his Twitter profile from Anubhav Sinha to Anubhav Sinha (Not Bollywood).

His official twitter identity, of course, remains the same -- @anubhavsinha

Filmmaker Sudhir Mishra tweeted a reply: "What's Bollywood? I came 2be part of Cinema inspired by Satya-

jit Ray, Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Ritwick Ghatak, Bimal Roy, Mrinal Sen, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, K Asif, Vijay Anand, Javed Akhtar, Tapan Sinha, Gulzar, Shekhar Kapur, Ketan Mehta, Bharatan n Aravindan etc. That's where I'll always be."

Filmmaker Hansal Mehta responded: "'Chhor diya (left it)... It never existed in the first place."

Most fans urged Sinha to continue filmmaking, even if it meant from outside Bollywood. AGENCIES

Sushant's death leaves Bollywood divided, shaken

Bollywood is a house divided perhaps like never before with the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput ripping the tinsel veneer to reveal the inner workings of an industry always in the public eye and expose schisms big and small.

From nepotism and insider-outsider to mainstream vs indie cinema and bullying, it is open season for debate and mud slinging.

The weeks since the death of the 34-year-old actor, who was found hanging in his Bandra apartment on June 14, has led to a churn, throwing up deep-rooted issues that have long troubled the glamour industry. The angst and anxiety has prompted searching, existential questions on the nature of Bollywood and its power structures.

During its investigation into the death of the actor,

who went from being the 'outsider' from Patna to the star of films such as "Chichhore" and "M S Dhoni: The Untold Story", Mumbai Police has questioned several big names, including producers Aditya Chopra and Sanjay Leela Bhansali as well as journalist Rajeev Masand.

And while the focus for a while was on mental health issues and their manifestations, the discourse has quickly moved on as increasing numbers of film industry insiders are speaking out, sometimes to air animus and other times to spotlight the many areas of friction.

The rifts are wide open and played out mostly on social media.

If Kangana Ranaut slammed film barons Chopra and Karan Johar and also took a swipe at Tapsee Pannu and Swara Bhaskar, Anurag



Kashyap and Ranvir Shorey were engaged in an unseemly spat on Twitter.

As the issue snowballed into something no one had quite envisaged, filmmaker Anubhav Sinha said he was quitting Bollywood, triggering intense discussion on what the moniker really means.

"ENOUGH!!! I hereby re-

sign from Bollywood. Whatever the f**k that means," Sinha wrote on Twitter and updated his profile to Anubhav Sinha (Not Bollywood).

Responding to Sinha, director Sudhir Mishra said, "Bollywood chodo . Let's go towards Indian Cinema, Indian Storytelling!"

"Aligarh" director Hansal

Mehta said, "Chhor diya (left it) It never existed in the first place."

Sinha, who has a string of recent successes with films such as "Thappad" and "Mulk", also said he does not understand the outsider versus insider debate.

"When successful people talk about nepotism and outsider-insider, I find it ironic. I know at least 200 people who are insiders and nobody knows them and then there are people who came out of nowhere and have made it big," Sinha told PTI.

Referring to Rajput, whose untimely death is clouded by talk of unfair contract details and films that he was done out of, Sinha said, "The guy was dealing with something that hurt him terribly. I don't know what that was. Maybe all these stories will turn out to be right, maybe not. I hope we

get to know someday whether we have made mistakes in dealing with people and get an opportunity to correct it."

But there was little space for any nuanced introspection as a discussion that began with Rajput's death took a turn.

Ranaut, who has labelled Rajput's death "murder", accused Bollywood biggies of systematically working against the "Chichhore" star, and promoting his image as a "flop actor". She also alleged that his hits were glossed over and the figures fudged to highlight the successes of 'insider' films.

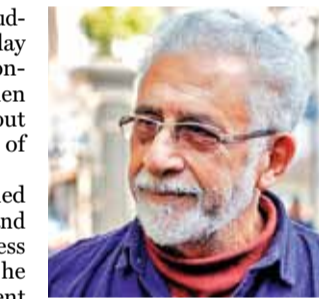
She dragged her "Panga" co-star Richa Chadha and "Tanu Weds Manu" co-star Swara Bhasker, both outspoken and both 'outsiders', into the controversy, calling them "B-grade" actors in cahoots with Johar. AGENCIES

Puneet Issar lost 7-8 films after accidentally injuring Amitabh

Actor Puneet Issar has recalled how he lost seven to eight films after accidentally inflicting a serious injury on Amitabh Bachchan on the set of the 1983 film Coolie, and how the Bollywood icon had greeted him with kindness and warmth despite the incident, and ensured that the world knew there was no bad blood between them.

"My encounter with Mr Amitabh Bachchan was rather unfortunate. I remember while shooting for 'Coolie', we had to perform this particular action sequence. The timing during the final take did not match and I accidentally injured Mr Bachchan," recalled Issar.

On July 26, 1982, as part of an action sequence in Manmohan Desai's "Coolie" being shot in Bangalore, Issar was supposed to aim a fake hit at Big B in a way that the latter landed on a nearby iron table. Unfortunately, the shot got mistimed and an edge of the table hit Big B's lower Abdomen, resulting in a near-fatal injury that saw him hospitalised for months. AGENCIES



Not an accomplishment when young actors say they get nervous working with me: Naseeruddin Shah on Monday said he doesn't consider it a compliment when fellow actors confess about being "nervous" in front of him.

Shah, who has straddled the worlds of cinema, TV and theatre with equal prowess for close to 45 years, said he tries to make the new talent feel at ease whenever he collaborates with them.

"It doesn't please me when young actors say they are nervous when they are working with me, because I don't think that's a compliment."

"If my presence disturbs a co-worker, that's not a compliment or an accomplishment on my part. I try to help them overcome their nervousness, I don't always succeed," he said.

The actor, best known for his work in films including "Nishant", "Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro", "Ijaazat", "A Wednesday", and shows like "Mirza Ghalib", "Bharat Ek Khoj", said he learnt this lesson from his seniors in the industry who never made him feel overwhelmed with their presence.

"I don't remember being

nervous in the presence of an actor who I liked very much, including Dilip Kumar, Sean Connery, Ashok Kumar... So if an actor gets nervous in my presence, it's not a good thing," he added.

Shah, who turned 70 on Monday, was interacting with media at the virtual press conference of his upcoming Amazon Prime Video series "Bandish Bandits". The ten-part show follows the story of two lovers, Radhe and Tamanna, played by Ritvik Bhowmik and Shreya Chaudhry, from different musical backgrounds. On the series, created by Amritpal Singh Bindra and Anand Tiwari, Shah will be seen playing the role of Pandit Radheshmohan Rathod, a celebrated classical musician who inspires his grandson Radhe to follow his legacy. AGENCIES