



Sachin Pilot dismisses reports of being in touch with BJP leaders

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Myanmar violence escalating, creating rights catastrophe: UN

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Tsitsipas outlasts Zverev, reaches maiden Grand Slam final

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NEARBY

Speed limits in Delhi revised for uniformity

NEW DELHI In view of the traffic scenario and safety of road users, the Delhi Traffic Police on Friday enforced revised speed limits for all categories of motor vehicles on National Highways, the Ring Road and other major roads in the Capital. The last revision was undertaken in 2011.

CITY PAGE 2

Delhi reports 238 new COVID-19 cases

NEW DELHI Delhi reported 238 new COVID-19 cases and 24 deaths in the last 24 hours, taking the cumulative cases to 14,30,671 and death toll to 24,772, said a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Friday.

CITY PAGE 3

Assam Congress slams CM's 'population' remark

GUWAHATI The Assam Congress flayed Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for asking a minority group to adopt population control measures. Party leader Bobbeeta Sharma said, "This is unbefitting of the CM who is expected to be well-versed in the demographic facts of a State he represents."

NORTH & EAST PAGE 4

Punjab police seize cache of foreign-made pistols

CHANDIGARH The Punjab police on Friday said they have seized a huge cache of foreign-made pistols and arrested a weapons smuggler, allegedly linked with Pakistan-based terrorist outfits and anti-India pro-Khalistani elements based in the U.S., Canada and the U.K.

NORTH & EAST PAGE 4

Centre unlikely to allow return of four Kerala women, who joined IS

They had surrendered after their husbands were killed in attacks

VIJAITA SINGH
SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

The four Indian women lodged in an Afghanistan prison, who accompanied their husbands to join the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), are unlikely to be allowed to return to the country, a senior government official said.

The women, all from Kerala, travelled to Nangarhar in Afghanistan between 2016 and 2018. Their husbands were killed in different attacks in Afghanistan. The women were among

thousands of Islamic State fighters and affiliates who surrendered before the Afghanistan authorities in the months of November and December 2019.

SPECIAL

On April 27, Ahmad Zia Saraj, the head of the National Directorate of Security, told reporters in Kabul that 408 members of the Islamic State from 13 countries are lodged in Afghanistan prisons. This included four Indians, 16 Chinese, 299 Pakistanis, two Bangladeshis, and

Cross-border tale

■ Sonia Sebastian, an engineering graduate, left for Afghanistan with her husband, Abdul Rashid Abdulla

■ Merrin Jacob flew out with her husband, Bestin Vincent, who was later killed in Afghanistan

■ Vincent's brother Bexon and his wife Nimisha too accompanied them

■ Reffela left with her husband Jias Kallukettiya Purayil, a physician. He is said to be one of the IS terrorists who stormed a prison in Jalalabad in August 2020

two from the Maldives, among others.

Mr. Saraj also said the Afghanistan government had begun talks with the 13 coun-

tries to deport the prisoners.

While Afghan officials in Delhi declined to comment, senior officials in Kabul indicated that they awaited word

from India on what it proposes to do.

A source, however, said there was no consensus among various government agencies on the return of the four women and it was unlikely that they would be allowed to come back. The women, accompanied by their children, were interviewed by Indian security agencies in Kabul in December 2019, a month after their surrender.

In March 2020, Strategysglobal.com, a strategic affairs website, published a video of the interrogation of the three women. The four women who appeared in the video were identified as Sonia Sebastian, alias Ayisha;

Reffela; Merrin Jacob, alias Mariyam; and Nimisha, alias Fathima Isa. A senior official added that there were two other Indian women and a man who had surrendered to the authorities.

'Highly radicalised'

"One line of thought was to allow them to come back and become approvers in the cases here. However, their interview revealed that they are highly radicalised. The France model may be followed and the Afghanistan authorities can be requested to put them on trial there," said the official.

The Interpol has issued red notices against the women on India's request.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) had filed a chargesheet in 2017 after a group of 21 men and women from Kerala, including Sebastian, left India in 2016 in batches to join the ISKP in Afghanistan. They crossed over to Afghanistan on foot from Iran.

The NIA said Sebastian, from Kasargod in Kerala, had left India on May 31, 2016, with her husband, Abdul Rashid Abdulla, from Mumbai airport.

The agency said, "The couple held secret classes in support of IS and jihad, as propagated by it, during last part of Ramadan."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Mukul Roy rejoins Trinamool

Welcomed by Mamata, he says she is the leader of the entire country

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

The repercussions of the BJP's comprehensive defeat in the West Bengal Assembly poll continued more than a month after the results were declared, with party vice-president Mukul Roy on Friday returning to the Trinamool Congress. One of the founding members of the party, Mr. Roy had switched to the BJP in November 2017. Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee and party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee were at the party headquarters to welcome Mr. Roy, 67.

An effusive Mr. Roy described Ms. Banerjee "as a leader of the entire country". He said he was feeling relieved after quitting the BJP.

"I feel glad to meet all the old faces again... I feel that Bengal will return to its old



Back in the team: Mukul Roy with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Trinamool national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee in Kolkata on Friday. ■ PTI

position of prestige, and the person who will lead Bengal to that position, she is the leader of all of us, the leader of India, none other than Mamata Banerjee," he said.

In the present circumstances, no one can stay in the BJP in Bengal, he added.

Ms. Banerjee, in turn, described Mr. Roy as an "old family member" and added

that "old is always gold".

"Mukul is an old member of our family. I feel that upon coming back he has got some mental relief. I saw his health was deteriorating and he was perhaps unable to express that. It is not possible to work in the BJP. The BJP is such an authoritarian party; it is so cruel that they do not allow anybody to exist with dignity. Mukul's return proves just that," Ms. Banerjee said.

Pointing that she "never had any difference of opinion with Mukul" and "Mukul did not say anything against our party", the Chief Minister alleged that the former Railway Minister "was intimidated, threatened... agencies were branched to harass him".

Ms. Banerjee added that many more leaders from the BJP may join Trinamool.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Modi meets Adityanath, Amit Shah to iron out issues

U.P. CM asked to 'take everyone along' in party and govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday had meetings with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath as well as Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda to sort out, what are said to be, several internal issues within the party and the government, including a possible Cabinet reshuffle.

The state of play in the BJP's State unit and the party-run government seem to be more or less settled in favour of Mr. Adityanath. The meeting between Mr. Modi and Mr. Adityanath lasted for over an hour. After this, the Chief Minister met Mr. Nadda and called on President Ram Nath Kovind.

Sources close to Mr. Adityanath said his meetings



Key talks: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath in New Delhi on Friday. ■ PTI/@PMOINDIA

with Mr. Modi and Mr. Nadda were "to do with governance and the coming Assembly poll next year". He was asked to "take everyone along" in both the party and the government, accommodate various interests in the party, and may expand his Council of Ministers sooner rather than later.

"The poorvanchal expressway is also going to be ready for inauguration by July 31 and an invitation for the ceremony was extended to the Prime Minister. The start of ground work of the proposed Jhevar airport was also discussed," said a source.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

SC rejects ex-Mumbai police chief's appeal

Case won't be shifted from Maharashtra

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday told former Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh that "people who live in glass houses should not throw stones at others" while refusing to entertain his plea seeking the transfer of the inquiries/case against him outside Maharashtra to be investigated by an independent agency. He alleged that the State government is trying to "frame" him for levelling corruption charges against NCP leader Anil Deshmukh, who had to resign as Home Minister.

Along with Mr. Singh's petition, the Bench of Justices Hemant Gupta and V. Ramasubramanian was also considering an application filed by Mumbai police inspector Bhimraj Rohidas Ghadge, who accused Mr. Singh, in turn, of corruption and vindictiveness. Mr. Ghadge, represented by senior advocate S.B. Talekar and advocate Vipin Nair, accused his former boss of having tried to "silence" him by framing fake cases against him.

"It is commonly said that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones at others," Justice Gupta told senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani, appearing for Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jethmalani raised an objection to the comment, saying it was a "prejudicial statement" and amounted



Param Bir Singh

to "pre-judging" the case. The court, however, was not impressed.

Alleges frame-up bid

Mr. Singh alleged that the government had instituted departmental inquiries against him as an act of reprisal for his complaint about Mr. Deshmukh.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta was present in court for the CBI.

However, the court saw it differently. "You [Singh] are part of the Maharashtra IPS cadre. You have served the State for 30 years, and now you don't have confidence in your own State. It is shocking... It is a shocking allegation you are making," Justice Gupta addressed Mr. Jethmalani.

The senior lawyer said there were other police officers in Maharashtra who, like his client, had been "victimised" by the government. He claimed that the Maharashtra DGP had approached him as a "mentor" to give up on his complaint.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Centre to engage with J&K parties

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Twenty months after the Union government ended Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional position, serious spadework is on, for

the first time, to rope in the mainstream political parties of the UT, especially Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration, to engage with New Delhi and meet the BJP's top leadership in the coming

weeks. Top sources told *The Hindu* that "people mandated by the Centre are in touch with the top leaders of the regional parties of J&K for many weeks".

DETAILS ON PAGE 8

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Court seeks jail's reply to allegations by 'ISIS member'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday sought response from Tihar jail authorities on an application moved by an alleged ISIS member claiming he was beaten up by other inmates and forced to chant 'Jai Shri Ram'.

The accused, Rashid Zafar, was arrested in 2018 on allegations of being part of a group planning suicide attacks and serial blasts.

Special Judge Parveen Singh issued notice to Tihar jail superintendent and sought a reply to Zafar's application by June 14, when the court will further hear the matter. The application said the incident was disclosed by the accused to his father telephonically from jail.

"The accused was beaten up and forced to chant religious slogans," advocate M.S. Khan, appearing for the accused, claimed.

Close aide of Sushil sent to 4-day police custody

He will be taken to Jammu as part of probe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday remanded an alleged close aide of Olympic wrestler Sushil Kumar to four-day police custody in connection with the murder of a 23-year-old former junior national wrestling champion at Chhatrasal Stadium.

Anirudh was arrested by Delhi Police's Crime Branch on Thursday. A total of 10 people, including Mr. Kumar, have now been arrested in connection with the incident.

The police produced Anirudh before Metropolitan Magistrate Divya Malhotra and sought his custody for seven days. The court, however, allowed his police interrogation for only four days.

Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Shrivastava, representing the police, told the court that Anirudh's custody is required as he has to

be taken to Jammu. The court was also apprised that Anirudh has been spotted in the purported video of the brawl. Mr. Kumar and his associates allegedly assaulted wrestler Sagar Dhankar and two of his friends Sonu Mahal and Amit Kumar on the intervening night of May 4 and 5 over a property dispute. Mr. Dhankar, 23, succumbed to his injuries later.

Sushil custody extended
The two-time Olympic medalist faces charges of murder, culpable homicide, kidnapping and criminal conspiracy. Police have called him the "main culprit and mastermind" behind the alleged murder and said there is electronic evidence in which he and his associates could be seen beating Mr. Dhankar with sticks.

Earlier on Friday, the district court extended his judicial custody till June 25 in connection with the case.

Speed limits revised for greater uniformity

New rules apply to vehicles plying on National Highways passing through Delhi and the Ring Road

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

In view of the traffic scenario and safety of road users, the Delhi Traffic Police on Friday enforced revised speed limits for all categories of motor vehicles on National Highways, the Ring Road and other important stretches in the Capital.

Passenger vehicles

The speed limit for M1 category vehicles is now 60-70 kmph for high speed/access-controlled roads, including stretches of National Highways passing through Delhi, Noida Toll Road, Saleemgarh Bypass Road, Barapullah Nallah, Northern Access Road, Central Spine Road, Ring Road, Outer Ring Road, Pusta Road and IGI Airport Road. Passenger vehicles comprising not more than eight seats in addition to driver's seat such as cars and cabs fall under the M1 category.

The speed limit for M1 category vehicles for all other arterial roads in areas between Ring Road and Outer Ring Road, beyond Outer Ring Road, inside Ring Road and entire Trans Yamuna area, is 50 now kmph.

The speed limit for two-wheelers on National Highways was 70

| Road | Earlier | Revised |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|
| Barapullah Elevated Road | 70 | 60 |
| Delhi-Meerut Expressway | 70 | 70 |
| Singhu Border-Mukarba Chowk | 70 | 60 |
| Ring Road | 50/60 | 60 |
| Airport Road | 50 | 60 |

All figures in kmph
SOURCE: DELHI TRAFFIC POLICE

kmph, which has now been reduced to 60 kmph. Speed limits for two-wheelers is separately notified as 50 kmph on roads where speed limit of cars is 50 kmph, and 60 kmph on roads where it is 60-70 kmph.

Meenu Choudhary, Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic), said: "There have been a number of changes and improvements in the road infrastructure in the city in the past few years, including construction of flyovers, underpasses, high speed/signal-free corridors as well as improvement in vehicle technology. Further,

there was a need to make speed limit uniform on Delhi roads as far as possible. Therefore, a revision of the existing speed limits was necessary."

"The maximum speed limit for M2 and M3 category vehicles (passenger vehicles comprising nine or more seats in addition to the driver's seat) has been notified as 50 kmph on roads where speed limit of cars is 50 kmph, and 60 kmph on roads where it is 60-70 kmph," a police officer said.

Transport vehicles
"The speed limit for all types of transport vehicles, including Gramin Sewa, TSRs, Phat-Phat Sewa, Quadricycle, and N-category vehicles (goods vehicles), has been notified as 40 kmph," the officer added.

The speed limit in residential areas, markets, service lanes and minor roads is now 30 kmph. The speed limit for loops of flyovers is

now 40 kmph. According to a police statement, then Delhi Police Commissioner Amulya Patnaik had constituted a Speed Review Committee under the chairmanship of Taj Hassan, Special Commissioner of Police (Traffic).

The committee included officers from the Delhi Traffic Police, expert members/officials from the Central Road Research Institute Delhi, and the Transport Department of the Delhi government to examine existing speed limits, through a notification dated April 6, 2018.

The revised speed limits have been notified in the Delhi Gazette based on the recommendations of the committee.

The Delhi Traffic Police has requested road-maintaining agencies to erect corresponding speed limit sign boards at all prominent locations, for guidance and convenience of all road users and the general public.

Man stabbed to death over parking space

Three people have been arrested

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 26-year-old man was allegedly stabbed to death by his neighbour following a quarrel over parking a two-wheeler in south-east Delhi's Badarpur, police said on Friday. Two others suffered injuries.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South East) R.P.

Meena said the victim has been identified as Shiv Yadav, a resident of Budh Vihar. A call regarding a quarrel between two neighbours over parking a two-wheeler was received on Thursday night, the police said. It was revealed that the quarrel started when the victim parked his two-wheeler in front of the house of the accused.

"During enquiry, we found that on Thursday morning, an argument had

taken place between Mr. Yadav and his neighbour Premvati over parking a scooter. She complained and asked him not to park his scooter on the street," Mr. Meena said.

Later in the evening, both parties tried to resolve the problem but Premvati's husband Prempal got angry and shared the incident with his two sons. The trio then stabbed Mr. Yadav, his brother Vikas, and cousin Ratan Lal.

Mr. Prempal's eldest son also suffered injuries.

The injured were taken to Apollo Hospital. Mr. Yadav, who sustained a stab injury in his chest, was declared brought dead, while the other two were discharged after treatment. Prempal's eldest son is undergoing treatment, the police said.

Police said that Prempal has been arrested and the minor son has been apprehended.

Five mowed down by speeding truck

Driver has been arrested; two of the victims were brothers aged 2 and 5

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Five people, including four members of a family, were mowed down by a speeding dumper truck early Friday in south-west Delhi's Najafgarh. The deceased have been identified as Ashok (30), his wife Kiran (27), his sons Ishant (5) and Dev (2), and one Jawahar Singh (93). The driver, 35-year-old Rajesh, was arrested from the spot.

Ashok and his family were walking along the road to take a bus to visit a temple in Gurugram while Mr. Singh was out for his morning walk, the police said. After hitting the victims, the truck crashed into several parked vehicles.

CCTV footage of the incident went viral on social media. In one video, the family of four is seen walking on the road near the parked cars. Ashok was carrying his younger son in his arms while his elder son was walking with his mother when the truck mowed them down.

"Information regarding the incident was received at 5.19 a.m. at Thana Road police station. Ashok, Kiran and Ishant were found dead at the spot. Dev and Mr. Singh were taken to Vikas Hospital," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said.

They later died during treatment at Safdurjung Hospital.

The bodies have been sent to the Rao Tularam Memorial Hospital for post



The offending truck at the Najafgarh police station; the heavy vehicle also hit several parked cars.
SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

mortem.

Five vehicles parked at the spot were also damaged by the truck driver's rash and negligent driving, the police said.

'Fell asleep'

The driver is undergoing medical examination to ascertain if he was under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the incident. He told the police that he had fallen asleep at the wheel and lost control of the vehicle.

A case under Sections 279 (rash driving or riding on a public way) and 304 (punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Indian Penal



Code has been registered at Najafgarh police station.

Mr. Singh's grandson Rakesh Yadav said his grandfather went for a morning walk every day.

"I was sleeping when the accident took place. The neighbours informed us about it. We reached the hospital and found him dead," Mr Yadav said.

Ashok worked as a security guard at Vikas Hospital.

"An elderly man was lying on the road and was rushed to the hospital. Later, I came to know that the children who had been hit by the truck were from our family. Ashok and his family were going to Sheetla Devi Mata temple in Gurugram," said a member of Ashok's family.

Afternoon siesta



A farmer takes a nap on sacks of paddy at the wholesale grain market in Najafgarh on Friday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

DUTA asks V-C to set up COVID care facility

It also proposes installing oxygen plant

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) has urged the university administration to take requisite measures and prepare for the next COVID-19 wave by setting up of a COVID care facility.

A proposal for setting up an oxygen plant was discussed in a meeting with vice-chancellor P.C. Joshi on Thursday, said DUTA.

DUTA president Rajib Ray said, "We discussed a proposal to set up an oxygen plant through contribution of teachers and employees. The V-C assured they are exploring various ways of materialising it, including requesting funds from the government. It was agreed that DUTA will join the appeal call in case the university requires raising funds for the plant."

The teachers' body also demanded the inclusion of

The V-C assured they are exploring ways of materialising it [oxygen plant], including requesting funds from the govt.

RAJIB RAY
DUTA president

electing DUTA members in the university's Covid Task Force.

It also urged the administration to ensure that employees of the 12 colleges that are fully funded by the Delhi government get their salaries on time.

"University officials were informed that most colleges are facing shortage and may not be able to give salaries of June and many have not been able to give full salaries for May. It is important that DU remind the Delhi government about the promise of ₹28 crore to settle the issue of this gap in grants and requirements," added Mr. Ray.

DSEU will enrol 6,000 students, says Sisodia

Admission to be based on aptitude test

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Friday said Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University (DSEU) officials will visit schools to encourage students to take admission in various skill and entrepreneurship programmes.

"In the current year, DSEU will admit 6,000 children out of which 4,500 will pursue diploma courses and 1,500 children will study degree courses. DSEU will focus on building talents and skills of students," Mr. Sisodia said, adding that instead of vying for grades, the university will enrol students based on an aptitude test which will be held in December-January.

The aptitude test will focus on '360 degree assessment' and will be a "revolutionary move" in education as most universities continue with the old practice of

admitting students based on grade lists, said the government.

"Universities like Oxford admit children based on conditions for them to complete courses and projects, not on their grades in Board exams. Similarly, our children can be secure in the fact that they will be admitted into a university that will not stress on their grades but on their intent and their interest to study skills and become entrepreneurs," Mr. Sisodia said.

"Generic undergraduate courses do not encourage students to become entrepreneurs and be future-ready... the government will encourage students to pursue vocational and skill courses," he added.

DSEU will have 12 job-oriented bachelor programmes and will offer internships in industries 50% of the time, the government said.

Hardayal Municipal Library reopens

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The historical Hardayal Municipal Library was thrown open to the public on Friday after undergoing extensive renovation over the past one year at a cost of ₹283.33 lakh.

Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan, who inaugurated the renovated library, said it had played an important role in promoting the culture of book reading.

8,000 rare texts

"The 104-year-old heritage building contains approximately 1.25 lakh books, which include 8,000 rare texts and 350 handwritten manuscripts," said North Delhi Municipal Corporation Mayor Jai Prakash. Digitisation and conservation of rare books was done by the Indra Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

NGT pulls up DPCC over illegal godowns

'No permits for units in Shahdara'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has pulled up the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) over operation of godowns in Shahdara without requisite permissions, leading to noise and air pollution.

A Bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel observed that the DPCC had failed to address relevant issues in the report furnished by it. "DPCC has filed a report in a careless manner, unmindful of its statutory duties.

This calls for accountability of the chairman and the member secretary of the DPCC. Before taking action against the officers, we grant one more opportunity to take effective remedial action for enforcement of rule of law and environmental norms in coordination with other concerned authorities," it said.



In case of non-compliance, the erring officials would be held accountable and "dealt with sternly," the Bench added, while noting that the DPCC had taken action against only two godowns instead of all the units that were in violation of the master plan.

The directions came on a plea moved by petitioner Sunil Kumar against the operation of illegal garbage godowns in Soniya Vihar. The plea had contended that the units were releasing dangerous oxides and leading to noise and air pollution.

Man kills brother

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 32-year-old man allegedly killed his older brother with dumbbells in south-east Delhi's Kalkaji following a quarrel. The accused has been arrested, the police said on Friday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South East) R.P. Meena said the accused has been identified as Ajay Kumar Sahu and the victim has been identified as Vijay Kumar Sahu, 35. They lived together and worked at the same place.

The police received a call about the incident around 1 a.m. on Friday. A police team found Vijay's body in a pool of blood and Ajay sitting nearby with the dumbbells next to him. "Vijay's body was shifted to a mortuary for post mortem and a murder case was registered," Mr. Meena said.

"They had frequent brawls over family issues," the officer said, adding: "This time Vijay retaliated and Ajay hit him in the head with the dumbbells."

Timings DELHI

SATURDAY, JUN. 12
RISE 05:23 SET 19:20
RISE 06:39 SET 21:08

SUNDAY, JUN. 13
RISE 05:24 SET 19:20
RISE 07:32 SET 21:57

MONDAY, JUN. 14
RISE 05:24 SET 19:21
RISE 08:29 SET 22:41

Delhi Weather

| | max | min |
|------------|-----|-----|
| Delhi City | 39 | 20 |
| Safdarjang | 39 | 20 |
| Palam | 39 | 23 |

Delhi Palam Today
37°C A hot and humid day with partly cloudy to cloudy sky. Short spell rain and thunderstorm with gusty winds may occur at few places.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
35°C Few spells of rain and thunderstorm with gusty winds likely at some places. Warm and humid day with cloudy sky.

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IN BRIEF



'First greenhouse to be started at ITO nursery'

NEW DELHI
Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Friday said the Delhi government is all set to start its first greenhouse at ITO nursery to cultivate plants using modern techniques. "We have developed this greenhouse so that we can produce the maximum quantity of medicinal plants, in minimal time," said Mr. Rai.

Excise licences of liquor shops, clubs extended

NEW DELHI
The Delhi government has decided to extend the excise licence of liquor shops, clubs, resto-bars and other establishments by three more months till September 30, an order issued by the excise department said.

Out of 77,112 people tested in the Capital, 238 found positive

263 centres are operating at 100 locations to vaccinate those in 18-44 age group

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Delhi reported 238 new COVID-19 cases and 24 deaths in the last 24 hours, taking the cumulative cases to 14,30,671 and death toll to 24,772, said a health bulletin released by the Delhi government on Friday.

Out of the total cases, 14,01,977 people have recovered and there are 3,922 active cases. A total of 77,112 tests were conducted while the test positivity rate was 0.31%.

This means less than one person out of 100 people taking COVID-19 tests are positive for the virus. The TPR was as high as 36% on April 22 and has been coming down since then.

Meanwhile, AAP leader Atishi said Delhi has vac-



Passengers taking COVID-19 test before boarding the train at New Delhi Railway Station on Friday. *SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

nated 30% of its population and 13,94,000 people have received both doses of vaccine.

"Now that the Delhi government has received vaccines, 263 government centres are operating at 100 locations where the 18-44

age group is getting vaccinated," she said.

Vaccine stock

"We have 25 days' stock of Covishield for those above 45. As far as the 18-44 years age group is concerned, Delhi has received a total of

As far as the 18-44 years age group is concerned, Delhi has received a total of 10,34,910 doses of the vaccine

ATISHI AAP leader

10,34,910 doses of the vaccine, out of which we have 1,40,000 doses available," she added.

After Central government capped the price private hospitals can charge for a dose of Covishield at ₹780, Aakash Healthcare on Friday said they have stopped their drive-through vaccination, where a dose of Covishield was given at ₹1,600. "Owing to new vaccination pricing, running it has become non-viable," the hospital said in a statement.

Centre must cooperate with State govts.: Sisodia

He terms BJP as 'Bharatiya Jhagda Party'

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister and AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Friday said that the BJP-led Central government should cooperate with State governments instead of acting as "obstructionists" and called the BJP "Bharatiya Jhagda Party".

"They will condemn the West Bengal government or the Jharkhand government or the Maharashtra government. It seems like the BJP-led Centre has no other work but to divert the focus of people and attack the State governments that are actually doing some work," the AAP leader said.

"The only common factor between oxygen management, vaccines, ration and COVID management is BJP's opposition and deliberate inaction. When the Chief Minister implored why ration

cannot be delivered to households while pizza can, several BJP leaders pounced on the CM and began calling him corrupt. What is wrong if the CM, who is an IIT graduate, promotes doorstep delivery of ration?" he said.

'Work as Team India'

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal reiterated that instead of abusing and fighting with State governments, the Centre should work with them. He tagged a media report according to which Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad blamed the Kejriwal government for allegedly failing to provide ration and oxygen to the people.

In response, Mr. Kejriwal said the country will progress when 130 crore people, all the State governments and the Centre work together as 'Team India'.

AAP ignored HC direction on pandemic control: BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday accused the Delhi government of having disregarded the directions of the High Court more than once in relation to multiple aspects of COVID management in the Capital during the pandemic.

The party alleged that the Delhi government did not curtail black marketing of medicines and other medical equipment, remedy the situation around oxygen supply, migration of labourers and low testing among other issues.

"The court has asked for compensation to dependants of those who died of oxygen shortage but no step has been taken yet," Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta alleged.

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged that the Delhi govt. created an atmosphere of "doubts and fear" during the first wave pushing migrant workers to leave the city.

Nod to cut trees for hospital pending with Minister for 30 months

Union Cabinet had cleared construction, but despite reminders Environment Minister has neither rejected nor approved it

NIKHIL M BABU NEW DELHI

The permission to cut or transplant trees for the Union government's plan to construct a 100-bed hospital in Najafgarh has been pending with the Delhi Environment Minister's office for almost two-and-a-half years, according to a status report accessed by *The Hindu*.

The Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has written a letter to Lt. Governor Anil Bajjal to speed up the process and the letter has also been submitted to the Minister's office through the Chief Secretary's office earlier this

Multiple reminders on this matter from the Central government have also been submitted to the Environment Minister's office, but there is no decision yet

A SENIOR DELHI GOVT. OFFICIAL

month, a senior Delhi government official said.

"Multiple reminders on this matter from the Central government have also been submitted to the Environ-

ment Minister's office, but there is no decision yet," the official said.

Catering to 13 lakh

In May 2018, the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had cleared the construction of the hospital and said it will cater to 13.65 lakh people. The hospital was supposed to be operational by May 2020.

Later in 2018, the officials had recommended the cutting of trees and as per a status report of the Delhi government, the file for the project was submitted to the

Environment Minister on December 18, 2018. The Minister has neither rejected nor approved it.

On April 16, Union Health Minister in a letter to the Lt. Governor directed to "expedite the forest clearance pending before Govt. of NCT of Delhi" for construction of the hospital. Mr. Vardhan said he had written twice to the Chief Minister.

A total of 57 trees have to be cut or transplanted for the project, as per officials. In April, during the peak of COVID-19 infection, people were running from one hospital to

another to find hospital beds and on many days, the total vacant beds were only about 5-6%.

Hurdles galore

As per rules, an applicant can go ahead and cut the trees if the government does not reply within 60 days. But officials said most government projects do not go ahead without a permission, so as to avoid problems in the future.

"The tree officer shall give his decision within sixty days from the date of receipt of the application. If the officer fails to communicate his permis-

ion on request within the period specified under sub-section (3), the permission referred to in section 8 shall be deemed to have been granted," the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994, states about permission for cutting of trees.

The report showed that permission to cut trees for about 12 projects are pending before the Environment Minister's office and many of them are Central government projects.

When contacted, a Delhi government spokesperson refused to comment.

Pregnant woman moves HC for job inclusion

Court disposed of the plea after Centre's counsel said it will take a decision on it

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

A pregnant woman on Friday approached the Delhi High Court seeking direction to the Centre to include pregnant women in COVID-19 vaccination drive on priority basis.

The court was informed by the Central government's counsel that the government is seized of the issue and will take a decision on the same.

Noting the statement made by the Centre's counsel, Justice Amit Bansal said no further orders are re-



quired and disposed of the woman's petition.

Advocate Vasudha Zutshi, representing the woman, said the petitioner is in advanced stage of pregnan-

cy and desires to get vaccinated on priority basis. She sought direction to the government to issue a fresh notification to include pregnant women in the vaccination drive on priority basis.

NTAGI recommendations

Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma and Central government standing counsel Anurag Ahluwalia said National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) has issued a notification on May 28 in which various recommendations were made including that all

pregnant women visiting antenatal care may be informed about the risks and benefits associated with the COVID-19 vaccines, Covishield and Covaxin, available in the country.

Based on the information provided a pregnant woman may be offered the available COVID-19 vaccine at the nearest centre and the vaccine can be given anytime during the pregnancy, the NTAGI recommendations said, adding that all lactating women are eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccines anytime after delivery.

Delhi Congress protests against rising fuel prices

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Delhi Congress on Friday protested at fuel stations across the Capital against the frequent hike in petrol and diesel prices. The Congress said the government has been burdening people, who are already under tremendous pressure due to the pandemic, with unbearable

expenses.

Delhi Congress chief Ch. Anil Kumar, who was joined by AICC general secretary K.C.Venugopal and AICC in-charge of Delhi Shakti Singh Gohil, staged a demonstration at a petrol pump at Delhi Gate, where they shouted slogans against the BJP government at the Centre and the AAP government in Delhi.

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NOTIFICATION

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'Distribute rations for June manually'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Amid a tussle between the Centre and the Delhi government over doorstep ration delivery, the Delhi Food Department has directed fair price shops, barring those in Seemapuri, to distribute rations for the month of June among beneficiaries manually.

The distribution of rations began on Friday. In Seemapuri, it will be distributed only through e-Pos.

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Counting the dead

Measuring excess deaths is the best possible way to estimate the count of COVID-19 deaths

The real time mortality impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is an important statistical measure to guide policy responses. But measuring the actual count is not an easy task. WHO, in January 2021, had estimated, based on excess deaths data in Europe and the American continents, that actual deaths were at least 1.6 times over the official count. The problem of under-counting, even in mature public health systems across the developed world, is largely because patients who die due to cardiovascular issues among others even after apparent recovery from COVID-19 are sometimes not tracked and registered as COVID-19-related deaths. This is why even in Kerala – with 100% registration of deaths and a relatively low case fatality rate – following criticisms about the methodology to evaluate whether a death was related to COVID-19, the health administration in the districts, rather than a State-level audit committee, will now audit deaths. But there is another class of under-counting across States, where health bulletins mislead by reporting a lower number of cases and deaths. This is the case with Bihar where the reported toll was suddenly increased by 72% following a Health Department review after the Patna High Court found discrepancies in figures cited by different agencies in Buxar district. Bihar is among the States in India with the lowest civil registration of deaths, with barely 34.1% of the dead being registered, according to the Civil Registration System (CRS) report of 2018. Estimations of the actual count of the dead are difficult to obtain in other States such as Uttar Pradesh as well, where public health systems are poor and neither the infections nor deaths have been effectively tracked, especially in rural areas, where many have died outside of hospitals.

One method to assess the actual number of deaths due to COVID-19 is by calculating the excess deaths during the given period when the pandemic has raged, compared to the baseline mortality occurring in similar time frames before the pandemic. This exercise also works best if death registrations are relatively high, which should be possible in most districts as registration of deaths has improved to 76% according to CRS 2018. Excess deaths analyses in Gujarat, Chennai and Kolkata based on collations of preliminary registration data by news organisations suggest that they were nearly 10, five and seven times higher, respectively, than reported fatalities during the second wave. If the CRS datasets, maintained by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India besides State registrars and municipal officials with a good quality of registration, are made available, it would enable better estimation of the actual mortality figures. In the meantime, only honest reporting of the deaths will help provide better mitigation strategies.

Monsoon malady

Mumbai must urgently replace decrepit buildings to prevent houses collapsing in rain

The monsoon over the greater Mumbai region has come to be characterised by the unsettling annual spectacle of collapsing buildings, and this year is proving to be no different. An unsafe multi-storied building in a core area of the city has collapsed on to another, leaving at least 11 people dead and exposing once again, the decrepit base of dwellings in India's much-romanticised economic powerhouse. The disaster has brought in its wake the familiar litany of accusations, of people occupying unsafe and illegal buildings, and civic authorities failing to act in time. Mumbai's Mayor Kishori Pednekar has responded to criticism with a helpless exhortation to the city administration to remove dangerous structures. Going beyond these predictable impulses, the overburdened city needs a time-bound and accountable system of ensuring the safety of its housing stock. Coinciding with this year's monsoon, the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority identified 21 structures in Mumbai as being extremely dangerous, with an advisory to over 700 occupants to move to transit accommodation, while reconstruction is undertaken. Understandably, the occupants are reluctant, since the alternative housing is far away from their education and work locations. This is a conundrum that Maharashtra will have to address, treating it as a crisis that will only be aggravated by changes to monsoon rainfall intensity over time.

Coastal Maharashtra sits in the pathway of extreme monsoon weather events, which are forecast to increase in frequency due to ongoing warming of the Arabian Sea. Scientists including those of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology have proposed, in the context of the deluge a few years ago, that accurate monsoon forecasting over central India, incorporating changes to sea surface temperature, would help governments prepare better to save lives and agriculture. For Mumbai, what this means is to accelerate its repair and rehabilitation programme for weak structures and replace those that cannot be salvaged. The city desperately needs channels for huge volumes of water to flow out, and a plan to create new urban wetlands where feasible to store the precipitation. A rejuvenated Mithi river – its planned clean-up has been delayed by the COVID-19 crisis – could offer some relief, but more waterbodies are needed. And it will take a mass housing programme to make life safer for the thousands in hovels. A far-sighted plan to shift people from squalid buildings to modern ones is also a health imperative; such a start must be made with the most dangerous structures. It is also unseemly for political parties to use a disaster such as the one in Malad as a cudgel against the government, considering that Mumbai's civic base lies neglected over the decades regardless of who ruled.

Refocused vaccination campaigns are possible

Local planning will need to go hand-in-hand with equitable plans at the national and global levels



SUPRIYA KUMAR & N.S. PRASHANTH

Poornima and Ashok, 80-year-old parents of two and grandparents of three, have been hunkered down in their Mumbai apartment for a year. When a COVID-19 vaccine became available in March 2021, they went to the local hospital to get their first dose of the Serum Institute of India's Covishield vaccine – the vaccine that was supposed to save the world. Seeing long lines and not wanting to risk being infected while waiting to be vaccinated, they returned home. This happened again the next day before a very helpful staff member of the World Health Organization (WHO) stepped in to help, taking them to a health centre early one morning and making sure they did not have to wait in a line to get vaccinated. This played out again in April 2021 for their second dose. This couple was lucky.

Where the focus must be

As we look ahead to what is promised to be a transition from a lack of vaccine supply to one of greater availability, the plan must be to prioritise people like the two octogenarians in Mumbai – older adults who remain unvaccinated, and very much at risk. Ensure we vaccinate them before we open vaccination to younger adults. This would prioritise people based on the risk of severe disease, and need – essential principles if we plan with justice in mind.

Local governments and municipalities should also prioritise vaccines for the historically marginalised by focusing through the lens of equity and justice. What does it mean to focus through a lens of equity and justice? It would mean ensuring that the vaccine roll-out does not result in avoidable differences in vaccine uptake – and hence preventable disease and

death – between marginalised groups and the rest of the country. It would require prioritising the poor, religious minorities, socially disadvantaged castes, Adivasi communities, those living in remote areas, and women.

In Chhattisgarh

One example of an equity-focused vaccination plan came from the Chhattisgarh government. The plan prioritised ration card holders, specifically because they are poor, and often live in multi-generation, larger households, putting them at higher risk of infection. They also often lack access to mobile phones and the Internet, which are necessary to register for vaccination. Though the High Court asked that the plan be modified to provide vaccines to the general public alongside ration card holders, we would propose prioritisation of the marginalised when vaccine supply is limited in order to minimise the risk of severe outcomes due to COVID-19. WHO's strategic advisory group of experts on immunisation recommend prioritising sociodemographic groups at significantly higher risk of severe disease or death (for vaccination) in the context of limited supply (<https://bit.ly/3pGy99C>). We should ensure that we remove barriers to vaccination for the most vulnerable in India to minimise preventable disease and deaths.

India depended, and continues to depend on the AstraZeneca vaccine because it was stable in a refrigerator for longer periods than mRNA vaccines (<https://bit.ly/3gv02Ny>). Presumably, this was so that vaccines could be made available where freezers do not exist. But it also enables the vaccine to be transported in vaccine carriers, and taken to the people where they are. In Indian villages, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and Auxiliary Nurse-Midwives (ANMs) have vast experience and expertise with campaign-style pulse polio vaccination and newborn vaccination; their expertise should be harnessed to take vaccines to villagers.

GETTY IMAGES



Urban slums and neighbourhoods, where socially disadvantaged caste and community groups, and migrants from Adivasi communities often reside, have poor access to and low levels of trust in the health-care system. Vaccines should be provided in camps or door-to-door in such areas. Appropriately, local governments are considering providing vaccines to older adults in door-to-door campaigns. A similar approach – vaccination camps where people live and work – could also greatly enhance vaccine uptake among essential workers and the poor. We need to ensure that those who work for daily wages are able to get the vaccine without having to forego work or pay.

Adivasi communities also reside in remote and forested areas that are also being ravaged by waves of death, presumably due to COVID-19; vaccine distribution should be prioritised to districts where they live. In India today, perhaps the most marginalised are religious minorities, and, specifically, poor Muslim communities. Vaccine distribution should also be prioritised to Muslim-dominated tier-3 towns across the country. An explicit focus on justice would prioritise the engagement of trusted spokespeople to engage in effective risk communication with vulnerable and marginalised communities, and to build trust in the vaccine.

Women-only vaccine days

We need women-only vaccine days to ensure that women know that they are being prioritised. During the 1918 influenza pandemic, India was one of few locations where mortality was higher in women than in men (<https://bit.ly/3gfc4vH>), and we barely un-

derstand the drivers of this observation. In the current pandemic, it is very possible that if women are not explicitly prioritised, economic pressures to protect the (often male) breadwinner in families, and the historically marginalised stature of women in society, will end up resulting in gender inequities in vaccine uptake – early signs of exactly this have been recently reported.

Unfortunately, our data during the pandemic do not allow us to examine whether gender, caste, religious, and indigenous identities have impacted the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection or death. Despite global calls for better surveillance (<https://bit.ly/2TjQxZU>), including among vulnerable groups, India does not regularly report even gender-disaggregated data. Despite crowd-sourced efforts to collect and make data available, reporting of geographic and other meta-data for tests conducted and sequenced samples is variable across laboratories and States. Better leadership to standardise and enforce meta-data collection and timely reporting is essential to inform data-driven interventions and prioritised resource mobilisation.

Equity and justice

Local planning will need to go hand-in-hand with a refocus on equity and justice at the national and global levels as well. Nationally, people have recognised that digital apps for registration are a recipe for inequity along age, gender, and economic dimensions, and reports have highlighted the plight of those on the wrong side of the digital divide. CoWIN data that are available to date (<https://bit.ly/2RjWQFw>) show that vaccination rates have been inequitable between tribal and non-tribal areas (<https://bit.ly/2TY9qBU>), for example. Going forward, let us focus on first doing no harm – get people vaccinated to save the lives most at risk. At the national level, the recent decision to procure vaccines centrally and make COVID-19 vaccines available free of cost through the public system goes a long way towards ensuring equity

and justice. WHO has been tireless in its call for the urgent need for vaccine equity at the global level. In an ideal world, vaccines would be procured and equitably distributed to countries based on need through the COVAX facility (<https://bit.ly/3pRoXPS>). But instead, wealthy countries have once again, as during the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic, secured more doses than they need to vaccinate every member of their population (<https://bit.ly/3zmRa5a>), and even pre-ordered booster doses (<https://reut.rs/3pHT1NL>). This leaves only poor countries to be dependent on supplies through COVAX, and they find themselves at the end of the line. This is a wake-up call for setting up vaccine distribution systems with equity in mind for the next pandemic. At this time, unfortunately, poor countries are at the mercy of the European Union and the United States, who need to donate vaccines now. They need to vaccinate the world alongside their own communities – they need to vaccinate grandparents everywhere alongside children and adolescents within their borders. Work during the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic showed that willingness among the U.S. public to donate vaccines to the poorer countries was appreciable (<https://bit.ly/3iAvnRU>). Today as well, surveys show that U.S. public support for immediate donation of COVID-19 vaccine exists (<https://bit.ly/3pls9gx>). Doses need to be donated to COVAX now so that they can be distributed to countries based on need. Every life matters in this world and world leaders need to follow the lead of WHO and embody global solidarity in this pandemic.

Refocused, rejuvenated local, national, and global vaccination campaigns are possible. Let us ensure that we plan now so that we get those shots in arms when they are available. Let us get to work in India.

Supriya Kumar is a public health researcher focused on health equity in South Asia. N.S. Prashanth is on the faculty at the Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru

The signal from the Iran presidential election is clear

The non-transparent process of candidate selection has carefully rejected reformists and focused on hardliners



TALMIZ AHMAD

On May 25, the Guardian Council in Iran announced a slate of seven candidates who would compete in the presidential election on June 18. The council, in a non-transparent process, selected these seven candidates from among 592 applicants, including 40 women. The list does not include a woman candidate. Iran has a dichotomous political order whose two parts are constantly at odds with each other. It has the institutions of a normal democratic system – a directly elected President, an elected national assembly, and a government responsible to the assembly. The other part of the political order is devoted to safeguarding the ideology and principles of the Islamic Revolution; this has provided the country with institutions that are unique to Iran and do much to dilute, if not undermine, the country's democratic credentials.

Placed above the popularly elected President is the Supreme Leader, who wields supreme authority in all matters of national governance – security, defence, foreign relations, the judiciary. One of the bodies under the Supreme Leader is the 12-member Guardian Council.

The council has now carefully rejected reformist candidates and retained two who seem to be cen-

trist, so that the slate has five so-called "hardliners". But many of them are relatively light-weight: prominent personalities such as Assembly Speaker Ali Larijani, have also been excluded. Clearly, the Guardian Council has decided to ensure the election of one specific candidate, Ebrahim Raisi.

Raisi at the helm

Raisi has been a high-profile legal luminary in Iran since the days of the Revolution. He is now head of the judiciary and deputy chief of the Assembly of Experts which selects the Supreme Leader. Raisi had stood against Hassan Rouhani for the presidency in 2017, but was soundly defeated. Raisi has been in campaign mode for the last two years and has made "fighting corruption" and "caring for the down-trodden and the under-privileged" the centre-piece of his platform.

The list announced by the council has evoked sharp criticisms across the political spectrum. President Rouhani has expressed concern about the "minimal participation" in the elections that could now occur. Ali Larijani's brother has called the list "indefensible". Surprisingly, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei himself has said that in the vetting process "some candidates were wronged", but, so far, the Guardian Council has not revised the candidates' list (<https://bit.ly/3CBIXR7>).

Khamenei appears to have backed the narrow selection of candidates to ensure that Iran's politics will now shift from Rouhani's moderate reform to the hard ideological posture of Ebrahim

GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO



Raisi, who is his long-term political associate. As Iran is now once again engaged in dialogue on the nuclear issue with the United States and other interlocutors in Vienna, Khamenei would like the credit for the lifting of sanctions to go to the hardliners.

But Khamenei has taken this gamble despite considerable public hostility to the overt manipulation of the election. Recent polls suggest a low voter turnout of about a third of the electorate which could dilute the credibility of the new President and condemn the country to domestic turmoil.

Economic despair

There could be longer term political implications as well. The economist Djavad Salehi-Isfahani has pointed out ("Iran's middle class and the nuclear deal"; brookings.edu) that the educated middle class plays a central role in determining the direction of Iran's elections: earlier, in the absence of harsh sanctions, Iran's economy had grown exponentially and expanded the size of the middle class.

In 2013, with the prospect of the end of sanctions, Rouhani won the

presidential election, when the middle class was nearly 60% of the population. The lifting of sanctions after the nuclear agreement saw him through during the 2017 elections as well.

However, the re-introduction of sanctions by the Donald Trump administration cost the economy about \$200 billion: the middle class has been reduced by eight million, while those living in extreme poverty have increased five-fold to 20 million. Poor medical facilities have caused pandemic-related deaths of around 80,000 people.

U.S. sanctions have also changed political attitudes: support for the nuclear agreement has gone from 80% in 2015 to just 50% today, while reformist politicians have been discredited due to their failure to obtain the easing of sanctions.

Domestic, regional outlook

The principal concern of the new President will be economic: Iran's inflation rate has gone from 10% in 2017 to 50% today, the national currency has depreciated four times in value, while unemployment is over 12%. The easing of sanctions after an agreement on nuclear issues in Vienna will remove restrictions on Iran's oil and financial sectors and help bring much-needed relief to the beleaguered population.

However, it does not seem that much else will change. Iran's politics is likely to remain fractious, with the clerics seeking to ensure that effective authority remains with them, while the reformists will try to nibble away at the ideo-

logical edifice, usually with limited success.

In the regional arena, Iran is likely to continue its present approach of combining pragmatic peace moves with confrontation: quiet dialogue with Saudi Arabia on the Yemen conflict could make progress, though Syria will take longer to settle as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its ally, Hezbollah, are deeply invested in that theatre.

Again, there will be no let-up in Iran's confrontation with the U.S. and Israel. The Carnegie scholar, Karim Sadjadpour, has reported Khamenei's observation that "the revolution needs enmity with America" (<https://bit.ly/3veSaoW>). However, hostility to Iran and its Revolution is also deeply ingrained in the U.S. psyche, which has meant that earlier peace overtures from the Islamic republic have repeatedly been rebuffed by Washington.

Thus, the "Cold War" between the two will continue, along with occasional skirmishes with Israel, not just in Syria, but also in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Iran will seek strategic comfort in closer ties with Russia and China.

Donald Trump's policy of "maximum pressure" that, with its crippling sanctions, was meant to achieve regime change in Iran, has had the ironical effect of tilting Iran's political balance sharply in favour of the hardliners. They will now control the levers of power in Iran for the foreseeable future.

Talmiz Ahmad is a former Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Shocker from Bihar

The whopping 72% increase in the number of COVID-19 deaths in Bihar is a sign of irresponsibility by the State administration there (Page 1, June 11). The hiding of actual figures of morbidity and mortality can only fuel a worsening of the pandemic. What has happened is a disservice to the families of the deceased. All other States should order a recount of

the toll during the second wave.

Dr. D.V.G. SANKARARAO,
Nellimarla, Andhra Pradesh

Elevation of lawyers

The Chief Justice of India has, unfortunately, agreed to consider a request made by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) to elevate Supreme Court lawyers as High Court judges. Under the scheme of the Constitution, the

High Courts form a separate chapter and appointments to the High Court find a place in that chapter. This is only consistent with the federal principle that the various States will have their own High Court, and lawyers practising in those High Courts will be elevated. This has been the convention. That apart, the collegium of the respective High Courts will have a fair knowledge

of the lawyers who are practising before them, which is not the case for Supreme Court lawyers. The only advantage that such lawyers have would be close proximity to Supreme Court judges, who may recommend them for appointment and it would not be easy for the High Court collegium to demur from such imposition coming as it would from the Supreme Court collegium.

Hitherto, only lawyers from the respective High Courts or from the lower judiciary have been appointed. This is not based on the sons of the soil theory but on sound principles of effective administration of justice. Apart from knowledge of the local language, which is a very important criterion, they will also have familiarity with the local laws and the local conditions which are

crucial.

The claim of the SCBA seems to be based on the lawyers' ambition to move further in life. This is unmindful of the fact that High Courts are constituted for the benefit of the people. There is definitely no talent lacking in the High Courts.
N.G.R. PRASAD,
Chennai

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Persecuted in Pakistan, ignored in India

Hundreds of Pakistani Hindus have migrated to India in search of security and citizenship but are caught in a maze of rules and regulations that have left them stateless for years. **Mohammed Iqbal** reports on their plight and the politics around citizenship

For two decades, Jogdas Maharaj waited in vain for Indian citizenship. Last month, the 82-year-old man, highly respected in the Kali Beri settlement of Pakistani Hindu migrants near Jodhpur, Rajasthan, died stateless.

Maharaj crossed the border into India with nine family members in August 2000. He decided to stay in the country, in Jodhpur, to escape the economic hardship and discrimination he was facing in Rahimyar Khan district in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. "Our father passed away waiting for citizenship. Our family has 19 members and we have nowhere to go," says Harjiram Bheel, Maharaj's son.

Bheel says the family has been wandering from one citizenship camp to another over the years. These camps were organised by the Union Home Ministry from time to time to receive new applications for citizenship and dispose of or clear old ones. But the camps have not been successful because of red-tapism. Bheel's family is one among many whose Pakistani passports and Indian visas have expired.

Karamshi Koli, 43, who migrated to India in 2015, lives as an asylum-seeker in the Anganwa hutment. Koli says he has not even succeeded in getting a long-term visa which would enable him to find a private job or take up self-employment to sustain his family.

The weary residents of the mud houses in Anganwa, adjacent to a water filtration plant, have no access to electricity, water, toilets and sanitation facilities. Women and children fetch water from a well in the Shri Khetanand temple situated 2 km away, while solar lights — some donated by philanthropists and some purchased by some of the migrants — are used at night.

The number of Pakistani Hindu migrants staying in 21 settlements in Jodhpur district is estimated to be about 30,000. The land where they have built their ramshackle dwellings belongs either to the Municipal Corporation or the village panchayats and Forest Department. These migrants came to India expectantly, but their eagerness has turned into disillusionment over time. They are unhappy with the way they are being treated in a country which they had hoped would accept them wholeheartedly and they could call home.

No sense of belonging

Young Laxman Singh, who hails from Sindh's Mirpur Khas district, says unhappily that migrants like him seem to belong nowhere. "We faced persecution on the ground of our religious identity in Pakistan. In India, we are being ostracised for being Pakistanis," he says. Most men like him, who were landless farmers or daily labourers in Pakistan, have failed to find any gainful employment in or around Jodhpur. The pandemic-related lockdowns have only made matters worse.

Hemji Koli, who is a shelter manager on a contractual basis with the Municipal Corporation, runs a "Chetana" study centre on behalf of a non-governmental organisation, Universal Just Action Society, in the Anganwa settlement. The centre provides basic literacy to children up to five years of age and tuition to those going to nearby government schools. About 350 children who were attending school before the COVID-19 outbreak have been confined at home for over a year due to the pandemic.

"No person in this locality has been given citizenship so far. This is a relatively new settlement. The only saving grace is that we have not been driven out of this land," Hemji says. Some migrants in the other settlements have got citizenship after completing the mandatory 11 years of stay for eligibility under the Citizenship Act of 1955, but even they struggle daily to get food, water, healthcare and education.

Since 2014, most Hindu migrants have been entering India, into western Rajasthan and northern Gujarat, on a pilgrim visa. They often leave their family members in Pakistan in the hope that they can travel later when they find employment in India. However, they are invariably disappointed when they are left to fend for themselves.

The migrants are mostly Dalits from the Meghwal, Koli, Bhil, Jatav, Kumawat and Mali communities. They are considered underprivileged on both sides of the international border, though some caste Hindus, belonging to the Rajput, Maheshwari and Brahmin communities, have also crossed into India.

They all say that they were segregated and persecuted in Pakistan on religious grounds. They say young girls are sometimes abducted and forcibly converted to Islam in the interior areas of Sindh. Their children faced discrimination in government schools. Their shops and commercial establishments were attacked by robbers. And Hindu residents were not allowed to buy property.

Hindu Singh Sodha, president of the Seemant Lok Sangathan, an organisation working for the welfare of migrants, points out that there have been



Pakistani Hindu migrants show their Pakistani passports at the Kali Beri settlement in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan (Below): Pakistani Hindu migrant children return after fetching water from a well located more than 1.5 km away from their Anganwa settlement in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan. • R.V. MOORTHY



deceit and exploitation by government officials.

Even when they do get citizenship, their problems don't end. Obtaining documents such as ration cards and caste certificates is no easy task and they find it difficult to avail themselves of the benefits of the government's healthcare, education and employment schemes. Sodha, who had himself migrated as a young boy from Tharparkar district's Chachro town in 1971, rues that there is no provision for the rehabilitation of people from Pakistan.

The Seemant Lok Sangathan has raised these issues repeatedly with the Union Home Ministry over the past few years. While affirming that the government needs to be migrant-friendly, Sodha has sought the grant of citizenship through special camps, which will benefit the migrants who still have their family members in Pakistan. "During the last 30 years, I have not found a single family which says it has no member over there. The families are divided," he says.

Improving the lives of migrants

Sodha feels that the Pakistan High Commission should be persuaded to withdraw the increased fee that the migrants are charged for renunciation of their Pakistani citizenship, which is mandatory for them to do before getting their Indian citizenship, and provide easy facilities for renewal of passports and identity cards. Besides, he says, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees should be approached for incorporating the minority migrants in its regular programmes for refugees.

Moreover, the gaps in livelihood development and rehabilitation status should be identified at the State level and a robust policy for rehabilitation introduced at the Central level for migrant families, he says. Stateless persons belonging to higher castes, who comprise 20% of the migrant population, manage the hardship better because of their socio-economic condition. They are generally engaged in business or private employment.

The children of these migrants are the worst affected. Schools reluctantly give them admission and do not provide them emotional support and counselling. The children struggle as their medium of instruction was Urdu and Sindhi in Pakistan and Hindi in India. They are often singled out by the teachers and

other students because of their Pakistani origin. Government schools, which earlier demanded their identity proof, started giving them admission only a couple of years ago.

Despite this, some migrant children have excelled in their studies. Chandra Prakash, son of a migrant teacher, Manjhiana Rana, topped Class 12 at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad School, run by the Marwar Muslim Educational and Welfare Society, in 2019. Chandra Prakash is now studying MBBS at the Sardar Patel Government Medical College in Bikaner.

The Marwar Muslim Educational and Welfare Society's CEO, Mohammed Atiq, says plans are afoot to open a primary school this year exclusively for the children of migrants at a plot of land situated near the Maulana Azad University in Bujhawar village. The school will be gradually upgraded to include higher education after the intake of 60 children in the first year.

As an indication of the State government's consideration for the rehabilitation of the migrants, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot inaugurated the Vinoba Bhav Nagar housing scheme for them, comprising 1,700 plots at the land measuring 300 bighas, in Chokha village near Jodhpur earlier this month. The residential scheme, announced in the 2021-22 State Budget, will be executed by the Jodhpur Development Authority.

Hope and despair

On the one hand, the government is making efforts to improve their quality of life, but on the other, the migrants have also had to face the problem of exploitation by government officials. In May 2018, a racket involving extortion of money from the migrants for extension of long-term visa, visa transfer, and grant of citizenship came to light after the arrest of a Home Ministry official by the Rajasthan Anti-Corruption Bureau. The official visited Jodhpur regularly to attend hearings on writ petitions moved by the migrants in the Rajasthan High Court. The official had three agents who identified themselves as Pakistani migrants with Indian citizenship. The case indicated that a larger nexus was at work to exploit the migrants for money. The Anti-Corruption Bureau's probe revealed that the official had demanded and accepted bribes from about 3,000 migrants in 2017 alone.



The inordinate delay in the grant of citizenship has led to a host of problems for the migrants. In November last year, a migrant woman, Janta Mali, was reunited with her family in western Rajasthan after being stranded in Pakistan for 10 months during the lockdown. Since her No Objection to Return to India (NORI) visa had expired, she was not allowed to travel back. Mali's husband and children, who are Indian citizens, travelled back to India in July 2020 after visiting her ailing mother in Pakistan's Mirpur Khas. The Seemant Lok Sangathan took up the issue with the Rajasthan government and the Centre and succeeded in bringing her back after six months by getting her visa extended.

Though the migrants have been staying in cities in western Rajasthan such as Barmer, Jaisalmer and Bikaner for several years, Jodhpur emerged as the preferred destination after the Thar Express train linking Karachi with Bhagat Ki Kothi railway station started in 2006. The train was stopped in August 2019 when tensions escalated between India and Pakistan following India's revocation of special status to Jammu and Kashmir. The Munabao-Khokhrapur rail route was restored after a gap of 41 years following the 1965 war to reduce the distance and journey of time for people from central and southern Indian States travelling to Pakistan. It gained popularity among the Pakistani Hindus who wanted to migrate to India. The train was also used by migrants frustrated by the delay in the grant of long-term visa or citizenship to return to Pakistan.

Bone of contention

On May 28, the Union Home Ministry issued a notification inviting non-Muslim migrants residing in 13 districts of five States to apply for Indian citizenship. It also empowered the Collectors of these districts to grant citizenship certificates. This has become the latest bone of contention between civil rights activists and asylum-seekers. The notification is applicable to migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

While the Collectors of Jodhpur, Jaipur and Jaisalmer districts were empowered to grant citizenship in 2016, the new notification has now delegated the same powers to the Collectors of Jalore, Udaipur, Pali, Barmer and Sirohi districts. Sodha says these powers should be conferred on the Collectors of all districts in the State to speed up the process of application, security check, and inquiry for grant of citizenship.

The Home Ministry says that the latest notification is not related to the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) of 2019, which has not come into effect and seeks to benefit the undocumented or illegal migrants from the six "persecuted communities" who entered India before December 31, 2014. The CAA will reduce the requirement of 11 years of aggregate stay in India to five years for citizenship, which would help fast-track the applications of migrants.

The president of the People's Union for Civil Liberties in Rajasthan, Kavita

Srivastava, disagrees. She says that the notification amounts to implementation of the CAA "by stealth" even as the law has been challenged in the Supreme Court. "The delegation of powers to the Collectors is only with respect to the communities covered by the CAA and not those otherwise eligible for citizenship by registration and naturalisation," she says. While demanding immediate withdrawal of the notification as well as nullification of the CAA, Srivastava says the notification's intention is to rush through citizenship without waiting for the court's verdict. She says it is also in complete disregard to the massive protests against the law in late 2019 and early 2020. "It is the first salvo towards implementing the 2019 Act, as its intention is to keep Muslims out of the purview of the citizenship law," she says.

Civil rights groups have called for taking measures to smoothen and hasten the process for grant of citizenship to migrants irrespective of their religious identity. Popular Front of India's State president Mohammed Asif says the organisation will stage protests against the May 28 notification in a democratic manner once the COVID-19-related restrictions are lifted, as it bears resemblance to the CAA which discriminates on the ground of religion.

COVID-19-related problems

A new issue that the migrants are now facing is inaccessibility to vaccines. This remains unresolved despite the intervention of the Rajasthan High Court. The State government has refused to inoculate those who do not possess Aadhaar cards or other prescribed documents. About 15 migrants, including those who tested positive for COVID-19 and those suspected to have the virus or are symptomatic, have died in Jodhpur during the second wave of infections.

A Division Bench of the High Court, which earlier ruled that the Centre's standard operating procedure on vaccination did not exclude the migrants from Pakistan, has hauled up the State government for seeking clarification from the Union government, and sought an explanation from the Chief Secretary. The migrants settled in Barmer have started getting vaccinated on the basis of their Pakistani passports.

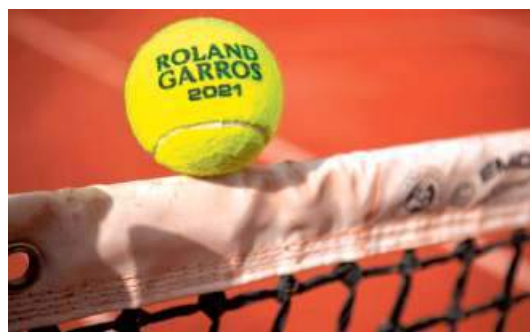
Hearing the additional submissions made on behalf of the migrants in a suo motu case, the court also directed the State government to supply ration material and food packets to them through the Food and Civil Supplies Departments, local bodies and non-governmental organisations. It was submitted to the court that only the migrants residing in Jodhpur were getting the food packets, while those in Jaisalmer, Barmer and Jaipur districts were deprived of food supply during the pandemic.

Hoping against hope that their basic needs will be met, the Pakistani Hindu migrants are caught in a vicious circle of poverty and vulnerability. They face an unresponsive government and uncertain legislation. Out of their homeland and across the border, the migrants wait endlessly for the day when they can call India their true home.



Instapick

NYC opens up: New hotels, restaurants and the subway returning to 24-hour service — New York City is coming back to life. In fact there is a Central Park mega-concert planned for August, a celebration of the city and its residents after surviving the pandemic. It's slated to have 'eight "iconic" stars perform a three-hour show for 60,000 attendees and a worldwide television audience'.



Talking point

French Open 2021: As this issue went to press, fans were awaiting a cracking semi-final with Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal. The winner will play against Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas or German player Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final. In women's singles, Slovenia's Tamara Zidansek became the first women's singles player from her country to enter the semi-final of a Grand Slam event.

Pick of the week

Virtual tours, workshops and other events you just can't miss



Virtual benefit

After the success of the first edition last year, carpet manufacturer Obeettee has launched its second edition, **Social Fabric 2.0 - Weaves of Solidarity** auction. It is aimed at assisting 25,000 carpet weavers in Mirzapur. obeettee.org. Watch Acapella group Penn Masala, and other artistes participate in a virtual benefit organised by non-profit, **Room to Read**, to support their Education Resilience Fund. June 25. give.roomtoread.org



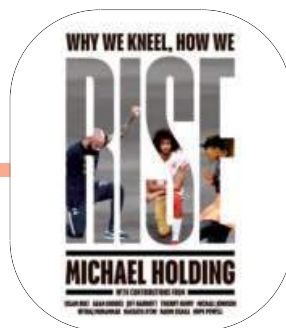
Comic hour

Taking on the role of 'The Expert' who knows everything about nothing is comedian **Sorabh Pant**. From politics to pop culture, the comic has a new episode launching every week. June 12, 8.30 pm on Zoom. ₹200. In **Teen Ka Tadka**, comics **Neeti Palta, Shreeja Chaturvedi and Devanshi Shah** share personal, twisted stories. June 14, at 10 pm. ₹200. Tickets for both shows are available on in.bookmyshow.com



Wears well

Falguni Shane Peacock have joined several other designer labels on the **Nykaa Fashion Luxe Store**, nykaafashion.com. The National Centre for the Performing Arts is conducting a two-day workshop on **'Reimagining dance costumes with Sandhya Raman'** highlighting the role and importance of costumes in various dance forms. On 18 and 25 June '6 pm over a Zoom call; ₹500; Call 8879114939 or 9819002515 for registration.



Booked weekends

Releasing next week: **Michael Holding's Why We Kneel, How We Rise**. The book by the former West Indies cricketer features conversations on racism with sporting legends Usain Bolt, Naomi Osaka, and others. ₹699. simonandschuster.co.in. Author **Ruskin Bond** has put his 70-year experience as an author into 28 lessons for a course on writing. Learn about his journey, how to build characters, book publishing, and more. Till June 30. ₹999. bookmyshow.com



A trip to the Louvre

Visit the **Louvre Museum** with this licensed guide-led webinar. The 60-minute virtual session covers a tour by an expert in Louvre art and history, photos, and videos. June 12. 8.30pm. ₹1,314. **Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo** is also organising online tours for viewers who want an intimate look at their animals. Each journey will give you insights into a specific animal group via one of four formats: meet-and-greet, cognition and care, enrichment, or feeding. ₹1,200. Both on eventbrite.com



Rolls-Royce on time

Luxury watchmaker **Bovet 1822** and **Rolls-Royce** have collaborated to create two tourbillon timepieces. The new offerings can transform from a wristwatch to a pocket/pendant watch, desk clock, and even a dashboard clock. Price TBA. bovet.com Bengaluru-based **The Summer House's** latest collection, Loom to Loop, features lounge pants, boxy jackets, and dresses crafted with fabrics recycled from production scrap. ₹3,900 onwards. thesummerhouse.in



Pride 2021

onePULSE Foundation in the US has teamed up with singer **Ricky Martin** for an exclusive event to commemorate Pride Month. While Martin will share his tips for the perfect selfie, if you make a ₹3,575 donation to their OUTLOVE HATE campaign, your self-portrait will appear on permanent display at the National Pulse Memorial & Museum. June 18. eventbrite.com. Social platform **Lemonade Social** has a series of events, including a dance masterclass. [@lemonade_social](https://twitter.com/lemonade_social)



YARN IT!

Who's in your head?

Making sense of wide foreheads, squeaking lizards and lengths of skirts

JANE DE SUZA

You should never listen to what they say. At least, that's what they say. To clarify, if you were to listen to what they say, then you'd not be listening to what they say. Clear now?

You've heard them say, for example, that wide foreheads signify great memories. Keep your hair on!

They also say wide foreheads signify balding genes. Not to split hairs, but they say that great memories are not worth losing hair over because the next generations will just Google, and let their great memories go redundant. And to bring it all to a head, they even say appearances are deceptive. Which means that those who appear to have wide fo-

reheads may not really have wide foreheads. Clearer now?

After a lifetime of listening to what they say, you will discover there are bunches of Theys who say deliberately contradictory things. As soon as you're following one, the others say something diametrically opposite. They are all convinced they are right and they are wrong.

That leaves us, as they say, with no options at all. You definitely should not be listening to whether they say that lizard squeaks herald weddings or deaths, whether to turn (or vote) left or right; whether lengths of skirts are in the eyes of the beholder or not. You should really be listening only to yourself.

Now here is where it turns hairy. I say categorically that you shouldn't care a toss about what they say. But since for you, I am one of They, if you listen to me, you could say that you shouldn't listen to me. Then I'd say that you're part of the They I'm advising against being listened to, in the first place. So you should really not be listening to you either.

And you don't. This is the final truth. They are so much in your head that you now listen to what they say because you think it is what you think. What you say is exactly what they say, after all. And what I say is exactly what they say, as well. It's just that your They and my They are different. And they say you and I should be, too. Are we really?

Where Jane De Suza, the author of *Happily Never After*, talks about the week's quirks, quacks and hacks

Inside Clubhouse India

It is like a live radio show, and in India the social media platform has taken on an identity of its own — with *antakshari* rooms, regional discourses, and more

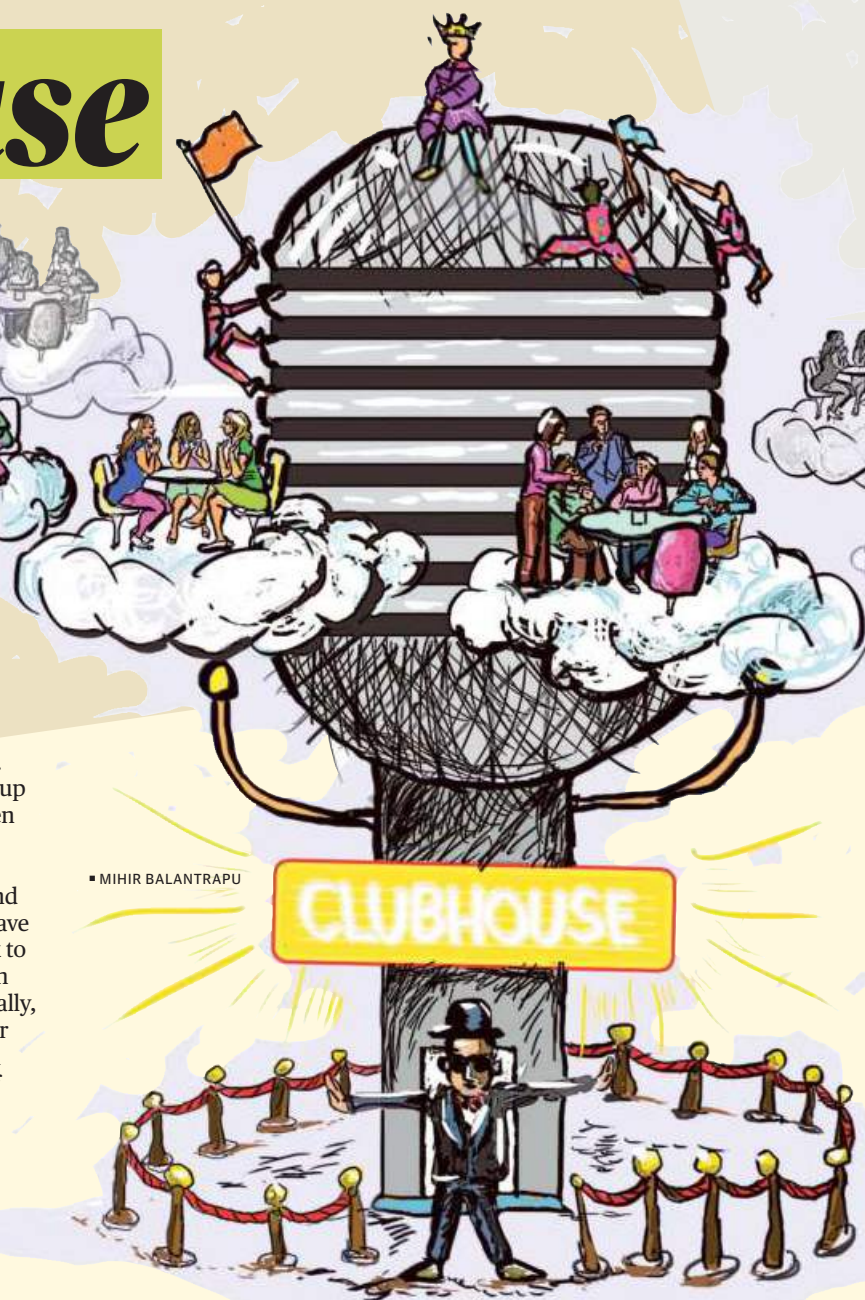
ARJUN MADAN

I first heard about Clubhouse back in January. A friend sent me an invite and I reluctantly opened an account, annoyed at being tasked with learning how to operate yet another social media platform. Then I ignored it. At least until the second wave hit and we were all back to being at home indefinitely. I logged on thinking it was going to be like last year's Houseparty fad; safe to say, I am now hooked and I have no concept of sleep any more.

What is Clubhouse? Think of it like a podcast in real

time or a live radio show. Some describe it as a group of friends chatting or even having a "kitty party". Whereas others call it a place to have dialogue and discourse. People now have the opportunity to speak to some of the best minds in their fields — internationally, rooms with names like Dr Anthony Fauci and Virgil Abloh have seen some of the biggest engagement. Closer home, people like Sonam Kapoor and Kusha Kapila now have a direct line with their fans. Since there are no text messages, direct messaging, or

MIHIR BALANTRAPU



commenting on the app, the audio-only format limits opportunities for trolling. Something that Twitter and Instagram still don't know how to deal with.

For me, it started out as some fun, frivolous conversations about dating and "shooting your shot" (basically the Clubhouse version of telling someone you find them attractive). But soon I was tuning into more "serious" rooms. I am now listening in on conversations about the caste politics in India, the #MeToo movement, and cryptocurrency.

Local connect Clubhouse's trajectory in India has been slightly different. The American market had a head start, which means they are now monetising rooms — artists are hosting paid gigs, people are charging fees for exclusive closed rooms, and the like. Indian Clubhouse isn't there yet, but it is close. The main difference I've noticed is that in the West, there are many rooms with certain people talking and others listening. The Indian audiences want to speak and contribute more. If I am hosting a room and the hand raising feature is off, I end up getting messages on my Instagram to invite people so they can

chime in.

India being a very linguistically diverse country has also ensured that regional languages have found a life of their own on Clubhouse. In fact, the rooms hosted by some Malayali folks — with the most diverse topics (think 'Can a parotta be a parotta if it looks like a chapathi?') — have seen up to 8,000 people at one point, the maximum number allowed in a room by Clubhouse.

Is it a polarising app? Absolutely! Especially since it is now open to Android users, and numbers have risen. Earlier a 500-person room was something to be proud of. Now 5,000 are not enough for some.

There is a lot of discussion about "influencers" on Clubhouse. People are annoyed that already popular digital stars are bringing their clout and disrupting a space that the early adopters worked hard to build. Yet, every other day there is a discussion about influencers, and each of these rooms draws large numbers, elicits several reaction rooms, and creates many Twitter and Reddit threads.

There is also a very active political subculture on Clubhouse, with a clear distinction between the Left and Right leaning groups. The word "echo-chamber" is often used because these heated rooms aren't really having a discourse. I have been "warned" about not following certain people and entering certain rooms

because they don't necessarily align with my political ideologies, and I am supposedly at risk of getting cornered.

Making it your own

My favourite rooms have been where my extreme privilege has been checked, and I have learnt a lot. A popular club, 'The Dark Room', has hosted incredible rooms on topics ranging from fat-phobia to caste-based discrimination. Making these spaces inclusive has been one of the reasons I find Clubhouse to be more democratic than other social media platforms.

Some of the other rooms I enjoy attending are the music rooms, including ones dedicated to *antakshari*! There are also some great artists that are now Clubhouse celebrities, such as Anirudh Deshmukh and Markand Soni.

Clubhouse has become a great forum for the LGBTQIA+ community. Queer people have found their own table, since a seat wasn't made available at the existing platforms for them. The conversations range from fun to educational, and the beauty of the app is that you get to shuttle between both.

Clubhouse is still very new in India. Questions like how to monetise it, what is the future of the app, are being asked. Nobody really has an answer, but what we know is that people are either on it or are trying to score an invite. DM me on Instagram (@arjunmadan), I may have a few spare invites.

Arjun Madan is a food, marketing and brand consultant.

Naomi Osaka has started a conversation about the mental load on young women athletes who are constantly battling stressors on and off the field

Into the open: struggles of the female athlete



Aakancha Kerketta (above, right) with teammate Basanti Barla, Tripta Behera (top right)
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

By SUNALINI MATHEW

In 2019, Utkarsha Pawar, 22, from Pune, began journaling. On its last page, she wrote down her goal: to be selected in the cricket Women's Under-23 Challenger Trophy. Every day, as she filled her diary, it was a reminder that all her thoughts and actions were fine-tuned towards that. "I achieved it, and ticked it off," she says, adding that writing has helped in visualisation, an exercise by sportspersons to sharpen focus and better performance. It also helped her process her grandfather's death last year.

While the practice is beneficial for men and women athletes, Pawar finds that it's her women athlete friends who journal more. "I also have gym training as part of the journal, so it helps me keep track of how I perform and lift [weights] during my periods," she says.

Added layers of pressure

There are two parts to building mental health in athletes: performance enhancement on field and well-being (tackling stress and disorders) off field, says Divya Jain, a sports psychologist from Fortis Healthcare. While journaling and visualisation are practised by both men and women, off field stressors may differ.

Soniya Dabir, Pawar's coach, singles out the word 'pressure' to describe a sportsperson's life: the need to perform better or at least at par with a previous time; the juggling of time between sport and study; the stress of endorsements. Women have added layers of pressure – the doubts about earning a living from sport, where women play for even shorter durations than men; the decision to have a child, etc.

The nuances of women's sport

While we will never know the depth of

Naomi Osaka's mental health condition – she does not owe us a detailed explanation, much like she wouldn't her history of a physical injury – she has opened up a conversation around mental health in sport.

On Clubhouse discussions, players have talked about the responses to her decision to take a break, opening the field for more nuanced discussions. Take just the issue of what to wear at sporting events. Karan Singh, who runs the Indian Track Foundation, set up three years ago, has four female athletes (handpicked from across interiors of Jharkhand) in his elite team of 10 trainees.

Earlier this year, the girls got Adidas gear, which gave them access to sports

bras and shorts worn at the international level in track and field events. "These clothes are shorter and more snug than what Aakancha [Kerketta, 16] is comfortable wearing," he says of his ward. So he left it up to her, but she realised the difference it was making to her performance and decided to go with them.

Singh, who is aiming for the 2028 Olympic Games and beyond, normalises conversations with the help of his wife, who talks menstruation and body changes with the girls, made easier since they live together in one house in Ooty.

About mental safety

Just like a physical injury, a mental one too needs more than just first aid. A sports psychologist at Jamshedpur, talks of a young woman who came to him two years after she had been raped in her early teens, by fellow senior male players. "She came with anxiety, and after three or four sessions on a phone consultation, she revealed she had been raped," he says.

But a girl doesn't have to be sexually abused to feel insecure. And it's not just about putting up a CCTV camera, says Gayatri Vartak Madkekar, a sports psychologist. "An athlete travelling alone must feel safe. There are overt ideas of safety, but there is also the mental angle," says Madkekar, adding that having a woman mentor, someone who has gone through a particular experience, will help young players.

There is also the question of 'what if not sport?'. While women in cities may have career options and choices they are free to exercise, those in villages might not. Arundhati (name changed to protect identity), 22, who (since 2009) has trained with Yuwa, an organisation for girls' empowerment through football, says girls in rural Jharkhand gener-

ally get married by 15 or 16. Sports, therefore, also offers an escape route and she says she "feels free on the football field".

Fighting the odds

Tripta Behera, 19, from New Delhi, talks about patriarchy and capitalism when it comes to earnings, even in seemingly egalitarian big-city settings. "I play for the Delhi Women's League. The men get prize money; we don't. Also, they get put up at five-star hotels, and we'll get a two-star hotel."

Arundhati remembers her first national camp. "In the evening, the coaches would ask us to sing or dance, and I am shy, so I wouldn't want to come to the front. They would force me to, and say, 'You girl from a backward community – learn to sing or dance.'" On field too, she felt bullied. These challenges that go beyond just concentrating on the game chip away at their self-belief.

Media matters

What appears in the press also has a bearing on the mind. Sprinter Dutee Chand says reporters will pit her against Hima Das in sensational headlines, and will take a quote out of context. Despite all the media coverage, a BBC survey last year, 50% of those surveyed in India (10,181 across 14 states) could not name even one sportswoman. Up to 42% felt that women's sports were not as 'entertaining' as men's.

Supporting women in sports will bolster their mental health, but this will need institutions, individuals, and society to come together. As Behera says, "I want to be known as a footballer; not a woman football player."

With inputs from Saraswathy Nagarajan and Uthra Ganesan

At SAI
Increasingly, though not to the extent needed, institutes and coaches are seeing the benefit of referring players to sports psychologists. The Sports Authority of India has tie-ups with these professionals, so elite athletes can access them through individual federations.

That feeling of camaraderie has changed. I feel that the media has become extremely intrusive and of 12 questions asked, often, 11 are negative ones. That is why I insist on those coaching with me not meeting mediapersons before an event.

PT USHA, SPRINT LEGEND



FOOD SPOT

Food on the plate, and on my mind



The Greek Salad from AMA's Kitchen
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

AMA's Kitchen works for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians and has a diverse menu that takes you from breakfast to dinner



RAHUL VERMA

It was our godchild's birthday, and she celebrated it by ordering in. Since it was a special day, she decided that she had to start with a gala breakfast. It came from a restaurant called AMA's Kitchen, known for its breakfast fare. She asked for a plate of fluffy pancakes. And the picture she sent us was so enticing that I put it on top of my must-have list.

AMA's Kitchen, she said, had come to her mind because we had, just a few days before that, ordered our lunch from there. We had seen this little café in Majnu-ka-Tilla some years ago when we had gone to this north Delhi food hub for a Korean meal. We thought of going to AMA's for dessert and coffee, but it had shut for the day, so that was a dream that remained unfulfilled. AMA's, I realise, is a great favourite of the young, who now know more about food than their grizzled parents. And the pizza and salad that we ordered from there explains just why it is so popular.

The café is in New Camp Majnu-ka-Tilla, or New Aruna Nagar, as it is now known. The menu is a foodie's delight, but it is especially known for its breakfast fare, including the old Manali breakfast (₹200) which consists

of a potato patty, scrambled eggs with cheese, coriander-mint chutney, multigrain bread, and tea or coffee. The American breakfast has eggs, pancakes, bacon, chicken sausages, maple syrup, whipped cream, tea or coffee (₹240). But we were looking forward to a pizza-laden meal. So we asked for the RGB pizza (₹245) with sundried tomatoes, spinach and olive and the Ultimate Meat Lovers Pizza (₹315), with chicken, bacon, and pepperoni. Since I believe in a balanced meal, I ordered a Greek salad (₹180) as well. I started with the salad, which was delightful. It had chopped green peppers, tomatoes, cucumber, lettuce leaves and crumbled feta cheese, in a light dressing of olive oil. The veggies were crunchy and fresh, and set the mood for the pizza meal. Surprisingly, the pizzas weren't too heavy, possibly because the base was thin and crisp.

I liked the meaty pizza, with its juicy pepperoni and chicken, but the vegetarian pizza was so delicious that I went back for seconds. The bits of crispy spinach, olive and sundried tomatoes gave it a sharp and tangy taste that I thoroughly enjoyed.

AMA's is known for its desserts (apple pie with vanilla ice cream, ₹180; mud pie and fudge brownie, both with vanilla ice cream, ₹160, and if you are lucky, you can get some banana pie).

I have decided that my next meal from there will consist of Thamel's bacon pineapple sandwich (₹265) and pancakes with maple syrup, whipped cream and fruit. The pancake is fluffy and light, soufflé like, I hear, and the cream and maple syrup add to the enjoyment. Then I shall exchange notes with the goddaughter.

Nothing quite like planning ahead.

The writer is a seasoned food critic

MINI ANTHIKAD CHHIBER

In 1985, *Saagar* was in the news for many reasons. It was director Ramesh Sippy's first romance after *Shakti* (1982), *Shaan* (1980) and *Sholay* (1975). It was also Dimple Kapadia's comeback film, opposite her *Bobby* co-star, Rishi Kapoor. It also happened to be the movie with an allegedly inadvertent topless scene.

The story goes something like this. Rishi Kapoor's character, Ravi, sees Mona (Kapadia) for the first time as she comes out of the sea. Not quite covered in foam, Mona wraps a towel around herself, which slips for a second. "The towel slipping was an accident", "We didn't realise the cameras were rolling" – these were the reasons trotted out at the time, still not explaining how the frame made it beyond the cutting floor. Fast forward to 35 years later, post #metoo and with intimacy coordinators now on film sets, how would this have played out?

Know your rights

"I probably would have done the exact same thing visually, but in a way that Dimple ma'am would have felt safe," says Aastha Khanna, India's first certified intimacy coordinator, who ventured into the space last lockdown. "An important part of intimacy is for performers to know their rights. If there was an accident on set which was shot, it should be deleted. However, if the director and actor feel the shot works aesthetically, they can take a decision to keep the scene," she explains.

Earlier this week, actor Michaela Coel (*I May Destroy You*) dedicating her BAFTA to intimacy coordinator, Ita O'Brien, shone a light on this new breed of on-set professionals. The second season of American drama *The*



Aastha Khanna, the country's first certified intimacy coordinator on creating a safe space for actors on set and why she's put together a collective for India

Taking sex seriously

Deuce was the first show to have an intimacy coordinator, Alicia Rodis. There also is Elizabeth Talbot for *Bridgerton* and Amanda Blumenthal (*Euphoria*).

The deep dive

Khanna, 26, says she learnt about intimacy coordinators when she was researching a workshop on intimacy for a film that she was an AD on. When she could not find an intimacy coordinator in India she wrote to the Intimacy Professionals Association (IPA), a global agency founded by Blumenthal. "When they said they had never trained anyone from the South Asian community, I thought I

could give it a shot," says Khanna who applied for the intensive, 20-week training programme that cost around ₹4 lakh. "We were taught to look at intimacy coordination through different lenses as well as basics like how to navigate a film set, how to read a contract, the different protocols and processes," says the artiste, explaining that she also learnt about scenes that can be categorised as intimate, how to break them down, etc. The course called for a deep dive into gender, sexuality and diversity, says Khanna. "There is training in inclusion, sexual harassment and conflict resolution. We were taught mental first aid for minors and adults, medical first aid, advocacy and how to

have non-violent communication." While cannot talk about the shows she has worked on (as they are still in production), Khanna reveals that she's "worked with a few studios, with Netflix on a couple of shows and Dharmatic on a feature and a show. I am looking forward to working with Amazon Prime."

Choreographing moives

Internationally, parallels are drawn between an intimacy coordinator and an action director.

"They do that because the pay is the same and so is the concept. An action director ensures the physical safety of the artist, while an intimacy coordinator looks out for the physical and mental safety." The money, however, is not great. "We are working on it. I have founded a collective of intimacy professionals in India. We are launching a website that is going to have guidelines and workshops," says Khanna, who likes to compare her role to that of a choreographer. "The choreographer executes the director's vision, doing a beat-by-beat breakdown of steps, expressions and emotions. A choreographer also liaises with different departments to ensure the right costume and make-up is used."

In a dance rehearsal, she says, the performer is not in costume, and similarly, no one is taking their clothes off in an intimacy rehearsal.

"It is a dry run to figure out positions. Just as a choreographer understands the strengths of the performer, an intimacy coordinator should know what the actors are comfortable with and design the scene around that," says Khanna.

Unlike a choreographer, however, an intimacy coordinator usually does not design an intimate scene. "If they want to show heterosexual oral sex, it would be written from the perspective of where the lens and camera are going to be. It will not be from the perspective of what my feet or hands are doing or how I am lying down. That is when I come in and have a conversation with the director to create a storyboard," says Khanna, adding, "I do not always choreograph the scene but I do need to know what the choreography will be so that I can liaise with the different departments to make sure that the safety gear and costumes are correct. Last minute changes on set become very difficult to handle."



Aastha Khanna
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT
(Above) A still from *Bridgerton*, and (inset) Aastha Khanna
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Prop game

The tools of her trade feature barriers, like an L Guard, the cup used by cricketers to protect the crotch. "Since it is a hard-case silicone, any form of arousal non-concordance that happens on sets, can be prevented. It can be a Pilates ball like this," Khanna says, brandishing a nine-inch ball. "I inflate it a little bit and place it between the performers but it also gives enough flexibility to create a thrusting movement. There are other kinds of barriers like a silicone posterior, modesty garments and pasties for breasts. Pasties are available for different skin tones including green for post-production, if the actress is okay with side nudity but not full frontal."

Khanna tells me that no company in India specifically does intimacy or modesty garments. "Some things you can get at high end lingerie stores but the sizes and skin tone don't match. I take samples and get them made myself. Others like the L guard or pilates ball, I buy online."

