



on Sunday

JULY 4, 2021

DELHI
CITY EDITION
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Twitter tells HC it will appoint interim chief compliance officer soon
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Vatican indicts 10 people in London real estate deal
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OPEC seeks consensus on oil output policy after UAE roadblock
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Kerber rallies past Sasnovich; Gauff, Federer move into fourth round
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NEARBY



Unpaid bill lands Navjot Sidhu in controversy

MANUFACTURE
Former Punjab Cabinet Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu landed in the thick of a controversy over an unpaid electricity bill of over ₹8 lakh for his Amritsar residence. The Congress MLA invited criticism from several quarters over the power dues.

NEWS & PAGE 8

BJP claims sweep in U.P. panchayat chief polls
The BJP on Saturday claimed to have swept the elections to the posts of district panchayat chief even as the Samajwadi Party alleged that the ruling party used "force" to stop people from voting. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of making a mockery of the polls.

NEWS & PAGE 7

Police find 4th body in Tripura lynching case

The death toll in the mob lynching incident in Khowai district on June 20 has risen to four with the recovery of the body of a missing youth. The police said the body of Salim Hussain was found buried in a wooded area in North Mohorampur on Saturday afternoon.

NORTH & EAST & PAGE 4

CLASSIFIED & PAGE 4

MAGAZINE & PAGES

Yediyurappa writes to Stalin on Mekedatu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU
Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa has written to his Tamil Nadu counterpart, M.K. Stalin, urging him not to oppose the Mekedatu project in Ramanagaram district and suggested a bilateral meeting to discuss each other's apprehensions.

In an effort to resolve differences over the long-pending balancing reservoir-cum-drinking water project, Mr. Yediyurappa said the project would "immensely benefit both States," and not adversely affect farmers in Tamil Nadu.

CONTINUED ON & PAGE 8

'Covaxin demonstrated 77.8% efficacy against symptomatic COVID-19'

Two-dose vaccine is 93.4% effective against severe disease, and also offers 65% protection against the Delta variant, says Bharat Biotech

JACOB KOIRALA

NEW DELHI

Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech India Ltd. on Saturday publicised the long-awaited results of the Phase-3 trial of Covaxin that involved nearly 25,000 volunteers spanning 25 hospitals across the country.

Along with partner scientists at the Indian Council of Medical Research, the company said the vaccine had an overall efficacy of 77.8% against symptomatic COVID-19. The pre-print revealed that in those 60 years and older, the vaccine was 67.8%

This is higher than the overall 70.4% efficacy reported from the Phase-3 trial results of the AstraZeneca (Covishield) vaccine published in Lancet in January.

Yet to be peer-reviewed

The latest Covaxin study is yet to be peer-reviewed and appears on a pre-print server. While Covishield is the most widely administered vaccine in India, data from a bridging trial on Indians extrapolating the vaccine's potency into Indians from in-

ternational recipients have not been published.

The two-dose Covaxin was also 93.4% effective against severe disease and 65% protective against asymptomatic COVID-19. Moreover, it was 65% protective against the Delta variant of the coronavirus, the most widespread in India and linked to a rising number of cases in Europe as well as the United States.

The pre-print revealed that in those 60 years and older, the vaccine was 67.8%

effective and 79.4% effective in younger people.

"Safety analysis demonstrates adverse events reported were similar to placebo for those who got a dummy dose, with 12% of subjects experiencing commonly known side-effects and less than 0.5% of subjects feeling serious adverse events," the company said in a statement.

Medical professionals welcomed the results.

"These results give us all of us a lot of reassurance that

Covaxin is an excellent option to prevent COVID-19 in India," tweeted Vincent Rajaman, Professor, Mayo Clinic.

S.P. Kalantri, Director and Professor of Medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Wardha, said the pre-print was rich in detail and, on preliminary reading, revealed a trial that was "well-conducted" and presented people with an informed choice on the vaccine's efficacy.

CONTINUED ON & PAGE 8

Report card | Covaxin had an overall efficacy of 77.8% against symptomatic COVID-19 in the Phase-3 trial, according to a study by Bharat Biotech and the ICMR. The study is yet to be peer-reviewed.

Criteria	Vaccine efficacy
Symptomatic COVID-19	77.8%
Severe symptomatic COVID-19	93.4%
Symptomatic in participants 18-59 years	79.4%
Symptomatic in participants ≥ 60 years	67.8%
Symptomatic COVID-19 in participants with a pre-existing medical condition	66.2%
Asymptomatic COVID-19	63.6%
Symptomatic and asymptomatic COVID-19	65.8%

French judge to probe Rafale deal

Suspicions of 'corruption' raised in the €78 bn sale



AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

A French judge has been tasked with investigating the controversial 2016 multi-billion-dollar sale of Rafale fighter jets to India on "corruption" suspicions, the national financial prosecutors' office (PNF) said on Friday.

The decision once again puts the spotlight on the role of the Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group which is an offset partner to Dassault Aviation, manufacturer of the Rafale, in the ₹7.8-billion deal.

According to French in-

vestigative website Mediapart, the judicial investigation was formally opened into the Inter-Governmental Agreement on June 14 following a decision by the financial crimes branch of PNF.

The deal has faced several questions in the past pertaining to allegations of corruption, favouritism and de-

revenue, and it needed to be thoroughly investigated in national interest. He added that former party president Rahul Gandhi who had flagged corruption in the aircraft deal stood vindicated.

made. The PNF had initially refused to investigate the sale, prompting Mediapart to accuse it and the French Anti-corruption Agency of "burying" suspicions surrounding the deal.

(With inputs from Debarak Peri)

CONTINUED ON & PAGE 8

Cong. demands JPC probe

The Congress on Saturday renewed the call for a probe by a Joint Parliamentary Committee into the Rafale deal. Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala said the deal had led to a massive loss to the

state treasury and it needed to be thoroughly investigated in national interest. He added that former party president Rahul Gandhi who had flagged corruption in the aircraft deal stood vindicated.

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(With inputs from Debarak Peri)

CONTINUED ON & PAGE 8

Pushkar Dhami to be next Uttarakhand CM

Two-time MLA from Khatima elected by BJP legislators

NITIKA HERBAN

NEW DELHI

Pushkar Singh Dhami, a two-term MLA from Khatima, will be the new Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. He was elected by the BJP Legislature Party as its leader on Saturday, following the resignation of Tejash Singh Rawat late on Friday.

Mr. Rawat quit citing constitutional reasons, of not seeing his way clear to getting elected as a member of the Assembly in Uttarakhand within the stipulated six-month period. He continues to be a Lok Sabha member from the State.

Constitutional crisis

"Given the constitutional crisis, I felt it was right for me to resign. Iyapa could not be held because of COVID-19," Mr. Rawat said in a brief statement on Friday.

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar and BJP general secretary D. Purandarshwari were the central observers who supervised the election of the new leader at a meeting at the Bipinji guest house in Dehradun on Saturday afternoon.

Mr. Dhami, 45, has been associated with the BJP since he entered student politics and has twice been head of Uttarakhand's Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), the youth wing of the BJP. Working his way up the party hierarchy in the State, he has been State general secretary and party vice-president.

A practising advocate, Mr. Dhami also holds a post-graduate degree in management and public administration from Lucknow University.

He has been closely associated with former Chief Minister and current Maha-



New CM Pushkar Dhami, centre, with former CM TS. Rawat, left, and State BJP chief Madan Kaushik. (Photo: ANI)

Chock-a-block



After the mayhem: Tourists visiting Mall Road in Manali on Saturday after the Himachal Pradesh government relaxed COVID-19 restrictions in the State. ■

Undercount factor in the State is lower than M.P.'s 23.8

SHRINIVAS RAMANI

CHEMICAL
The number of "excess deaths" registered by the Civil Registration System (CRS) in Rajasthan ever since the COVID-19 pandemic hit (from April 2020 to May 2021) was 45,088, which is 5.4 times the official reported figure of 8,385 deaths for the same period.

This high number was largely due to the deaths registered in April 2020 (26,250) and May 2020 (19,046).

In this period, which coincided with the second COVID-19 wave, the excess deaths were around 39,458, compared with the registered COVID-19 tally of 5,967, leading to an undercount factor of 7.1. The overall COVID-19 tally in Rajasthan so

Moderate undercount

Rajasthan's estimated undercount factor for COVID-19 deaths was comparable to that of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and lower than M.P. and A.P.

State	Excess deaths*	COVID-19 deaths	Multiple†
Rajasthan	45,088	8,383	5.4
Tamil Nadu**	15,965	3,082	4.4
Telangana**	15,965	2,232	6.4
Karnataka	12,572	2,990	4.3
MP	4,178	954	0.8
AP	1,95,422	10,800	18.2
M.P.	1,90,004	8,068	23.8

*Baseline mortality: Average of 2016 and 2019 figures.

**Reconstructed COVID-19 death toll released by State CRS.

†Based on State's official COVID-19 toll.

‡Data accessed by Scroll.

Estimates using other methods are available in the online article.

far, as of July 2, is 8,970.

Excess deaths in Rajasthan were calculated based on the month-wise number of deaths registered in the Rajasthan Civil Registration System (eGehchan) portal from January 2018 to May 2021, which was accessed by The Hindu. It was ensured that the data analysed did not include duplicate re-

cords (1,100 names out of 7,32 lakh deaths from 2018 to 2020). Not all "excess deaths" would be related to COVID-19 but a bulk of them are, during the pandemic.

The undercount factor (5.4) and excess deaths for Rajasthan (45,088) were lower than those for Madhya Pradesh (22.8 and 1,92,044) in the same period and for which complete data have been made available so far. Excess deaths have also been estimated for Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat but these figures are only partial, either for some districts (UP) or for a limited period (Bihar and Gujarat).

According to the CRS report for 2019, Rajasthan registered an estimated 58.6% of all deaths in the State, and thanks to the eGehchan system, they are registered online as well.

RELATED REPORT ON & PAGE 8

Trouble began for Suresh Kumar when his bus hit a car, injuring its driver, in February 1995. Four years later, in 1999, the local magistrate sentenced him to six months of imprisonment and a fine of ₹500. The sessions court dismissed Suresh Kumar's appeal in 2003. The High Court too did not find any reason to intervene with the verdict in 2015. He appealed to the top court, which issued notice in August 2016.

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Irreparable injury

After a gap of nearly five years and with no one appearing on the other side for the prosecution, the court acknowledged Suresh Kumar's case that sending the sole breadwinner to jail after more than two decades of the incident would cause "irreparable injury". It said, "It would be too harsh."

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1 A weekly market in north Delhi's Joharipuri
2 Wholesale spice market in Kharibooti
3 Sadar Bazar
4 Azadpur Mandi
5 Ghazipur flower market
6 Laxmi Nagar Market in east Delhi
7 Sarojini Nagar Market in south Delhi



Shopping for trouble

Experts and health officials have raised red flags over massive crowds at market places across the Capital and people not adhering to COVID-19 appropriate behaviour

PHOTOS BY SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA, SANDEEP SAXENA



OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

D.S. GARGI

MANJU PAURI

गर्व से दिलों का बाहर नहीं पूछ दिया तो न दूँ।
तो दिलों अपनेहम हुए तो जीत दिया भासी।



With profound grief we inform of the sad demise of our beloved Mother.

Smt Sarla Devi Agarwal

on 28 June 2021. Hawan will be held at 11 AM & Basam Pagi at 3 PM on **Wednesday, 07 July 21** at our residence

SA-24, Shanti Nagar, Ghaziabad, U.P.-201001

In Grief

Smt Anil Gupta (Son) Smt Sudhir Gupta (Son)

Smt Geeta Gupta

9718848708

Smt Poonam Chandra (Daughter)

Smt Urmila Gupta

9761883270

Arsh Gupta (Great Grandson)

IN BRIEF



Court orders probe against Karnataka CM

In a serious setback to Karnataka Chief Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, a special court on Saturday ordered further investigation against him while terming as "defective" the closure report filed by the Lokayukta police giving him a clean chit in the case of alleged corruption in illegal denotification of land in 2006 when he was serving as the Deputy Chief Minister.

Extremists' role suspected in illegal phone exchanges

The probe into the illegally operated parallel telephone exchanges recently unearthed in eight locations in Hubli city is in its early stages, but what the investigators are seriously looking into is the suspected involvement of extremist elements in their operation. The exchanges receive international Internet calls and divert them at a cheaper rate to local receivers using a dedicated broadband connection and call router devices.

Victory Flame arrives in Kerala capital

The arrival of the Sevami 'Vijay Marshali' (Victory Flame) in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday was an occasion to remember a hero from this city whose brave actions in the 1971 Indo-Pak war won him the Vir Chakra. During the war, Ramon Pillai Gopukumar, a young Army captain at the time, was posted in GS-3 (Intelligence) at the Eastern Command. He organised and led the Mukti Bahini operatives in a series of daring missions against the enemy.

Smuggling case opens a can of worms

Probe indicates links between gangsters, local leaders of CPI(M)

MOHAMMED NAZIER

An early morning accident on the National Highway at Ramanathkara in Kothikode on June 21 blew the lid off the 'operations' of gangsters involved in gold smuggling and their counterparts committing robbery to snatch the contraband gold smuggled by carriers through airports in the region, including the Calicut International airport.

But that is not the worst of it. The ongoing investigations following the accident that claimed lives of five people are likely to unravel what can be suspected as deep-set ties among gangsters, people convicted in cases of political murders and local political functionaries. What would otherwise have been a



Customs officials bringing Arjun Ayanki to Kannur on Saturday in connection with the gold smuggling case. ■ S. MAMTA

routine probe into a road accident and gold smuggling took an interesting turn when it was found that the accident-prone vehicle had been involved in a chase between rival gangs.

The prime suspect in the case of foiled gold smuggling, Arjun Ayanki, former DTE worker in Kannur, was brought to his native village of Azhikode in Kannur on Friday by the Customs offi-

cials as part of the probe and to the house of Muhammad Shah, a convict in the murder of Revolutionary Marxist Party of India leader T.P. Chandrasekharan, in nearby Mahe. The investigators suspect that Ayanki had close links with Shah and Kofi Sudi, another convict in Kannur.

The arrest of Ayanki has put the Kannur district CP (N) on the backfoot.

Eight Bangladeshi nationals held in A.P.

They infiltrated with fake documents

RAJALAKSHMI KRISHNA

TIRUPURAPURAM

In a joint operation, the Railway Protection Police (RPP) and the law and order police arrested eight Bangladeshi nationals, who allegedly infiltrated with fake documents, at Rajahmundry and Vijayanagar railway stations on Saturday. They were travelling on two trains.

K.V. Mohan Rao, IGP, said the police teams checked the Howrah-Chennai Express and took Kayum Khan, Md. Sadiq Hussain, Shaukat Sadiq and Mohammad Al-Ameen, into custody at the Rajahmundry station.

"We seized some documents and their mobile phones from them," he told The Hindu.

The Vijayawada police took Hyder Ali Khan, Md. Hassan Khan, Inidal Khan and Salih Shaik, natives of Bagerhat district, Bangladesh, into custody from the Howrah-Vasco da Gama Express at Vijayawada railway station on Saturday. They were travelling on two trains.

"We are trying to find out the purpose of their visit, how they entered the country and their contacts. We are also verifying their ID cards and other documents," said the police.

No permission for Cong. MPs to visit islands

STAFF REPORTER

TIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Lakshadweep administration denied permission to Hibi Eden and T.N. Prathapan, Congress MPs, and C.R. Lakshmi Sharma to travel to the island.

An order signed by S. Asok Al, District Collector holding additional charge of Additional District Magistrate, said he was satisfied that "their visit to the islands will certainly disturb the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the islands and it will be against the interest of the general public and security of the Union Territory."

Ayanki's wife to be quizzed

STAFF REPORTER

KANNUR

Customs officials investigating the Karipuzha gold smuggling case have asked the wife of Arjun Ayanki, an accused in the case, to appear in the Kochi office on Monday for questioning.

The investigation team, which came with Ayanki to Kannur for evidence

collection, said it obtained crucial evidence from his home linking him to the case. The team reportedly found documents and digital evidence from the house. Meanwhile, Ayanki corrected his earlier statement that his phone was lost. During evidence collection, he said he threw it in the nearby Valapattanam river.

The party leadership was hard-pressed to explain that party functionaries had no links with people such as Ayanki and his associate Akash Thillainery, former CPDM worker and accused in the murder of Youth Congress worker S.P. Shabab in Kannur.

Ruled of retaliatory political violence, Kannur is no stranger to loyal gangs of rival political parties hired for

killing and maiming their political rivals. The details of the investigation into the gold smuggling racket in the aftermath of the accident at Ramanathkara have raised the spectre of putative metamorphosis of those gangs into independent gangster groups taking to illegal and anti-social activities for realising a fat buck using their political loyalties as protective shields.

Probe into 'leak' of voters' list begins

Complaint says data illegally removed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

TIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Crime Branch has opened an investigation on a complaint filed by the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Kerala, that electoral roll data were illegally removed from a laptop in the CEO's office in Thiruvananthapuram.

The complainant, which seeks a probe into the possibility of a conspiracy behind the incident, was filed by joint Chief Electoral Officer Krishnadasan P. two days ago. The Crime Branch re-

gistered the FIR on Friday.

The voters' list had been the subject of controversy ahead of the April 6 elections. Congress leader Ramesh Chemintha had alleged that more than 4 lakh double entries had crept into the rolls.

The Election Commission had later informed the Kerala High Court that it could detect only 38,586 demographically similar entries.

CEO Teeka Ram Naota's office has lodged the complaint now following a direction from the ECJ.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA (MAX. / MIN.) / RAINFALL DATA (MM) / AQI INDEX (TODAY)

Forecast for Sunday: Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Assam, Sikkim, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Rayalseema, Tamil Nadu, Poducherry and Karikal. Thunderstorms with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Kerala, Mahe and Lakshadweep.

City	Max	Min	AQI	Day	Night
Kolkata	31.0	25.8	270	31.0	25.4
Mumbai	37.6	21.2	240	37.6	24.8
Chennai	6.3	18.3	120	33.4	27.2
Hyderabad	36.6	27.8	240	36.6	28.1
Bengaluru	21.0	21.3	140	28.4	23.5
Delhi	37.7	25.8	260	31.3	27.0
Jaipur	30.6	24.8	160	30.6	24.8
Agartala	12	10.6	10.4	16.6	10.4
Port Blair	34.7	23.4	140	34.6	25.6
Lakshadweep	43.6	23.2	140	31.8	23.2
Dibrugarh	34.1	23.7	140	37.7	27.6
Gangtok	18	17.8	140	34.5	31.8
Visakhapatnam	12	12.0	140	31.1	23.2
Silvassa	1	15.0	15.4	15	32.2
Mysuru	28.0	22.4	140	26.0	23.0
Shillong	0.3	10.0	14.4	38.6	24.8
Imphal	6.2	10.1	11.1	34.8	16.4
Agartala	49.0	28.6	140	32.4	24.7
Port Blair	6.2	11.8	14.4	37.7	23.6
Port Blair	2	14.1	18.8	35.9	25.7
Agartala	98	34.6	23.8	30.8	25.6

(Plotted data in mm, temperature in °Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

City	PM 2.5	PM 10	SO2	NO2	CO	CH4
Hyderabad	4.24	95.4	11.18	12.09	0.00	0.00
Bengaluru	11.37	55.3	6.67	8.57	0.00	0.00
Chennai	8	46	—	18	0.00	0.00
Delhi	11.79	97.7	15.72	17.11	0.00	0.00
Hyderabad	2.58	15	4.8	8.62	0.00	0.00
Jaipur	8	20	5.6	10.76	0.00	0.00
Lucknow	10	41	10.2	10.2	0.00	0.00
Mumbai	10	28	13	15	13.7	0.00
Port Blair	54.06	14	—	8.06	0.00	0.00
Agartala	12	41	13	12	7.71	0.00

(Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Average) average AQI
■ Superior condition. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and reduce visibility of objects such as status and vegetation.

NO: Nitrogen Dioxide: Aggravates respiratory illness, causes heart to beat with extra air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide: High concentration can reduce oxygen supply to vital organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause unconsciousness, confusion, and even death.

PM 2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes and throat, causing coughing, sore throats and irritation of lungs. Acute attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

WEST

ED searches were based on HC directions, says Fadnavis

BJP is not behind any of this, says former Maharashtra CM

STAFF REPORTER

MUMBAI



The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has denied allegations that the action by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against the relatives of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar was at the party's behest.

Former Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis said that the agency's actions were based on the directions of the Bombay High Court.

"The Bombay High Court directed to file an FIR against all the accused in the Maharashtra State Co-operative Bank scam in August 2019. Based on that FIR, the ED filed an ECR (Enforcement Case Information Report). How can there be any political involvement? It

nothing substantial had come out of them.

Mr. Pawar also defended the letter sent by the State ED unit to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, requesting an inquiry into allegations against Mr. Pawar and Transport Minister Antara Banerjee of the Shiv Sena. "What's wrong in it? It is the job of the opposition to demand probe into allegations. There is a letter by Sachin Waze that has named both of them and therefore we demanded the inquiry," he said. The Leader of Opposition said that demanding a probe does not mean branding people as guilty. "We have never called anyone criminal; neither have we demanded that anyone be jailed," he said.

Mr. Pawar and his two associates had organised the drive where the employees took the first shot which the accused told was of Covishield, senior police inspector Rajendra Awadh from Turbhe MIDC police station said.

Fake vaccination camp: first case registered in Navi Mumbai

Maharashtra adds 9,489 fresh cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The Turbhe MIDC police on Friday night registered a case, the first in Navi Mumbai, in connection with a fake COVID-19 vaccination scam.

According to a complaint filed by Kalpesh Patil (29), administration manager of Atomberg Technologies Private Limited, Shirwane MIDC, Nerul, the camp was conducted on the industrial unit premises on April 23 and all the 352 employees were administered fake vaccine.

The accused, Dr. Manish Tripathi and his two associates of whom one was identified as Kavita, charged Rs. 12,200 per dose, other than travelling and set-up expenses, which amounts to Rs. 24,400.

Dr. Tripathi and his two associates had organised the drive where the employees took the first shot which the accused told was of Covishield, senior police inspector Rajendra Awadh from Turbhe MIDC police station said.

While two employees were pro-

vided with certificates which had Nanegatti Hospital's name and a wrong date, other workers did not receive a certificate at all.

Principal offers support to parents facing joblessness induced by the pandemic



Friend in need: Principal of Holy Star English High School hands over ration kits to needy parents of students. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

At a time when parents are at loggerheads with the management of private schools over payment of fees, a 35-year-old principal of an English-medium school at Mahaveer in Nalad has waived the annual fees of 1,000 students, amounting to around ₹80 lakh.

Holy Star English High School with 1,500 students charges annual fees of ₹7,000 to ₹8,000 per student till Class 7, and up to ₹10,000 till Class 10. However, several parents have been unable to pay the fees due to joblessness induced by the pandemic. "When I came to know that parents of about 1,000 students are not in touch with the school, I reached out to the students to know the reason. I understood that they had

needy parents and provided them with ration kits. Our objective was to ensure that no one went to sleep with an empty stomach," he said.

"In this slum colony, most people are daily wagers and have a hand-to-mouth existence, with no savings. COVID-19 and lockdowns have worsened their condition. Many have preferred to return to their villages, jeopardising the future of their children," Mr. Shaikh said.

"Since the school is situated in an area with underprivileged families, many parents drop in every 10 to 15 days seeking financial help. During the first lockdown, I used my savings of ₹8 lakh, which I had set aside for the higher studies of my newborn daughter, to help the community members in one

way or another," he said.

Faced with a slump in the school's finances, Mr. Shaikh mortgaged his wife's jewellery to pay partial salaries to teachers, run the school, and meet its other liabilities. "Today, of the total 40 teachers, 12 are taking classes. The rest have returned to their villages or could not be retained. The existing teachers have been persuaded to work at half their salary to keep the school running," he said.

"During this period of hardship, we have to support the students and their parents at any cost. It is a matter of survival for everyone. We are doing this because we have received everything from the community.

FROM PAGE ONE

'Covaxin demonstrated 77.8% efficacy'

"The true test of a vaccine is whether it protects from hospitalisation and death. The reported 93.5% is very good, and protection in those over 60 as well as against the Delta variant, too, are encouraging," Dr. Kalantri stated. He, however, cautioned that it would be unwise to speculate if Covishield or Covaxin was superior to the other as there were variations in the conduct of the trial.

Priya Abraham, Director, ICMR-National Institute of Virology, said in a statement, "The overall efficacy is wonderful news. ICMR-NIV and BBL have had very

fruitful interactions during this exhilarating journey. So far [from blood samples] have also been evaluated against viral variants detected in India i.e., the Alpha, Beta, Zeta, Kappa and Delta. The making of this vaccine entirely on Indian soil is a matter of great pride to every Indian."

NIV was among the partner labs involved in the manufacture of Covaxin and cultured the strain of the virus that was used to design the vaccine.

Bharat Biotech began recruiting volunteers in November 2020 and completed the exercise in January.

French judge to probe Rafale deal

In April, Mediapart claimed that "millions of euros of hidden commissions" were given to a go-between who helped Dassault conclude the sale, of which "some... could have been given as bribes" to Indian officials.

Dassault retorted that no wrong-doing was flagged in the group's audits.

After the reports, France's Sherpa NGO, which specialises in financial crime, filed an official complaint for "corruption" and "Influence peddling" among other accusations, prompting an investigating magistrate to be designated to probe the deal.

Role of Anil Ambani

"Documents seen by Mediapart show that Dassault and Reliance had in fact signed their first MoU – a document setting out broad outlines of an agreement – on March 26, 2015. That was 15 days before Mr. Modi's announcement of the turnaround, and the exclusion of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and begs the question as to whether the two companies had been informed of it in advance," the report states. The MoU which was signed at a time when Dassault was still in talks with HAL under the earlier deal, was for a possible joint venture between the two companies.

Following the deal, Dassault and Reliance created a joint venture JV in 2017, Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited (DRAL) for discharging the offsets. Revealing the details of the part-

nnership, the report, citing documents accessed, states that Dassault provided Reliance "with remarkably generous financial terms for the establishment of their JV".

Stating that ordinary partners in a jointly owned subsidiary would provide equal funds for its capital, but that was not the case with DRAL. "The two partners agreed a maximum investment in the subsidiary of 169 million euros. Of that sum, Dassault, which held a 49% stake in DRAL, pledged to provide up to 159 million euros, representing 94% of the total, while Reliance would provide just the remaining €10 million."

While Reliance brought neither funds nor know-how of any significance to the joint venture, it did bring its capacity for political influence.

An extract from one of the documents obtained by Mediapart detailing the agreements between Reliance and Dassault, Anil Ambani's group was handed the mission of "marketing for programs and services with the GOI" – the acronym for "government of India", the report added.

Sherpa had already asked for an investigation into the deal in 2018, but the PMF took no action. In this first complaint, the NGO had denounced the fact that Dassault chose Reliance Group as its Indian partner, a conglomerate headed by billionaire Anil Ambani, who is close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Pushkar Dhami to be next Uttarakhand CM

"Pushkar Dhami is a second term MLA from Khatima, in Utham Singh Nagar, and he is from Pithoragarh. He has been at the helm of several agitations by farmers against then Congress-led governments and is considered to be very close to former Chief Minister Bhagat Singh Koshyari," said a senior party leader. Mr. Tomar, after the conclusion of the Legislative Party meet, said no other name had

been proposed and Mr. Dhami's election was unanimous. Former Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat was also present at the meeting.

"My party has appointed a common worker, son of an ex-serviceman, who was born in Pithoragarh to serve the State. We will work together for people's welfare. We accept the challenge of serving people with everyone's help, in a short time span," Mr. Dhami said.

Yediyurappa writes to Stalin on Mekedatu

"It would be in the interest of all concerned and to have a better relationship between the State of Karnataka and State of Tamil Nadu, if the Tamil Nadu government in the right spirit would not oppose implementation of the project," he said in the letter dated July 3.

He further said, "In order to address issues, if any, it is suggested that a bilateral meeting could also be held in the presence of officials concerned to clear all apprehensions."

On the status of the project, Mr. Yediyurappa said while Tamil Nadu has filed a

Miscellaneous Application in the Supreme Court against the project, Karnataka has sought approval from the Centre for Terms of Reference to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment. He pointed to several projects planned by Tamil Nadu, including two hydro-power projects and some in the main river below Mettur, and said, "The government of Tamil Nadu has neither entered into any kind of negotiations nor secured consent from the Government of Karnataka for the above projects at the Gaviyur basin."

Fr. Swamy, 84, is currently

After Tirath, Mamata faces tight deadline

She needs to get elected to the Assembly and has repeatedly urged the EC to hold bypolls to 7 seats

SHEV SAHAY SINGH
RAMNIK NATH
MANOJ KARAN

The resignation of Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat as he could not get elected to the State Assembly within the six-month deadline has put the spotlight on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the pending by-election to certain Assembly seats in the State.

Mr. Banerjee faces a similar situation, with her party winning the 2021 West Bengal Assembly election with a massive mandate for the third time, though she lost the Nadighram seat by a narrow margin of 1,956 votes.

Mr. Banerjee was sworn in as the Chief Minister for the third consecutive time on May 5. She was hoping to get elected from the Bhawanipur Assembly seat, her home constituency. To facilitate the by-election, Minister



In a fix: Mamata Banerjee was hoping to get elected from the Bhawanipur Assembly seat, her home constituency

Sohrabjee Chatropadhyay resigned from the seat on May 21.

Selection in seven Assembly seats – Bhawanipur, Shamshernagar and Suti in Narshinghpur, whose contesting candidates died before the polls could be held; Santipur and Dinhata, where the elected BJP MPs (Jagannath Sarkar and Nithil Pra-

manik) did not take the oath as MLAs; and Khardah and Gosba where successful candidates died after the polls were held – is due to the EC.

Mr. Banerjee, on several occasions in the past few days, demanded that the Election Commission (EC) announce the dates for the bypolls to these seats. She al-

BJP has given Uttarakhand a long list of ex-CMs: Cong.

BJP has not delivered on promises made to voters, it alleges

BORBANA R. NAIR
NEW DELHI

The BJP, instead of delivering on its tall promises made to the Uttarakhand voters, has given the State a long list of former Chief Ministers, the Congress said on Saturday, a day after Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat resigned, cutting short his four-month-long tenure. The State now awaits the third BJP Chief Minister since the 2017 election.

The Congress also questioned if the BJP was sacrificing Uttarakhand in an attempt to fix Trinamool Congress leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Mr. Banerjee also faces a similar predicament as Mr. Rawat. She lost the Nadighram seat to Trinamool rebel Suvendu Adhikari in the poll and, to retain the Chief Minister's post, she has to get a berth in the Assembly within six months.

Mr. Banerjee had already asked for an investigation into the deal in 2018, but the PMF took no action. In this first complaint, the NGO had denounced the fact that Dassault chose Reliance Group as its Indian partner, a conglomerate headed by billionaire Anil Ambani, who is close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Harish Rawat

A joint press conference was addressed by the Congress's Uttarakhand leadership in Delhi, including All India Congress Committee (AICC) State in-charge Devenender Yadav, State Congress chief Pritam Singh and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Rakesh Kapoor. Former Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Harish Rawat, who was unwell, addressed the press conference over phone.

The high drama going on in Dehradoon was an insult to the people of Devbhoomi (Holy Land) of Uttarakhand, Mr. Rawat said. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised a double-engine government to the State, with the BJP in power in Dehradoon and Delhi. But instead, what we got was a long list of former Chief Ministers," he said.

The BJP had ruled the State for two terms now. There have been eight Chief Ministers in these two terms, he pointed out.

Congress general secretary (communications) Ranjeet Surjewala asked how the BJP, if it could not even pick its chief ministerial candidate, could administer the State or the nation.

Mr. Nair said the target was not Mr. Tirath Singh Rawat. "The target here is Mamata Banerjee. Prime Minister Narendra Modi could not tolerate the way she challenged him and won the West Bengal poll," he said.

With the six-month window for him to get elected to the Assembly closing, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat put in his papers on July 2.

Also, the Election Commission (EC) is yet to take a call on holding bypolls to vacated Assembly seats, which would have given Mr. Rawat a way to carry on as Chief Minister.

EXPLAINER

Mr. Rawat took over as Chief Minister on March 10, after being chosen by the BJP. As per the Constitution, he had six months till September 10, to become a member of the Uttarakhand Assembly in order to continue in the post.

According to top EC officials, the Commission had not yet decided on holding the bypolls to various Rajya Sabha and Assembly seats that are vacant across the country. The EC had to ex-

amine how it was not necessary for a Chief Minister to contest and win the Assembly election. Mr. Roy told persons that in 1973, West Bengal Chief Minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray did not contest the election and was elected within six months of the polls from a constituency in Mafatlal.

Sources in the EC, however, said the matter of holding bypolls to the vacant Assembly seats across the country had not been decided yet and that the COVID-19 situation would be assessed first.

The Chief Minister has argued that the COVID-19 situation had improved since the EC wanted to hold elections to the two Rajya Sabha seats vacated by Dilip Trivedi and Manas Ranjan Bhunia, and had written to the officials in this regard. Elections to the Rajya Sabha require only MLAs to cast their vote. The State government, however, was insisting that the Assembly bypolls be the priority.

That the events in Uttarakhand would have a ripple effect in West Bengal became evident when hours after Mr. Rawat resigned, Trinamool Congress leader Sudhendu Sekhar Roy chided an instance

Why did Tirath Singh Rawat have to resign?

No bypoll possible at this juncture

RAMNIK NATH

mine the COVID-19 situation in the States before taking a call, a source said.

After the West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Puducherry elections were concluded in May, the EC decided to defer the bypolls for Parliamentary and Assembly seats due to the pandemic.

The source added that the matter of the pending Rajya Sabha bypolls would be decided first, with the EC reaching out to the States to assess the situation.

At the same time, the Representation of the People Act, 1951, mandates that a bypoll for any vacancy should be held within six months of that vacancy arising, provided the remainder of the term is not less than one year or the EC and the Govt do not certify that holding the bypoll in that time frame is difficult.

With the Uttarakhand Assembly term till March 23, 2022, the Assembly election in the State is less than a year away.

Row over bill unnecessary; Sidhu's wife

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MANJUL KUMARI

Former Punjab Cabinet Minister and Congress MLA Navjot Singh Sidhu landed himself in the thick of a controversy over an unpaid electricity bill of over ₹8 lakh for his Amritsar residence.

Mr. Sidhu found himself on the back foot on Friday when, in a series of tweets, he advised Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to resolve the ongoing "power crisis" in the State. However, he invited criticism from several quarters after it came to light that he himself was one of the State's biggest individual defaulters in electricity dues.

A day after the controversy erupted, Mr. Sidhu's wife, Navjot Kaur, on Saturday came out to clear the air.

Asserting that there was nothing wrong, Mrs. Kaur, in a video message, said an unnecessary controversy was being raked up, adding that an appeal surrounding the "higher" amount of the electricity bill was being taken up with the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) and whatever the billed amount, it would surely be paid.

The point is not about not paying the electricity bill. The issue was why the power bill was of a near similar amount in both the summer and the winter as air conditioners were not used in the winter, but the bill was on the higher side. So, an appeal was submitted with the Department to look into the issue... Also, the Department has accepted the appeal, and whatever the amount that is unpaid, it will be paid," Mrs. Kaur said.

Mr. Sidhu has an outstanding electricity bill of ₹8,74,784 for his residence in Amritsar till July 2, which was the last date for paying the bill. An PSPCL official said Mr. Sidhu had owed ₹17,62,742 in March 2020 and later, when a special recovery drive was started, Mr. Sidhu had paid ₹10 lakh. However, an amount of ₹8,74,784 was still pending against his account.

ED conducts searches in mass conversion case

Searches conducted at six locations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday conducted searches at its locations in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh in connection with an alleged mass conversion case against Mohammed Umar Gantam and others.

The searches were carried out at Badia House in Delhi and Sant Kishan Nagar and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The premises included the office of Mr. Umar Gantam's organisation, Islamic Dawah Centre, and his house and the residence of his associate, Mufti Qazi Jahan Qazi, in Delhi.

The offices of Al Hasan Education and Welfare Foundation and the Guidance Education and Welfare Society in Lucknow and Sant Kishan Nagar were also searched.

Several documents

Several incriminating documents have been seized during the searches. They reveal large-scale conversion carried out by accused Umar Gantam and his organisations all over India.

The documents also reveal the receipt of foreign funding running into several crores by these organisations for the purpose of illegal conversions," the ED said.

Its probe is based on one of the two cases registered by the Uttar Pradesh Police.



The searches were carried out in Delhi and UP under the PMLA.

The Anti-Terror Squad (ATS), involving Mr. Umar Gantam, the Islamic Dawah Centre, Mr. Qazi and others, under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religious Ordinance, 2020.

Last month, in the first case, the ATS arrested Mr. Umar Gantam and Mr. Qazi from Delhi. The police alleged that about 1,000 persons were converted and many of them were married to Muslims.

Mr. Umar Gantam was tied to the mass conversion of non-Muslims, especially initially converted students, women, children and persons from weaker and vulnerable sections, they added. It was also alleged that Mr. Qazi illegally issued conversion and marriage certificates for those converted.

The second police case alleges conversion of a Hindu woman in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, before her marriage to a Muslim man.

Stan Swamy challenges validity of UAPA Section

Jesuit priest says provision creates a hurdle for an accused to be granted bail

SOMAN SAIGAL
NEW DELHI

Father Stan Swamy, an accused in the Bhima Koregaon case, has filed a fresh criminal petition before the Bombay High Court challenging the constitutional validity of Section 43(2)(c) of the Undesirable Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). It creates a hurdle for an accused to get bail, he said.

being treated in a private hospital.

Section 43(2)(c) says, "No person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV (punishment for terrorist activities) and VI (betrayal of proceeds of terrorism or any property intended to be used for terrorism) of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond."

The petition stated, "The

section creates an insurmountable hurdle for any accused to be granted bail under the provisions of UAPA."

"Violating rights"

Fr. Swamy, through his lawyer, had also challenged the use of "frontal organisations" by the authorities to "apprehend the bail application 'illegally, arbitrarily and also violating the fundamental rights under Article 14

[Equality under the law] and 21 [Right to Life] under the Constitution".

The Jesuit priest was shifted to the private hospital from the Taloja Central Jail on May 29 after being directed by the Bombay High Court. He was arrested from Ranchi on October 9 last year and charged under several Sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the UAPA.

His probe is based on one of the two cases registered by the Uttar Pradesh Police.

INTERVIEW HAMID KARZAI

The U.S. has obviously failed in its mission to fight extremism in Afghanistan'

Hopes for regional security solutions rest on Russia, China, Iran and India, and an end to extremism by Pakistan, says former President

SHABNAM RAHMAN

As the U.S. hastens the pace of its troop pull-out, and intra-Afghan talks in Doha fail to begin, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who is still seen as a power figure in the country, is due to travel for talks with the Taliban and Pakistan. In an interview, Mr. Karzai says the U.S. has failed in its mission in Afghanistan, and sold hopes for regional security solutions rest on Russia, China, Iran and India, and an end to extremism by Pakistan.

You have been very critical of the U.S. as it completes its troops pull-out, you said. The West has let Afghanistan down. What could they have done differently?

■ When the United States and its allies, after the tragedy of September 11, came to Afghanistan, they were welcomed wholeheartedly by a great majority of people in the hopes that they would be liberated from the creeping invasion that occurred in our country, and that Afghanistan would then be built primarily with efforts of Afghan people but also the international community, India included. We thank all those who have helped us but the

part which we suffer now, and has not been fulfilled, was the mission, as was stated by the United States repeatedly, that their presence in Afghanistan is to fight extremism and terrorism and bring stability. That has obviously failed.

Just a few months ago, U.S. Secretary of State offered a new proposal to President Ghani for a transition government that includes Taliban officials. Do you think that proposal is workable?

■ The Taliban belong to the same country as we are. And we belong to the same country as they belong to, there-

fore we must sit together. And we must not be victims of a foreign plot in which we Afghans die, and others reap the profits. Therefore, the solution to whatever mechanism that brings peace to Afghanistan and stability to our nation, is something that Afghan people will wholeheartedly work for.

There was a report in India that suggested that you might be the consensus candidate in a transition government?

■ No, leading any such arrangement would hurt my efforts for peace, and I don't want my efforts to be tainted that way. As a citizen of Afghanistan, I'm working for a peaceful life, for the Afghan people, for myself, for my children, for my friends for the country. But in no way would I be part of any mechanism that becomes a government.

You are expected to lead a delegation for talks with



■ Afghan people will engage in all sincerity in making sure that Afghanistan and Pakistan have good neighbourly, friendly, civilised relations. A civilised relationship will include the end of the use of extremism

and that this becomes a reality. If it is true, Afghan people will engage in all sincerity in making sure that Afghanistan and Pakistan have good neighbourly, friendly, civilised relations. A civilised relationship will include the end of the use of extremism

What do you hope to achieve with this visit? And does this mean that the Doha process for talks has reached a dead end?

■ Doha process has not been productive so far, it has not given us the results that we wanted. We wish it well. We want it to succeed. We're looking forward to meeting with the leaders of the Taliban movement. We also hope that our engagement with Pakistan, if it happens, will be one that will lead both nations to a better relationship. That is a desired outcome people and we're looking forward to substantive real engagement on this.

The Qatari Special Envoy

has said an Indian delegation had met the Taliban. What is your reaction to that?

■ I have been for a long, long time of the view that South Asia must be peaceful, and that we must all live together, exactly the way that European Union is now having a very profitable and free interaction among the states there. And for that to happen, how can we not recognise that India must be part of the processes in this region, not only the peace process, but everything else? Therefore, I welcome India's talks to the Taliban. I think it was long overdue. I hope it has occurred. I didn't have first-hand information from either the government of India nor the Taliban. But I wish it is true.

Do you think India has had to acknowledge that the Taliban was, and in fact, it is a force that they have to reckon with, and that violence in Afghanistan will

impact India as well?

■ Extremism in Afghanistan, in any form is going to affect the neighbourhood of Afghanistan. Therefore, any engagement by India and Afghanistan, or with Pakistan, that brings about the reduction and the eradication of extremism and terrorism is good for all of us. And I believe that is a responsibility upon us to fulfil.

How long will the Afghanistan democratic leadership continue to engage the Taliban, what are the red lines for them?

■ The red lines are a sovereign Afghanistan, exactly in the same way as it was towards the former Soviet Union, exactly in the same way as we reacted to the United States. As Afghanistan where the will of the Afghan people determines the future, an Afghanistan where people enjoy the rights that God has given to them, and where Afghan women have the

right place in society. These are red lines that cannot be compromised. And that has been amply, and very often made clear to the Taliban.

What is the role of Russia and China right now?

■ Russia has conducted several very productive rounds of intra-Afghan dialogue in Moscow from November 2020, to last March 2021. And the last Trilateral meeting ended with a very good declaration statement on Afghanistan. China is a good friend of Afghanistan, a neighbour of Afghanistan, we also hope very much they would step up their profile and activity in Afghanistan.

We hope that the Trilateral plus would include Iran and India as well. Peace in this region can only come when we join hands, all of us, and remove the competition, or the negativity surrounding this exercise.

(Watch the video of the interview on <https://bit.ly/Karzaiinterview>)

Cong. renews call for JPC probe into Rafale deal

Party says Rahul Gandhi stands vindicated over his allegation of corruption against the Narendra Modi government

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday renewed its call for an investigation by a Joint Parliamentary Committee into the deal reached by the Union government with Dassault Aviation and the French government for procuring 36 Rafale fighter aircraft. The French Public Prosecution Services (PNF) has ordered an investigation into the "Rafale Papers" on a complaint by a French anti-corruption NGO, Shero.

French news website Mediapart reported on Friday that the PNF had on June 14 ordered the investigation into the 2020 inter-governmental deal following a decision by its financial crimes branch.

At a press conference, Congress general secretary



Controversial fight: A Rafale fighter jet during its induction at an Air Force station in Ambala. ■ AP PHOTO

court-monitored probe, Mr. Surjewala said former party leader Rahul Gandhi, who had carried out a sustained campaign against the government flagging corruption in the Rafale aircraft deal, stood vindicated.

When pointed out that the Supreme Court in its verdict had said it is not the competent authority to hear the Ra-

fale case, The Prime Minister must tell the country when his government will allow a JPC probe in the light of the French enquiry."

Mr. Surjewala said the deal had led to a massive loss to the exchequer, and it needed to be thoroughly investigated in the national interest.

He said that as per the documents that were in the public domain, Reliance owned 51% and Dassault 49% in Dassault Reliance Aerospace Ltd. (DRAL). But whereas Dassault pledged to provide €89 million of the \$129 million investment decided by the two, Reliance was to bring only €10 million.

"As per the agreement between Reliance and Dassault, Reliance was to provide production facilities and marketing for pro-

gramme and services with the Govt. Obviously, this is a reference for the influence of Reliance with the Modi government," he said.

HAL excluded

The agreement between Reliance and Dassault excluded Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., since it was the DRAL which was responsible for Rafale's "aircraft Final Assembly Line".

On March 25, 2015, CEO of Dassault Aviation Eric Trappier, in the presence of the IAF chief and the chairman of the HAL, announced in Bangalore that Dassault and HAL were in agreement in accordance with the RFP signed by them. A day later, Reliance and Dassault signed an MoU. This was just 15 days before the unilateral announcement by Mr. Modi on

April 10, 2015 to purchase 36 Rafale Aircrafts for ₹12.8 billion without transfer of technology and bypassing the global tender to purchase 126 aircraft Roasted by the UPA government.

It is important to remember, Mr. Surjewala said, the "Defence Procurement Procedure" contains mandatory "anti-corruption clauses". This policy was also part of the tender issued by the Congress-led UPA government for purchase of the Dassault fighters. "But later the French government/Dassault deleted the 'anti-corruption clauses'".

Senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram in a series of tweets said eight new dates have been revealed in the deal: "Surely, the PM and, if not PM, then Defence Minister can tell us what events happened on these dates?"

BJP accuses Congress of lying about jet deal

There was no govt. interference

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday accused the Congress and its former president Rahul Gandhi of spreading lies about the Rafale deal, soon after reports of an investigation into the deal being launched in France broke.

After French website Mediapart reported on Friday that an investigation by an independent magistrate would be carried out, Congress spokesperson Sambit Patra said the Congress and Mr. Gandhi were "vindicated".

Reacting to the Congress's press conference, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said at a virtual press conference that Mr. Gandhi had "spread lies" about the Rafale deal. The Congress



leader had incorrectly claimed that there was pressure on Dassault to partner with Reliance. This had been denied by the French government, he stated.

"They said the offset arrangements were between two private companies and there was no government interference, whether from France or the Modi government," Mr. Patra said.

BJP claims sweep in U.P. panchayat chief elections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW

The BJP on Saturday claimed to have swept the elections to the posts of the district panchayat chief even as the Samajwadi Party (SP) alleged that the ruling party "kidnapped" voters and used "force" to stop them from voting.

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of making a mockery of the elections, saying it is strange that while most results in the polls for the district panchayat members were in favour of his

party, the BJP gained in the contest for the district panchayat chief.

Though the panchayat polls in U.P. are not held on party lines and the State Election Commission did not announce the party affiliation of the winning candidates, the BJP claimed that candidates backed by it won 67 of the 75 posts to which the elections were held on Saturday.

Claiming victory, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said in a tweet that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pop-

ularity and welfare policies initiated by his government and the Centre are responsible for the party's good show. "This is the manifestation of public confidence in the good governance that has been established in Uttar Pradesh. Thanks to all people of the State and a hearty congratulations for the victory," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said this was people's blessings to the party for its work for development, public service and the rule of law.

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, TIRUPATI
(An Autonomous Institute under Ministry of Education, Govt. of India)

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Advt. No.19/2021/BSER-T/R/Recr./03/07/2021

OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER
PHOTO READER (JODHPUR)

Tel: 0291-2557755 E-mail: r1_i@iiser-jodhpur.ac.in Date: 23/07/2021

Job Description: For the work of "Selection of works in villages in Hosur, Mathuram, Thirumangalam, Madukkai, Kallikudi, Kanchipuram, etc. as per Job grade from time to time defined by the Government of India for the supply of village water and sanitation schemes upto 1000 litres per second (LPS) and 1000 litres per second (LPS) to 10000 litres per second (LPS) of drinking water. Other particulars of the job may be stated on the procurement portal (www.iiser-jodhpur.ac.in). The basic pay and PHED department norms.

LICENSURE: PHED registration norms
LICEN NO: PHED/2019/000001
LICEN NO: PHED/2019/000002
LICEN NO: PHED/2019/000003
LICEN NO: PHED/2019/000004

DIVISION: R&D

Designation: ADDL. CHIEF ENGINEER
PHOTO READER (JODHPUR)

TAMIL NADU STATE AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD
Tender No.:T-21/03/2021/SC/1/2021/1/2021/03/07/2021

SC/1/2021/03/07/2021

For and on behalf of the Government of Tamil Nadu, State Agricultural Marketing Board, Chennai, invites tenders for the following works to be carried out on the following contracts under the Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board (SC/1/2021/03/07/2021).

NAME OF WORKS

1 Construction of 90000T storage godown (Under SC/1/2021/03/07/2021).

2 Construction of 1000T storage godown (Under SC/1/2021/03/07/2021).

3 Construction of 1000T storage godown at Poomuttur MM (Under SC/1/2021/03/07/2021).

4 Construction of 1000T storage godown at Poomuttur MM (Under SC/1/2021/03/07/2021).

Note: 1. The Tender Schedule for the works mentioned above is as follows:-
1.1 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.2 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.3 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.4 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.5 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.6 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.7 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.8 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.9 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.10 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
1.11 The tender documents will be available on the website of SC/1/2021/03/07/2021.
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Undercounting more in rural Rajasthan

It was the highest in Jalore and Nagaur districts.

RAJASTHAN RAMANI
DEHRADUN

Rajasthan's 45,058 "excess deaths" are 5.4 times the official COVID-19 death toll of 8,385, based on deaths registered in the State's civil registration system (CRS). According to the CRS report for 2019, Rajasthan registered an estimated 98.6% of all deaths in the State.

The report also mentions that 67.3% of all deaths are registered within 21 days of the event in the State, a number that is comparable to Karnataka (67.2%) and Kerala (65.1%) but lower than States such as Punjab (98.9%), Himachal Pradesh (92.1%), West Bengal (90.7%), Andhra Pradesh (90.4%), Tamil Nadu (90.9%) and Gujarat (97.5%) and Madhya Pradesh (90.6%).

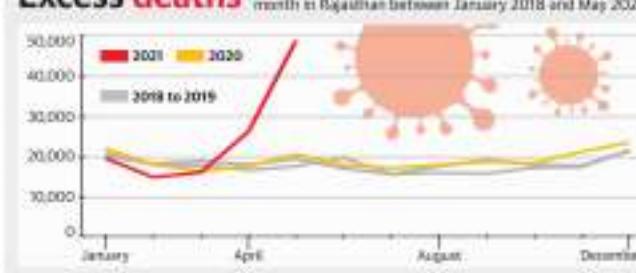
This suggests that excess deaths might go up as late registrations are tallied in Rajasthan (similar to Kerala and Karnataka) but at a higher rate compared with States such as Tamil Nadu which have quicker registration.

Excess deaths calculations (and therefore, undercount factors) change if the method to calculate it changes based on the years for which averages are considered or if a projection based on linear growth of deaths year-on-year is used.

For Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, excess deaths were calculated based on registrations available only for two pre-pandemic years, 2018 and 2019.

Rajasthan's undercount figure is comparable to those

Excess deaths The chart shows the number of deaths registered each month in Rajasthan between January 2018 and May 2021.



Data for Rajasthan were compiled by Pratap Vardhan, Groningen.

of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and lower than that of Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Karnataka and Kerala's figures fall if the linear growth estimation method is used, indicating that better registration in later years have lowered "excess deaths". Tamil Nadu's undercount factors do not change much.

Among districts in Rajasthan, Udaipur (3,949), Nagaur (3,870), Jodhpur (3,734) and Jodhpur (2,874) had the highest excess deaths, but the undercount factor for Jodhpur and Jodhpur (3.8 and 2.7)

were lower than that of Nagaur (3.0) and Udaipur (4).

Jalore (2,420 excess deaths) had the highest undercount factor (34.1). All numbers correspond to the April 2020 to May 2020 period.

In general, rural and semi-rural districts had a higher undercount factor than districts such as Jaipur and Jodhpur.

Rajasthan's Medical and Health Secretary Siddharth Mohajan told The Hindu that the State had commissioned a death audit to ascertain mortality figures and that reports were awaited.

He said that the State had sought to ramp up measures to identify patients through effective surveillance, even those with influenza-like illnesses during the pandemic to ensure that they get adequate care and to avoid deaths.

Faster registration

He also said that the Pehchan application has ensured that deaths that have occurred are registered within 15 days of the event.

A look at the gender break-up of the deaths in the State from 2018 to 2020 shows that the proportion of deaths among women went up marginally during the pandemic years compared with the previous ones.

This was unlike in Tamil Nadu (the only other State for which The Hindu had data available for the pandemic years), where the proportion of women among those dead was close to 40% consistently from 2018 to 2020.

Quoted on data compiled and aggregated by Pratap Vardhan. Inputs from Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Sunant Sethi.

Pregnant women eligible for vaccination: Health Ministry

Guidelines and informative material given to States, UTs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI



main index as factors for severe COVID-19 in pregnancy," the statement said.

The Ministry has accepted recommendations made by the NTAGI and the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration.

It has prepared operational guidelines for vaccination of pregnant women, counselling kit for medical officers and frontline workers, and informative material for the public to equip the States and Union Territories to carry out the vaccination of pregnant women.

A national-level consultation with representatives of State governments, management organisations, the development sector and professional bodies was held to build a consensus on vaccination for pregnant women, the statement added.

Pregnant women with COVID-19 infection are at an increased risk for preterm birth and other adverse pregnancy outcomes, including higher chances of neonatal morbidity. Additionally, the experts have also highlighted pre-existing co-morbidities, advanced maternal age, and high body

We are complying with guidelines, says Twitter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Big step for transparency: IT Minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad on Saturday issued major social media platforms such as Google, Facebook and Instagram for publishing their first compliance report on voluntary removal of offensive posts as per the new IT rules, terming it a big step towards transparency.

With the intermediary guidelines.

In his plea, filed through advocates Akash Vapai and Manish Kumar, Mr. Acharya said that he came to know about the alleged non-compliance when he tried to lodge a complaint against a couple of users.

Twitter has argued that the plea is not maintainable as a writ petition and that Mr. Acharya moved the court "prematurely" without waiting for the redress of his grievance under the rules.

It said Mr. Acharya had no locus standi to raise a complaint with respect to the tweets in question and added it has informed that the complaint has now been considered and disposed of.

Procession planning



At the ready: Police personnel get their morning briefing in front of the Jagannath Temple in Puri as they prepare for the annual Rath Yatra to be held on July 12. Devotees will not be allowed to take part due to COVID-19 restrictions. —PTI/ULAS ANANTKUMAR

Student leader files plaint on 'communal' remarks

He accuses J&K BJP president of lies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT DEHRADUN

Nasir Khuehami, spokesman of the J&K Students Association, on Saturday said he had lodged a complaint against Maninder Singh Sira of the Shromani Akali Dal and Ravinder Raina and Amanat Ali of the BJP over their "communal" remarks, made in reference to a Sikh woman marrying a Muslim man in Kashmir.

Mr. Khuehami tweeted: "After I was dodged and refused to lodge an FIR, I moved court on Saturday and filed a complaint against Sira, BJP's J&K president Raina and Sali for distorting peace, communal harmony and spreading

Beggars should also work for country: Bombay High Court

Everything cannot be provided by the state, says Bench

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Saturday said that homeless people and beggars should also work for the country as everything cannot be provided to them by the state.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Balkar was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by one Brijesh Arora, seeking directions to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to provide nutritious meals, including potable water, thrice a day, along with sanitation, shelter and clean public toilets for

homeless persons, beggars and poor people in the city.

The civic body told the court that food packets were being distributed to such people all over Mumbai with the help of NGOs, and sanitary napkins were being provided to the women from this section of society.

The court said, "They (homeless persons) should also work for the country. Everyone is working. Everything cannot be provided by the state. You (petitioner) are just increasing the population of this section of the society," the High Court said.

While disposing of the pe-

Number of jabs given in India crosses 35 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI



The cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has exceeded 35 crore, the Union Health Ministry said on Saturday.

At the new phase of universalisation of COVID-19 vaccination commenced from June 21, more than 57.36 lakh vaccine doses were given in the country on Saturday, as per a provisional report up to 7 pm.

The Ministry said 28,33,691 first vaccine doses and 3,29,889 second doses were given in the 18-44 years category on Saturday.

Cumulatively, 95,634,862 people in this age group across all States and Union Territories have received their first dose and 27,62,794 have received their second dose since the start of phase

three of the vaccination drive, the report showed.

Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra have given more than 50 lakh first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in the age group of 18-44. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, Kerala, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, Uttarakhand and West Bengal have inoculated more than 10 lakh beneficiaries of that age group with one dose.

ED arrests journalist on graft charge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Rajeesh Sharma, a freelance journalist, on money laundering charges. He was earlier arrested by the Delhi Police for allegedly supplying confidential information to Chinese intelligence officials.

The accused was produced before a special court, which sent him to seven days of ED custody.

The ED investigation is based on an FIR registered by the Delhi Police against Mr. Sharma under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Official Secrets Act.

The police, who have filed a chargesheet in the case, had arrested him in September last year. Mr. Sharma was later released on bail.

It was alleged that Mr. Sharma had supplied confidential and sensitive information to Chinese intelligence officials in exchange for remuneration, thereby compromising the security and national interests of India. The cash for remuneration of Rajeesh Sharma and other unknown persons was being generated through hawala means by some Manipur-based shell companies run by Chinese nationals named Zheng Cheng alias Suraj, Zheng Lishu alias Usha and Qiang Shi, along with a Nepalese national Sher Singh aka Raj Bohra, said an official. The ED alleges that apart from cash, huge transactions were made with some Chinese companies.

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

A court acquitted him of all charges after 11 years in jail

PEERZADA ASHIQ DEHRADUN

Back home after 11 years of detention on unproven charges, Bashir Ahmad Baba from Srinagar's Jogi Lanark area wants to just remember his postgraduate degrees and diploma certificates he earned in his jail cell in a prison in Anantnag, Jammu, and the letters of his now dead father.

Mr. Baba, who was booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in 2010, was acquitted of all charges this week by a sessions court. Additional Ses-

sions Judge S.A. Nakuru dismissed the case. The court said there was not enough evidence to prove the charges levelled against him.

"I decided to keep myself busy in a constructive way in the jail, I chose studies to stay sane. I completed a post-

graduate course in Urdu and other diploma courses," Mr. Baba said, who is busy meeting his friends, neighbours and relatives, whom he is seeing for the first time in 11 years.

The ATS booked him on charges of recruiting boys into militancy and affiliation with the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen handlers across the border on email and phone. He was

charged under the IPC and the UAPA.

Long struggle
"It was a long struggle to prove my innocence. I have to curse the wond all my life for not being able to participate in the final rites of my father in 2017," he said. His father died of colon cancer and had been denied to him on the occasion. His mother, who met him once in the jail in 11 years "only after selling gold ornaments for tickets and stay", said, "When Baba left home in 2010, I had bid him farewell saying 'Ghar khidaya huw' (Go and Allah be your protector). And Allah has returned him to me," she added.



In loving arms: Bashir Ahmad Baba back at home with his mother in Srinagar. —KALRAJ MAHMOOD

Afghanistan fighting rages amid U.S. exit

300 Taliban fighters killed in 24 hours, says govt.; Washington plans complete troop pull-out by August

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
PARIS

Hundreds of Taliban fighters were killed in fierce battles with government forces across several provinces of Afghanistan, officials said on Saturday, as Washington announced it would finish withdrawing its troops from the country by the end of August.

Washington's announcement came after all U.S. and NATO troops vacated their main Bagram Air Base, from where the coalition forces led operations for two decades against the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies.

Over the past 24 hours, more than 300 Taliban fighters were killed in fighting with government forces, the Ministry of Defence said on Saturday.

Scores were killed in air strikes, including a pre-dawn assault on Saturday, in the southern province of Helmand, where the insurgents



Force clashes: Armed men pledge their support for Afghan forces against the Taliban near Kabul, on June 23. ■ AP

and government troops have regularly clashed.

The Taliban rejected the government's claims.

Both sides often exaggerate each other's casualties and their claims are difficult to independently verify.

But since May 1 when the U.S. military began its final withdrawal of about 2,500 troops, the two warring sides have clashed fiercely across the rugged country-

side as peace talks between them have faltered.

As a result, the Taliban have seized dozens of districts in blistering assaults targeting government forces.

The insurgents have encircled almost all major cities across the country, and on Saturday claimed seizing seven more districts in the northeastern province of Badakhshan.

Top U.S. envoy to Kabul, Ross Wilson, lashed out at the insurgents.

"The Taliban is using violent propaganda and hate speech to intimidate, threaten & attack Afghans on social media," Mr. Wilson said on Twitter on Saturday.

"Violence and terror cannot create peace."

The Pentagon pressed on with its withdrawal to end America's longest war.

On Friday, all U.S. and NATO troops left Bagram Air Base, signalling that the military involvement for coal-

ition forces was finally nearing its end.

"For many Afghans, Bagram is remembered as the hub for more than one foreign intervention, as it was the main air base for the Soviets throughout their occupation of the country as well," said Andrew Watkins, an Afghanistan expert at the International Crisis Group.

'Civil war' fears

The exit of foreign troops from Bagram has further fuelled concerns the country might slide into new civil war, as in the 1990s after the Soviets left.

"I see history repeating. The Americans are doing the same what the Russians did. They are going without ending the war," said Kabul resident Dawood Hosni.

"I feel our country will slide back into another civil war as the Taliban have intensified their attacks and the Americans are exiting."

Ten killed in Al-Shabaab attack on Mogadishu tea shop

Al-Qaeda-linked group targets cafe frequented by soldiers

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
MOGADISHU

A suicide bombing attack by the Al-Shabaab jihadi group on a crowded tea shop in Somalia's capital Mogadishu killed 10 people and injured dozens, the government said on Saturday.

The death toll from the attack, which targeted a tea shop near heavily guarded government institutions on Friday evening, was significantly higher than the four previously reported.

"On the evening of July 2, a suicide bomber wearing a vest detonated the device

near the Juba Hotel, killing at least 10 people with dozens injured," the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism said in a statement.

"The attack occurred during a busy hour where the victims were enjoying a local tea shop," it added, saying the "malicious" attack was by Al-Shabaab.

The al-Qaeda-linked group swiftly claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement, saying "IS elements from the government intelligence, police, and militia were killed and 22 others were wounded."

Sources told AFP that the attack took place just a few hundred metres from the headquarters of the Somali Intelligence Agency at around 5:30 pm on Friday. "The cafe was crowded when the blast occurred," said witness Abdulkarim Ali.

The cafe is often frequented by members of the Somalia security forces, sources said. Al-Shabaab, which is fighting to overthrow the internationally-backed government in Mogadishu, regularly attacks government and civilian targets in Mogadishu.

Pipeline rupture causes fire in Gulf of Mexico

Oil firm says leak brought under control

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MEXICO CITY

Mexico's state-owned oil company said on Friday it suffered a rupture in an undersea gas pipeline in the Gulf of Mexico, sending flames boiling to the surface in the Gulf waters.

Petrobras Medicane said it had dispatched fire control boats to pump more water over the flames.

Pemex, as the company is known, said nobody was injured in the incident in the offshore Kashabak-Zapu field.

The leak near dawn on Friday occurred about 150 yards from a drilling plat-

form. The company said it had brought the gas leak under control about five hours later.

But the accident gave rise to the strange sight of rolling balls of flame boiling up from below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico.

It was unclear how much environmental damage the gas leak and oceanic fireball had caused.

Myoko Sasaki, oceans program director for the Center for Biological Diversity, wrote that "the frightening footage of the Gulf of Mexico is showing the world that offshore drilling is dirty and dangerous."

China goes malaria-free with multi-pronged health strategy

It hasn't reported any case in four consecutive years

ANANTH KRISHNA



The World Health Organisation (WHO) declaring that China was "malaria-free" followed a seven decade-long, multi-pronged health strategy that was able to entirely eliminate indigenous cases for four straight years, health experts said.

The "malaria-free" certification from the WHO this week followed a visit in May from an independent panel to verify China's malaria-free status, which requires four consecutive years of reporting no local cases.

The number of malaria cases worldwide in 2019 was around 229 million, according to the World Malaria Report in 2020, with 609,000 lives lost to the mosquito-borne disease. The 2020 report said the majority of cases were reported in Africa, while India and Southeast Asia recorded a significant drop. Cases in India fell from approximately 20 million to 6 million, according to the 2020 report.

The WHO said China is the first country in the Western Pacific region to be declared malaria-free in more than 30 years. Following Australia in 1981, Singapore in 1982 and Brunei in 1987, Takeshi Kasai, Regional Director of the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, attributed its success to "strong political commitment and strengthening national health systems" allowing it to "eliminate a disease that once was a major public health problem".

The effort began in the early 1980s, a time when China was reporting millions of cases annually, starting with a multi-pronged approach of providing anti-malarial medicines while targeting mosquito breeding

spots by the seventh day, along with continued surveillance in high-risk areas.

At the same time, concern over imported cases remains, particularly from Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, which share a border with the southwestern Yunnan province. The "malaria-free" certification was welcomed by public health experts in China and was welcome news for its health authorities, amid an intense global debate over how they handled the COVID-19 pandemic and scrutiny facing its disease control agencies.

China has been widely criticised for the delays in initial reporting of an unknown pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan that was suppressed by local authorities in late December 2019 and early January 2020, including by silencing doctors, later leading to the sacking of city and provincial officials. Subsequently, a sweeping nationwide lockdown ordered by the central authorities, along with a massive testing and tracing strategy, allowed China to control the outbreak by the summer of 2020 and avoid a second wave unlike most countries, with continuing travel restrictions as well as test-and-trace strategies successfully squelching subsequent local outbreaks linked to imported cases.

The COVID-19 response showed the duality of the Chinese system, according to Dafe Yang, professor of Chinese politics at the University of Chicago, who told The Hindu earlier the system can see "shrinking" at the local level and a tendency to cover-up problems when they emerge, combined with a top-down approach that is "capable of decisive action when things get big".

Myanmar coup leader's birthday marked with mock funerals

Almost 890 civilians killed in crackdown: monitoring group

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
NAYPYIDAW

Protesters in coup-hit Myanmar marked the birthday of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing on Saturday by burning his portrait and staging mock funerals.

The nation has experienced mass protests and a brutal military response since the February 1 coup which ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

About 890 civilians have died in a crackdown by the State Administration Council – as the junta calls itself – and almost 6,500 have been arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

On Saturday, several anti-coup demonstrators posted pictures on social media of a traditional noodle soup dish called mohinga, which is often served at funerals in

mock funerals. "Because of this man, our Myanmar has many problems," a Mandalay resident told AFP.

Retirement age
General Min turns 65 on Saturday – the age he would have been subject to mandatory retirement while he headed up the armed forces, as stipulated by the country's 2008 Constitution.

Some analysts believe that was a factor in his power-grab because he had not been able to see a path to higher office with the help of the military-backed political party, which was round in an election last year. Before the coup, General Min was considered an international pariah, condemned for presiding over the brutal 2017 crackdown on the country's Rohingya population.

TikTok back in Pakistan after ban revoked

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
KARACHI

TikTok was running again in Pakistan on Saturday after a provincial court lifted suspension of the popular social media service but ordered it to address complaints that it hosted objectionable content.

Freedom of speech advocates have long criticised creeping government censorship and control of Pakistan's internet and media.

TikTok said on Wednesday it had removed more than six million videos from its Pakistan service in the past three months alone – around 15% featuring "adult nudity and sexual activities".

This speaking test from The Hindu Group is conducted by an Expert Coach over a video call. Standing apart from other tests, this test allows you to schedule the 30-minute interactive video call at your convenience.

Designed for grades 3 to 10, this assessment offers:

- Percentile score to rank your child among other test takers in the country
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STEP
Standardised Test of English Proficiency
from THE HINDU GROUP

SNAPSHOTS

**Goldilocks Supernova**

Supernova explosions can happen in different ways. When the star is not light enough to avoid collapsing under its own core mass, and not heavy enough to prolong its life and die in some other way later, it forms an electron-capture supernova. This has been theorized for 40 years, but has been seen now according to a paper in *Nature Astronomy*.

**Detecting life far from Earth**

Most biomolecules, such as the DNA, are either left-handed or right-handed and not a mixture. In a study published in *Astrobiology and Astrochemistry*, researchers show that this property of homochirality, which is a signature, can be detected from a distance of 2.5 kilometres, when travelling at a speed of 20 km/h. This could help in studying exoplanets for signs of life.

Can some States serve as a bellwether for the third wave?

Both in the first wave and second wave of COVID-19, increase in daily cases was first reported in Maharashtra, then Kerala and Delhi.

R. PRASAD

post, what we are searching for can be found there.

Given that these States have traditionally recorded well, it would be good to pay attention to them, but in a large and diverse country, a new variant of concern could emerge anywhere. We need to beef up testing and surveillance across India and not just in those States. It would be best if we looked for an unusual increase in cases, novel symptomatology and new variants across India, paying special attention to large and crowded cities, and not just to Kerala and Maharashtra. For example, Bengal is potentially another hotspot for a new wave to emerge, given the diversity of sequences obtained from there and Kolkata, its capital, is dense enough for a new variant to spread fast.

Will future spikes be first seen in Mumbai and Delhi or will tier-2, tier-3 cities serve as a better indicator of the beginning of the third wave?

Tarun Bhatnagar: New surge in cases would depend on the magnitude of susceptible population, population density, mobility and implementation of public health

Predicting future surges

In a large and diverse country, a new variant of concern could emerge anywhere

■ New surges can arise depending on magnitude of susceptible population, population density, mobility and implementation of surveillance measures.

■ Duration of persistence of protective levels of immunity is another important parameter for the timing of another surge.

■ Future surges in cases are expected in areas with low seroprevalence coupled with high population density and mobility.

■ Tier-2 and tier-3 cities with relatively low case reporting during the earlier waves are more likely to be affected in the future.



Testing and surveillance need to be sharply intensified in all places. ■ RAMESH

surveillance measures including testing and contact tracing. Duration of persistence of protective levels of immunity is another important parameter for the timing of another surge in cases. Published data indicates this to be for 7-12 months. Another critical factor is the distribution of variants with high transmissibility or ability for immune escape. Information on all these factors is needed to say where the third wave could be documented.

Gautam Menon: We should not make the mistake of assuming that because there is more light under the lamp-

expected in areas with low seroprevalence coupled with high population density and mobility. This could happen even in localities within Mumbai and Delhi depending on the representativeness of the surveys done in these cities. However, tier-2 and tier-3 cities with relatively low case reporting during the earlier waves are more likely to be affected in the future. However, surveillance is key to early detection of such trends. Vaccination coverage and emergence and distribution of variants that are more transmissible or can evade

the second wave across the west of the country originated in tier-2 and tier-3 cities of Maharashtra, spreading only later to Mumbai. Ideally, we should be sensitive to an anomalous rise in cases at the level of districts, since a new variant that has increased immune escape attributes could emerge anywhere.

Will the high seroprevalence recorded in Mumbai and Delhi diminish its ability to serve as a bellwether of the third wave?

GB: Future surge in cases is

immune response would also influence a fresh surge of cases.

Giridhara Babu: With increasing vaccination coverage and decline in the vulnerable population, any wave higher than earlier in these two cities might mean a higher reinfection rate and/or waning immune response. But yes, if these two cities have large outbreaks, the rest of the country will follow a similar trajectory as in previous two waves.

What could be the reasons for daily cases plateauing in Kerala?

GB: There might be two reasons, namely better testing strategy and transmission dynamics. One, the detection in Kerala is better than in other States. Although even Kerala can also do better in terms of the number of tests, their testing strategy is good. The districtwise and rural distribution of testing is higher and well distributed compared to other States. Therefore, they will continue to detect cases. The absence of detection in other rural hamlets in India does not mean that there is no circulation. Two, it is possible that more spread might

have occurred within primary and secondary contacts due to the contagious nature of the virus, poor isolation and quarantine efforts, resulting in a propagated outbreak in Kerala.

GB: There are no surprises in Kerala vis-a-vis the rest of the country in terms of new variants that are not seen elsewhere. My tentative guess is that despite Kerala's large numbers of cases, the multiplicity between cases recorded and background unrecorded cases may be smaller than in the rest of the country. This means a reservoir of those who are still to be infected, an idea supported by the relatively low seropositivity found there, of about 10% in a survey in March, a surprisingly low number. So the plateauing may simply be a network effect – those most at risk are likely infected already, but many are not and have been able to shield themselves so far, likely due to the stringent measures undertaken by government and precautions at the personal level. They are slowly getting infected, contributing to the cases, but not at the pace seen in the second wave, due to the restrictions in place.

Social structure differs in Asian and African elephants, find researchers

Male Asian elephants spent only about 12% of their time in all-male groups as compared to 30-60% of the time in African savannah elephants

SHRUSHTI DESKAN

Despite the fact that they occupy similar ecological niches, the social structure of Asian elephants differs from that of their African savannah counterparts. This is perhaps due to their different habitats. It is important to understand this and grasp the diversity of strategies that these endangered species might be adopting to survive.

Since there have been many studies of the African savannah elephants since the 1970s and there have not been many of the Asian elephants until more recently, there is a tendency to believe that what holds good for the former also holds for the latter. However, this is not so, as evidenced by studies conducted by the members of the Evolutionary and Integrative Biology Unit of the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for

Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru.

Asian elephants, in general, do not move in mixed groups consisting of males and females. "From what we see, males use smell to track females. They also cover long distances when they are in search of females," says P. Keerthi Priya, the first author of the paper.

Young and old

Further, in an African savannah elephant population, young males seemed to prefer older males possibly due to opportunities for social learning. This was contrary to what the group observed. The observations on Asian elephants can be summarized thus: Young males spent a greater proportion of time associating with females (in mixed-sex groups) than with other males (in all-male groups). For old males, these two proportions were similar. While males met at ran-

dom in the presence of females, the behaviour differed in their absence.

Old males preferentially associated with other old males, and old and young males met each other less than expected by chance. Young males met each other as expected by chance. There was no evidence that young males spent more time with old males relative

to time they spent with other young males. They also did not preferentially associate with older males.

Another important finding of the study is the restriction on male group size. The group had also found a similar restriction on female group size in Kabin. "This is important and suggests that the food distribution is such that it limits large groups of

elephants from feeding together," says Dr. Vidy.

The study documented 138 independent sightings of all-male groups during the study period. "There would be a lot more sightings if we included the non-independent sightings," says Dr. Vidy.

Two hypotheses

The researchers had hypothesized two possibilities for adult male elephants getting together in groups: (i) Testing their strength in a relaxed setting against similarly sized and closely matched age-class peers and settling their dominance position, and (ii) young males preferentially associating with, and socially learning from, older males.

"We found no evidence for young males preferentially associating with older males, thus social learning from older males does not

New source of gravitational waves detected

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Scientists have for the first time detected gravitational waves produced by the collision of a neutron star and a black hole.

+

In the study, elephants aged 15-30 years were classified as young and those above 30 years were classified as old.

Characteristics such as shoulder height, body length, skull size, and skin folds were used to estimate the ages of the elephants.

"We used the semi-captive elephants near the study area, whose ages are known, as a reference while estimating the ages of the adults," explains Dr. Keerthi Priya.

The researchers used their field data from 2009-2014 based on observations made at the Nagarhole and Bandipur National Parks.

"We identified 96 adult males. In all, 83 of them were sighted when they were not in musth, and we used this in this study," Dr. Keerthi Priya clarifies.



Young males: Elephants Pema and Moti are seen associating in the absence of female elephants. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Time to tackle COVID-19 vaccine delivery bottlenecks

India needs effective communication strategy to tackle vaccine hesitancy

CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA

On June 21, India administered 8.6 million shots of COVID-19 vaccines, the highest daily doses since the start of the drive on January 16. With an officially projected supply of around 210 million doses of COVID-19 in the period from June 21 to July 31, India should be able to administer 5 million shots a day (6 million shots a day, if we exclude holidays) and sustain the tempo for the coming weeks. Yet, this would not be enough to achieve the stated target of 600 million for the entire adult population by the end of 2021. To achieve that, India needs to conduct at least 10 million jabs a day, now onwards.

Even with the ongoing vaccination drive, there are many ground reports about two challenges, which demand urgent attention and intervention.

The first is vaccine inequity. There is low uptake of COVID-19 vaccines among groups such as slum dwellers and urban poor as well as in rural population. Some of these inequities have their origin in supply-side aspects, as most vaccination centres are in urban settings, and the need for prior and, for some, mandatory, registration on the digital platform.



Vital challenges: Even with the ongoing vaccination drive, there are many ground reports about vaccine inequity and vaccine hesitancy that demand urgent attention and intervention. ■ SATYAMALA

data were willing to get COVID-19 vaccine. Many thought that since they were healthy they did not need vaccines and nearly one-third of respondents were afraid of vaccines.

In Madhya Pradesh State, reportedly, 270 COVID-19 vaccination sessions in rural areas ended up at zero sessions.

In the four months since the opening up of COVID-19 vaccination for 45+ populations, only 48% of the 60+ population has received at least one dose. That is a reminder that merely availability of vaccines does not translate into increased coverage. Vaccine hesitancy seems to be playing a role in keeping the coverage low.

In the last few weeks, the Indian government has taken some corrective measures to re-jig the COVID-19 vaccination strategy, resolve a few

vaccine hesitant group is an urgent need. We need to plan and prepare for such eventualities to achieve coverage as close to 100%, to halt the march of the virus.

Addressing inequity

First, analyse vaccine coverage data by every possible equity stratifiers such as rural/urban, rich/poor, religion, deprivation status, tribal and other population sub-groups. The government needs to use more granular data by equity stratifiers and develop appropriate strategies to scale vaccination coverage in these settings and areas. Special mobile-based vaccination sessions should be conducted at those areas and population groups.

Second, generate scientific evidence to understand vaccine hesitancy. The government needs to engage academic institutions to conduct primary research to understand the concerns of people who accept any form of hesitancy. Alongside, professional agencies, with experience in social marketing should be engaged in developing vaccine communication campaigns. Instead of newspaper advertisements, science and evidence-based communication for vaccination drives need to be implemented in advance and evidence and science-based strategies and communication plans are drafted and implemented to tackle this with immediate priority.

Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, a physician-epidemiologist, is a public policy and health systems expert and co-author of 'Till We Win India's Fight Against The COVID-19 Pandemic'.

chiar and local influencers.

Third, implement the evidence-informed COVID-19 vaccine communication strategy adapted for local context: the Indian ministry of health & family welfare had formulated a COVID-19 vaccine communication strategy in Dec 2020. However, many of the health functionaries are not even aware about various communication strategies. Some of the good practices including financial and non-financial incentives (both at individual and community/village levels) implemented by various districts and Indian states should be explored for further expansion.

Science-based strategies

The Indian government aims to achieve COVID-19 vaccination of the entire adult population in India by end of 2021. However, it will be a race to assume vaccine coverage is simply a function of vaccine availability. It is a sine-qua-non that the challenges of vaccine inequity and hesitancy are identified in advance and evidence and science-based strategies and communication plans are drafted and implemented to tackle this with immediate priority.



Salt and Pepper

Does stress make hair go grey and is colour reversal possible?

Researchers at Columbia University have found (Laf) that stress can accelerate greying, and surprisingly the hair colour can be reversed when stress is eliminated. They also found that stress does not affect the colour of hair that has already grown out of the follicle. When hairs are still under the skin in follicles, they are subject to the influence of stress hormones. Once hairs grow out of the scalp, they harden and permanently crystallize and serve as record of past stresses, much like tree rings hold information about past.



Stress free: Colour of hair can be reversed in young. ■ GETTY IMAGES

of hair growth.

While the colour difference may not be perceptible to the naked eye, under a high-resolution scanner, subtle variations in colour were seen. The researchers analysed individual hairs from 14 volunteers. The results were compared with each stress level: volunteer on a weekly basis. They found that some grey hairs naturally regained their original colour and when the change in colour was compared with stress levels, a striking association was seen.

Based on modelling, scientists think in middle age, hair needs to reach a threshold before it turns grey. Stress pushes it over the threshold so the hair becomes grey. While the colour of hair can be reversed when the stress is removed, it cannot be the case in old people.

Readers may send their questions (answers to questioncorner@thenextweb.com)



A woman checking her EU Digital COVID Certificate at El Prat airport in Barcelona on July 1.

EU's 'Green Passport'

Why is the move being opposed by India and the African Union and what does it mean for travellers?

SURASINI HAJDAR
KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE

The story so far: On July 1, the European Union implemented the EU Digital COVID Certificate (EUDCC) or the "Green Passport", which allows ease of intra-European travel for passengers who have taken one of four vaccines "recognised" by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) that excludes Indian-made Covishield and Covaxin, among others. The move led to a sharp protest from India, as well as the African Union, as concerns grow over vaccine passports that discriminate against travellers from developing countries with limited access to vaccines. Some European countries have since relented, with a third of the 27-member EU agreeing to include Covishield in the list of approved vaccines.

What does the EUDCC entitle passengers to? The EUDCC, or the Green Passport, which is in the form of a digital QR code, attests that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19, and also if they have had a recent negative test and/or are considered immune having previously contracted the illness. It is recognised by all 27 EU countries, as well as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway for passengers within Europe, who are bound not to need separate documentation for intra-EU travel.

In its interim guidance published this week, the World Health Organization held categorically that vaccine passports should not be made mandatory for travel.

How will it impact Indian travellers? The EUDCC will impact Indians nationally at present, as only essential travel is allowed into EU countries and special permission has to be taken for those travelling from India. With global concerns over the Delta variant, which was first detected in India, more measures are in place for Indians travelling abroad. The European Union has pointed out that the EUDCC is only meant for passengers within the EU, and that most, if not all, residents would have received one of the four vaccines that have been cleared by the EMA – Comirnaty (Pfizer/BioNTech), Vaccine Janssen (Johnson & Johnson), Spikevax (Moderna) and Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca/EUrope).

According to the EU, the Serum Institute of India's (SII) Covishield was a "biologically" different product and it hence needs to apply separately for EMA clearance. Both SII and AstraZeneca have since clarified that they are in the process of seeking clearances. Meanwhile, the road seems harder for Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, as unlike Covishield, it has not received recognition from even the World Health Organization (WHO) and is in the process of completing its application there.

How did India register its protests? During his visit to Italy for the G20 ministerial conference last week, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar registered a strong protest in his meetings with European counterparts as well as EU High Representative Josep Borrell Fontelles, as government sources indicated that India was prepared to initiate reciprocal harsh quarantine measures against countries that discriminated against Indians.

India's concerns are three-fold. It feels vaccine passports will restrict passengers from countries that don't have the same access to vaccines and will increase vaccine inequality. It also argues that the EU should recognise Covishield as it is no different from other AstraZeneca-licensed vaccines, and more broadly that all Indian-approved vaccines should be given recognition worldwide, and that passengers can be certified via the Co-WIN website.

Furthermore, officials point out that Covishield was distributed to 95 countries, mainly low- and middle-income countries of the global South, and the EU action discriminates against all of them. There is a hint of racism, they claim, in the fact that all vaccines cleared by the EMA are those that have been taken by residents in Europe and North America, whereas the ones excluded are those made and distributed far and wide in the rest of the world by Russia, India and China.

Backing India's stand, the African Union and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention issued a statement raising concerns over the Green Passport, pointing out that the Covishield vaccine was the "backbone" of the EU-supported International COVAX alliance programme in Africa, along with the AstraZeneca-Skype vaccine produced in South Korea.

What is the WHO's stand? In its interim guidance released on July 2, a day after the EUDCC was launched and implemented, the WHO published its "Policy considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to travel in the context of COVID-19". In it, the WHO held categorically that vaccine passports should not be made mandatory for travel and should be optional, stating that proof of COVID-19 vaccination should not be required as a condition of entry and exit from a country.

Will the EU relent? By bringing in the EUDCC, the European Union has made it clear that it intends to use these vaccine passports in some measure to differentiate between those who are vaccinated and those who aren't or have taken "unrecognised" vaccines. However, with at least nine countries, including Austria, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland, agreeing to independently make exemptions for Covishield, and Estonia accepting both Covishield and Covaxin, there is hope that enough pressure will build on the EMA to include exemptions for Indian vaccines as well.

What lies ahead for Afghanistan after U.S. exit?

How will the pull-out of troops change equations and can Kabul forces hold off the Taliban?

STANLEY JOHNSTON

The story so far: On July 2, U.S. troops departed from the Bagram Air Base that coordinated the 20-year-long war in Afghanistan, effectively ending their military operations in the country. The exit is part of President Joe Biden's plan to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan by September 11. Ever since the remaining U.S. troops began pulling out on May 1, the Taliban have made rapid territorial advances. If the Taliban had controlled 73 of Afghanistan's 407 districts before May 1, the number of districts went up to 168 in two months, according to the Long War Journal.

Why did the U.S. invade Afghanistan? Weeks after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush declared war on Afghanistan. Mr. Bush said the Taliban regime had turned down his demand to hand over al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, who plotted the attacks. Inside Afghanistan, the NATO coalition troops led by the U.S. quickly dislodged the Taliban regime and established a transitional government. Al-Qaeda's leaders and key operatives fled to safe havens in Pakistan. In May 2003, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that major military operations in the country were over. The U.S. focus shifted to the Iraq invasion, while in Afghanistan, western powers helped build a centralised democratic system and institutions. But that neither ended the war nor stabilised the country.

Why is the U.S. pulling back? The U.S. had reached the conclusion long ago that the war was unwinnable. Presidents, starting with Barack Obama, had promised to bring American troops back home from Afghanistan. In July 2011, the Obama administration had sent a representative to the first-ever meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government that was hosted by Pakistan in Murree. The Murree talks did not progress as the Afghan government disclosed after the first round that Taliban leader Mullah Omar had died two years earlier.

Later, President Donald Trump appointed a special envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, with a mandate to directly negotiate with the Taliban. Mr. Khalilzad and his team held talks with Taliban representatives in Doha that led to the February 2020 agreement between the U.S. and the insurgents. In the agreement, the Trump administration promised that it would withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. President Joe Biden endorsed the Trump-Taliban deal, but pushed the deadline for withdrawal to September 11.

What are the terms of the Trump-Taliban deal? The February deal dealt with four aspects of the conflict – violence, foreign troops, intra-Afghan peace talks and the use of Afghan soil by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. According to the agreement, the Taliban promised to reduce violence, join intra-Afghan peace talks and cut all ties with foreign terrorist groups, while the U.S. pledged to withdraw all its troops, roughly 12,000 at the time of the signing of the agreement in February 2020, by May 1, 2021.

After the agreement was signed, the U.S. put pressure on the Afghan government to release thousands of Taliban prisoners – a key Taliban precondition for starting intra-Afghan talks. Talks between Taliban representatives and the Afghan government began in Doha in September 2020 but did not reach any breakthrough. At present, the peace process is frozen. The Taliban reduced hostilities against foreign troops but continued to attack Afghan forces even after the agreement was signed. Afghanistan also saw a series of targeted killings of journalists, activists and other civil society figures over the past many months, which the Afghan government says is a Taliban act. Kabul maintains that the Pakistani support for the Taliban is allowing the insurgents to overcome military pressure and carry forward with their agenda.

What does Pakistan want? Pakistan was one of the three countries that had recognised the Taliban regime in the 1990s. The Taliban captured much of the country with help from Pakistan's

Insurmountable losses

The U.S.'s 20-year-war in Afghanistan has claimed over 70,000 civilian lives and cost the country more than \$2 trillion. Even as all U.S. combat troops will withdraw by September 11, a large share of the country remains under the control of Taliban. A look at the impact of the war:

Loss of life

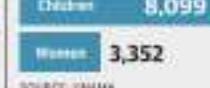
Nearly 2,400 lives have been lost in the two-decade-long war that ensued after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. According to recent estimates by Brown University's Cost of War, at least 71,344 civilians died in the conflict while the Afghan national military police lost 78,314 personnel, an estimated 6,384 U.S. soldiers and 1,144 soldiers of allied troops were also killed during the war.

SOURCE: HUMAN AND BUDGETARY COSTS OF AFGHAN WAR, 2001-2021, BROWN UNIVERSITY



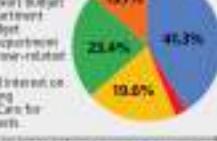
Impact of war on women and children

As many as 8,099 children and 3,352 women were killed between 2009 and 2020, according to data by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

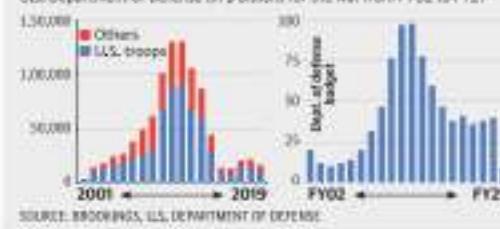


Financial drain

Chart shows % split of the \$2.3 trillion spent by various U.S. departments according to Brown University.



America's longest war: The first chart shows the number of U.S. troops and others (including those part of NATO) stationed in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2019. The second chart shows the yearly budget of the U.S. Department of Defense (in \$ billion) for the war from FY02 to FY21.



Any nation planning to deal with Afghanistan should be prepared for several scenarios, including the possibility of the Taliban taking over the country.

ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) after the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan's military dictator Pervez Musharraf, under pressure from the Bush administration, cut formal ties with the Taliban and joined America's war on terror. But Pakistan played a double game. It provided shelter to the Taliban's Haibat Sharif, a group composed of their top leaders. In Pakistan, the Taliban regrouped, raised money and recruits, planned military strategy and staged a comeback in Afghanistan. The fractious Kabul government, faced with corruption allegations, incompetence, and the excesses of the invading forces, made matters easier for the Taliban.

Now, when the U.S. is leaving and the Taliban are advancing, Pakistan is again in the spotlight. A violent military takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban may not serve Pakistan's core interests. Pakistan wants to check India's influence in Afghanistan and bring the Taliban to Kabul. But a violent takeover, like in the 1990s, would lack international acceptability, leaving Afghanistan unstable for a foreseeable future. In such a scenario, Pakistan could face another influx of refugees from Afghanistan and a strengthening of anti-Pakistan terror groups, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban. From a strategic point of view, Pakistan would prefer the Taliban being accommodated in power through negotiations and a peaceful settlement, which would also allow Rawalpindi to stabilize its conflict-ridden western border. But it's not clear whether Pakistan has the capacity to shape the post-American outcome in Afghanistan.

Why is India reaching out to the Taliban? The Hindu reported in June, quoting a Qatari official, that India made contacts with the Taliban in Doha. New Delhi

has not denied reports of its outreach to the Taliban. This signals a low but real acknowledgement from the Indian side that the Taliban would play a critical role in Afghanistan in the coming years. India has three critical areas in dealing with the Taliban. One, protecting its investments, which run into billions of rupees, in Afghanistan; two, preventing a future Taliban regime from being a pawn of Rawalpindi; three, making sure that the Pakistan-backed anti-India terrorist groups do not get support from the Taliban. In the past, India chose not to engage the Taliban and the costs were dear when the Taliban was in power. This time, New Delhi seems to be testing another policy.

Is the Afghanistan government doomed? The American intelligence community has concluded, according to The Wall Street Journal, that Kabul could fall within six months. None of the U.S. military and political leaders, from General Austin Miller to President Biden, is certain about the survival of the Afghan government. When Mr. Biden was asked this question on Friday, he didn't say that the government would survive, but said, "They have the capacity to sustain the government". One thing is certain – the American withdrawal has turned the balance of power in the battleground in favour of the Taliban. They are already making rapid advances.

So, there could be three scenarios, according to experts. One, there could be a political settlement in which the Taliban and the government agree to some power-sharing mechanism and jointly shape the future of Afghanistan. As of now, this looks like a remote possibility. Two, an all-out civil war may be possible, in which the government, economically lacked and militarily trained by the West, holds on to its positions in key cities, while the Taliban expand its reach in the countryside, while other ethnic militias fight for their fiefs. This is already unfolding. A third scenario would be of the Taliban taking over the country. Any nation planning to deal with Afghanistan should be prepared for all three scenarios.

Can reducing cess levies ease high fuel prices?

What has the ICRA proposed and will it cool inflation to the comfort level prescribed by the RBI?

K. BHARAT KUMAR

The story so far: Ratings agency ICRA recently pointed out that the government had risen to cut cess levies on retail prices of petrol and diesel, thereby easing prices. Lower fuel prices will likely help cool inflation levels, which are currently beyond the 6% upper limit specified by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Why has the ICRA said that there is room to cut cess levies?

The ICRA anticipates an increase in the mobility of the population and economic recovery after the easing of curbs and accelerating pace of COVID-19 vaccinations. It forecasts that consumption of petrol and diesel would hence grow at about 4% and 8%, respectively, in the financial year 2022-23 (from the low base in financial lockdown-hit 2020-21).

The agency projects aggregate revenue from such taxes on these two fuels to expand by about 6% in FY22 from the previous year, assuming that the total cesses on unbranded petrol and diesel remain unchanged at ₹3.9/litre and ₹1.8/litre, respectively. That is, the forecast for government revenue from the cesses imposed on these two fuels is ₹3.6 lakh crore this fiscal, or about ₹40,000 crore more than in the last financial year.

The ICRA argues that if the government decides to forego the additional revenue that could accrue with higher fuel consumption, it would be able to cut it up to ₹4.50 per litre for petrol and diesel each.

How much tax do we pay on a litre of petrol? As of June this year, taxes accounted for close to 58% of the price of petrol in Delhi. Between May 2014 and June 2021, the Centre's share of taxes on the retail price of petrol rose 28%, even though the base price of the fuel declined 24%. As per an analysis by The Hindu, if one had bought a litre in New Delhi for ₹94.49 on June 01, 2021 (as

per the latest data available from the government's Petroleum Planning and Analysis cell), ₹52.90 would have accrued to the Centre as tax. Compare this with the Centre's tax of ₹10.39 when the total price of the fuel was ₹71.40 per litre in May 2014.

In its June analysis, the ICRA highlighted that the current fuel prices reflect the higher cesses that have been imposed by the Centre since March 2020 and an increase in Value Added Tax (VAT) rates by more than three-fourths of the State governments.

Its estimates showed that on average, the prices of petrol and diesel rose to ₹96/litre and ₹57/litre, respectively, in June 2021, from ₹75.5/litre and ₹58.4/litre, respectively, in April 2019, despite the U.S. dollar price of the Indian crude oil basket being at similar levels (about ₹572 on average in June in Indian basket terms) at these two points in time.

Would a reduction in fuel cesses affect the government's ability to pay interest and principal on oil bonds issued to public oil marketing companies (OMCs) as compensation for subsidies? The agency has estimated that the Centre needs ₹20,000 crore in the current financial year to service the interest and principal related to special oil bonds issued to oil marketing companies (OMCs) in the period 2006-2010. If this debt servicing obligation is to be offset through additional revenues collected from fuel cesses, then the potential duty cut could be to the tune of ₹2 per litre for both fuels, it said. The government had serviced interest of close to ₹10,000 crore related to the oil bonds in each of the financial years FY20 and FY21, according to a recent Budgetary Review report. The last principal payment was made in March 2015, of ₹3,500 crore. The total current outstanding is about ₹1.30 lakh crore, out of which ₹10,000-crore principal and an equal amount as

interest is payable this year, the report said, citing official data. These bonds are interest-bearing, having a fixed coupon rate and paid on a half-yearly basis. The annual interest due of around ₹10,000 crore has been provided for in the Budget.

How can lower fuel prices make it easier for the RBI to balance economic growth and inflation? Retail inflation based on the consumer price index (CPI) has been persistently higher than the RBI's medium-term target of 4%, which, however, allows for a range of 2%-6%.

For May 2021, the provisional inflation reading was 6.3%, owing to persistent price pressures in the transport and communication category, which includes the automotive fuels of petrol and diesel and has a weight of 8.39% in the CPI. The transport and communication category saw price gains accelerate to 12.38% in May, from 11.04% in April.

While the RBI has been trying to maintain a growth-supportive stance by retaining an accommodative monetary stance that includes keeping benchmark interest rates substantially low and unchanged in response to the pandemic, its monetary policy committee (MPC) has been repeatedly warning of upside risks to the inflation trajectory from "international commodity prices, especially of crude, together with logistics costs". The MPC's prescription to address this risk: "Excise duties, cess and taxes imposed by the Centre

NEEVA

Challenging the Google way in search

A new search engine is offering 'a private, ad-free experience with only real results', but for a price

BRIAN BREWSTER

Twenty-three years ago, Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page presented the idea of Google in their research paper, 'The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine', optimistically concluding that "there is a bright future for search". They couldn't have been more prophetic. Google has, over the years, built its massive empire, thanks to the continuing success of its search engine.

It has been so successful that its brand name is synonymous with the word "search", worryingly so for the company. Its rivals have been few and far. And don't forget the commercial success - last year, Google made revenues of over \$100 billion just from its search operation. It is in this Google-dominated universe that newcomer Neeva sees an opportunity. Just a few days ago, Neeva made its search engine available for users in the United States, promising them "a private, ad-free search experience with only real results". Users who sign up get three months of free access, after which they have to pay \$4.95 every month.

There has also been a buzz around Neeva for it being the story of two ex-Googleers, Seidhar Ramaswamy and Vivek Raghavathan, challenging Google in its core business. Mr. Ramaswamy, a former senior vice-president of ads at Google, was part of the team that built Google Search in the early years. Mr. Raghavathan is a former vice-president of monetization at YouTube. They are both IT alums.

So, what opportunity did they sense in a marketplace where Google is near-ubiquitous? Mr. Ramaswamy made this clear in his very first blog for Neeva about a year ago:



Instead of adopting the Google model, which has built an empire, Neeva promises to fix the search experience and seeks to build a subscription model

Google "entered with a new approach to searching - namely, by ranking web pages on the basis of the number of links to those pages and, eventually, by supporting it self with advertising," says author Shane Greenstein in the book, *How the Internet Became Commercial*. Like many other internet services, search has almost always been free for users. In 2006, it was in explaining this business strategy that Chris Anderson wrote the book *Free*.

opposed to having it be free, supported by ads?

Last year, in one of his blog posts, he weighed in on the question of price. He wrote: "We will start at a reasonable price, say the cost of two black coffees a month. We hope that over time, we will be able to reduce the price as we become more efficient. Everything that we take for granted (our computers and phones, even ice cream) started out at a higher price point before scale and innovation made them available to everyone."

New challengers

Neeva isn't alone in seeing an opportunity in search. Just a few days before Neeva's announcement, Brave Browser announced the beta version of its search tool - "offering users the first independent privacy search/browser alternative to big tech". In recent years, DuckDuckGo has been an alternative that has

emphasised privacy over other things.

Last month, it said, "Spurred by the increase in our app usage, over the last 12 months, our monthly search traffic increased 55% and we grew to become the #2 search engine mobile in many countries, including in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands". It further said: "We don't track our users so we can't say for sure how many we have, but based on market share estimates, download numbers, and national surveys, we believe there are between 70-100 million DuckDuckGo users."

TechCrunch reported DuckDuckGo picking up another \$60 million in investment, saying, "Privacy tech continues cooking on gas".

In March this year, Neeva raised a further \$40 million in funding from Sequoia Capital, Greylock Partners and Inovia Capital. They had

raised a similar amount in an earlier round.

This is a very different world compared to the initial years of Google, when it was important to not only improve the search results but also build new features. These years saw new features such as news, shopping, videos, and maps coming in. Privacy has emerged as an important competitive element across many digital product categories.

The world has changed in another way. As David Doty wrote in a Forbes article,

"People aren't just typing in a search term on whichever main search engine they prefer - they're searching and consuming in context, on YouTube, Netflix, Amazon or Pinterest and increasingly on any of a zillion specialized apps."

The point being, the search market is more fragmented than ever.

And yet, as a study last year by the Competition and

Markets Authority of the U.K. pointed out, "There is a long history of search providers other than Google and Bing choosing to outsource some or all of their search engine activities."

The reference is to them maintaining web indexes. It said, "The main way that they acquire information for their index is through their automated web-crawling bots. These bots follow the links between webpages and bring data about those pages back to the search engine's servers."

The *Fast Company* story says Neeva "has indexed several billion web pages on its own but also credits Apple, Bing, and Yelp at the bottom of search results; other information providers include Intrinio, Weather.com, and Xignite. Even Google is an ingredient, with Google Maps embedded in search results".

The important question now is: will users pay for search?

In Focus

• Neeva was founded by two ex-Googleers, Seidhar Ramaswamy and Vivek Raghavathan. They are both IT alums

• In March, Neeva, which had earlier raised \$40 million, raised a further \$40 million in funding from Sequoia Capital, Greylock Partners and Inovia

• A few days ago, Neeva made its search engine available for users in the U.S. Those who sign up get three months of free access, after which they have to pay \$4.95 every month

BILL COSBY

Free from prison

The star comedian's conviction has been overturned over a legal loophole

SHRATIN LAKHMAN

Bill Cosby (83), the man known as "America's Dad" and famed megastar of "The Cosby Show", of the 1980s, who then fell spectacularly from grace after being convicted on sexual assault charges after more than 50 women accused him of sexual misconduct, walked free this week after the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned his 2018 conviction, owing to a technicality in the trial. His release prompted an outpouring of shock and despair among his accusers and within the #MeToo movement and broader campaigns for justice for victims of sexual assault and harassment, with some describing his overturned conviction as the story of "a rich entitled man who beat the odds through good lawyering".

Cosby was born William Henry Cosby Jr. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 12, 1937, one of three children to Navy mess steward William Senior and domestic worker Anna. Although his father abandoned their family while Cosby was still a young child, he went on to have a four-year stint as a Navy medical corpsman, during which time he completed high school and secured an athletic scholarship at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Cosby performed well in sports, yet dropped out of university when his comedy career began its meteoric



uptake. Nevertheless he returned to academia a few years later to finish his BA and then acquire both an MA and a PhD in Education. Cosby started television produce *Carroll's Blank* in 1964 and they had six children, of whom one, Ennis, died tragically after being shot in 2007.

Despite the many allegations and accusations that Cosby faced, his conviction ultimately came in the case brought by one accuser, Andrea Constand, director of Operations for the Temple University women's basketball team. Ms. Constand alleged that when she met Cosby at his home in January 2004, he gave her pills in the pretext of reducing her stress, but following that he sexually assaulted her.

Subsequently Ms. Constand filed civil charges against him, yet that case was settled out of court for an unspecified amount in 2006. Nevertheless, in December 2015, Cosby was arraigned on one charge of aggravated indecent assault regarding Ms. Constand's allegations. In April 2018, Cos-

bys highly publicised allegations began to surface against him, including of rape, sexual assault facilitated by drugging victims, sexual battery, and other crimes related to sexual misconduct.

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While most TV peddlers have indicated that they would continue to stand by their decisions to shut the idea of ever signing Cosby on for any new programming after his release, it remains to be seen whether a man once regarded as an icon of wholesome family values then revealed to be a sexual predator will succeed in rehabilitating his public image.

Many allegations

It was from the mid-1960s, spanning 1965 to 2008, and across 10 U.S. States and one Canadian province, that

he was found guilty on three counts of felony aggravated indecent assault against Ms. Constand, and then in September of that year, he was sentenced to three to 10 years in State prison.

Cosby managed to get his conviction overturned on June 30, 2021, because of a legal loophole, the fact that in his civil case in 2005, erstwhile District Attorney for Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Bruce Castor, made a promise that Cosby would not be charged in a criminal case because he had deposed in the civil case.

This decision has resulted in a setback for the gains achieved through the #MeToo movement of recent years. Since #MeToo kicked off, Cosby was the first major criminal conviction, following allegations of sexual assault made against disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

While most TV peddlers have indicated that they would continue to stand by their decisions to shut the idea of ever signing Cosby on for any new programming after his release, it remains to be seen whether a man once regarded as an icon of wholesome family values then revealed to be a sexual predator will succeed in rehabilitating his public image.

AKHIL GOGOI

Always in opposition

The activist MLA says he will continue to fight the BJP's 'communal agenda'

RAHEL KARMAKAR

Akhil Gogoi has had run-ins with the Assam government since he took the Right to Information (RTI) route to expose alleged wrongdoings in 2005. But it took a turn for the worse in December 2019 when he took to the streets against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). He had been jailed for 18 months for allegedly fomenting violence during the anti-CAA protests and maintaining links with Marxists.

On July 1, he was cleared of all charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act.

In 2004-05, Mr. Gogoi led the Doyang-Tengnari Sangram Samiti that concentrated on the Doyang-Tengnari area of eastern Assam's Golaghat district where the locals, some of them alleged encroachers on forest land, were experiencing ecological transitions due to the government's development agenda. He formed the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMS) around that time to take up issues on a larger scale. The organisation worked on a diverse range of issues affecting farmers and daily wagers - from public distribution system thefts and anti-implementation of the rural job scheme, to land rights and fighting big dam projects. About 100 cases were filed against him over the years.

Ironically, the 45-year-old Mr. Gogoi's political journey began by rejecting the pub-



lic turn the India Against Corruption campaign, led by Anna Hazare, had taken in 2011. His KMS dissociated from the movement after Arvind Kejriwal, now the Delhi Chief Minister, and his associates decided to form the Aam Aadmi Party. But the KMS took the political plunge by forming the Ganak Mukti Sangram Asom in March 2015 for "changing the capitalist system of India". Later, the KMS mobilised support for fighting the Sarbananda Sonowal-led government over its "Hindutva" and "anti-people" agenda, specifically the bid to implement the CAA.

being its president. The party contested the 2021 Assembly polls in alliance with the Assam Jatiya Parishad, also borne out of the anti-CAA protests, and Mr. Gogoi emerged the front's only victor, from the Sibsagar constituency. He became the second leader after George Fernandes to win an election from jail.

Assam-based academic Udayon Misra said Mr. Gogoi added a new dimension to the politics of protest in the State. This virtually made him a one-man opposition during the Tarun Gogoi-led Congress government and the BJP-led alliance later. He was arrested in June 2012 for instigating violence during a siege of the Assam Secretariat to protest against alleged eviction of locals from the hills around Covaihat. In September 2020, he was arrested again after an eviction drive in Kuntiara National Park turned violent. A decade ago, he said his Marxist belief made him fight

for social transformation. He joined the United Revolutionary Movement Council of Assam, a mass organisation of the CPI-Marxist-Leninist in the late 1980s but left a couple of years later to join Natus Podatik, an Assam Marxist journal.

The Congress government charged him for having links with Marxists in 2020, based on a photograph he had allegedly posed in with CPI-Marxist leaders in the Sarbari forest of Jharkhand in 2009. The special court of the National Investigation Agency, which acquitted him on July 1, said the photographic evidence was inconclusive. "It may be true in Maran, but I am definitely not a Marxist; the government is desperate to brand me as," Mr. Gogoi said.

He wants to focus on the development of his Assembly constituency besides spending quality time with college teacher wife Girishree Tasnami, son and 84-year-old mother Priyada Gogoi, who had campaigned for him during his election.

Mr. Gogoi has also vowed to revive the anti-CAA fight and continue to protest the "pro-dam" and the "communal" agenda of the BJP-led government. Among his goals is ensuring a "BJP-free" Assam by 2026. But Mr. Gogoi insists that he targets political parties based on issues concerning the peasants and marginalised classes, pointing to his call to vote out the Congress from Assam in 2011.

OPEC+ seeks consensus on oil output

Without a deal, the alliance could limit supply even as rising oil prices are slowing economic recovery

REUTERS

CONOR PERIN/REUTERS

OPEC+ will resume talks on Monday after failing to reach a deal on oil output policy for a second day running on Friday because the United Arab Emirates blocked some aspects of the pact.

The stand-off could delay plans to pump more oil through to the end of the year to cool off prices that have soared to 2½-year highs. Without a deal, the alliance could keep tighter restraints on output with oil prices now trading around \$75 a barrel, more than 40% up this year.

Fanning global inflation
Consumers want more crude to aid a global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rise in oil prices is contributing to global inflation.



Row control: The UAE blocked a deal mooted by Saudi Arabia and Russia to add 2 mn bpd by the end of 2021. ■ WIRE

ion, slowing the economic recovery from the novel coronavirus crisis.

The UAE put the brakes on a deal that had been pushed by top producers Saudi Arabia and Russia to increase output by 2 million barrels per day (mbpd) by the

end of 2021 and extend remaining cuts to the end of 2022, instead of ending in April.

Responding to oil demand destruction caused by the COVID crisis, OPEC+ had agreed last year to cut output by almost 10 million bpd

from May 2020, with plans to phase out the cuts by the end of April 2022. Cuts now stand at about 5.8 million bpd.

If UAE blocks any deal, the remaining cuts would likely stay in place. There is a slim chance the deal could fall apart and all countries could pump as much as they want.

Under another scenario, the group could agree to increase output in the end of 2021 but postpone discussions about extending the deal beyond April 2022. OPEC+ sources said UAE had made this proposal.

OPEC+ sources said the UAE complained that its baseline – the level from which any cuts are calculated – was originally set too low, as it was raised before but was ready to tolerate if the deal ended in April 2022 but not if

it went on longer.

The UAE has ambitious production plans, investing billions of dollars to boost capacity. The OPEC+ pact has left about 30% of UAE capacity idle, sources say.

Russia's focus on shale

In the build up to the meeting this week, OPEC+ sources had said Russia was insisting on releasing more oil to the market as the rise in prices was encouraging the growth of rival U.S. shale output – which tends to need higher prices to be economic.

OPEC's leader Saudi Arabia had taken a more cautious approach saying fewer barrels should be released given uncertainties that remained about the course of the pandemic with virus variants causing new outbreaks in many countries.

INTERVIEW | P. MADHAVAN

'Europe's scooter market an opportunity for us'

Capex will help expand tyre capacity: TVS Srichakra EVP

P. ANAND



really gave us a push while developing the product in coordination with our Milan R&D centre.

What more can we expect in this tie-up?

■ Eurogrip, as a bike tyre specialist brand, will continue to invest and expand its presence in all powered two-wheeler segments: Touring, Off-Road, On-Road, Trail and many more, all in due time.

Right now, we are in the middle of testing an off-road tyre (Motocross/Enduro), and the results, so far, have been outstanding. Post this, we'll move to a street product in radial as well as bias construction for motorcycles of medium and high displacement.

Do you have plans to set up a facility in Europe?

■ We are at present focusing on capacity expansion in India for two-wheelers and OTR. We have earmarked significant capex for the purpose.

Can we see the European products in India?

■ As a manufacturer of 2-wheeler tyres for over 3 decades, we were confident of making a mark in developed markets

As a manufacturer of 2-wheeler tyres for over 3 decades, we were confident of making a mark in developed markets



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Kerber, Federer shake off the rust, enter second week

The 2018 champion beats Sasnovich from a set down to set up a meeting with Gauff; Swiss maestro overcomes a spirited Norrie in four

WIMBLEDON

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Former Wimbledon champion Angelique Kerber was put through the wringer early in her third-round clash against unseeded Alizé Cornet on Saturday, but rallied from a set down to win 2-6, 6-0, 6-1.

Kerber, who had overcome Sara Sorribes Tormo in the previous round in the longest women's match at Wimbledon since 2011 (hours 18 minutes), made a sluggish start against Sasnovich by twice dropping serve in the opening set to go 0-4 down.

World No. 100 Sasnovich, taking on a second former Wimbledon champion this week after watching Serena Williams limp off injured in their opener, wrapped up the first set in style after rain temporarily halted action on Court No. 2.

But Kerber's response was blistering, handing her 23-year-old opponent a bagel to level the contest.

A wayward forehand by Sasnovich gifted Kerber the advantage at 3-1 in the decider and the only remaining Wimbledon winner in the women's singles draw finished off the match with an ace.

The German will next meet 17-year-old American Coco Gauff, who matched her 2019 dream Wimbledon debut run with a 6-3, 6-3 defeat of Kaja Juvan.

Gauff, the 20th seed, raced to a 5-1 lead in 18 minutes. She went off the boil briefly to lose two games, before recovering to take the set. The teenager established a lead in the second set and never looked back.

Next on Centre Court was eight-time winner Roger Federer and he dispatched local favourite Cameron Norrie 6-4, 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 to enter the Wimbledon last 16 for the 18th time.

Federer on course

Federer is the third-oldest man to reach the round of 16 at Wimbledon in the Open Era – after Pancho Gonzales

140 in 1968 and Ken Rosewall 140 in 1975.

Victory was in sight for the Swiss much earlier, but he bluffed two break points in the fifth game of the third set and Norrie dug deep to stretch the match into the fourth. But once Federer broke for 5-4, there was no second opportunity.

Federer finished with 48 winners and will face Italy's Lorenzo Sonego next.

Out of steam

On Friday, two-time winner Andy Murray's run ended with a crushing 4-6, 2-6, 2-6 loss to 30th seed Denis Shapovalov.

The tournament, overall, was a positive for the Brit, but the result – it was his most lopsided defeat at Wimbledon – left him with mixed feelings.

"There is a part of me that feels a bit like I have put in so much work the last three months and, you know, ultimately didn't play how I would want and expect, and it's like, is it worth it?", he pondered.

The highlights



KERBER

FEDERER after entering his 60th fourth round at Majors

After Federer Open 2021 second straight Major Gauff has reached the fourth round without losing a set

B Kerber is on a eight-match winning run, her longest since the 10-match streak in early 2019 (Sydney and Azk Open)

29 Number of days between Federer's exit from French Open on a wheelchair – he underwent knee surgery to repair the torn meniscus – and third-round match against Zweig at Wimbledon

33-8 Ranking of 18-year-old British wild card Emma Raducanu, who is in the women's fourth round

THE RESULTS

Third round

Men: 4-Zweig (Ger) bt 31-Fritz (USA) 6-7(1), 6-4, 6-3, 7-6(4); 6-Federer (Sui) bt 29-Cameron Norrie (GBR) 6-4, 6-4, 5-7, 6-4; 7-Bernardini (Ita) bt 32-Bedene (Slv) 6-4, 6-4, 6-4; 14-Hurkacz (Pol) bt 28-Lublik (Kaz) 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

23-Sonko (Ita) bt Duckworth (Aus) 6-3, 6-4, 6-4; 19-Shishkin (Rus) bt Thompson (Aus) 6-4, 6-4, 6-4; 18-Auper-Aljazsim (Cnr) bt Krajicek (Aus) 2-6, 6-1, 6-1.

Women: 1-Barty (Aus) bt Sharapova (GBR) bt 31-Dinara (Rus) 6-3, 7-5; Tomljanovic (Aus) bt 32-Sperkova (Cz) 4-6, 6-4, 6-2; 20-Gauff (USA) bt 31-Juarez (Mex) 6-3, 6-3; 25-Kerber (Ger) bt Sasnovich (Bel) 7-5, 6-3; 30-Bedene (Eng) bt Linette (Pol) 5-7, 6-2, 6-4; 14-Raducanu (GBR) bt Sevastova (Lat) 7-6(7), 3-6, 7-5.

Fallen seeds

Men: 29-Norrie, 31-Fritz

Women: 16-Pavlyuchenkova

Bopanna-Sania duo advances to third round

AGENCIES

India's Rohan Bopanna and Sania Mirza beat the British duo of Alison McHugh and Emily Webley-Smith 6-3, 6-1 in the second round of the mixed doubles event on Saturday.

The Indian pair hit 11 winners to two by their opponents and made only five unforced errors to seven before Bopanna finished the contest with an exquisite lob on the second match point.

Sania and Bopanna had earlier defeated Ankita Raina and Ramkumar Ramanathan in a historic all-Indian Grand Slam clash in the opening round.

However, Sania tasted defeat in women's doubles along with her American partner Bethanie Mattek-Sands.

Sania, who returned to the grass court Grand Slam after four years, and Mattek-Sands lost 4-6, 3-6 to Russians Elena Vesnina and Veronika Kudermetova in one hour 38 minutes.

IN BRIEF



Robinson gets reprieve

Cricketer Ollie Robinson is free to play for England again after receiving an eight-game ban – five of them deferred – for offensive tweets he posted several years ago. The England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Saturday. He will be available for the five-Test series against India as a disciplinary panel ruled he had already served the three-game ban.



Semenya's Tokyo hopes dimming

Caster Semenya, poised out of her favourite race by World Athletics' testosterone rules, took a late shot at qualifying for Tokyo in the 5,000m, an event not affected by the hormone regulations. The two-time Olympic 800m champion, however, came up short. The 30-year-old South African's hopes of making it to the Tokyo Olympics have dwindled.

Olympics protest rules relaxed

Athletes at Tokyo 2020 will be allowed to "express their views" before and after competing – but not on the podium – after Olympics chiefs relaxed some of the rules for protests. The International Olympic Committee released guidelines on Friday softening a long-standing ban on political protests.



Teuns wins eighth stage, Pogacar takes yellow

Belgian Dylan Teuns won the eighth stage of the Tour de France, a 150.8 km ride from Oyonnax, on Saturday. Defending champion Tadej Pogacar claimed the yellow jersey with a stunning attack 32km from the finish.

Aronian leads Artemiev

Levon Aronian's win in the third game decisively swung the first set in his favour against a fighting Vladimir Artemiev in the final of the Goldmines Asian Rapid online rapid chess tournament on Saturday.

The results (Set One): Total: Levon Aronian (Arm) 0.5-1.5, Vladimir Artemiev (Rus) 1.5-1.5; Third place: Magnus Carlsen (Nor) 0.5-0.5; Ding Liren (Chi) 2.5-1.5.

Denmark keeps its dreams alive

Sees off a spirited second-half fightback from the Czechs

EURO 2020

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

Denmark's fairytale run at Euro 2020 will continue into the semifinals after it defeated the Czech Republic 2-1 on Saturday to move into a last-four meeting with either England or Ukraine at Wembley.

First-half goals from Thomas Delaney and Kasper Dolberg were enough to see Kasper Hjulmand's men through despite a second-half rally from the Czechs inspired by Patrik Schick's fifth goal of the tournament.

The Danes have now scored 10 goals in winning their last three matches after



The clincher: Kasper Dolberg, second right, bundles the ball home for Denmark's second.

starting the tournament with two defeats, the first amid shocking circumstances when Christian Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest on the pitch.

Three weeks on, they are dreaming of a repeat of 1992 when Denmark won the European Championship despite not even qualifying.

On Saturday, Denmark

was celebrating within five minutes as Delaney was left completely unmarked as he beat home Jess Stryger Larsen's corner.

Blistering start: Tomas Vaclik then had to prevent Mikkel Damsgaard to prevent the Danes doubling their lead in a blistering start.

Vaclik though was powerless three minutes before half-time when Joakim Maehle added another assist to his fine tournament with a teasing cross that Dolberg smashed home.

The result: Quarterfinals: Czech Republic 1 (Schick 49) lost to Denmark 2 (Delaney 5, Dolberg 42).

Italy motors past Belgium

Makes the semis at the expense of the World No. 1 side

REUTERS

ITALY

Italy reached the Euro 2020 semifinals with a 2-1 win over Belgium on Friday as first-half goals from Nicolo Barella and Lorenzo Insigne netted a thrilling encounter against the number one-ranked team in the world.

Barella fired home the opener after 31 minutes before Lorenzo Insigne's wonderful curling strike doubled Italy's advantage on the brink of half-time before Romelu Lukaku pulled one back for Belgium in first-half stoppage time.

Both sides had chances to score after the break in a breathless match, but Roberto Soriano's side held on



Delectable curler: Insigne's brilliant effort beats Belgium's defences. (GETTY IMAGES)

for a 12th consecutive win to extend its record unbeaten run to 32 games.

Italy will face Spain at Wembley on Tuesday for a

Verstappen takes pole

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

Red Bull's Max Verstappen will start on pole for the Austrian Grand Prix after edging out McLaren's Lando Norris in qualifying on Saturday. The day also saw Lewis Hamilton extend his contract with Mercedes until 2023.

Verstappen, with 80,337 runs, is the most prolific batter in women's internationals, overtaking Edwards' 80,273.

When asked how she felt about becoming the highest run-getter across formats, Mithali replied: "I am happy."

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

INDIA

India captain Mithali Raj became the highest run-getter in women's cricket across formats, surpassing former England skipper Charlotte Edwards, here on Saturday.

Mithali achieved the feat during the third ODI against hosts England while chasing 220 for a consolation win. The talismanic India batter reached the milestone with a boundary off Nellie Sciver in the 23rd over.

Mithali, with 80,337 runs, is the most prolific batter in women's internationals, overtaking Edwards' 80,273.

When asked how she felt about becoming the highest run-getter across formats, Mithali replied: "I am happy."

Mithali's numbers

■ 600 runs, 11 Tests (88 inn)

■ 734, 217 ODIs (96 inn)

■ 5992, 191 T20Is (180 inn)

■ 265, 85 T20s (84 inn)

Verstappen takes pole

Red Bull's Max Verstappen (Red Bull), Norris (McLaren), Perez (Red Bull), Hamilton (Mercedes), Gandy (AlphaTauri), Russell (Williams), Stroll (Aston Martin), Sainz (Ferrari), Vettel (Aston Martin), Leclerc (Ferrari), Ricciardo (McLaren), Alonso (Alpine), Giovinazzi (AlphaTauri), Räikkönen (Alfa Romeo), Gasly (AlphaTauri), Ocon (Alpine), Latifi (Williams), Mick Schumacher (Haas), Mazepin (Haas).

Ranji Trophy from Nov. 16

BCCI announces domestic calendar

ANIL KARLADESH

INDIA

olved being paramount," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said at a statement.

Format: According to the statement, the Ranji Trophy and Vijay Hazare Trophy will have 38 teams being divided in four groups (nine each in Group A and B and 10 each in C and D). The Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy will see the teams being divided in five groups, with three of eight teams each and two with seven.

Even as the schedule will help scores of cricketers and officials have a sigh of relief, stakeholders are desperately waiting for the announcement of the compensation package committed by the BCCI.

The BCCI is confident of hosting the domestic season with health and safety of players and all people in

The schedule

MEN

Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy: Oct. 20 to Nov. 12

Ranji Trophy: Nov. 16 to Feb. 19, 2022

C.R. Nayudu (U-23) Trophy: Nov. 18 to Feb. 12, 2022

State A/C One-day (U-23) tournament: Feb. 23 to Mar. 26, 2022

Vijay Merchant (U-19) Trophy: Sept. 28 to Oct. 29

U-19 One-day Challenger Series: Nov. 3 to Nov. 9

Coch Behar (U-19) Trophy: Nov. 14 to Feb. 7, 2022

Vijay Merchant Trophy (U-19): Oct. 1 to Dec. 7

WOMEN

Senior One-day League: Sept. 21 to Oct. 27

Senior One-day Challenger Trophy: Oct. 27 to 31

Senior T20 League: Mar. 19 to Apr. 11, 2022

U-23 T20 League: Jan. 17 to Feb. 7, 2022

U-23 One-day League: Feb. 21 to Mar. 15, 2022

U-19 One-day League: Oct. 1 to 31

U-19 T20 League: Nov. 4 to 27

U-19 One-day Challenger Trophy: Dec. 1 to 5,

Gutsy Harika finishes runner-up

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

INDIA

World No. 1 Hou Yiliang of China won the Women's Speed Chess Championship, beating B. Harika IS-13 in the final on Saturday.

Harika put up a brave fight till the end, and had leveled the score at 13-13 in the final segment, after trailing by two points. But, however, won the last two games to clinch the title.

24-member athletics team for Paralympics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA