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IN BRIEF

Hit-and-run on Dhanbad judge was deliberate: CBI

PATNA The CBI told the Jharkhand High Court on Thursday that the hit-and-run involving the Additional Sessions Judge of the Dhanbad court in Jharkhand was deliberate.

NEWS PAGE 9

Police force mourns death of former chief

NEW DELHI Former Delhi Police Commissioner Y.S. Dadwal breathed his last on Wednesday night at 70 after a prolonged illness.

CITY PAGE 2

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Modi meets Adobe, Qualcomm CEOs on first day of U.S. visit

PM, Biden to discuss Afghan situation, terror

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
 WASHINGTON DC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked off his first visit to the U.S. in two years, with meetings with CEOs of Fortune 500 companies in the morning and bilateral meetings with Vice-President Kamala Harris and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan and Scott Morrison of Australia scheduled for the afternoon.

Mr. Modi's motorcade arrived at the Willard Intercontinental, a short distance



Investor talk: PM Narendra Modi meeting CEO of First Solar Mark R. Widmar in Washington DC on Thursday. ANI

from the White House, just before 7.30 p.m. on a wet and windy fall evening in Washington. On Thursday morning, he met with the CEOs of five companies that have invested in India or

have significant investment potential: semiconductor and wireless technology manufacturer Qualcomm, renewable energy company First Solar, software company Adobe, energy systems

and arms manufacturer General Atomics, and investment management company the Blackstone Group.

The main events for his DC trip, however, are Friday's bilateral talks with U.S. President Joe Biden to discuss India's 'Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership', and a Quad summit with Mr. Biden, Mr. Suga and Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Modi and Mr. Biden will discuss a range of issues, including Afghanistan and counter-terrorism. They are also expected to discuss trade and climate cooperation.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Minor girl sexually assaulted near Mumbai, 26 arrested

2 minors among those held, search on for 3 more accused

STAFF REPORTER
 MUMBAI

In a shocking crime, a minor girl was sexually assaulted over a period of nine months. The Manpada police in Dombivli, a town neighbouring Mumbai, have booked 29 accused and arrested 26, including two minors, under the Indian Penal Code as well as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO).

The arrested have been remanded in police custody till September 29. The minor offenders have been sent to a juvenile remand home. Police teams are searching for three others.



Some of the accused seen at the Manpada police station.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

force her into physical relations with some of his friends.

"The victim reached the police station on Wednesday night. According to her statement, the accused sexually assaulted her repeatedly at various locations from January to September this year," said Additional Commissioner of Police (east region) Datta Karale.

A Special Investigation Team, headed by Assistant Commissioner of Police (Administration) Sonali Dhole, has been formed to probe the case.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

2 die in Assam eviction drive

11 injured as mob clashes with police in Darrang



A policeman kicking a man in Dholpur on Thursday.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 GUWAHATI

Two persons were killed and 11 others, including nine policemen, were injured when a large mob clashed with the police during an eviction drive in northern Assam's Darrang district on Thursday afternoon.

The incident happened at Dholpur 3, one of four areas the police had targeted for

evicting about 800 families of Bengali-speaking Muslims "illegally occupying" about 4,500 bighas of government land. A similar eviction drive on September 20 passed off

peacefully, with some families dismantling their houses and moving elsewhere, officials said.

"Two civilians are probably dead and two more injured, along with nine police personnel. A mob of not less than 4,000 resisted the eviction drive by throwing stones at the police and attacking them with sharpened bamboo sticks," Darrang's Superintendent of Police Sushanta Biswa Sarma told *The Hindu*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

SC may form panel to look into snooping charges

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
 NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) N.V. Ramana on Thursday indicated the Supreme Court's intention to form a committee to examine allegations that the government used Israeli-based Pegasus software to spy on citizens.

The revelation came when the CJI informed senior advocate C.U. Singh, who represented one of the petitioners in the case, that the court wanted to pass or-

ders this week but could not do so because some of the members it had shortlisted for the committee were unavailable due to personal reasons. The CJI said the court would now pass orders sometime next week.

The court decided to pass an interim order after the government expressed reservations over filing a "detailed" affidavit responding to the allegations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Panel set up to monitor Delhi riots probe

STAFF REPORTER
 NEW DELHI

Police Commissioner Rakesh Asthana has ordered the setting up of a Special Investigation Cell (SIC) to expedite and streamline the investigation and scrutiny of north-east Delhi riots cases.

Last week, a Delhi court came down heavily on the city police for its "lackadaisical approach" and said no steps for the proper prosecution of the 2020 riots cases had been taken by the Police Commissioner and other top officials. The order, dated September 20, said the

SIC will be constituted under the chairmanship of Special Commissioner of Police (Central Zone) with Joint Commissioner (Eastern range), Deputy Commissioner (East) and Additional DCP (East) as members.

Mr. Asthana said the panel shall take stock of pending investigations and trial of riots cases and chalk out a strategy to ensure swift investigation and effective prosecution. Officers should be guided to complete the probe timely, the order said.

In the order, the Commissioner said the SIC should

follow up with the Forensic Science Laboratory where case results are pending on priority.

"Need SPPs in court" Emphasising the need for Special Public Prosecutors to be present in court in all matters, the order said the court should be informed in advance in case they are not in a position to attend and suitable adjournment taken.

"In such cases, Senior Police Officers will remain present in the Court to effectively present the facts," the order stated.

No space for anger in politics, says Congress

Party hopes Amarinder Singh will reconsider his remarks against Gandhi siblings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 NEW DELHI

Describing former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's comments against Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as one made in anger, the Congress on Thursday hoped he would reconsider his words as it didn't suit his stature and there was no place for "anger in politics".

Responding to those comments, Mr. Singh was quoted by his media adviser as asking if there was "space for humiliation and insult in politics".

Addressing a press briefing, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate was asked a series of questions on Mr. Singh's outburst against the Gandhi siblings on Wednesday and if he was planning to leave the party after his "unceremonious exit".

Ms. Shrinate said the party had no comments if some-



Supriya Shrinate

We hope he [Amarinder] will rethink his own words while showing prudence, as he has remained a stalwart of the Congress

SUPRIYA SHRINATE
 Congress spokesperson

one wants to leave and that Captain Amarinder is an elder and may have stated things out of anger.



Amarinder Singh

"He is our elder and the elderly often get angry and say a lot of things. We respect his anger, age and experience. We hope he does reconsider his words. But there is no space in politics for anger, envy, enmity, vendetta and personal attacks and comments against political opponents," she told reporters.

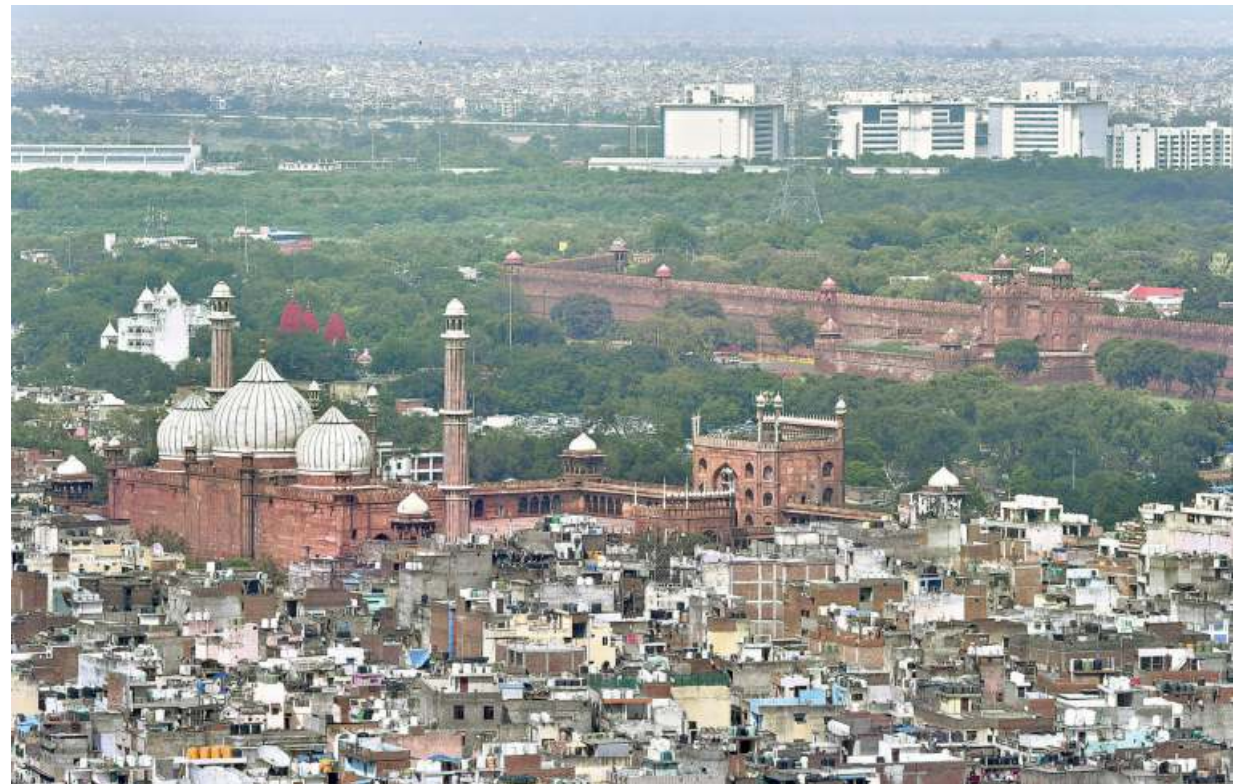
"We hope he will rethink his own words while showing prudence, as he has remained a stalwart of the

Congress party, which made him the Chief Minister for nine years and nine months," Ms. Shrinate said.

"Yes, there's no space for anger in politics. But is there space for humiliation and insult in a grand old party like the Congress? If a senior party leader like me can be treated like this, I wonder what the workers must go through!" Mr. Singh was quoted by Raveen Thukral, who served as the media adviser to the former Punjab Chief Minister.

On Wednesday, Mr. Singh, in a series of media interviews, had called the Gandhi siblings as 'inexperienced' and made it clear that he would strongly oppose the Punjab unit chief, Navjot Singh Sidhu, whom he accused of behaving like a "super CM" with the newly appointed Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi "simply nodding along".

Toxic air



Danger zone: An aerial view of Old Delhi on Thursday, a day after the World Health Organization set new norms for air quality levels. According to Greenpeace India, Delhi's PM2.5 levels in 2020 were 16.8 times more than the revised threshold. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Caste census of Backward Classes difficult, Centre tells SC

It has suffered, and will suffer, both on account of completeness and accuracy of the data, says govt.

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
 NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday told the Supreme Court that a caste census of the Backward Classes was "administratively difficult and cumbersome".

While replying to a writ petition filed by the State of Maharashtra to gather Backward Classes' caste data in the State while conducting Census 2021, the Centre took the issue a step forward to clarify that "exclusion of information" regarding any other caste - other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes - from the purview of the census is a "conscious policy decision".

This comes amid a growing clamour by political parties for a caste-based census, and the ruling BJP's silence.

...the view has consistently been that the caste Census of Backward Classes is administratively difficult and cumbersome; it has suffered and will suffer both on account of completeness and accuracy of the data, as also evident from the infirmities of the SECC 2011 data, making it unusable for any official purposes and cannot be mentioned as a source of information for population data in any official document

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT MINISTRY IN THE SUPREME COURT

The Centre reasoned that even when the census of castes were taken in the pre-Independence period, the data suffered in respect of "completeness and accuracy". It said the caste data enumerated in the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 is "unusable" for official purposes as they

are "replete with technical flaws".

"The issue has been examined at length in the past at different points of time. Each time, the view has consistently been that the caste Census of Backward Classes is administratively difficult and cumbersome; it has suffered and will suffer both on

account of completeness and accuracy of the data, as also evident from the infirmities of the SECC 2011 data, making it unusable for any official purposes and cannot be mentioned as a source of information for population data in any official document," the affidavit filed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment said.

Grave danger

The government said caste-wise enumeration in the Census was given up as a matter of policy from 1951. It said there was a policy of "official discouragement of caste".

On the specific issue of collecting caste data during Census 2021, the Centre explained that a population census was not the "ideal in-

strument" for collection of details on caste. There is a "grave danger" that the "basic integrity" of census data would be compromised. Even the fundamental population count may get "distorted".

Besides, the Centre said, it was too late now to enumerate caste into the Census 2021. Planning and preparations for the census exercise starts almost four years earlier. The phases of Census 2021 had been finalised after detailed deliberations with ministries, data users, recommendations from technical advisory committees, etc. Preparatory work was already in place.

The census questions were finalised in August-September of 2019. Instruction manuals were ready.

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
 BHUBANESWAR

India's vaccination drive may be making steady progress but Odisha has a peculiar problem at hand. Many recipients of the first dose are failing to turn up for their second. Reason: the long interval between the first and second doses has meant that several have forgotten their scheduled date for full vaccination. Several such instances have been noticed in villages across the State of late.

The interval prescribed for two doses of Covishield is 12-16 weeks, while for Covaxin it is 28 days. In Odisha, Covaxin is being administered only in two major urban centres, Bhubaneswar and Bhanpur, and Covishield in the rest of the State.

not turning up for the second dose is a sizeable one.

As of now, 2.83 crore people have been inoculated. About 67% of the State's eligible population has taken the first dose. But 72% of people whose second dose is due have been vaccinated whereas 28% beneficiaries have not come to vaccine centres," said Bijay Panigrahi, director, Family Welfare, and nodal officer for the vaccination drive.

Dr. Panigrahi said though the reminder for the second dose is generated from the CoWIN portal automatically, beneficiaries have not been paying the requisite attention. The State government has come out with a list of people whose second doses are due. Front-line health workers have been instructed

to bring these beneficiaries to vaccine centres.

'Enough vaccine stock'

The State has administered the vaccine to 1.60 lakh pregnant women. "We have enough vaccines (around 20 lakh) stocked with us. For the past three days, we have been administering 4 lakh doses a day. We are also increasing the vaccination sites. As many as 1,775 vaccination centres were identified on Thursday," he said.

The vaccine and vaccination site distribution has been done in such a way as to reflect the State's population spread. "Since beneficiaries in rural areas are more than that in urban areas, we are focusing on villages and setting up centres up to the gram panchayat level," he said.

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PUBLIC NOTICE
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General public is informed that Mrs. Parneet Birgi intends to purchase property bearing Apartment No. 12-07-04, CWG Village, adjacent to Akshardham Temple, New Delhi. Any person having any right, title or interest by inheritance or any claim against the above property should send their claims in writing to the undersigned with supporting documentary evidence within seven (7) days of this notice, failing which such claims shall be deemed to be waived. Issued in public interest on 24.09.2021 by Parneet Birgi, d/o Mahinder Singh r/o 601, Tower 9, CWG Village, New Delhi 110092. Phone: 9989489455 Email: wsindia@gmail.com

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BJP's brainstorming meet plots plans for 2023 Assembly polls

Vasundhara Raje missing, party emphasises on ending factionalism and infighting

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

A two-day brainstorming meeting of Bharatiya Janata Party's Rajasthan unit, held at Kumbhalgarh, addressed the issues of weaknesses as an Opposition party and internal differences, while discussing strategies for the 2023 Assembly election. The performance of all the 71 BJP MLAs was also evaluated on the occasion.



BJP national general secretary B.L. Santosh inaugurating the party's meeting at Kumbhalgarh. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Senior BJP leader and former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje was conspicuous by her absence. The party's national general secretary, B.L. Santosh, presiding over the 'Chintan Shivir', reviewed organisational structure and activities and laid emphasis on ending the perception about 'factionalism and infighting'.

Power continuity
The BJP's State office-bearers and core group members discussed the plans for booth management to be carried out till the elections. The party sources said a consensus emerged in the meeting, which concluded on Wednesday, for highlighting the social welfare schemes of the Narendra Modi government without projecting any individual leader as the Chief Ministerial candidate.

BJP State president Satish Poonia said after returning to Jaipur that the party would try to break the belief that power shifts alternately between the Congress and BJP after every five years. "We will ensure that the BJP returns to power in 2023 and forms the government each time. The party workers will be more vocal on political issues," he said.

No factionalism
Mr. Poonia denied that factionalism was adversely affecting the BJP and said it was the ruling Congress that was witnessing infighting and contradictions because of "two power centres". He affirmed that the BJP was following an ideology rather than an individual. The BJP has been giving importance to Ms. Raje's detractors for the last several months and has even appointed some of them to important organisational posts. Senior leaders such as Mr. Poonia, Gulab Chand Kataria, Rajendra Rathore, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Arjun Ram Meghwal are said to be nursing Chief Ministerial ambitions.

The launch of an outfit in support of Ms. Raje - Vasundhara Raje Samarhat Rajasthan Manch - had created ripples in the political circles earlier this year amid speculations that it was floated at her own behest after her marginalisation by the party's top leadership. Signals of internal feud have been coming from the remarks of Ms. Raje's supporters, who have asked the top leadership to announce her as the party's CM candidate for the 2023 polls, saying she was the "most popular face" of the BJP in the State. Ms. Raje's absence at the 'Chintan Shivir' has only confirmed internal differences.

Khowai ruckus: HC orders stay in probe against TMC's Banerjee, 5 others

No issuance of notices till Nov. 11: court

SYED SAJJAD ALI
AGARTALA

The Tripura High Court on Thursday ordered an interim stay on the ongoing investigation against senior Trinamool Congress leaders, including party's national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee in connection with their visit at the Khowai police station on August 8 last.



Abhishek Banerjee

Chief Justice Akil Kureshi passed the order after hearing a petition filed on behalf of Mr. Banerjee and five other TMC leaders who were booked for allegedly creating ruckus at the Khowai police station and obstructing police officers from discharging duty.

Other leaders
Other leaders who were named in the FIR are West Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu, MP Dola Sen, party's West Bengal General Secretary Kunal Ghosh and two local leaders.

The High Court of Tripura on September 2 admitted a petition that sought

court's order to quash the complaint bearing FIR No. 77 of 2021 registered with the Khowai police station for offence punishable under Section 186 (with sub section 34) of the Indian Penal Code.

Mr. Kureshi held a hearing in the case on Thursday and issued an interim stay on the investigation till November 11 2021. "In the meantime there shall be no further investigation or issuance of the notices against the accused persons," the order read.

The Chief Justice also ordered the listing of the next hearing on November 11.

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And whereas correspondence has been made by this office vide Memorandum no. 4867 - 71 dated 09.10.2018 with the direction to report for duty immediately. Further due to continuous absence from duty a final show cause notice was issued vide no. 986 - 87 dated 25.04.2020 but the official neither reported for duty nor submitted any intimation. Thus, this act of unauthorised absence is unbecoming of govt servant and thus official has violated the provision of CCS (Conduct) Rules and CCS (Leave) Rules and deemed fit for disciplinary action against him.

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Appeal for Identification

General Public is hereby informed that a male dead body Name: Unknown, S/o Unknown, R/O: Unknown, Age: about. 30-35 years, Height: 5'7", Complexion: Wheatish, Built : Strong, Face: Round, Wearing: Black shirt with white dots and blue jeans black belt and silver colour kadaa in right hand found in the Ganda Nala of Village Singhu, New Delhi. In this regard, DD No. 21 dt 13.09.2021 has been lodged at PS Alipur, Delhi. The Dead Body has been preserved at Mortuary of Babu Jagjivan Ram Hospital, Jahangir Puri, Delhi for 72 Hours for identification. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this male but no clue has come to light so far. Any, person having any information or clue about this male may kindly inform to the following.

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OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH
OBITUARY

GURUSWAMI PADMANABHAN affectionately addressed as Paddu, went to his heavenly abode on September 20, 2021 after a brief illness.
Please join his family in celebrating his rich life with Nalini, Venkt, Padma, Paul, Jayanthi, Dakshin, Veda, Vyas, Anjali and Ann. Contact: 91761 47752

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PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON
See Section 82 Cr. PC

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Ajit S/o Jhumman Singh R/o H. No. 936, PKT-7, Sec-A10, Narela, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 212/21, U/s 302/201/34 IPC has been registered at Police Station - Narela, Delhi which is punishable and a warrant of arrest issued thereupon has been returned unexecuted stating that the said accused Ajit could not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Ajit has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Ajit is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before 31.10.2021.

By Order
Ms. Divya Malhotra
L.D. Metropolitan Magistrate-01,
Room No. 116, 1st Floor,
Rohini Court, New Delhi
DP/1272/ON/2021

READ
FRONTLINE
EVERY FORTNIGHT

Does NEET privilege the privileged?

PARLEY

Has Tamil Nadu's stand on the medical entrance exam raised valid questions?

With the Tamil Nadu government seeking to 'dispense' with the requirement for candidates to qualify in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to undergraduate medical courses in the State, the controversy over NEET is alive again. T.N.'s position is rooted in the conclusions of the Justice A.K. Rajan Committee report, which claims that NEET has undermined diverse social representation in MBBS admissions. J. Amalorpavanathan and Sumanth C. Raman discuss whether NEET has adversely affected the disadvantaged groups, in a conversation moderated by Ramya Kannan. Edited excerpts:

T.N. has been opposing NEET since the inception of the test in 2013. While the other States that opposed NEET then have subsequently come to terms with the exam, T.N. continues its crusade. What is the reason for this? Is it simply a question of politicking or one of ensuring social justice?

J. Amalorpavanathan: You are asking us what is unique about T.N. Let's remember that the State (and even Madras, as it was then called earlier) has always been unique. It was the first to demand reservations based on caste and property rights for women. It introduced early on progressive legislation such as property rights for women. Therefore, T.N. is, and always will be, unconventional and progressive. The issue with NEET, too, is a case of the State seeking to assert its federal right on education, running its own medical institutions, and selecting candidates in the manner that it deems fit. So, I'm not surprised that T.N. took the issue of the erosion of federal rights seriously - and rightly so. If other States had commissioned a study on the impact of NEET on the State (like Tamil Nadu did with the Justice Rajan Committee), they might have come to similar conclusions. It is the dissenters who usher in progress - in politics, in science, or in any other field.

Sumanth Raman: The reason for a common entrance test is that different States have different modes of

education and all of them are not necessarily benchmarked against each other. While some States have stringent criteria, others do not. So, the thinking behind NEET is that for certain areas like professional courses - typically, medicine, engineering and law - there needs to be a common entrance test.

The decision of having a common entrance exam was, in fact, taken by the UPA [United Progressive Alliance] government of which the DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] was an integral part. Of course, the difference was that at that time, the modalities or the mandatory nature of this exam had not yet come into force. In fact, it was said that some States would adopt it and some States may not.

The Justice Rajan Committee report is, in fact, an example of why an entrance test like NEET is probably necessary. I don't think he [Justice Rajan] thought that a lot of the data that he put out as part of the report would actually support the pro-NEET arguments.

Look, nobody is saying NEET is 100% fair. But you have to look at it in the context of the earlier system, which was grossly unfair and which was deemed as social justice, where 220 students would get admission from one school and close to 30% of the seats would be cornered by eight to 10 schools. The unfortunate part is that the Tamil Nadu government maintains that Class 12 exam results are infallible and are the right way of evaluating students.

Unfortunately, NEET became a political issue. And once it became political, it has continued to be used for political objectives rather than economic ones.

Both of you mentioned the A.K. Rajan Committee report. Its data point to a lower absorption of first-generation graduates, Tamil students, and rural students into MBBS courses. Do you think the report has been fair to the actual position in the State?

SR: I'm not even very sure that he has applied his mind to the data, which he says was provided by the government. For instance, he says 99% of all students who got admis-



The issue with NEET is States' seeking to assert their federal right on education, running their own medical institutions, and selecting candidates in the manner that they deem fit.

J. AMALORPAPANATHAN

sion into MBBS underwent NEET coaching. The source of the data is not mentioned here. The government has a duty to explain where all the data came from.

It has become apparent that there is cherry-picking of the data. The classic example of this is that for students who got admission into MBBS courses from government schools, the data are only given from 2014 and not from 2010, unlike all other data. The reason for that, which we subsequently found, is that the number of government school students had started dropping from 2010 itself, but there was no NEET then.

The biggest concern is that the outlier data of 2017-18 have been used to justify preconceived conclusions. The previous AIADMK government had given 7.5% reservation for government school students, but the data had started to trend towards the pre-NEET levels from 2019-20, the year before the introduction of the 7.5% quota.

The report says the CBSE students have now claimed 26.8% of all seats, whereas earlier they were claiming 0.11%. You will also have to look at the number of students who applied. In 2010-11, 489 CBSE students applied for MBBS courses compared to the 17,518 applicants from the State Board. In 2015-16, the number of CBSE applicants rose to 1,151 and the number of State Board applicants peaked at 30,777. In 2020-21, the number of CBSE applicants went up further to 7,808, whereas the number of State Board applicants almost halved from the 2015-16 figure, to 15,556. So, is it not logical that when the number of State Board students remains more or less constant or starts to go down, and the number of CBSE applicants goes up, the number of seats that CBSE students take up will also rise?

the contention that the marks required for entry into medical school can be lowered substantially, to ensure diversity, besides keeping students motivated. I would say that measuring merit alone is a very bad indicator for selecting students into medical schools.

A key issue that has been raised repeatedly here is the standard of State Board education. The recommendation to State Boards is that they should up their game, and the poor quality of teaching in schools is attributed to children going to coaching centres. Is this a fair assessment?

JA: This understanding that State Boards promote learning by rote, whereas CBSE encourages analytical thinking is superficial. This is not based on any scientific study. The best way to make an assessment is to do a random double-blind control study with medical students who graduate, drawn from the State Board and CBSE. Find out who has more analytical capacity and who has less. Until then, I won't accept that the State Board is inferior.

SR: I agree that we should do such a study. The government has proposed an exit test that can benchmark students, but that is also being opposed by those who oppose NEET. A number of State Board students who were getting MBBS seats before NEET were to a large extent from coaching institutions/coaching schools from one district, and they paid several lakhs for the schools. The school itself might have doubled up as a coaching institution.

We need to look at the annual ASER reports. The 2017 report said that more than 50% of Class 5 students could not read Class 2-level Tamil texts. We need to ask ourselves whether the quality of education in the State Board is adequate or not. We can choose to ignore these figures, but if there is something that we need to correct, we have to accept it.

Education is on the Concurrent list, allowing the Central government to legislate on it. That makes this a constitutional issue. So, are we at an impasse? If the Centre and T.N. stick to their stand, will there be a resolution at all? Do

you see any possible scenarios that suggest a way out of this?

SR: Honestly, I don't see a possibility of this getting reversed. There has to be an extremely good reason for giving one State an exemption. But this is a land of possibilities. We have seen the Supreme Court change stance on an issue after a period of time, we have seen governments do political deals to facilitate assent. Former Chief Minister Jayalitha managed to push through 69% reservation and get constitutional protection for it.

But do I think it is probable? No, I don't think this will get presidential assent. And even if it does, will it stand the scrutiny of the court? This means that NEET is likely to continue, at least in the near term.

But in the meantime, don't make false promises to students saying that we will abolish it next year, until you get a written order saying that it is not going to be held. As long as NEET is there, ramp up the coaching in government centres for the exam. It is the duty of the government to make sure that as many students as possible, especially those from weaker sections, have the infrastructure and government support to crack the exam. Importantly, please do not politicise suicide and do not give compensation to the families of students who reportedly died due to NEET. This has to stop, and adequate counselling should be provided to students. If students don't crack NEET this year, they have two more opportunities, and if they don't crack it then, there are other career options available.

JA: Yes, I have a strong belief that the President might give his assent because this is an extraordinary situation where two subsequent governments have passed the Bill. I think the Central government will accord consent. It is like what we achieved in the jallikattu issue. Exemption was given for this State alone. Ultimately, democracy has to accede to people's genuine legal rights and legal demands within the framework of the Constitution. There is a High Court case demanding that education be brought back to the State list. Let us wait for the judgment. And even if the judgment goes against the plea, the parties can still go to the Supreme Court and agitate the matter. Therefore, there's a long legal way ahead.



J. Amalorpavanathan is Member, Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission



Sumanth C. Raman is a doctor and political analyst



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

Make departments smart, first

E-governance holds the promise of improving local governance, but only if we pay attention to the basics

ADITYA BATRA, AMEYA ASHOK NAIK, & KRISHNAKUMAR THIAGARAJAN

As India grows more urban, the importance of effective governance and service delivery by city governments becomes central to the well-being of Indians. We hope to live in 'smart cities', where digital systems enable the use of data - generated by people living and working in the city itself - to continuously improve how the city functions.

A smart city requires good data to inform decision-making. The only reliable way to get good data is to design 'smart systems' that generate such data by default. Given the complexity of our cities, and the various entities that are involved in their governance, this journey will have to be undertaken one step at a time.

More precisely, it will be one function at a time, then one department at a time, finally building up to the city as a whole. A department refers to a specific administrative entity, with the mandate to deliver a defined set of services, and the resources it is assigned for delivering them; a function is any such set of services and the people who deliver them. A smart city is a network of smart functions and departments.

Digitisation

What makes a department smart? In a recent white paper, we lay out a five-level framework for assessing where a given function, department, or city stands in its journey of e-governance. This framework looks at how the department has been able to apply digital technologies across three domains - processes, human resources, and citizen-centricity - in order to work more smartly.

The core insight of our paper is that even the most advanced e-governance systems stand on the foundation of a simple behavioural change: when doing their work, local government employees have to switch from using pen and paper and records to using digital tools and systems. This is the first step in the e-governance journey. The reality in most local government offices in India is that records are kept on paper; if they do get digitised, it is as part of a post-fac-

to data entry exercise. This creates scope for errors and manipulation.

To ensure digitisation, city leaders must use a combination of expectation-setting and incentives. They can demonstrate the time saved and ease of work gained when digital tools automate away record creation and retrieval. In Andhra Pradesh, for instance, ULB employees reported saving an average of 11 hours every week after a digital system was adopted. At the same time, leaders can set phased targets for adoption of the new tools, and ensure adequate technical support and education for employees during the transition. These changes are reflected in the 'process' and 'human resources' levers of the framework.

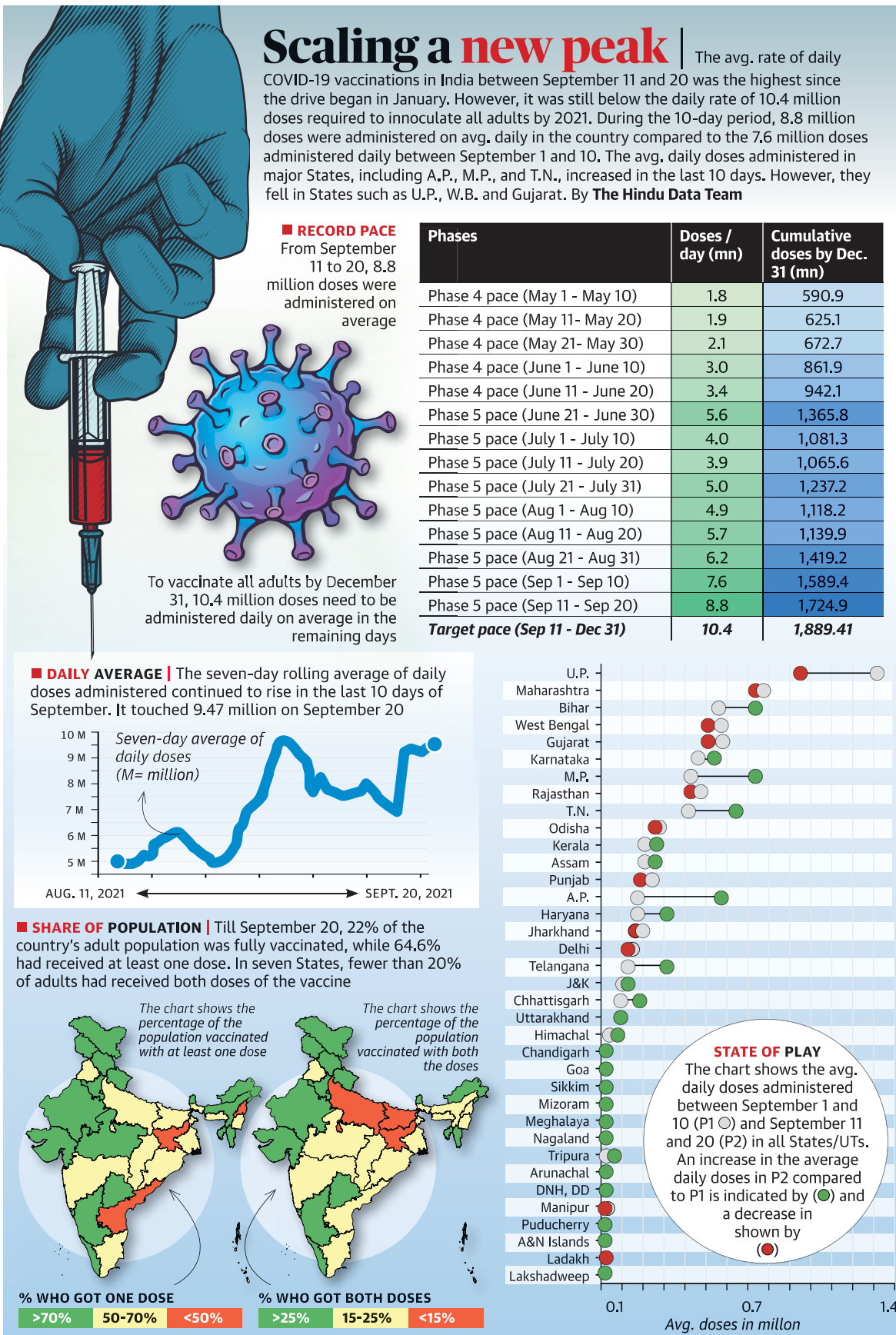
Citizen centricity lever

In implementing such changes, however, administrators must ensure that e-governance is not reduced to an exercise in performance management alone. The framework incorporates a 'citizen centricity' lever to emphasise that urban local bodies are service delivery organisations, and that internal reforms have to reflect in better experience and empowerment for citizens.

All the benefits we associate with e-governance - the ease of interaction, the gains in efficiency through both performance management and process reform, and the potential for data-driven preventive maintenance of infrastructure - hinge upon adoption of the system by local government employees and citizens themselves. In turn, adoption leads to the richer datasets that will bring various departments in a city to collaborate with each other - and indeed with non-governmental partners as well - to create a virtuous cycle of co-creation, learning, and efficiency. This is how smart cities emerge, not from the top down, but from organic collaboration between departments, employees, and citizens, who are simply looking to do their own jobs more effectively.

Aditya Batra is Associate, Ameya Ashok Naik is Senior Manager, and Krishnakumar Thiagarajan is Vice President, eGovernance Foundation

DATA POINT



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 24, 1971

Mao portraits vanish from streets

Though not a single shred of direct evidence has emerged from China so far to prove that Mr. Mao Tse-tung is dead or that his name is being denigrated, one cannot also ignore the number of bits of circumstantial evidence which simply cannot be without meaning or be sheer cases of coincidence. For one thing, reports from Peking have noted how portraits of Mr. Mao have been quietly disappearing from different parts of the city. In Hong Kong a big neon sign atop the Bank of China building which carried a well-known Maoist saying for many years has been mysteriously removed without any explanation. Monitors of Chinese broadcasts in Japan reported to-day [Tokyo, Sept. 23] that for the first time in many years this morning's nationwide domestic broadcast from Peking in the Chinese language did not open with the usual sayings of Mr. Mao. One point seems to be becoming fairly clear that whatever the conflicts that might have possibly developed within Chinese leadership hierarchy or whatever turmoil or disturbance may be rocking the country for some reason, which still remains to be determined, China has decided to denigrate Mr. Mao's name and to eliminate his personality cult which had been so assiduously built up over the years.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 24, 1921

The Great Explosion

Mayence, September 22: The catastrophe at Oppau was due to excess of pressure in two adjoining gasmeters which caused the explosion. It is now estimated that the death toll may reach 1,500. It was at Oppau during the war that the Germans made poison gas. The manufactory has lately been making nitrogen compounds for agricultural fertilisation. A large hole one hundred and thirty yards wide and forty nine deep marks the former site of the gasmeters which blew up. Invaluable assistance was rendered by French troops under General Degoutte, Commander-in-Chief. The fact that several tombstones in Oppau cemetery weighing at least five kilograms were lifted up and hurled sixty feet shows the force of the explosion.

Berlin, Sept. 22: The explosion at Oppau killed some French soldiers who were guarding the works and injured a number of others who were boating on the Rhine. The management of the Badische works assess damage to works at 150,000,000 marks.

IN BRIEF



Meghalaya Cong. must correct course: former CM
GUWAHATI
Former Meghalaya Chief Minister Mukul Sangma on Thursday said the State unit of the Congress needs course correction. He also played down speculation on him quitting the party. The veteran Congress leader, sulking after the All India Congress Committee (AICC) reportedly snubbed him while appointing Lok Sabha member Vincent H. Pala as State party president, said he would seek to rectify the "mistakes" and "wrongs" at an appropriate level within the "four walls of the party".

U.P. Cong. vice-president Lalitesh Tripathi resigns
LUCKNOW
Uttar Pradesh Congress vice-president and former MLA Lalitesh Tripathi on Thursday announced that he had resigned from the party but remained tight-lipped on his next step. Mr. Tripathi is the great grandson of former U.P. Chief Minister Kamalapati Tripathi. Addressing journalists, Mr. Tripathi said he resigned from all posts of the Congress as well as his primary membership. He said he felt he had "lost the right" to continue in the posts.

Ex-chairman of J&K Bank joins Sajad Lone's party
SRINGAR
Former J&K Bank chairman Parvez Nengroo joined Sajad Lone's Peoples Conference (PC) on Thursday. Mr. Lone said Mr. Nengroo would play a key role in scripting the party's economic agenda as he "has had an illustrious banking career and is a hands-on leader who has risen from the ranks". "Parvez sahib's experience and expertise in economic matters will immensely benefit the party in formulating a futuristic economic policy to steer J&K from changelessness to change," Mr. Lone said. Mr. Nengroo was arrested on April 3 this year in the 2019 graft case filed by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, and was granted a bail by a local court.

U.K.-based firm, Indian directors held for fraud
NEW DELHI
The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has booked a U.K.-based company, Molinare Limited, and its Indian directors for allegedly cheating the London branch of Bank of India to the tune of ₹192.48 crore. The company was into post-production services in the entertainment and media industry. The FIR also names its then managing director, Prabodh Kumar Tewari, and his two sons, Anand and Abhishek, as accused. Anand was also a company director. The three accused, who are residents of Maharani Bagh in Delhi, had cheated the bank's London branch of £18.51 million, the CBI stated.

Jabs to be given at home for disabled

Centre gives nod for special provision for those who have restricted mobility and special needs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Persons with restricted mobility, disabilities and those with special needs can get COVID vaccination at home while following all safety protocols, the Health Ministry said on Thursday.

NITI Aayog member (health) V.K. Paul said India had already achieved the milestone of vaccinating 66% of its adult population with one dose of the vaccine.

"The Health Ministry aims to provide maximum vaccine cover to as many people as possible and in the endeavour this is an important step forward. Those who do not have enough mobility, and cannot even access the near-to-home vaccination facility, can be covered under this programme. We have made the provision for at-home vaccination under supervision for this group of persons," Dr. Paul said.

Speaking at the Health Ministry press conference, he said the government was



Improving access: All safety protocols will have to be followed during home vaccination. •PTI

confident that that the system to take vaccines to homes would be safe, effective, nurturing and supportive. "All SOPs will be followed," he said.

"The vaccination drive aims to be equitable and citizen-centric. Hence, the decision to reach those people who are not able to come to the vaccination centre for

some valid reasons has been taken," he said.

Meanwhile, Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan cautioned that though the number of new cases was

declining, people should continue to follow COVID appropriate behaviour and get themselves vaccinated.

Lakshadweep, Chandigarh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Sikkim had reached 100% COVID vaccination coverage of first dose for its population, he said.

Festival SOP

A detailed SOP had been issued for States and Union Territories for the upcoming festival season, with the direction that relaxations and restrictions be imposed based on weekly case positivity, he said.

"We have advised that mass gatherings be avoided in areas identified as containment zones and in districts reporting more than 5% case positivity. Also, gatherings with advance permissions and limited people [as per local context] can be allowed in districts with a positivity rate of 5% and below," Mr. Bhushan said.

SC introduces FASTER system to send records

Bail orders to be transmitted instantly

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

In a big fillip to the fundamental rights of life, dignity and personal liberty, the Supreme Court has introduced a new system by which crucial decisions, including orders on bail and stay of arrest, can be communicated electronically to prison authorities and investigating agencies through a secure channel.

Following an order on July 16 by a Special Bench led by Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, the top court introduced the "Fast and Secured Transmission of Electronic Records" (FASTER) system. The Bench approved its use on Thursday.

The system is meant to ensure that undertrials are not made to wait for days on end behind bars to be released because the certified hard copies of their bail orders took time to reach the prison.

The system would also

prevent unnecessary arrests and custody of people even after the court had already granted them its protection. It may even communicate a stay on an execution ordered by the final court on time.

The process to develop the FASTER system began with the CJJ's observations in court on July 16, "In this modern era of technology, why are we still looking at the skies for pigeons to deliver our orders?"

The court hearing was based on a suo motu case.

The suo motu case was taken after *The Hindu* reported the plight of 13 prisoners in an Agra jail, who suffered imprisonment for up to two decades despite the Juvenile Justice Board declaring them 'juveniles' at the time of commission of their crimes. The top court had granted them bail on July 8, but they were released by the prison authorities after a delay of four days.

Govt. expands compensation ambit

Kin of those who died by suicide 30 days after COVID-19 diagnosis eligible for aid

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry informed the Supreme Court on Thursday that the families of those who died by suicide within 30 days of a COVID-19 diagnosis would be eligible for financial help under the Disaster Management Act.

The statement came against the backdrop of the guidelines issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), which recommended ₹50,000 each as ex gratia to the families of people who died of the virus. The NDMA has proposed that the States should provide the money from their State Disaster Response Fund.

In the previous hearing of the case on September 13, a Bench of Justices M.R. Shah and A.S. Bopanna urged the government to consider ex gratia payment to the fami-



Today, we are very happy. This [COVID compensation] has brought solace to many. This would wipe away the tears of many... We are happy something has been done

JUSTICE M.R. SHAH
Supreme Court judge

lies of people who died by suicide, unable to bear the shock of a COVID-19 positive diagnosis.

On Thursday, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Ministry, stressed that these families were also "entitled to avail financial help as granted under the SDRF" in accordance with the NDMA guidelines of September 11. That is, they too would be eligible for the ₹50,000 ex gratia payment. If the person died by suicide within 30 days of a positive test, it should be deemed

that the person took his own life because of COVID-19, he submitted.

Medical records

During the hearing, the court suggested that the committees proposed to be formed at the district level under the NDMA guidelines to deal with grievances regarding certification of death should be able to directly access hospital medical records to check claims of COVID-19 deaths. This would help resolve cases in which families claim ex gratia assis-

tance but do not have medical records of COVID-19 treatment to show. The court would pass formal orders on the NDMA guidelines on October 4.

On June 30, the court, in a judgment based on a petition filed by advocate Gaurav Bansal, ordered the NDMA to frame uniform guidelines for payment of ex gratia assistance to families of COVID-19 patients who had died. On Thursday, Justice Shah observed that the court was "very happy" with the NDMA guidelines extending financial aid to many families of the COVID-19 dead. "Today, we are very happy... This has brought solace to many... This would wipe away the tears of many," he remarked.

"We are happy something has been done," Justice Shah said. Mr. Mehta stated, "What India has done, no other country has done".

Wearing masks saves lives, stresses court

Judge cautions those who fail to do so

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday sent a strong message to people who ridicule wearing masks in public.

A Bench of Justices M.R. Shah and A.S. Bopanna said wearing masks during the pandemic saves not only the person's life but also that of others. The court said every citizen should take care not to be a public risk factor in times of a pandemic that has cost many lives globally.

"It is not just a question of your life only... You have no right to play with the lives of others," Justice Shah observed sternly.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta referred to how mask violations were rampant in several foreign countries. Mr. Mehta said people have started asking for the freedom to not vaccinate and to



Wearing masks is not only for self-protection but also to protect others, says SC.

not wear masks in public. However, India has been more cautious, he said.

The exchange came during a hearing on the National Disaster Management Authority's (NDMA) recommendation to provide ₹50,000 each as ex gratia to families of those who died of COVID-19.

₹50,000 as aid is a cruel joke: Congress

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday described the Centre's decision to pay ₹50,000 as compensation to families who lost loved ones to COVID-19 as a "cruel joke".

Addressing a press conference, spokesperson Supriya Shrinat said that every family that lost a member can "easily" be paid ₹5 lakh from the amount collected by the Centre as taxes on pe-

troleum products. Ms. Shrinat claimed that last year the Centre collected ₹4.54 lakh crore by way of taxes on petroleum products and it would need to spend only ₹22,000 core from this amount to cover the official figure of 4.5 lakh deaths during the pandemic.

"We demand a compensation of ₹5 lakh for every life lost to corona, because in India, it was a man-made crisis. Instead of providing

for oxygen cylinders, beds and vaccines and medicines, this government was too busy electioneering," she alleged.

The Congress spokesperson also claimed that the Narendra Modi government initially did not want to classify the pandemic as a "disaster" under the National Disaster Management Act, 2005, to avoid paying the ex gratia of ₹4 lakh that is mandated to every victim of a

disaster. "It is also a good day to ask: where is the PM CARES fund? Why is nobody talking about the PM CARES fund in the government? This is not some private fund of the BJP. This is money that people like us have contributed to and thus is money that has been collected under the seal of the Union Government, in the Prime Minister's name. Why is this money not being put to use?" she asked.

No evidence of any new variant, says INSACOG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

There is no evidence of a new variant of SARS-CoV2 and presently there is no additional or public health concern regarding the Delta sub-lineages, the INSACOG, a genome sequencing consortium, has said.

In its latest bulletin dated September 20, the INSACOG said Delta continues to be

the main variant of concern in India.

"The second wave, driven by the Delta (variant), is continuing at low levels in some States and there is no evidence of a new variant," it said.

There is a small but steady increase in the sub-lineage AY.1 since June 2021, which is being monitored, the INSACOG noted.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will announce the nationwide roll-out of the Pradhan Mantri Digital Health Mission on September 27, Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Twitter.

"Under this, a unique digital health ID will be provided to the people, which will contain all the health records of the person," he said.

The Minister released post-COVID-19 sequelae modules, aimed at capacity-building of health workers to manage long-term effects of the disease in those who have recovered. "The modules have been prepared to provide guidance to doctors and healthcare workers to deal with the issue of long-term effects of COVID-19," he observed.

Proactive and comprehensive treatment of COVID-19 was required to ensure minimum side-effects, he said. "We have witnessed in patients the consequences of post-COVID-19 effects due to taking higher doses of steroids in cases of mucormycosis. It is important to take medicines with fewer or negligible side-effects. If we are alert beforehand, it will be fruitful in tackling the future consequences of COVID-19," he noted.

Some perceptions related to COVID-19 – such as fear and mental health issues – needed to be tackled, he added.

TH CROSSWORD + 13360 Display keystrokes of genius. Type your answers in our online grids. @ https://qr.go.page.link/jjpTn

Crossword grid with clues:

- Small conservative banker, someone like Disney? (11)
- We start to basically record our thoughts here (6)
- We morons created this place in CNN office, perhaps (8)
- Embarassingly idle at a party (6)
- True representation of a Gir lion (8)
- They reportedly attract wealth? (8)
- Booted king chose to leave quietly (6)

DOWN

- Loudmouth waving big wand (7)
- Stars pop out for papers (8)
- Filmmaker approached the Gunners (6)
- Sort of global dope (8)
- Concoct a very intrinsic kind of verse (6)
- Dance of monk with evil heart (7)
- Snappy and stylish comic book writer and model, one USA repackaged (13)
- Handle pistol that ricochets and rattles occasionally (8)
- Part of telephone that is fabricated with a crepe (8)
- Some serve a large organisation (7)
- Spread word about mature, rich, old woman (7)
- Grasped that this King was a tragic character, not heartless (6)
- Why is King going inside for a drink? (6)

SUDOKU

9x9 Sudoku grid with difficulty rating: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to puzzle 13359 and Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

FAITH

Pull of the Ramayana

The Ramayana has a pull, which has remained undiminished over centuries, said Kidambi Narayanan in a discourse. It is perhaps one of the few stories where the hero Himself enjoyed hearing the story. Bhavabhuti, in his Uttara Rama charita, says that in Rama's palace in Ayodhya, scenes from the Ramayana were painted on the walls, and Rama, Sita and Lakshmana enjoyed looking at the paintings. Lava and Kusa had been trained by Valmiki to narrate all the verses of the Ramayana. Their speech itself was sweet, and when they sang the verses before Rama people listened, their attention unwavering. Rama too left His throne and sat among the people. The story continued to be a big draw even after the Rama avatara ended.

While it is common knowledge that Srimad Bhagavatam contains many exploits of Krishna, significantly, it also has Suka talking about Rama's story. When Kulasekara Azhvar heard about Rama preparing to fight Ravana, he forgot that it was a story about the past. He ordered his army to go to the aid of Rama!

Parasara Bhatta, wrote a commentary for the Vishnu Sahasranama, called Bhagavadguna Darpana. Here, before he talks about names referring to Rama, he says that he is going to talk about the name which is like nectar to the dying. The name 'Rama' offers consolation when we are unhappy. It is evident from Nammazhvar's works that Krishna was his favourite deity. And yet, even he remarked in a verse that if at all one wanted to learn something, it should be the story of Rama, for by His very presence, Rama granted moksha even to blades of grass in Ayodhya. Nampillai explained Nammazhvar's Thiruvaimozhi in his discourses. In these explanations, Nampillai gave references from Valmiki Ramayana.

