

**EXPRESS NETWORK****IN ASSAM, CONG SAYS WILL SNAP TIES WITH AIUDF** [PAGE 5](#)**OUTGOING ITBP CHIEF: CAN BE MORE HOSTILE ON CHINA BORDER IF NEEDED** [PAGE 6](#)**BENGALI WRITER BUDDHADEB GUHA DIES AT 85** [PAGE 6](#)**Delhi schools, colleges open tomorrow: 50% class strength, staggered lunch breaks****SUKRITA BARUAH**
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

ONLY 50 per cent students per class, staggered lunch breaks, mandatory thermal screening, alternate seating, a quarantine room — these are some of the guidelines that schools and colleges in Delhi will have to follow when they reopen on Wednesday.

While schools for Classes IX-XII, colleges and coaching institutions will reopen, it will not be compulsory for students to attend physical classes. Online learning will continue for those who opt out. Those who choose offline classes will have to get the permission of their parents/guardians.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority on Monday issued the standard operating procedure (SOP) to be followed by institutes which decide to open. The schedule has to be staggered to avoid crowding in classrooms and outside; class size has to be limited to 50 per cent of the total strength. Apart from standard precautions on sanitisation, masks and physical distancing, institutes have also been directed to maintain a 'quarantine room' on campus in case a student or teacher displays symptoms.

In case of a double-shift system, the institutes will have to maintain a gap of at least one hour between the two batches of students. Further, students, teachers and employees living in containment zones will not be permitted to the institutes.

Meanwhile, several private schools in the city said they would not re-open on Wednesday, and would first gauge parents' response, assess how many students would opt for offline classes, and formulate

CITY**MOST PVT SCHOOLS PUT OFF REOPENING, CITE LOGISTICAL ISSUES, EXAMS** [PAGE 3](#)**RESPONSE TO TALIBAN**

Russia, China, Pak in new regional structure, India calibrates stand

Russian reminder, statements on Putin calls amplify urgency of new reality**RAKESH SINHA**
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

CALIBRATING ITS response to overtures Sunday by Taliban leader Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, New Delhi is keenly aware of the power structure emerging in the region.

Officials told *The Indian Express* that much before the Taliban takeover, India was being reminded by Russia of the need to come to terms with the shifting sands in Afghanistan.

China made its stand public when Foreign Minister Wang Yi met a Taliban delegation led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in Tianjin on July 28. "The Afghan Taliban," Wang said, "is an important political and military force... expected to play an important role in the country's peace, reconciliation and reconstruction process."

On August 11, four days before the fall of Kabul, the Extended Troika on Afghanistan, comprising Russia, China, Pakistan and the US, met in Qatar's capital Doha.

That India would not find a place at this table was made amply clear by Zamir Kabulov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's special envoy on Afghanistan.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**BUSINESS AS USUAL**

By UNNY

**THE EDITORIAL PAGE****TALIBAN AND NEW REALPOLITIK**By C RAJA MOHAN [PAGE 8](#)**WORLD****SEVEN CHILDREN AMONG 10 KILLED IN U.S. DRONE STRIKE, SAYS FAMILY****WHITE HOUSE: WE CAN EVACUATE ALL AMERICANS** [PAGE 10](#)

DAY BEFORE DEADLINE

The United States said its missile defence system intercepted rockets fired from cars towards Kabul's international airport on Monday. *Aamaj News Agency via Reuters*

13-year-old Dalit girl from Delhi raped, killed; landlord's kin held

Father says called cops after accused pushed to cremate her**JIGNASA SINHA**
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

A 13-YEAR-OLD Dalit girl from West Delhi was allegedly raped and killed by a relative of her landlord, according to the victim's parents and an FIR registered by police. The relative has been arrested and police said they are investigating the alleged involvement of the landlord and his wife in the case.

According to the girl's father, the accused claimed that the girl

had died due to illness and pressured him to cremate the body, until neighbours intervened and got him to call the police. The post-mortem report revealed that the girl, who had suffered severe injuries on her face and private parts, had been raped.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, the victim's father, who is a daily wage labourer, said that last month, on the recommendation of the landlord who "was like family", he had allowed his daughter to go with the arrested accused Praveen to work at his

home in Gurgaon.

"The landlord's wife told me that her brother had a younger daughter and my daughter can play with her and stay with the family for some time. She took her on July 17," the father stated in the FIR.

Speaking to this newspaper, he said that around 3 pm on August 23, he received a call from the landlord, saying his daughter had died of food poisoning. Four hours later, Praveen, the landlord's wife and two others

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Goa rammed through land ownership Bill despite objections by Revenue, Law, Finance

MAYURA JANWALKAR
PANAJI, AUGUST 30

IN THE crucial hours before the Goa Legislative Assembly passed the controversial Goa Bhumiputra Adhikarini Bill, 2021, the Revenue Minister who introduced it, Jennifer Monserrate, raised eight issues that required scrutiny and asked for its introduction in the next session. Revenue Secretary Sanjay Kumar advised against haste, even warned of "unseen repercussions".

The Bill accords the status of

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW
AN EXPRESS RTI APPLICATION

bhumiputra (son of the soil) to persons living for at least 30 years in Goa. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant told the House it would allow the "mool Goenkar (original Goans)" the right to stake claim to ownership of their house on land measuring up to 250 square meters.

Pushed by Sawant, the Bill was introduced on July 29. The day's session spilled over to July 30, and, according to documents obtained by *The Indian Express* under RTI, at 2.12 am that day, Revenue Secretary Sanjay Kumar advised "caution as haste can lead us to some unseen repercussions" in his file noting.

But then it was passed in the Assembly in the evening of July 30 amid a walkout by the Opposition after being introduced in the early hours.

In the previous two days, the state's departments of law and

finance, also raised red-flags, the RTI documents revealed.

Among the eight points requiring detailed examination, Monserrate said, was the interest of owners who had rented out their houses that would not be protected if the Bill was passed in its present form. "Government servants staying in quarters will claim right to quarters while staying in the said quarters," she wrote.

She raised the issue of regularisation of properties up to 250 sq m, "whether it will include

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**PAGE 1 ANCHOR****DIVYAA & KAMALDEEP BRAR**
NEW DELHI, AMRITSAR, AUGUST 30

JALLIANWALA BAGH a century ago, the historian Kim A Wagner wrote in his 2019 book of the same name, was a right trapezoid about 200 yards long and 150 yards wide, "entirely enclosed by the backs of houses and brick walls", the main entrance to which was "a long narrow passage, wide enough for people to pass in both directions, though not so wide as to accommodate vehicles".

From the time schoolchildren first learn about the massacre that took place at the Bagh on Baisakhi day, 1919, they are told about this lane — by blocking which the troops of Gen REH Dyer cut off escape for the crowd assembled inside, and mowed down hundreds at practically pointblank range.

On Saturday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the revamped Jallianwala Bagh, the narrow lane with stark brick walls had transformed into something unrecognisable — a tunnel partially closed to the sky, complete with a new floor, and with the walls on either side



The passage leading to the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar as it was earlier (left) and after renovation



Rana Simranjit Singh

crowded with a shiny mural of dozens of human figures, symbolising the common people who fell to Dyer's bullets that day.

"Devastated to hear that Jallianwala Bagh...has been revamped — which means that the last traces of the event have effectively been erased," Wagner posted on Twitter on Saturday. He called it a "part of the general Disneyfication of the old city of Amritsar".

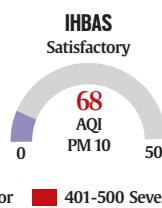
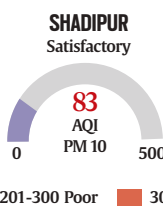
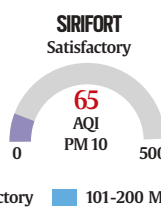
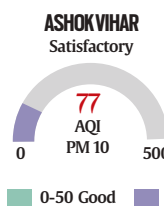
Wagner's tweet set off a storm of outrage from historians, culture aficionados, and ordinary tourists who had visited Jallianwala Bagh before it was shut for renovation in 2019.

British Sikh MP Preet Kaur Gill tweeted: "Our history being erased. Why?"

There was the other view as well. BJP MP Shwait Malik, who is also a trustee of the Jallianwala Bagh Trust, argued: "These sculptures in the lane will make visitors conscious of those who walked in on that day... Earlier, people walked this narrow lane without knowing its history, now they will walk with history."

A senior official of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) told *The Indian Express* that the project was executed entirely by the Union Ministry of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



0-50 Good 51-100 Satisfactory 101-200 Moderate 201-300 Poor 301-400 Very Poor 401-500 Severe

S K Y W A T C H
FORECAST: August 31
Generally cloudy sky. Light to moderate rain/thundershowers

MAX: 33 | **MIN: 25**
1.4°C below normal | 1.5°C below normal

DU's Ramanujan college looks to introduce mass media diploma

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

DELHI UNIVERSITY'S Ramanujan College is looking to introduce a 'skill-oriented' diploma programme in mass media. This will be the first diploma programme run from the DU's undergraduate colleges.

A one-year diploma course in Mass Media and Film Studies to be run from Ramanujan College was approved by the Faculty of Applied Sciences and Humanities last month and has been run through the Academic Council. It will now have to be approved by the Executive Council, following which the college will formulate basic guidelines for the course.

Ramanujan College principal Dr S P Aggarwal stated that this will be the first diploma course for undergraduate-level students to be run from a DU college. It will be open to everyone, not restricted to Delhi University students. "This is basically a skill-oriented course aimed at generating employment. It is for 10+2 students, students of B.A. Programme and other programmes to equip them to get a job in media. There will be around 40 seats and for most of the classes, we will be inviting members of the media," he said.

DDMA NOD FOR CLASSES TO RESUME FOR SENIOR STUDENTS

Most pvt schools put off reopening on Sept 1, cite logistical issues, exams

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

MOST PRIVATE schools in the capital won't be reopening for senior students from Wednesday as they are still working out the logistics of classroom seating, running both online and offline classes, and other infrastructure arrangements.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority in an order Monday permitted schools, colleges, technical and training institutes, coaching institutes, and libraries to re-open for students from class IX and above, and issued a detailed SOP for the same.

Schools have been directed to design their time-tables and stagger timings in such a way that a maximum of 50 per cent students are in class at a time. Only those students written consent from their parents will return to school while online classes will continue for the rest. Schools have cited challenges of working around these various necessities.

Said Suruchi Gandhi, principal Bal Bharti Public School, Dwarka, "Social distancing means we can't put many students together in one classroom and



Schools have been directed to design their time-tables and stagger timings in such a way that a maximum of 50% students are in class at a time. *Archive*

they'll have to be split up in groups. This will mean that teachers will have to repeat the same lesson for different groups. We will also have to run both online and offline classes simultaneously and monitor both. This is not simple and is a lot more for teachers to handle. We are more than prepared with our infrastructure arrangements, we just need to plan for our logistics. We are in the process of collecting submissions of consent from par-

ents for classes IX and XI. We had already done it for classes X and XII when it was allowed for some students to come to school for practical and exam-related work. At that time, we had got consent from around 45% parents."

The principal of a prominent private school in South Delhi also cited the same challenges.

"The school is already ready because we had class XII students coming for practicals. We had received a 50-50 response from

parents of that grade. We'll start testing the waters with parents of other grades this week and prepare our time-table keeping in mind the hybrid model we'll have to follow," the principal said.

Other schools cited different reasons for putting off re-opening for now.

DAV Public School, Pushpanjali Enclave, is set to hold internal examinations in the coming fortnight and has decided to focus on these before shifting

gear to offline classes. "We were planning to conduct these exams offline for classes X and XII, but we might convert the exams to offline mode for classes IX and XI too. It might serve as preparation for their return to offline mode. We will not be re-opening for offline classes this week as we don't disrupt the current preparations and classes happening online," said principal Rashmi Biswal.

Meanwhile, Mount Carmel School, Dwarka has decided to adopt a more cautious approach. School authorities said they are willing to wait for up to a month to assess the re-opening process and learn from others.

"We are happy for the government to take the lead and show us how they implement the Standard Operating Protocol in their schools. We don't want to rush and cause any confusion as of now. Wherever there has been a rush to open schools, there has soon been a rush to close them back again. India's Covid cases are rising again, we don't know which way it will go. We will take at least another month; we're also working to get all our staff, including class 4 employees, vaccinated," said Dean Michael Williams.

Deploy women officers across all beats: Police chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

DELHI POLICE Commissioner Rakesh Asthana has directed the 15 DCPs to deploy women officers in all beats, especially in areas that have schools, colleges, and which see a high footfall of women. This comes as the Delhi Police PCR unit is set to be integrated with the district teams from September 1. PCR vans will also be known as beat vans from now.

The standard operating procedure, issued by DCP (headquarters) Shweta Chauhan, said, "JCPs of ranges with their counterparts in PCR and communication wings will merge existing PCR beats of mobile patrol vans (MPVs) and motorbike patrols into existing beats of police stations. This implies that post-integration, each beat will have a patrol vehicle with a minimum of two personnel patrolling 24x7 in shifts. They will attend PCR calls, other minor law and order issues in the beat, and ensure surveillance over unlawful activities and other issues that are currently the responsibility of the beat, division officers, and PCR MVPs respectively."

Usually, on receiving a call on 112 at the control room, a PCR van shares brief facts of the inci-

dent with the district police and heads to the spot.

As per the new plan, an officer said, "PCR vans will now merge with the district police, and personnel from the local police station will travel with the PCR van."

Chauhan further states, "Beat MPVs will have to resume patrolling after handing over any call that mandates registration of crime to the staff of the investigation wing of the police station. We should prepare a list of all beats, the number of MPVs, and names of the buddy pair of officers of the beat and their shifts. Special attention must be paid to deployment of women officers in the beats, particularly those which have schools, colleges, and other areas having a heavy footfall of women."

Beat MPVs will also have a new uniform, which will be communicated by the PHQ in the coming days.

"Call sign of the reorganised PCR vehicles, which will also have vehicles of the police station, will be assigned by DCP/PCR. All vehicles of PCR and police stations to be merged into a common pool so that all beats have at least one patrol vehicle. Response time of PCR vehicles must be monitored and maintained for citizen's satisfaction," she said.

HC directs parking dispute accused to perform social service at Lok Nayak

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

QUASHING AN FIR related to a car parking dispute, the Delhi High Court has directed two brothers, who were accused in the case, to perform social service for one month at Lok Nayak Hospital.

The accused had approached the court for quashing the FIR registered at Gokul Puri police station in 2017. The accused had abused and hit the complainant with an iron rod over a dispute related to car parking. Both the accused and complainant are relatives and neighbours and had settled their disputes in February 2021.

Observing that continuation of the proceedings will only aggravate the bad blood between the parties who live in the same locality, Justice Subramonium Prasad quashed the FIR and ordered the accused persons and complainant to remain bound by the terms of the settlement.

Justice Prasad asked the accused to file a certificate from the Medical Superintendent of Lok Nayak hospital after com-

The accused and complainant are relatives and neighbours and had settled their disputes in February 2021

pletion of one month to show compliance with the order.

"In case of any absenteeism/default or any misbehaviour on the part of petitioners, the same shall be conveyed immediately by the Medical Superintendent, Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital, to the SHO concerned, who shall, in turn, inform the learned ASC for the State, for bringing the same to the notice of the Court and for seeking recall of orders passed today," said the court in its order.

The court also imposed a cost of Rs 10,000 each on the six persons of the family so that they do not repeat such activities in the future. The court directed that the cost be deposited with the "Army Welfare Fund Battle Casualties".

ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOL (APS), NEW CANTT, ALLAHABAD
Tele No : 0532-2420772, email : armyschoolalld@gmail.com
School website : armypublicschoolalld.org

Sealed quotations for purchase of New Maruti Car (Wagon R) model ZXI (1.2L) are invited. Sealed quotation to be sent by post or dropped by hand in quotation box of the School by 20 Sep. 2021.

PRINCIPAL

BANGALORE UNIVERSITY
Jnanabharathi, Bangalore - 560 056, Karnataka State

No: Aca-IV /LL.M/Admn/2021-22 Date: 17-08-2021

ADMISSION NOTIFICATION FOR LL.M COURSE
Ref: Approval of Vice-Chancellor date: 16.08.2021

Applications are invited for admission to the I Semester of 2 Years LL.M Course in the University Law College and Department of Studies in Law, Jnana Bharathi Campus, Bangalore University, Bangalore-560056 for the academic year 2021-22 from candidates who have passed 3/5 year LL.B Degree with not less than 45% (40% only in the case of SC/ST/Category-I).

Application shall be filled online uploading relevant documents by visiting the University website www.bangaloreuniversity.ac.in or www.ulcbangalore.com on or before **03.09.2021** (late fee without fine) and **06.09.2021** with late fee of **Rs.200/-**. Downloaded application should be filled in and submitted with relevant documents to the **Principal & Chairman, University Law College and Department of Studies in Law, Jnana Bharathi Campus, Bangalore University, Bengaluru-560056** on or before **09.09.2021** either in person or through post.

Application / Processing Fee		
Particulars	General/OBC	SC/ST/Cat-I
1. Application fee	Rs. 800/-	Rs. 400/-
2. Penalty for Late submission	Rs. 200/-	Rs. 200/-

Sd/-, REGISTRAR

महाराष्ट्र शासन
उच्च शिक्षण संचालनालय, महाराष्ट्र राज्य, पुणे-४११ ००१
जाहिरात

केंद्र शासन पुरस्कृत अल्पसंख्याक विद्यार्थ्यांसाठी मॅट्रिकोत्तर (Post Matric) शिष्यवृत्ती योजना सन २०२१-२२

राज्यातील मुस्लिम, ख्रिश्चन, शीख, बौद्ध, पारशी व जैन या अल्पसंख्याक समाजातील गुणवान विद्यार्थ्यांसाठी केंद्र शासन पुरस्कृत मॅट्रिकोत्तर (Post Matric) शिष्यवृत्ती योजना राज्यमध्ये सन २०२१-२२ साठी ऑनलाइन पद्धतीने सार्वजनिक केले आहे. यासाठी विद्यार्थ्यांचे नवीन शिष्यवृत्ती (Fresh) व शिष्यवृत्तीचे नवीनीकरण (Renewal) करण्यासाठी ऑनलाइन पद्धतीने अर्ज मागविण्यात येत आहेत. विद्यार्थ्यांनी www.scholarships.gov.in या संकेतस्थळावरून ऑनलाइन पद्धतीने अर्ज भरणे आवश्यक आहे. फक्त ऑनलाइन (Online) पद्धतीने भरलेले अर्ज स्वीकारले जातील. कोणत्याही परिस्थितीत ऑफलाइन (Offline) अर्ज स्वीकारले जाणार नाहीत.

अल्पसंख्याक शिष्यवृत्ती सन २०२१-२२ करिता नवीन शिष्यवृत्ती (Fresh) व नवीनीकरण (Renewal) अर्ज सादर करण्यासाठी भारत सरकारने घोषित केलेले वेळापत्रक

अ. क्र.	कार्यसूची	अंतिम दिनांक
१	विद्यार्थ्यांनी ऑनलाइन अर्ज भरण्याचा अंतिम दिनांक	३० नोव्हेंबर, २०२१
२	महाविद्यालयांने अर्जांची ऑनलाइन पडताळणी करण्याचा अंतिम दिनांक	१५ डिसेंबर २०२१

महाविद्यालयांनी विद्यार्थ्यांचे ऑनलाइन अर्ज फॉरवर्ड करण्यासाठी विद्यार्थ्यांनी ऑनलाइन भरलेल्या अर्जांसोबत दिलेल्या कागदपत्रांची तपासणी करून त्या अर्जांवर विनाविलंब योग्य ती कार्यवाही करून पात्र अर्ज पुढील टप्प्यावर तात्काळ फॉरवर्ड करावेत.

सर्व महाविद्यालयां/ संस्था यांनी त्यांच्या लॉगइनमधून ऑनलाइन पद्धतीने अद्ययावत अस्थासकर्मिन्हाय फी नमूद करून Profile update करावे. महाविद्यालयां/ संस्थांनी प्रत्येक विद्यार्थ्याचा ऑनलाइन अर्ज तपासणी करताना विद्यार्थ्यांचे Fee Details तपासून बरोबर नसल्यास त्यात दुरुस्ती (Edit) करावी.

NSP पोर्टलवरील सर्व महाविद्यालयांना Aadhar base लॉगइन करण्याची सुविधा देण्यात आलेली आहे तसेच सन २०११-२२ पूर्वी ज्या महाविद्यालयांनी KYC पूर्ण केले आहेत त्यांनी त्यांच्या NSP Portal वर Institute लॉगइनमध्ये आधार व मोबाइल नंबर नोंदणी (Register) करणे आवश्यक आहे. तसेच सन २०११-२२ साठी नवीन महाविद्यालयां/ संस्था यांनी KYC करण्याबाबतची प्रक्रिया NSP Portal च्या HOME Page वरील Services Option वर Institute KYC Registration Form मध्ये देण्यात आलेली आहे. (KYC करण्याबाबतची प्रक्रिया याची सविस्तर माहिती www.dhepune.gov.in या संकेतस्थळावर देण्यात आलेली आहे.) सदर Form भरल्यानंतर State Nodal Officer द्वारे सदरच्या सन २०२०-२१ मध्ये शिष्यवृत्तीसाठी निवड झालेल्या/ शिष्यवृत्ती मिळालेल्या व चालू वर्षी शिष्यवृत्तीच्या अटी पूर्ण करणाऱ्या सर्व विद्यार्थ्यांनी सन २०२१-२२ करिता नवीनीकरणचा अर्ज ऑनलाइन भरणे आवश्यक आहे. NSP Portal द्वारे ज्या शिष्यवृत्ती लाभार्थ्यांचे आधार कार्ड, मोबाइल नंबर प्रमाणित केलेले आहेत व त्यांचे वय १८ वर्षांच्या वर आहे अशा सर्व (Fresh & Renewal) लाभार्थ्यांना शिष्यवृत्तीची रक्कम मिळेल.

विद्यार्थ्यांनी व महाविद्यालयांनी अधिक माहितीसाठी तसेच याबाबतच्या नवीन प्राप्त होणाऱ्या सूचनांसाठी www.scholarships.gov.in व www.dhepune.gov.in या संकेतस्थळांचे अवलोकन करावे. तसेच संबंधित विभागीय सहसंचालक, उच्च शिक्षण कार्यालयानी किंवा उच्च शिक्षण संचालनालय, महाराष्ट्र राज्य, पुणे-१ येथे दूरध्वनी क्रमांक ०२०-२६१२६१३१/ २१००७०९८ या क्रमांकावर कार्यालयीन वेळेत संपर्क साधावा अथवा schol.dhepune@gov.in या ई-मेलवर मेल करावा.

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(उ. धराज माने)
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Registration Close Date & Time 30.09.2021 (at 11:59 pm)

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4 THE CITY



VACCINATIONS IN
LAST 24 HOURS
10,826



		Total		Vacant
TOTAL CASES		16,565	16,273	
HOSPITAL BEDS		3,560	3,465	
ICU BEDS				
	Cases	Recoveries	Deaths	Tests
Aug 29	31	32	0	51,636
Aug 30	20	36	1	51,387
Total	375*	14,12,280	25,081	2,56,23,431

*Total active cases

BRIEFLY

Woman attacked, robbed in Narela

New Delhi : A 60-year-old woman was allegedly attacked and robbed by an unidentified man in Outer Delhi's Narela. A video of the incident in which the woman is seen resisting the robbery bid went viral on social media. Rajiv Ranjan, DCP (Outer North), said, "She withdrew money from a bank in the area and put it in her bag. She was walking home when two boys on a bike followed her. One of them got down and tried to snatch her bag. The woman resisted the attempt but the bag got torn and cash fell on the road. The accused took the cash and ran." Raids are on to nab the accused.

Senior citizens can nominate others to get ration

New Delhi : The Delhi Food Department has issued an order allowing senior citizens, differently abled people, and those unable to authenticate their biometrics (thumb impression) to nominate others to collection ration on their behalf. The order has been issued to ensure that no PDS beneficiary drops out of safety net due to biometric failures.

Aqua Line's 'fast trains' to halt at more stations

Noida : Noida Metro's fast train will stop at more stations, as demand rises, said NMRC officials. A review meeting on the non-stoppage stations of fast trains was held to decide on including more stations. Fast trains function during peak hours between Sector 51 and Depot in Greater Noida and do not halt at all 10 stations. As per officials, it will stop at Sector 50, Sector 101, Sector 83 and Sector 143 stations from Tuesday.

Administration of Sputnik V stays limited to 4 districts

New Delhi : Despite almost two months having gone by since the rollout of Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine in Delhi, there are only four districts where it is being administered. It was initially being administered in a few private hospitals, including Indraprastha Apollo, Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital, Action Cancer Hospital, Batra Hospital and Sarvodaya Medicentre. **ENS**

NCR POPULATION TO OVERTAKE TOKYO BY 2030: DRAFT REPORT

Rapid rail, new townships: NCR board to discuss regional plan

SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

AN AMBITIOUS plan to make Delhi-NCR future ready envisages high-speed rail tracks capable of handling bullet trains, heli-taxi services, expansion of airport network, and development of 5-8 townships, with the projection that the population of the region will overtake Tokyo by the year 2030.

The draft Regional Plan-2041 is likely to be taken up by the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) Tuesday. The board, which comes under the MoHUA, has entire Delhi, 14 districts of Haryana, eight districts of Uttar Pradesh and two districts of Rajasthan under its fold — collectively covering an area of about 55,083 sqkm.

The draft report states that the population in NCR is expected to grow to around 7 crore by 2031 and to about 11 crore by 2041. It also said the region will be highly urbanised, around 57% of the total area by 2031 and 67% by 2041.

Among key transport-related proposals in the report is the need to "minimise journey times across NCR and make travel times across NCR limits under 30 minutes by superfast trains and heli-taxis, within 60 minutes by other trains, and two to three hours by car preferably".

It says Delhi should have 30-minute connectivity through su-



The report suggests exploring possibilities of increasing the speed of Metro rail

KEY PROJECTS

87 Projects where cost is estimated **₹19,56,164 cr** Estimated cost

BREAK UP	
Economic growth and income generation	₹3,44,084 cr
Transport and mobility	₹12,07,574 cr
Tourism and heritage	₹3,500 cr
Water, drainage and sanitation	₹3,13,841 cr
Housing and heritage	₹10,900 cr
Rural development	₹7,951 cr
Future ready citizen infra	₹52,508 cr
Environment	₹15,806 cr

PROJECTS WHERE COST YET TO BE ESTIMATED: 94

per-fast trains with major cities of NCR. "All RRTS tracks should be Fast Track. Further possibilities be explored to utilise fast track RRTS lines for 'Bullet Trains' thus enabling the 30 Minutes

NCR," proposes the report.

Currently, the three RRTS corridors that are being implemented are Delhi-Alwar (164-km), Delhi-Meerut (82-km), and Delhi-Panipat (103-km). The

Meerut corridor is expected to be completed by 2023.

The report suggests the possibilities of increasing the speed of Metro rail from existing average of 32-35 km/hr to about 50 km/hr by 2022 and up to 70 km/hr by 2025 be explored. Currently, the Metro network in Delhi-NCR spans 396 km, including 291 km in Delhi, 34 km in Haryana cities such as Gurgaon and 71.6 km in UP cities such as Noida.

The report alludes to interstate restrictions on movement during the pandemic by suggesting that steps "shall be taken to prevent closure of interstate borders by states in NCR area, except in emergency situations like crime control etc". It also underlines the need to review taxes imposed on commercial passenger vehicles.

On air connectivity, it spells out the need to have one airport in Karnal or Panipat and Meerut or Muzaffarnagar, along with development of proposed international airport at Jewar and an aviation hub at Hisar "on priority". "The six-existing unserved/ small airports/ airstrips in NCR namely, Karnal, Bhiwani, Narnaul, Meerut, Alwar & Baratapour and Bareilly, Kota and Patiala should be developed by 2025 and made fully operational. Private players should be incentivised to develop these..."

It also identifies industries and MSMEs, economic corridors, skilling and employment, farm incomes, and traditional economy as priority areas.

North MCD to move proposal to hand hospitals to Centre

ABHINAV RAJPUT
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

THE NORTH MCD plans to move a proposal in the standing committee to hand over hospitals under its jurisdiction to the Centre, citing fund constraints in managing them.

This comes after the Delhi High Court had pulled up the corporation last week, saying it did not exhibit a sense of urgency in considering the proposal of handing over its six hospitals and medical college to the Centre or Delhi government, and warned that any default in timely payment of salaries and pensions to its employees will lead to attachment and sale of its properties.

Standing committee chairperson Jogi Ram Jain said the proposal has been put up by the executive wing but the deliberative wing is not in support of it. He said the proposal was placed following the court observation.

The development has led to sharp reactions from AAP with spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj saying that "after pushing the MCDs to bankruptcy, the BJP-led North MCD now plans to sell hospitals and medical colleges... they have emptied the MCD's assets to such an extent".

Jain said the AAP has forced MCDs to take such steps. "It has curtailed funds for years leading to such situations. However, we are going to reject the pro-

posal," he said.

Senior officials said though the proposal would be defeated, the corporation is not in a position to hold on to the hospitals in its current financial situation where it has a budget deficit leading to delay in salary and pensions becoming a regular feature. "These hospitals are from the time when the MCD was unified and had sound finances," said a senior official.

A similar proposal was placed during a standing committee meeting in 2018, but it was never executed.

The six hospitals under the civic body are Hindu Rao, Kasturba, Rajan Babu Institute of Pulmonary Medicine and Tuberculosis, Girdhari Lal, MVID, and Balak Ram. Hindu Rao, the biggest hospital, has 900 beds. In comparison, the East and South corporations have just one hospital each — which are smaller in size, with 370 beds and 100 beds respectively.

While annual expenses of the hospitals amount to Rs 500 crore, another Rs 40 crore is spent on medicines, and there are maintenance costs as well, said a senior official in the administration.

Health staff of North MCD have gone on strike more than five times since the Covid outbreak over salary delays. The civic body employs at least 1,000 senior doctors, 500 resident doctors, and 1,500 nursing officers across five medical facilities.



RAZED

Slums demolished at Dhobi ghat in Jamia Nagar's Batla House area last week. *Gajendra Yadav*

HC declines to hear plea on EWS beds not reserved during 2nd wave

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

THE DELHI High Court has declined to entertain a contempt petition alleging that the requirement of reserved beds for EWS patients was not adhered to during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It is common knowledge that during the second phase of the pandemic there was absolute emergency and dearth of beds, therefore, whoever came

to the hospitals was first accommodated and attended to. Not doing so would have been against the medical ethics," said Justice Najmi Waziri in an order.

The plea before the court alleged that government hospitals and those private hospitals, which have been allotted land at concessional rates by the State, were in violation of a March 2007 HC order. The order had said that these hospitals shall provide free treatment to indigent persons to the extent of 10 per cent of beds in the

IPD and 25 per cent of patients in OPD.

The court in 2007 had passed the directions in a petition filed by Social Jurist, a lawyers' group, which alleged that the conditions of allotment of land to hospitals and nursing homes in respect of providing free treatment to the poor and indigent persons was not being complied with.

The contempt petition alleging non-adherence of the 2007 directions was withdrawn by the petitioner after it did not find favour with the court.

some operative history'.

Holding her daughter, Bahar, she says, "This is not the life I had imagined for her... I speak to my five other children; three sons and two daughters, over the phone. They cry a lot... they ask me to come back to get them." The children continue to stay

21% staff shortage across 15 police districts, audit shows

Special Cell only unit with more personnel than sanctioned

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

DELHI POLICE has a staff crunch of 21.03 per cent across its 15 districts — 33,833 personnel against a sanctioned strength of 42,847 — revealed an audit conducted earlier this month by the police headquarters. It also shows that the Special Cell is the only unit where sanctioned strength is 722 but total strength is 1,336, as compared to the districts, security wings, and specialised units.

Police chief Rakesh Asthana, who took charge of the force on July 28, had told the DCPs in his first meeting that he wants to implement a three-shift duty system and enforce separation of law and order over the next two months.

"A few days ago, Asthana reviewed a presentation by the PHQ that was prepared by Special CP (headquarters and general administration) Sivagami Sundari Nanda, in which she claimed that the total sanctioned strength of Delhi Police is 94,353, but they have 78,985 personnel — a shortage of 15,368," a senior police officer said.

As per the report, the actual shortage is from the level of inspector to constable. "There are 1,455 sanctioned posts of inspectors, but only 1,427 are currently employed; 6,237 sub-inspectors against sanctioned strength of 8,096; 20,355 head constables against 23,717 sanctioned posts; sanctioned vacancy for constables

STAFF CRUNCH

District / Specialised unit	Sanctioned strength	Present strength	Variation
South	3,541	2,567	28%
Central	3,271	2,444	25%
Northeast	3,302	2,487	25%
Rohini	2,988	2,186	27%
New Delhi	2,759	1,957	29%
Traffic	5,948	5,015	15%
Metro	954	591	38%
Railways	668	488	27%

is 50,969, and there are 41,488 at present," said the officer.

The officer said there are more officers in higher posts as compared to the lower constabulary: 16 Special CPs against sanctioned vacancy of 13; 63 DCPs and additional DCPs against 54 total posts.

Nanda informed the police chief that South district is facing the highest shortage of 974 personnel. "Sanctioned strength of South district is 3,541 and they have only 2,567 personnel. It is followed by Central district, which is facing shortage of 827 personnel against sanctioned strength of 3,271. The third is Northeast, which has a shortage of 815 personnel against sanctioned strength of 3,303," said the officer.

Nanda also told the police chief that 12 proposals are pending with the Ministry of Home Affairs. "Some of these proposals are to increase staff strength, creating posts for CyPad (cyber unit of special cell), and for fingerprint

bureau (crime)," a senior police officer said.

"Nanda also showed data from 16 specialised units, including special cell, crime branch, traffic, PCR. She said among other units, special cell has the highest number of personnel at 1,336, excluding strength of the cyber cell unit. As per data, total sanctioned vacancies of inspectors in the special cell is 32, but they have 45; sanctioned strength for head constables is 131 and they have 331; sanctioned posts of constables is 227, but they have 650," an officer said, adding that sanctioned posts for personnel in crime branch is 980, and they have 962.

Asthana was informed that the security units, including the Prime Minister's security wing, is also facing a shortage — 25,620 personnel against sanctioned strength of 27,368. In all the battalions of Delhi Armed Police, there are 7,739 staff against 8,189 sanctioned posts, data revealed.

Get old vehicles scrapped: Transport dept issues advisory

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

NOT ALL provisions of the Centre's automobile scrapping policy, under which old vehicles clearing an automated fitness test are allowed to ply, will be applicable in Delhi as existing provisions mandating phasing out diesel vehicles older than 10 years and petrol vehicles older than 15 years will remain enforced in the city.

The Delhi Transport Department has issued a public notice, advising owners of such vehicles not to take them out on the roads and get them scrapped under the end of life vehicles policy notified by the Delhi government in 2018. There are six authorised centres where old vehicles are scrapped.

Under the Centre's policy, vehicles are classified into commercial and personal categories, unlike Delhi where classification is done based on fuel type. The Central policy states that commercial vehicles over 15 years old and personal vehicles over 20 years old are marked for scrapping if they fail an automated fitness test. However, in Delhi's case, diesel vehicles over 10 years old and petrol vehicles over 15 years old "shall not ply" and are "liable to be impounded and invite necessary penal action under Motor Vehicles Act, 1988" due to the city's hazardous



Existing provisions mandate phasing out diesel vehicles older than 10 yrs and petrol vehicles older than 15 yrs

levels of air pollution.

Authorities are, however, not yet cracking down on old vehicles, deciding to raise awareness first. Such vehicles, including two-wheelers, number around 37 lakh out of over 1 crore registered vehicles. The Transport Department has also clarified that notwithstanding the fact that Registration Certificates are valid for 15 years, diesel vehicles cannot ply beyond 10 years.

However, no-objection certificates will be issued to diesel vehicles aged between 10-15 years old for re-registration in certain states. "NOC can be obtained for diesel vehicles beyond 10 years but less than 15 years for states which have conveyed their concurrence for registration of such diesel vehicles," says the notice.

'DON'T WANT THE SAME TO HAPPEN TO MY CHILDREN'

Among Afghan refugees outside UNHCR office, woman assaulted by Taliban

ASHNA BUTANI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

KHATERA HASHMI (32), an Afghan refugee living in Lajpat Nagar, has a faint recollection of what happened on June 7, 2020, the day she lost her eyes. She says she was assaulted by the Taliban while she was three months pregnant, and then her eyes were removed because she saw their faces. Outside the UNHCR office in Vasant Vihar on Monday, she says, "I do not want the same to happen to my children. I want to go back to them, or I want them to come here..."

Khatera used to work for the Afghan police in Ghazni before

the assault in June 2020. She and her husband suspected that Khatera's father, who was a Taliban, had a role in ordering her assault as he did not approve of her working as a policewoman.

Last November, the couple came to India for two reasons: because they had been shaken up by the attacks, and because they hoped that Khatera could undergo eye treatment in India after it had been unsuccessful in Afghanistan. At the time, she was seven months pregnant. Doctors in Delhi too said there was no way for her to see again. In January, she gave birth to her youngest child at Indraprastha Apollo in Delhi.

According to her medical reports, she was assaulted on her



In November last year, Khatera Hashmi and her husband came to Delhi so she could undergo eye treatment. They were unable to return. Her five children are back in Ghazni; (right) outside the UNHCR office in Vasant Vihar. *Abhinav Sahra*



head, chest, neck, and back. The records read that she had "eviscerated eyes" and that she underwent a craniotomy. While the scars on her face have healed, she has been on medication for a frontal headache. Another medical record stated that she had a 'history of bullet injury with

in their rented home in Ghazni. She says, "I used to get compensation of around 13,000 AFN (Afghan Afghani) from the government because I served in the police force... but ever since the Taliban came, I have not been getting anything."

She hopes to go back to Afghanistan or to a third country with her entire family. Her husband, Nabi (36), spends the entire day taking care of the baby. He says, "We came to India by ourselves... back then, we felt unsafe but we thought we would return to get our children after my wife's treatment. Little did we know that the situation would worsen and we would not be able to go back." In Afghanistan, he used to

work as a shopkeeper. They got their UNHCR refugee cards a few days ago. They have also been getting monetary assistance from a family in America.

Khatera says that while her mother and sister visit her children to help them with food, cleaning, and laundry, it has become tougher now: "My eldest son is 15. He takes care of the younger ones... he tells me that people with guns take rounds of the house. They are very scared of guns and want me to go back so that I can protect them."

Several Afghans have been asking the UNHCR to help look for jobs for them or to send them to other nations with more opportunities.

5 GOVT & POLITICS

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



ON HIS MARK, GET SET...

WITH THE BJP national leadership eyeing Telangana as its next focus state, state party chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar has embarked on the tried-and-tested method of mass mobilisation — padayatra — to begin his preparations for the next elections. Kumar, who has received the go-ahead from both BJP chief J P Nadda and Home Minister Amit Shah, is on a walkathon towards 'Democratic Telangana'. Started from Hyderabad's Charminar on August 28, the yatra, covering 750 km in the first phase, will be completed in 55 days. Around 300 BJP karyakartas have enrolled themselves to walk along with Kumar on the first day. He is expected to highlight various welfare schemes introduced by the Centre, besides listening to people's grievances. Party leaders say this will be the beginning of BJP's election preparations in the southern state.

ONWARD JOURNEY

SENIOR DIPLOMAT P Harish has been named India's ambassador to Germany. Harish has been Indian envoy to Vietnam and is now a senior official in South Block. As Indian envoy in Berlin, he will have to navigate the relationship with Germany, where German Chancellor Angela Merkel is slated to leave office.

FAREWELL TO ARMS

OUTGOING ITBP D-GSS Deswal, who retires on Tuesday, has the unique distinction of having headed every Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) barring the CISF. As ITBP D-G, he was given additional charge of various forces in the absence of regular chiefs six times — twice for BSF and NSG, and once each for CRPF and SSB. At one point during his tenure he was commanding CRPF, BSF and ITBP together, putting him next only to the Army chief as commander of so many personnel (close to 7 lakh). Many in these forces will likely heave a sigh of relief on Tuesday, as whenever he took charge of any of these forces he made all officers and personnel walk hundreds of kilometers, leading the contingent himself in a bid to keep everyone fit.

Afghan situation shouldn't be allowed to promote cross-border terror: Rajnath

KRISHN KAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

THE SITUATION in Afghanistan has brought up new issues from the national security perspective, and India is monitoring the developments there, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday. He said India is also concerned that "anti-national" forces should not take advantage of the changed scenario and promote cross-border terrorism.

"What is happening in neighbouring Afghanistan is raising new questions from the security point of view. Our government is constantly monitoring the situation there. Along with the security of Indians, our government also wants that by taking advantage of the situation being created there, anti-national forces should not encourage cross-border terrorism," Singh said.

"At the same time, there are some other concerns as well, which can become a challenge from the point of view of national security but our government is alert, and is capable of facing any kind of situation."

Delivering the third Balramji Dass Tandon memorial lecture virtually, the Defence Minister also spoke about the security chal-



Rajnath Singh

lenges posed by China. Referring to the nearly 16-month military standoff in eastern Ladakh, which began in May 2020, he said the reason behind the "controversy" was that the "Chinese forces had ignored the agreed protocols". "It is true that there has been a perceptual difference regarding the border with China for a long time" and "despite this, there are some such agreements, protocols, following which the armies of both countries do patrolling." But, he said, "we cannot allow the Chinese Army to act on the LAC in a unilateral manner under any circumstances, and will never allow it to happen."

Ever since India became Independent, "it has been a constant attempt by many anti-India forces to create an atmosphere of instability within India, either on the borders, or through the borders", Singh said, and added, "a massive effort has been made for this from Pakistan's soil."

Assam Cong decides to split ties with AIUDF over 'praise for BJP'

TORAAGARWALA
GUWAHATI, AUGUST 30

CITING THE All-India United Democratic Front's (AIUDF) "continuous and mysterious praise" for the BJP, the Congress in Assam Monday announced that it will sever ties with its Mahajot alliance partner, which it had paired up with in January 2020 ahead of the Assembly elections.

The resolution was passed after a four-hour core committee meeting of the party in Guwahati on Monday afternoon. A communique from Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) said that it was "unanimously decided that AIUDF can no longer remain an alliance partner of Mahajot" as its "behaviour and attitude in relation to BJP party" had "baffled" the members of the Congress.



AIUDF MLA: What about 2 Cong MLAs who joined BJP?

"The AIUDF leadership's and senior members' continuous and mysterious praise of the BJP party and the Chief Minister has affected the public perception of the Congress party," the statement said, adding that an intimation would be sent to the All India Congress Committee (AICC) on the matter. It said the high command would take a decision on the Bodoland People's Front, another Mahajot partner which has in the last few months expressed its reluctance to remain with the alliance.

Reacting to the development,

AIUDF's Aminul Islam said it was a very "immature" decision by the Congress, and a step that would "ultimately benefit the BJP". "The only way we can edge out the BJP in Assam is by the smaller parties allying," he said. On the Congress's allegation that the AIUDF has been "praising the BJP", Islam said that "only one AIUDF politician had complimented the CM". "But at least two Congress MLAs have left the party to join the BJP. What do they have to say to that?"

Congress leader and Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi Wednesday said it was time for the Congress "to be independent of the Mahajot".

Bypolls to at least five constituencies (Tamulpur, Gossaigaon in Bodoland, and Mariani, Majuli, Thowra in Upper Assam) are scheduled in the next couple of months.

Selection of district party chief exposes rift within Kerala Cong

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUGUST 30

DISQUIET IS brewing in the Kerala unit of the Congress over the appointment of party chiefs in 14 districts in the state. The selection of a new crop of leaders has demonstrated the declining sway of senior leaders Oommen Chandy and Ramesh Chennithala, who would share the party slots at all rungs between them for nearly two decades.

A day after Chandy and Chennithala openly expressed their displeasure over their nominees not being considered as



Oommen Chandy, Ramesh Chennithala

DCC presidents, senior Congress leader A V Gopinath, who lost the race for the Palakkad district, quit the party on Monday.

Former party legislator K Sivadasan Nair and KPCC general secretary K P Anil Kumar were suspended from the party after

they criticised the new list, while KPCC secretary P S Prasanth was expelled after he wrote to senior party leader Rahul Gandhi, raising allegations against AICC general secretary K C Venugopal.

Prasanth had come out against the appointment of Palod Ravi as DCC president in Thiruvananthapuram and called Venugopal a Congress "terminator" in Kerala.

Kerala Congress president K Sudhakaran said, "Till now, decisions had been taken by them (Chandy and Chennithala) without any discussions... It is quite natural that they get uneasy when that practice is over... only merit would matter in Congress."



BJP DEMANDS REOPENING OF TEMPLES: BJP workers protest in Thane, Maharashtra. The BJP on Monday staged protests in several cities of the state against the government's stand to not reopen temples, which remain shut due to Covid-19 restrictions. Deepak Joshi

ED searches 7 locations linked to Sena MP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NAGPUR, MUMBAI, AUGUST 30

THE Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday carried out searches at seven places, including an educational institute, connected to Shiv Sena MP Bhavana Gawali in Washim in reference to an offence registered at Risod town in the district last year.

"The offence was in connection with alleged misappropriation of Rs 16 crore. Searches were



Shiv Sena MP Bhavana Gawali

conducted at seven places in Washim district in connection with the offence," ED sources said.

Last week, senior BJP leader Kirit Somaiya had told *The Indian Express* that action would be taken against Gawali in connection with

"a Rs 100-crore fraud".

Somaiya's car was attacked with stones and ink last week when he was in Washim district to visit Shri Balaji Particle Board Limited unit at Risod, which is at the center of the alleged fraud.

Gawali, the five-term Sena Parliamentarian from Yavatmal-Washim, said the ED raid "is akin to the Emergency and all the Shiv Sena leaders are being targeted". "When there was some mismatch in the accounts, I myself had lodged an FIR regarding my insti-

tution. But, picking up a single sentence and single number from it and making it look like a big thing is being done by some political leaders. Children from rural areas have been studying in my institution for the last 20 years," said Gawali, while speaking with media persons, after the ED raids on her institution.

"I was not given any notice by the ED. The ED officials have come to my institutions and are investigating. This is akin to the Emergency," she said.

FARMERS SET DEADLINE FOR ACTION



Farmers at a mahapanchayat by Sanyukt Kisan Morchha in Karnal on Monday. PTI

Day after Dy CM sought action on SDM, Haryana CM defends him

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 30

A DAY after Haryana Deputy CM Dushyant Chautala said that the state government will act against the Karnal SDM for his controversial remarks, purportedly asking the police to beat up protesting farmers, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar Monday said that "although the officer's choice of words was not correct, strictness had to be ensured at the venue (of BJP meeting), where law and order had to be maintained".

Farmer unions condemned Khattar's "soft stance" on IAS officer Ayush Sinha's action, and the Samyukt Kisan Morchha (SKM) expressed "deep shock and objection against the Chief Minister's defence of the officer".

The Karnal SDM had earlier told *The Indian Express* that the video clip of his remarks that went viral on social media "was doctored", and that "only a selected portion" of his briefing to the police personnel deployed at his naka was made viral.

Replying to questions on Monday, Khattar said: "If any action has to be taken (against the officer), it would first have to be assessed by the district administration. The DGP is also looking into it. We shall see it later. To maintain law and order, strictness had to be ensured."

"Also, the lathicharge took place at Bastara toll plaza, while the video of the officer that went viral was at a distance of 15 km from the place where lathicharge took place. There is no relation between the two incidents. It is not due to the officer's briefing that the lathicharge took place," Khattar said.

"At Bastara toll plaza, where lathicharge took place, another duty magistrate was posted," he said.

Khattar also said that public sentiment was turning against

Lathicharge: Opp Cong to move NHRC

Chandigarh: A delegation of Haryana Congress leaders under the leadership of state Congress in-charge Vivek Bansal will submit a complaint to the National Human Rights Commission Tuesday regarding the "barbaric" lathicharge on farmers in Karnal on Saturday.

Congress MLAs led by former CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda will meet Haryana Governor

In its meeting with the Governor, the Congress will seek a judicial probe into the lathicharge.

The complaint to the NHRC will demand action against those who ordered and carried out the action. **ENS**

farmers. "I am getting phone calls that they (farmers) need to be dealt with strictly. But, we are exercising restraint."

The SKM, meanwhile, demanded that a murder case be registered against the officer. A Kisan Panchayat organised in Gharanda grain market also issued an ultimatum to the Haryana government, by setting a September 6 deadline for acting against all police officials involved in the lathicharge.

At Gharanda meeting, farmers asked the state government to lodge an FIR against officers responsible for the lathicharge, or face an indefinite gherao of Mini Secretariat on September 7.

BKU leader Gurnam Singh Chaduni demanded cancellation of all "false" cases lodged against the protesting farmers.

AT UNSC Concerned over Gaza escalation, need to address causes: India

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

INDIA ON Monday expressed concern over the escalation at the Gaza Strip and called for restraint on the part of all parties saying they should refrain from acts that could worsen the security situation of the region.

Speaking at the UN Security Council meeting in New York on the Middle East Peace Process, including the Palestine Question, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla also expressed hope for early commencement of high-level negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

"We are concerned by the recent escalation in the Gaza Strip, which once again underscores the fragility of the ceasefire and the urgent need for addressing the underlying causes that have triggered the escalation," said Shringla, who chaired the UNSC meeting as president of the Security Council for the month of August.

CJI to administer oath of office to nine new SC judges today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

NINE NEW judges, including three women, will be administered oath of office as judges of the Supreme Court by Chief Justice of India N V Ramana on Tuesday.

It is for the first time that nine judges will be taking oath of office at one go. The swearing-in ceremony will be held at the auditorium of the Supreme Court's additional building complex.

Traditionally, the oath of office for new judges was administered in the CJ's court room.

With the swearing-in of the new judges on Tuesday, the strength of the Supreme Court will rise to 33, including the CJI. "This is for the first time in the history of the Supreme Court of India when nine judges will be taking the oath of office in one go. In another first, the venue of the ceremony is shifted to the auditorium. This is done keeping in view the need for strict adherence to Covid norms," said a press release issued by the SC's public relations office.

Probe into Lanka boat intercepted with drugs, rifles may suggest LTTE revival: Kerala, TN officials

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, AUGUST 30

AN ONGOING National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe into the seizure of 300 kg heroin, five AK-47 rifles and 1,000 live rounds of 9mm ammunition off the coast of Vizhinjam near Thiruvananthapuram has led to speculation that an international drug running and weapon trading racket is aimed at reviving the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist group LTTE.

The case relates to the March 18 interception of a boat with the contraband by the Coast Guard following an intelligence input.

The mastermind behind the operation was Sri Lankan Tamil Suresh Rajan, a resident of Colombo who had been living at Kundrathur, a Chennai suburb, for some time.

Multiple sources in Kerala and Tamil Nadu intelligence agencies said they failed to closely look at the case as it was being probed by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). "The NCB was about to chargesheet six Sinhalese who were on board when NIA stepped in and probed further," said an intelligence officer attached to Kerala Police.

The NIA probe would later find that six Sinhalese were labourers. Meanwhile, Rajan was

arrested from Angamaly, Kerala in August and was later taken into custody by the Tamil Nadu Q-branch for his links with LTTE groups still active in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

But after the NIA stepped in and took over the probe, they found scientific evidence of a Dubai link from a Thuraya handset (considered an advanced satellite phone) which was seized from the boat. "That was the crucial evidence that led to the arrest of Suresh and his associate Soundararajan," the officer said.

During searches conducted by NIA at premises linked to the accused in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, several incriminating documents,

including books relating to LTTE and several cellphones, gadgets and SIM cards were seized.

According to the officer, the March 18 incident was not an isolated case. "Evidences collected from Rajan after his arrest, including those of transactions worth crores, shows that he was an international drug smuggler with active links with Pakistan-based drug runner Haji Salim, who often shuttled between Dubai, Pakistan and Iran. Rajan held a prominent role in drugs and arms trafficking to Sri Lanka through the backyard of India," the officer said.

A Tamil Nadu intelligence officer said there was evidence that

Rajan met Sri Lankan drug lord Madhush Lakshitha alias 'Makandure Madush', who was killed in a shootout in the island nation in October 2020. "Rajan also was in touch with Salim," said the officer.

There was also evidence that Rajan and Soundarajan worked closely with individuals who are being monitored for their sympathies for LTTE and its reported revival mission. "If drugs were to earn money, the five AK-47 rifles seized from the boats were supposedly for LTTE sleeper cells," the officer said.

Officers in Kerala and Tamil Nadu familiar with the NIA probe said they are closely working with

Central agencies to explore the LTTE angle. "We cannot ascertain at this moment whether there is already a revival (of LTTE) in Sri Lanka or Tamil Nadu, or if it is a group earning money in the guise of reviving the group," said an officer.

Two similar seizures of Sri Lankan boats — before and after the Vizhinjam incident — are still being probed by the NCB. In March, the Coast Guard intercepted a Sri Lankan boat off Minicoy with six crew members and seized another Sri Lankan boat off Kanyakumari in November with 120 kg of narcotics worth approximately Rs 1,000 crore and five weapons.

EXPRESS NETWORK

BRIEFLY



Waze was allowed to be admitted to hospital to treat a heart condition

MAHARASHTRA

Court refuses NIA custody of Waze, Mane

Mumbai: A special court on Monday rejected an application filed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) seeking custody of dismissed Mumbai Police officers Sachin Waze and Sunil Mane in connection to the Ambani terror scare case. Special Judge Prashant R Sitre, meanwhile, allowed Waze to be admitted to a hospital to undergo treatment for his heart condition. With just a few days left to file its chargesheet in the case, the NIA had sought Waze's custody for two days and Mane's custody for five days. **ENS**

JAMMU & KASHMIR

2 killed during 'infiltration bid'

Jammu: Two militants were killed during an infiltration bid from across the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir during the early hours of Monday, the Army said. Defence PRO, Lt Colonel Devender Anand, said Army troops detected the infiltration bid by effective use of the integrated surveillance grid. On being challenged by the troops, the infiltrating militants opened fire, leading to a fierce firefight, he said. **ENS**

NEW DELHI

Thakur launches Fit India app

New Delhi: Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Singh Thakur launched the Fit India mobile application at the Major Dhyani Chand National Stadium in New Delhi on Sunday, on the occasion of National Sports Day as well as the second anniversary of the Fit India Movement. "The Fit India mobile app brings ease of checking fitness levels right into the palm of every Indian. It has some unique features like 'fitness score', animated videos, activity trackers and 'my plan' catering to individual specific needs," the minister said. **ENS**

Uttarakhand: 5 dead in heavy rain following cloudburst

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
DEHRADUN, AUGUST 30

AT LEAST five women were killed and two others were reported missing after they were trapped in a flood of debris following a cloudburst in Jumma village in Dharchula tehsil of Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district late Sunday, officials said Monday.

Five bodies were recovered from the debris and sludge by Monday afternoon during the search and rescue operation run by NDRF, SDRF, SSB, revenue department and police personnel.

Among the bodies recovered were those of siblings Sanjana (15), Renu (11) and Shivani (9). The other deceased were identified as Sunita Devi and Parvati Devi. Pithoragarh DM Ashish Chauhan said two people are still missing and search and rescue operations will continue. He said ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh has been sanctioned for the next of kin of each deceased.

"Five bodies, including those of three children, have been recovered, while the search for two more still missing is underway," SSB commandant M P Singh said.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami spoke with Pithoragarh district officials and took stock of damage and rescue operations.

Our forces can be more hostile on China border if needed: outgoing ITBP chief

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

INDIAN FORCES can be "more hostile" to Chinese troops if needed "in case of national interest and to protect our borders", and are enhancing their capabilities regularly to face any situation, according to Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) chief SS Deswal.

Speaking to *The Indian Express* on Monday, a day before he retires from service, DGP Deswal also said that forces under his command had to "take multiple steps on a daily basis" to secure India's embassy and consulates in Afghanistan and ensure the evacuation of its diplomats and nationals.

Apart from guarding the India-China border, the ITBP had been responsible for securing Indian missions at Jalalabad, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar,

and the embassy in Kabul. Deswal is a 1984-batch Haryana-cadre IPS officer, who served as ITBP chief for two years and 10 months.

Describing the India-China border as an "active border" from 2020, the ITBP chief said: "Any attempt to disrupt the equilibrium between the two countries will not be permitted. We have the capabilities and those capabilities...were reflected last year also. Wherever such attempts to change the ground situation were made, our forces gave complete resistance. Galwan was an example. We have brave soldiers who are always willing to sacrifice their lives for the country."

Deswal was referring to the border clash in June last year in the Galwan valley where 20 Indian Army personnel and an unconfirmed number of Chinese troops were killed. Since then, the ITBP has been a part of Corps Commander-level talks to achieve disengagement.



Kabul airlift a result of multiple steps: SS Deswal

Asked about the delay in talks on friction points after the Pangong Tso disengagement this year, Deswal said: "We can't be tired out as a nation (by Chinese delays in negotiations). In case of national interest and to protect our borders, our security forces can be more hostile to them. Hostility is not one-sided. It is need-based. When it is needed by our country, our forces can be extremely hostile. We should not fear the hostility of our counterpart. We are more capable of be-

ing hostile towards them."

He said India was increasing the capabilities of its forces at a faster pace than earlier. "Sometimes, it is deceptive of our counterparts to show strength that they actually may not have. We are enhancing our capabilities irrespective of what our counterpart is doing..."

Asked whether India lost a chance to negotiate on the Depsang Plains issue while it had leverage on the south bank of Pangong Tso, Deswal said: "You can't negotiate just one point. It is always give and take during the negotiations, which are going on successfully."

He pointed out that disengagement at Pangong Tso was achieved also due to "diplomatic and political efforts". "Urgency to complete negotiations is not the issue. The issue is that our claims must be accepted by the counterpart," he said.

Speaking on ITBP's role in

India's evacuation efforts from Afghanistan, Deswal said: "Hostile elements have always threatened our embassy there. It was a collective security environment created mainly by US and NATO forces on which our assessment of what would happen (as the Taliban advanced) was based. It was not under our control. Our control was only on how to protect our embassy in the given situation."

However, he said, the "total system changed in the past one month since the US withdrew". "We have taken steps on a daily basis in view of the emerging situation. That is how we were able to successfully evacuate all our people in the embassy," he said.

Incidentally, Deswal's daughter Yashaswini was a member of the Indian contingent at the Tokyo Olympics, participating in the 10 m air pistol event.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Numbers will not be a problem if Nitish Kumar becomes PM: Kushwaha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA, AUGUST 30

THE JD(U) on Monday said that Nitish Kumar is "Prime Minister material", and while the party was not staking claim to the highest seat of power for the Bihar chief minister, numbers would not be a problem if such a situation were to arise.

The statement was made by JD(U) parliamentary board chief Upendra Kushwaha, who brushed aside remarks by some Bihar BJP leaders that one needed the support of 272 MPs to become the PM, and that the JD(U) was unlikely to win as many seats on its own.

"*Kyun nahin ho sakta hai* (why can't it happen)?" Kushwaha said when asked if Kumar could muster the requisite numbers in view of the limited reach of the JD(U), which has little presence outside Bihar.



Upendra Kushwaha

The former Union minister, however, hastened to add, "We are not making a claim to the PM's post at present. We are with the NDA and acknowledge the leadership of Narendra Modi. But, if people talk about a hypothetical future, then nothing can be dismissed as impossible."

Nitish, however, sought to make light of Kushwaha's remarks. On Sunday too, the CM had refused to respond to queries by journalists, who asked him for his take on the party's projection of him as a veritable cult figure.

ANTI-ENCROACHMENT DRIVE

Thane civic official loses fingers in knife attack by street vendor

VALLABH OZARKAR
MUMBAI, AUGUST 30

THANE ASSISTANT Municipal Commissioner (AMC) Kalpita Pimple and her security detail were grievously injured Monday when a street vendor attacked them with a knife during an anti-encroachment drive.

Pimple lost two fingers in the attack, and Somnath Maruti Palve, her security guard, lost one finger, as both used their hands to fend off the attacker. Both are in hospital undergoing treatment.

The attacker was identified as Amarjeet Singh Yadav, a vegetable vendor. He was arrested on the spot even as he threatened to harm himself with the knife if the police came near him.

According to the police, the incident took place when Pimple was leading an anti-encroach-



Thane AMC Kalpita Pimple after the attack. Deepak Joshi

ment drive against street vendors. Her team had upended Yadav's vegetable kiosk.

As Pimple moved on from Yadav's scattered vegetables, he came at her with a sharp knife. Pimple tried to block the knife with her hands, and two fingers from her hand got cut off. She also suffered injuries on her head.

The police said her security guard, attached with the Thane

Municipal Corporation, rushed to save Pimple, but the vendor attacked him too, and he lost a finger. Two policemen and three policewomen were deployed for the anti-encroachment drive, but according to their seniors, it happened so quickly that they had no time to react.

The police were able to overpower him after a few minutes, and took to him station where he was booked and subsequently placed under arrest.

A police source said Yadav had no past criminal record, and said that he was angry that his kiosk had been upended.

Kiran Khairnar, Senior Police Inspector of Kasarvadavali police station, said, "The accused has been booked under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code for attempted murder, assaulting and deterring public servant while performing duty. He will be produced in the court on Tuesday."

Thinc session examines need for jobs with dignity for migrants in urban areas, policy changes needed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

SINCE THE pandemic began, "migration" in India has gained a negative connotation. But the problem may not be migration itself, but the fact that large chunks of migrants come from source regions facing economic distress.

In the destination areas, there is the problem of finding jobs with dignity, coupled with states politically driven to keep migrants out. It may fall on the private sector, as much as the government, to figure how to change this.

The latest edition of Indian Express Thinc, presented by Omidyar Network India, focused on this subject, starting with

thoughts from keynote speaker Meher Pudumjee, chairperson of Thermax Limited. In September last year, Thermax joined hands with like-minded corporates across Mumbai, Pune and Ahmedabad, in partnership with NGO Dasra, to launch an initiative called SoCo or Social Compact. The initiative aims at assuring standards for the workforce, including safety and social security cover.

Speaking about SoCo, Pudumjee said: "... It's a self-driven journey by companies committing to ensure a set of standards for their workforce."

He cited the example of health insurance -- usually set for one year, despite the fact that some employees are for six months. How can companies ensure they



get insurance for that period?

Similar concerns set the tone for a panel discussion, hosted by Udit Misra, Deputy Associate Editor, *The Indian Express*. Pudumjee was joined by Rajiv Khandelwal, founder of Aajeevika Bureau; Manish Sabharwal, chair-

man of TeamLease; Radhicka Kapoor, fellow at ICRIER and Deepak Mishra, professor at JNU.

Mishra, who has recently come out with a volume on contemporary migration in India, shed light on what's holding back employment generation. "The first thing for a policy maker is to move away from a generalised description of migrant workers to look at specificities of groups and how they are incorporated in the larger labour market," he said.

Assessing the impact of Covid on India's already strained migrant workforce, Kapoor said it was "the circular migrant who bore the brunt last year". "Basically, the ability of the manufacturing sector to exercise a pull from agricultural sector has been

weaker... so where were people being employed?... The fact that cities were generating relatively lacklustre employment opportunities meant much of this migration was circular..." she said.

Looking at policy changes, Sabharwal said: "... Urbanisation isn't showing more people into [existing cities]. It's creating more cities with more than a million people. We need better cities..."

Khandelwal, the founder of Aajeevika Bureau, which has collaborated with SoCo, said if Covid-19 added to an existing migrant crisis last year, this year, people went back to cities quickly. "There was no employment crisis. It is actually a wage, quality of work and work condition crisis, which existed, and has continued," he said.

Mysuru rape accused arrested earlier in sandalwood theft cases, got bail in Feb

KIRAN PARASHAR
BENGALURU, AUGUST 30

A KEY accused in the Mysuru gangrape case was linked to at least four sandalwood theft and smuggling cases in the region since 2019, with the latest of those filed in January this year, it has emerged.

Police are now looking at the possibility of the sandalwood theft gang's involvement in other attacks and robberies in Mysuru, which may have not been reported on account of fear among the victims.

Bhupathi, alias Keeri, 24, a resident of Talavadi town in Tamil Nadu's Erode district, a key accused held in the August 24 gangrape case, was arrested, along with three others, on January 8 after Mysuru police seized 40 kg sandalwood pieces from a car with Tamil Nadu registration. A senior officer said the seized sandalwood was worth Rs 5.5 lakh. "He was on the (police) radar, but not for crimes against women. He was out on bail," the officer added.

Before that, in 2019, Bhupathi and an associate, Praveen Kumar, alias Thambi, 20, were accused of stealing sandalwood trees on November 29 and December 1, from the premises of Sandalwood Oil Factory and the forest department, respectively, in Mysuru.

In another case registered last year, Bhupathi is accused, along with Praveen, of stealing a sandalwood tree from the home of a Mysuru resident named

Chirag Mehta on July 9-10 night.

Bhupathi was linked to the 2019 and 2020 cases after his arrest this January. While he got bail in the latest sandalwood theft and smuggling case on January 30, he was released on bail in the earlier three cases on February 26 this year.

A vital clue that led to the arrest of Bhupathi and four other suspects from Tamil Nadu on August 28 -- four days after the gangrape of a student and assault on her male friend in Lalithadripura near Chamundi Hills road of Mysuru -- was a bus ticket for travel between Talavadi in Tamil Nadu and Chamarajnagar, Karnataka. Police sources said the ticket found at the crime scene, the language the suspects spoke in, and cell tower information of Tamil Nadu phones that were in use at the crime spot led police to the suspects.

Bhupathi was a key link in the case, leading to the arrest of four others.

Police sources said Bhupathi and a second person allegedly involved in the gangrape were also involved in the sandalwood theft and smuggling cases.

"They would come to Mysuru often and visit the banana market. Their recent visit, when the crime was committed, was also to the market," a source said.

Bhupathi and Praveen Kumar were due to attend a court hearing in connection with the sandalwood theft cases of 2019 and 2020 on August 27 this year.

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TRACKING THE SECOND SURGE

547
DAYS SINCE
PANDEMIC
BEGAN

NEW CASES: 29,606

ACTIVE CASES: 3,70,385

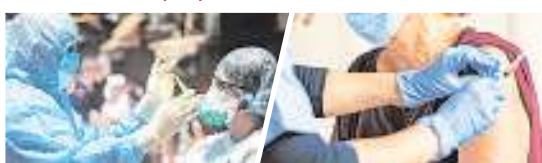
TOTAL VACCINATION: 63,43,81,358

DAILY DEATHS
206

TOTAL DEATHS
4,38,416

WEEKLY CFR
1.31%

OVERALL CFR
1.36%



TESTS TODAY: 15,84,531 | TOTAL TESTS: 52,17,31,056
WEEKLY POSITIVITY: 2.37% | OVERALL POSITIVITY: 6.28%

STATES REPORTING MOST CASES

STATE	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	WEEKLY POSITIVITY	TOTAL VACCINATION
■ Kerala	19,622	2,09,961	18.57%	2,81,52,494
■ Maharashtra	3,741	51,834	2.37%	5,71,66,822
■ Tamil Nadu	1,523	17,085	0.98%	3,16,02,266
■ Karnataka	973	18,418	0.66%	4,10,47,158
■ Andhra Pradesh	878	14,862	2.21%	2,89,39,289

STATES REPORTING MOST DEATHS

STATE	TODAY'S DEATHS	TOTAL DEATHS	WEEKLY CFR	OVERALL CFR
■ Kerala	132	20,752	0.80%	0.56%
■ Odisha	67	7,954	5.70%	0.80%
■ Maharashtra	55	1,40,734	2.97%	2.20%
■ Tamil Nadu	21	34,899	1.23%	1.35%
■ Assam	15	5,655	1.25%	0.97%

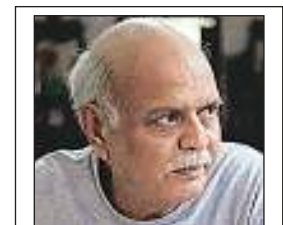
Note: Data as on Aug 30, vaccination numbers as of Aug 29. Deaths include those caused by comorbidities.

'Generous, encouraged people to be comfortable with their sexuality'

ASAD REHMAN
LUCKNOW, AUGUST 30

THE CONSENSUS among those who knew historian, scholar and queer rights activist Saleem Kidwai is that he never said no to share the "wealth of knowledge he possessed". "He was very generous with his knowledge, which was immense and he was one of the most humble people I have known," said author Rana Safvi, speaking after Kidwai's death due to heart-related complications at his residence in Lucknow on Monday morning.

Kidwai, who was openly gay, taught medieval history at Delhi University's Ramjas College for 20 years till 1993, when he returned to Lucknow after taking early retirement to focus on scholarship. He is survived by his three sisters. His burial was conducted in his ancestral village



SALEEM KIDWAI
1951-2021

Badagaon in Barabanki district.

Kidwai was one of the first academics to publicly speak as a member of the LGBT community. He co-edited the book *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings in Indian Literature* with Ruth Vanita, an Indian academic who teaches at University of Montana. It was a collection of writings on same-sex love from over 2,000 years of Indian literature.

"The idea behind the book was

to contradict this idea that homosexuality as a concept emerged from the West and was adopted by Indians...it was the British who came to India with their Victorian values who villainised it," said Lucknow-based author and journalist Mehru Jaffer, a close friend of Kidwai. "I think one of his bigger contributions was that he encouraged people to be comfortable with their sexuality."

Born in Lucknow in 1951, Kidwai belonged to an influential family from Badagaon. He also knew Begum Akhtar very closely as she was his neighbour.

Kidwai's friend Askari Naqvi, who is a performing artiste, said, "When Kidwai sahab was alive, he told me how it had rained the day Begum Akhtar died and that was a way for nature to mourn her death. Today, when I am heading for his burial, there is intense rain and I am reminded of what Kidwai sahab had told me."

Noted Bengali author dies at 85: 'His works displayed great sensitivity to environment'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, AUGUST 30

NOTED BENGALI writer Buddhadeb Guha, who authored several popular books including *Madhukari* (Honey Gatherer), died of post-Covid complications after cardiac arrest at a private hospital on Sunday night. He was 85. Guha had contracted Covid-19 in April and was hospitalised for 33 days. Earlier this month, he was hospitalised after complaining of breathlessness and urinary infection.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar all condoled his death.

Guha is survived by his two daughters. His wife Ritu Guha, an eminent Rabindra Sangeet exponent, died in 2001.

Guha's elder daughter Maleni



BUDDHADEB GUHA
1936-2021

said on social media. "Buddhadeb Guha is no more. He was blessed as to be one with the Divine on the night of Janmashtami (Lord Krishna's birthday) 2021. Do join his family and friends in celebrating his life."

Born on June 29, 1936 in Kolkata, Guha had spent his childhood in Rangpur and Barisal districts of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). His childhood experiences and travels left

a deep imprint on him, which were reflected in his works.

His novels and short stories have been highly acclaimed by critics which helped him win several awards, including the Ananda Purashkar and Sharat Puraskar. He was also a noted classical singer and proficient illustrator.

Besides *Madhukari*, some of Guha's notable works include *Koeler Kachhe*, *Sobinoy Nibedon* and *Baba Howa*. He was also popular among children as he was the creator of the fictional character Rijuda, a hunter-turned-conservationist, and his side-kick Rudra. Most of his works focused on the theme of nature and forest.

PM Modi tweeted, "Shri Buddhadeb Guha's writings were multifaceted and displayed great sensitivity to the environment. His works were enjoyed across generations, particularly among youngsters. His passing

away is a big loss to the literary world. Condolences to his family and admirers. Om Shanti."

Banerjee said, "I am deeply saddened by the demise of the eminent writer Buddhadeb Guha. He passed away in Kolkata last night. He was 85 years old. Buddhadeb Guha, the prominent author of Bengali literature, has written notable books, including 'Koel', 'Kojagar', 'Madhukari', 'Jangalmahal', 'Charibeti' etc. He is also the creator of two popular fictional characters in Bengali literature - Rijuv and Rijuda."

Dhankhar tweeted, "Saddened at passing of eminent Bengali writer Buddhadeb Guha, author of many notable works such as 'Madhukari' (Honey Gatherer). His works of fiction reflected his closeness to nature and forests of eastern India. Pray Almighty to bestow eternal peace on the departed soul."



7 | E. THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2021

EXPLAINED



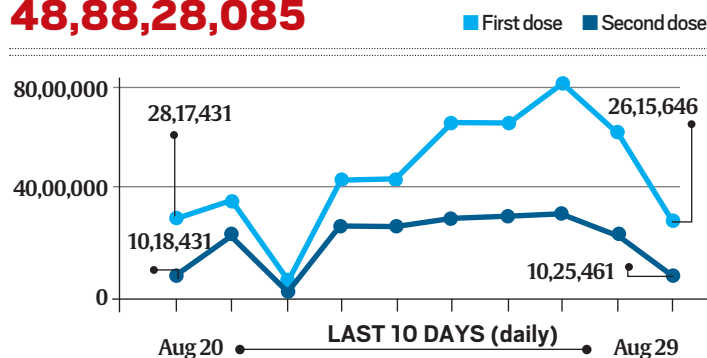
@ieExplained

#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

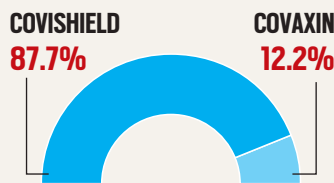
CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

TOTAL VACCINATED IN INDIA (at least one dose)
48,88,28,085



TOTAL DOSES
63,34,71,925

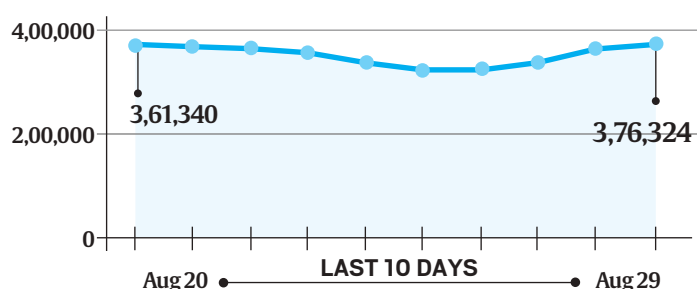
(Sputnik V's 7,38,777 doses not represented in pie)



DOSES ON AUG 29 **36,41,107**
AUG 28: 68,41,684 (1ST DOSE: 53,35,740; 2ND: 15,05,944)

INDIA ACTIVE CASES

3,76,324



Note: The August 29 figures in these graphs are based on the government updates on August 30

INDIA TOTAL CASES 3,27,37,939

Source: Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, updated at 11 pm on August 30

Combo antibody treatment reduces hospitalisation: study

IN AN observational study, Mayo Clinic researchers have found that a combination of casirivimab and imdevimab — two monoclonal antibody treatments that have emergency use authorisation from the US Food and Drug Administration — keep high-risk patients out of the hospital when infected with mild to moderate Covid-19. The study has been published in *The Lancet's Clinical Medicine*.

Of the nearly 1400 Mayo Clinic patients enrolled in this study, 696 received the drug combo between December 2020 and early April. An equal number of patients didn't receive the drug combo. Upon evaluation of their status at 14, 21 and 28 days after treatment, the numbers for hospitalisation were found to be significantly lower for the treated group, at each stage.

At 14 days, 1.3% of the treated group was hospitalised, while 3.3% of the non-treated group was hospitalised. At day 21, the percentages of people hospitalised from the treated and non-treated groups were 1.3 and

4.2, respectively. At day 28, 1.6% of the treated patients were hospitalised compared to 4.8% of the non-treated patients.

From this data, it can be inferred that there was 60%-70% relative reduction in hospitalization among treated patients, Mayo Clinic said in a press release.

The release quoted Raymund Razonable, a Mayo Clinic infectious disease specialist and senior author of the study, as saying that when a combination of monoclonal injections is used to treat patients who are at high risk due to a range of comorbidities, and contract a mild or moderate case of Covid-19, they get an opportunity to recover without being hospitalised.

"Our conclusion overall at this point is that monoclonal antibodies are an important option in treatment to reduce the impact of Covid-19 in high-risk patients," Dr Razonable was quoted as saying.

Source: Mayo Clinic



PAPER CLIP

NEW RESEARCH

How pandemic changed nature of police work, relations with public

VIBHA ATTRI

THE NATIONAL Covid-19 lockdown was imposed with a four-hour notice in March 2020. The stringent curbs on movement were intended to stem the chain of infection. The lockdown was tough on the community.

Many sections of society faced police action in an unusual context. And the police themselves faced an enormous challenge — they were the authority entrusted with preventing panic and maintaining normalcy in not-so-normal circumstances.

The nature of policing changed during the lockdown, reveal data from the recently released Lokniti-CSDS and Common Cause report. Nearly 9 out of 10 police personnel (88%) felt that the nature of policing was different compared to normal times. Enforcing a lockdown was a whole new ball game, for which India's police forces were neither well equipped nor trained.

The 'Policing in the Covid-19 Pandemic' study was conducted among 2,409 civilians and 1,198 police personnel in 19 cities spread across 10 of the worst affected states after the first wave of Covid-19.

Fear of police

The general public expressed a somewhat mixed opinion of the police's behaviour during the lockdown. More than half

(56%) witnessed the police providing help — but at the same time, about 1 in 3 (30%) reported the police were rude, and a nearly equal proportion (36%) said they saw them use force against civilians (Figure 1).

Increased restrictions led to confrontation between people and police — 33% said this was a common sight. But a significant majority (40%) reported they did not come across such incidents, or witnessed them rarely (20%).

The use of force by police in some cases resulted in fear of arbitrary state violence.

Data reveal that the fear of police ('a lot' and 'somewhat' combined) was high among people. Among the biggest of fears and anxieties were those of fines (57%), followed by that of police beatings (55%). More than 2 out of 5 people (43%) reported they were afraid the police would force them to undergo testing for Covid-19, or detain or arrest them (Figure 2).

How police saw things

More than a quarter (27%) of police personnel reported that managing pandemic-stricken people during the lockdown was their biggest challenge. Two in five (45%) said there were confrontations with people while checking their travel passes, and in containment zones (42%). Confrontations at local shops selling essential food items (38%) and during food distribution (37%) were also reported. Asked about the actions they had to take,

FIGURE 1

HOW PEOPLE SAW POLICE

WHEN LOCKDOWN WAS IN PLACE, DID YOU WITNESS...

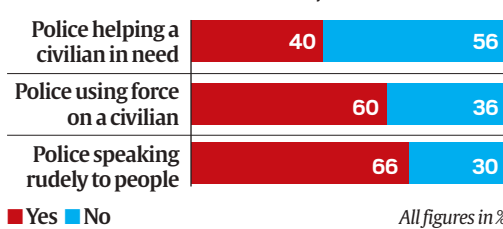
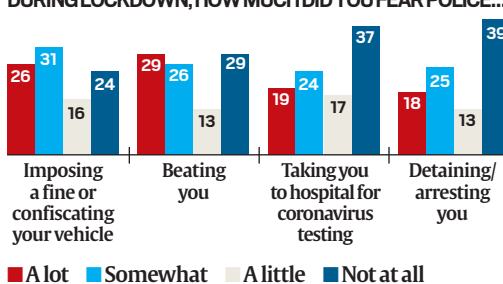


FIGURE 2

DID PEOPLE FEAR POLICE?

DURING LOCKDOWN, HOW MUCH DID YOU FEAR POLICE...



half the police personnel said they often imposed fines; about one-fourth (24%) reported having done so a few times (Table 1).

Two out of 3 (66%) police personnel inter-

viewed said they let people go after minor punishments (at their discretion) for offences. One out of three (34%) said they or their team had done this often, and another one-third

(32%) claimed this had happened a few times. Seven per cent reported having used force frequently, and about one fourth (27%) claimed to have done so a few times. Twelve

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Is Covid now endemic in India?

WHO chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan has said India seems to be entering some stage of endemicity. If the virus is present all the time, what are the implications for immunity, future waves, and vaccination?

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, AUGUST 30

AS INDIA gets ready to face a possible third wave of SARS-CoV-2, World Health Organization (WHO) chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan has said that "India seems to be entering some stage of Covid-19 endemicity where there is low- to moderate-level transmission". Earlier this year, scientists had indicated in a survey carried out by the journal *Nature* that the SARS-CoV-2 virus is set to become endemic and would continue to circulate in pockets of the global population.

What is endemicity?

Endemic means something that is present all the time. For example, said leading virologist Dr Shahid Jameel, influenza is endemic, unlike smallpox which has been eradicated.

"Only those pathogens can be eradicated that don't have animals (another species) as a reservoir. Smallpox and polio are human virus examples, rinderpest is a cattle virus. This means if there is a virus/pathogen that is present in some animal reservoir like bats, camels or civet cats, then it can transmit again once the level of immunity wanes in the population against the disease caused by it," Dr Jameel said.

"In the case of coronavirus disease, it will continue to circulate as it is present in the animal reservoir. This also means that it will cause disease to the extent that people have had no vaccination against or exposure. If, however, enough people are vaccinated or have been exposed to the infection, then the virus will cause symptomatic infection but not disease. So, that is what is considered becoming endemic — it is there but not causing disease," Dr Jameel said.

When is SARS-CoV-2 likely to become endemic?

That will depend on how fast it spreads and mutates. There are many variables that have to be considered, Dr Jameel said, and there is no clear answer regarding when the virus is likely to be endemic. "Instead of getting bogged down on whether the virus has become endemic or not, the need is to focus



People wait for a Covid-19 vaccine dose at a hospital in Noida on Monday. Scientists believe a large section of the population has developed antibodies against the virus, either due to vaccination or natural infection. Reuters

on vaccination and limit transmission. It is not possible to predict when the virus is going to be endemic," Prof Jameel said.

The last serological survey by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had shown from a representative sample of the population — 70 districts out of 718 — that roughly two-thirds of the population have antibodies. Again, out of those two-thirds, some would have had the antibodies because they have now been fully vaccinated. However, since vaccination rates are still fairly low, the general assumption is that most people who have antibodies have been infected but not all have had disease. This means a majority will be protected from symptomatic disease later on, Dr Jameel explained; they may get infected but are protected.

"Again, that is assuming the virus is not going to change to a form that transmits easily and evades immunity. One cannot predict if and when the virus mutates into something where vaccines start failing," Prof Jameel said.

How long can the antibodies be expected to last?

It is an open question, said Professor Partha Majumder, National Science Chair, Government of India. "Most everybody now has antibodies that likely reduces the chance of infection and even if infected may not develop severe disease. This virus is going to stay with us. We may already have developed herd immunity, which indicates that most of us have antibodies — either due to infection or vaccination — and hence if infected we may not develop severe disease," he said.

"From its rate of spread and its rate of mutation, many of us indeed expect that this coronavirus will never be eradicated — not just in India, but globally — and will become endemic to stay with you without causing major health problems, since the vast majority would have developed protective antibodies," he said.

Clinical epidemiologist Colonel (retired) Dr Amitav Banerjee, too, referred to country-wide serosurveys that indicate almost 67% Indians, including a large proportion of chil-

dren, have IgG antibodies. "As the antibody levels wane over time, the immunity persists due to memory and T cells. We can assume that a much larger proportion beyond this 67% have encountered the virus and would have had immunity due to natural infection. There is a need for more serosurveys for IgG levels to be carried out," Col (Banerjee) said.

Can an additional vaccine dose help?

Whether or not a booster dose of a vaccine is required, Professor Majumder said, depends on how quickly the antibody level comes down in the average individual. "There are wide variations in the trend of waning of antibody level among persons; sufficient data have not yet accumulated to definitively determine the need for a booster dose," Professor Majumder said.

"While vaccine effectiveness does appear to decline over time, there is still expected to be substantial protection. It is likely that a third shot or booster might be necessary in the future and in fact, a regular booster shot, just like for influenza, might be indicated," said Professor Gautam Menon, Professor of Physics and Biology at Ashoka University.

Should we worry about numbers rising again?

According to Professor Menon, one can expect a more or less constant level of infection within the population, with the likelihood of severe illness, hospitalisation or death becoming increasingly small as people are vaccinated.

The Delta variant now dominates new infections around the country. Viruses mutate constantly, but the question, Professor Menon said, is whether a new variant will come along that is much more transmissible than Delta and can evade an immune response from either a prior infection or vaccination.

"As long as it does not, we might expect that a small background of reinfections and vaccine breakthroughs will help maintain numbers of infected at a low, constant level. It is more likely that there will be a steady level of cases, with some regions, especially of low prior seroprevalence and low vaccination rates, seeing spikes. It is completely unlikely that we will see case numbers comparable to the second wave," Prof Menon said.

THIS WORD MEANS: VACCINE TRAVEL LANE

Singapore's latest concept for vaccinated fliers

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

SINCE THE end of last year, several countries have experimented with various concepts to allow international travel in the aftermath of Covid-19. These have included air bubbles, vaccine passports, travel corridors and even a traffic light system. The latest addition to this list is Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL), introduced by Singapore. While still in its early days, experts believe it could become a pro forma for jurisdictions opening up to vaccinated travellers.

What are Vaccinated Travel Lanes?

VTLs are basically an extension of travel corridors, albeit only for travellers who have been fully vaccinated. As of date, Singapore has established VTLs with two jurisdictions

— Germany and Brunei Darussalam — allowing fully vaccinated passengers from these two places to arrive in Singapore for any travel purpose without quarantine requirements, which are otherwise mandatory for those flying to Singapore.

How will these VTLs work?

Singapore will designate specific flights with the country on the other side of the lane only for passengers who have a Vaccinated Travel Pass (VTP) issued by the Singapore government. Fully vaccinated passengers will be able to apply for a VTP from September 1 for travel from September 8 onwards on the designated flights. Singapore citizens and permanent residents do not need to apply for the VTP to travel back home under the VTL.

What do travellers need to do?

To apply for a VTP, travellers must be fully

vaccinated — an individual will be considered fully vaccinated 14 days after they have received the full regimen of a vaccine authorized by WHO for emergency use. This includes the Serum Institute of India's Covishield.

Applications for a VTP must be made between 7 to 30 calendar days before the intended date of arrival in Singapore. Quarantine requirements have been done away with for passengers arriving on VTL flights. However, they must still get an RT-PCR test done 48 hours ahead of the scheduled departure time and prepay for their post-arrival Day 3 and Day 7 Covid-19 PCR tests when applying for the VTP. It is also important to note that travellers to Singapore must have only been to their country or region of departure and/or Singapore in the last 21 consecutive days before departing for Singapore.

What about passengers who are not

fully vaccinated?

Designated flights between Germany and Singapore (by Lufthansa and Singapore Airlines) and Brunei Darussalam (by Royal Brunei Airlines and Singapore Airlines) will only carry passengers with a VTP. However, in addition to these, usual flights from these countries and others under agreements with Singapore will also be allowed to fly. In those flights, passengers without a VTP can travel but they will be subject to stringent quarantine requirements upon arrival in Singapore.

German carrier Lufthansa will start operating its VTL flights between Frankfurt and Singapore from September 16, flying twice a week on Thursdays and Saturdays. Singapore Airlines will operate its VTL flights between Frankfurt and Singapore on September 7 and between Munich and Singapore on September 8.

per cent resorted many times to detaining or arresting people. About a quarter said they had done so a few times.

The evidence from police interviews suggests the police got the most support from affluent localities, followed by the middle class, and then from the poor — probably because the lockdown was the harshest on the lowest strata of society, which was, therefore, more anxious and less supportive of police.

Shift in crime dynamics

With fewer people venturing out, a substantial dip was reported in the crime rate. However, this is not official, countrywide data provided by the government; it is based on accounts of police personnel.

An overwhelming proportion of police personnel (79%) reported a drop in the overall crime rate. A look at individual crimes shows that while police personnel reported that general crimes such as theft, robbery, kidnapping, and murder seemed to have reduced significantly during the lockdown, offences committed in the private space — such as cases of domestic violence against women and incidents related to cybercrime — saw an upward trend. (Table 2).

The 'stay at home' restrictions brought to light the dynamics of interaction between citizens and police. Although the majority of people rated the behaviour of the police as good, there were many instances of confrontations and altercations as well. The lockdown not only led to a sudden change in the pattern of daily life, but also triggered a shift in crime dynamics and policing duties.



New Delhi





The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

‘BREAK THEIR HEADS’

SDM's brutish diktat highlights how the official machinery has switched off farmers' protests, sees them as enemy

NOBODY MUST BE allowed to breach the security cordon without a “broken head”. That was the brutish, illegal instruction sub-divisional magistrate Ayush Sinha — caught on camera— gave to the police on Saturday in Karnal, where farmers had gathered to protest against a BJP meeting led by Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. In the aftermath of a lathi charge that left several farmers injured, the officer has claimed the video recording was selective and that no crackdown on protesters happened in his vicinity. The chief minister says the officer’s “choice of words” was not correct, but that “strictness” was required to maintain law and order, even as his deputy from another party has promised appropriate action against the SDM. The question for the Haryana Chief Minister is this: How can any notion of “strictness” in a democracy get away with being so flagrantly anti-people? And what does it say about the Haryana government if the law and order machinery treats the farmers as the enemy, not citizens with a grievance and a constitutional right to protest? The larger question is this: Where is politics, and the politician? The scenes from Karnal on Saturday have once again underlined that politicians have all but abdicated their responsibility to play the mediating and moderating role vis a vis the farmers’ movement against the Centre’s three farm laws. Political interventions are actually reactions, after the event. For the most part, protesting farmers have been left to confront a stone-walling and quelling police force — even as what is most needed are not check-posts and barricades but outreach by the people’s representatives, and a listening state.

It is true that the Centre has conducted 11 rounds of talks with the farm union leaders and that in round 10, the NDA government bent enough to place on the table an offer to suspend the farm laws. And that the dialogue broke down in January because the farmers refused to relent from their maximalist demand of a complete repeal of the laws, and a legal guarantee for MSP, and then, due to the movement’s brief lapse into violence on January 26. But what is also true is that the Centre’s dialogue had come too late, and after too much name-calling. By then the movement had already surged and strengthened on the back of fears and insecurities of farmers, mainly in Punjab and Haryana, over the new legislation shortchanging them while benefiting big corporates. That the Centre was seen to push through the changes last year, first as ordinance amid pandemic, without consultation, and then as law through Parliament without adequate debate, laid the ground for the distrust that has only thickened since.

Now, nine long months after the mobilisation moved to Delhi’s borders, and with assembly elections to Punjab only months away, it is essential that politics finds its way back in. The farmers’ problem cannot be kicked down the road, it is not going to go away by a strategy of wearing them out. There is no alternative to the government engaging the farmers through their representatives and leaders, and persuading them about the benefits and efficacy of the new laws.

AAP’s JOURNEY

Tiranga yatra is an attempt to take the fight to the BJP. But AAP will also have to navigate strategy’s pitfalls

THE BJP’S SUCCESS in framing nationalism and aligning it to its politics of Hindutva has been remarkable. On the other side of the political fence, is the Opposition’s failure in separating Hinduism from Hindutva, or demarcating a more encompassing notion of patriotism that also appeals to the people. The Aam Aadmi Party’s decision to take out a “Tiranga Yatra” in Ayodhya on September 14, with likely stop-overs at the Ram temple and Hanumangarhi, is clearly an attempt to take the battle to the BJP on both fronts. To do so successfully, however, the AAP will need ideological clarity and political finesse — else, its experiment risks succumbing to the failures of the me-too “soft Hindutva” strategies that have been tried by non-BJP parties in the past.

The Tiranga Yatra is evidently a culmination of a series of symbolic and policy actions by the AAP. In November 2020, as the pandemic raged, Arvind Kejriwal conducted a “Diwali Pujan”. His government introduced a “Deshbhakti” curriculum in the city’s schools, “embedded in constitutional values”, and is putting up 500 national flags across the capital at a cost of Rs 85 crore. Announcing former Colonel Ajay Kothiyal as the AAP’s chief ministerial candidate for the upcoming Uttarakhand assembly elections, Kejriwal underlined his credentials as a “deshbhakt fauji (patriotic soldier)” and the party has publicised his work in rebuilding the Kedarnath temple, devastated by the 2013 floods. The AAP has made it clear that it will contest elections in UP, Uttarakhand and Gujarat and that part of its strategy to challenge the BJP is to draw associations between patriotism with governance, and highlight its own record in education and health in Delhi as evidence of its success in the latter.

This experiment of wedding patriotism with development and moving the conversation around nationalism beyond demonising the “Other” could be a welcome addition to the political repertoire and conversation. However, the strategy also has potential risks and pitfalls. The AAP’s temple visits and flag marches could have the unintended effect of entrenching and solidifying the terms of political debate set by the BJP. Unless it is specifically guarded against, this politics could normalise the invisibilisation of minorities and harden categories like “anti-national”. The AAP has shown an innovative streak with a politics of civic governance earlier. How it navigates these pitfalls going ahead will be closely watched. It will, for better or worse, have a bearing on the robustness of Opposition politics.

JHAJHARIA’S FEAT

His gold in 2004 had marked a turning point for Indian para sport. His silver now shines even brighter

TOKYO CONTINUES TO bring happy tidings for India as the Paralympics take off from where the Olympics left. At halfway mark, India have gone past their best-ever medal count, securing two historic gold medals with a world record to boot. Shining in that glittering star cast is javelin para-thrower Devendra Jhajharia whose silver is as bright as any gold. Jhajharia, 40, won his first gold medal at the Paralympics in 2004 at Athens, and 17 years and one pandemic postponement later, returned to Tokyo to win his third Para Games medal to become one of India’s greatest sportspersons. In what is a testament to the Rajasthan legend’s longevity, resilience and continued commitment to excellence, his latest silver came on the back of his personal best throw of 64.35 metres — a progression from his historic hauls that fetched him gold medals in Athens and at Rio.

Jhajharia’s gold in 2004 had marked the turning point for Indian para sport, and it had owed almost entirely to the efforts of his mother to bolster his confidence when he was young. Undeterred by the accident that led to amputation of his left arm as a child, she told her son that there was no reason to fear the outdoors and reinforced in him the self-assurance that he belonged on the sports field. No impairment could pull him back from self belief as one of India’s most inspiring figures aiming for and achieving the very best in global sport.

On Monday, Jhajharia would achieve success again on the javelin field, the scene of Neeraj Chopra’s gold a fortnight ago. Having spent years taking the help of scientific advances in training techniques and seeking expertise from some of the best coaches in Europe, Jhajharia would also raise the bar of excellence. The country will do well to learn from Jhajharia that smart solutions exist to help the differently abled to not just survive, but excel — on the field, and off it.



C RAJA MOHAN

AS THE LAST American soldiers fly out of Kabul airport and the world adapts to the return of the Taliban, three uncomfortable but enduring features of international politics have come into sharp focus. The human tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan, India’s enormous emotional investment in the Kabul government that collapsed this month, and Delhi’s strong concerns that the Taliban’s connections with Pakistan should not muddy our thinking about the ways of the world.

That victories on the battlefield have political consequences is one of the fundamental features of international politics. Governments have no option but to come to terms, now or later, with the victor. There is no reason, then, for the Indian discourse to be surprised at the rapid normalisation of the Taliban by the international community.

On August 2, the UNSC warned the Taliban against pursuing a military solution to the conflict and establishing an Islamic Emirate; on August 16, both the references were dropped as the Taliban took charge of Kabul. And last week, the UNSC stopped referring to the Taliban by name and moved to a general appeal against letting Afghan territory be used by terror groups.

The UNSC’s sensitivity to the rapidly-changing ground situation reminds us of the legendary headlines of a French newspaper as Napoleon escaped from confinement in Elba and marched on Paris in March 1815. Here is a rough sense and sequence of the headlines: “The Cannibal has left his den”. “The Monster has landed”. “The Tyrant has passed through Lyon”. “The Usurper is 60 leagues from Paris”; “Bonaparte is advancing, but will never enter Paris”; “Napoleon will be below our ramparts tomorrow”; “The Emperor has arrived at Fontainebleau”; “His Imperial Majesty is in the Royal Palace”.

All students of politics know that total wars of the kind that we have seen in Afghanistan change the domestic and international politics of a nation. Whether it likes the new and victorious sovereign or not, a government has the obligation to secure its national interests — ranging from the protection of its citizens and property to maintaining the regional balance of power. India is not immune to this essential principle of international relations and will find ways to protect its stakes in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

That brings us to the second enduring feature of world politics — that there are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent

Differences even among the closest of friends are natural and always offer openings to adversaries. History tells us that movements based on ideology — either secular or religious — are especially prone to internecine conflict. Ideological outfits squabble over the interpretation of the scripture and on the appropriate strategies for realising the declared goals.



C UDAY BHASKAR

INDIA AND the US were “estranged” democracies for many decades and gradually moved towards cautious “engagement” after the end of the Cold War, during the Narasimha Rao-Bill Clinton phase. Among the many individuals and institutions who were part of the vast bilateral ensemble that contributed to this transformation was Stanley A Weiss, former chairman of BENS (Business Executives for National Security) who passed away in London on August 26. Weiss played a critical role as a discreet enabler both in the Beltway and corporate America of the mid-1990s.

At that time — when the India-US relationship was estranged — IDSA (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses) was often referred to as the “lion’s den” by American academics and analysts for its fierce defence of why India remained outside the NPT (Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty). In a lighter vein, India experts alluded to the late K Subrahmanyam, long-time director of the institute, as the “lion king”. But it was also deemed mandatory for members of the American strategic community on their first visit to India to stop by at Sapru House and be “given a stern tutorial by Subbu” — as the late Steve Cohen used to quip.

In early 1997, the IDSA was informed that a business team from the US would be in India

A FRIEND OF INDIA

In the mid- 1990s, Stanley Weiss was a wise and empathetic ally India could rely on

When the India-US relationship hit rock bottom after the tests and the White House was ‘mad’ with India for crossing the nuclear Rubicon, Weiss was the solitary American voice to provide an empathetic interpretation of the Indian decision.

interests. Consider reports that the US is providing intelligence inputs to the Taliban on the terror threats from ISIS-K.

Although these reports are disconcerting to many, the conditions on the ground mean the US needed the Taliban’s support for the safe evacuation of its citizens in the last couple of weeks, as well as in the future. When asked whether he trusts the Taliban, US President Joe Biden told the press that “It’s not a matter of trust — it’s a matter of mutual self-interest.” “It’s in their self-interest that we leave when we said (August 31) and that we get as many people out as we can,” Biden added.

The convergence of US and Taliban interests may be more than tactical. The US would want to explore if the Taliban can help secure long-term American interests in preventing a regrouping of international terror outfits like the al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan. The Taliban on the other hand would want American and Western support in rebuilding Afghanistan. It is by no means clear if such a deal can be clinched, given the big risks it presents to both sides. But the two sides seem ready to explore the possibilities.

The same can be said about the prospects for long-term cooperation between India and the Taliban-led government. For Delhi, the main interest is in preventing Afghan soil from being used by anti-India terror groups. At least a section of the Taliban is eager to continue political and commercial engagement with India.

Last week, in a major speech on the Taliban’s approach to domestic and international issues, the head of the Taliban political commission Sher Mohammad Stanikzai underlined the movement’s interest in continuing the partnership with India. This is part of a natural quest for a diversified set of international partnerships. Delhi would be right to keep its fingers crossed on the Taliban’s ability to deliver on these promises and stand up against the Pakistan army’s pressures to keep India out. But it would certainly want to find out if the Taliban means what it says and if there are any cracks in Pakistan’s relationship with Kabul’s new rulers.

Finally, the US engagement with the Taliban to counter the ISIS-K has been met with derision across the world. Critics say all these groups are part of the same school of terror, driven by similar religious zeal and nurtured in Pakistan’s sanctuaries.

India’s extensive experience of dealing with Pakistan-supported terror lends credence to the narrative on Rawalpindi’s masterful cho-

later in the year and that we (I was then the deputy to Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, who was the director) were to coordinate the visit. What seemed like one more foreign delegation acquired a different texture when the then Indian ambassador to the US, Naresh Chandra, met Subbu and Jasjit and indicated that this was more than a routine visit and that the PM would also meet the BENS team.

Events moved swiftly after that and I was nominated as sherpa from the Indian side and tasked to plan the BENS visit with the US embassy, ably led by ambassador Frank Wisner and Raphael Benaroya, the India expert assisting Weiss. Most members of the BENS delegation were CEOs of top US companies. They had never visited India and were exploring business options after economic liberalisation.

The result was a very successful BENS visit to Delhi in 1997. The team met the top brass of the Ministry of Defence and the military, and finally called on Prime Minister I K Gujral. Weiss conveyed to the PM that the real India story was not being heard in the Beltway and Gujral suggested that he (Stanley) could tell the story in his widely read column in the *International Herald Tribune*.

What was the outcome of the quiet role played by BENS apropos the bilateral relationship? In response, Weiss would point to the

reography of the unending terror ballet in our region. But Delhi should not rule out contradictions between Pakistan and the terror groups it has spawned as well as among various jihadi organisations.

Differences even among the closest of friends are natural and always offer openings to adversaries. History tells us that movements based on ideology — either secular or religious — are especially prone to internecine conflict. Ideological outfits squabble over the interpretation of the scripture and on the appropriate strategies for realising the declared goals.

Recall that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi exploited the divisions in the Indian Communist movement for promoting her dominance over the Congress and reorienting India’s politics. In the US, President Richard Nixon and his adviser Henry Kissinger actively exploited the differences between Russian and Chinese communists. Across Asia, conservatives actively used splits in the communist parties to establish their political dominance.

Despite its powerful appeal, religious ideology has failed to build durable political coalitions within and across nations. Pan-Islamist movements have quickly splintered amidst sectarian tensions as well as the clash between nationalism and ethnicity on the one hand and the calls for religious solidarity on the other.

Afghan history, too, bears witness to perennial political schisms. The Afghan communists who seized power in Kabul in the 1978 revolution could not overcome their internal differences on how to modernise their nation or the role of the Soviet Union.

The various religious groups that Pakistan supported could not unite after the Soviet army was ousted from Afghanistan. It had to create the Taliban to counter the Mujahideen. The Taliban’s capture of power in 1996 produced a new set of ethnic and religious divisions within Afghanistan.

Given this history, it is unwise for Delhi to paint the external challenges arising from the Afghan tumult as a single coherent threat; and to believe in leveraging the external force for domestic political ends. The Panchatantra has a more sensible strategy to offer — try and divide your potential adversaries and strengthen your internal unity.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

lead story of *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), which noted in its September 26, 1997 report: “Why did the US President Bill Clinton, undoubtedly one of the busiest heads of state, seek a meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, I K Gujral, in New York (at the United Nations)? The answer is a four-letter word: BENS. Business Executives for National Security.”

Subsequent events moved in a roller-coaster manner after Prime Minister A B Vajpayee took office in Delhi and India conducted its nuclear tests in May 1998. When the India-US relationship hit rock bottom after the tests and the White House was “mad” with India for crossing the nuclear Rubicon, Weiss was the solitary American voice to provide an empathetic interpretation of the Indian decision.

To their credit, the apex political leadership on both sides and their tireless diplomats were able to reach a rapprochement after the Kargil war of 1999 and Bill Clinton’s visit to India in early 2000 was testimony to the tentative “engagement” between the two prickly democracies. Stanley A Weiss, a World War II veteran and mining tycoon, will be long remembered as a wise and empathetic friend of India.

The writer is director, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi

AUGUST 31, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

TEHRAN BOMBING

A POWERFUL BOMB rocked the prime minister’s office in Central Tehran on August 31 wounding the President Mohammad Ali Rajai and the Prime Minister Mohammad Javed Bahonar, the official Iranian media reported. Pars, the official Iranian news agency, reported that at least five persons were killed with some and 15 wounded with some of the bodies burnt beyond recognition. The Iranian cabinet held an “emergency meeting” and adopted certain decisions to cope with the blast’s aftermath and condemned the episode as a “last ditch attempt by American hirelings”. The blast, which sent a fire raging through the building, appeared to be the most serious in

Iran since a bomb killed more than 70 of the Iran’s religious and political leaders in Tehran.

ADVANTAGE URS

D DEVARAJ URS was unanimously elected president of the state unit of Karnataka Congress (U). Before the meeting, D Chandra Gowda and his followers resolved to join the Congress (I) at a parallel meeting of the KPCC (U). Gowda had to be content with very little support even though he had claimed support of 150 members of the party.

IMPASSE ON DA

REPRESENTATIVES OF CENTRAL government

employees have rejected the government offer of merging a part of the cleanness allowance with basic pay if they agree to the impounding of the 50 per cent of instalments of the DA payable. The matter came up at an informal meeting of the representatives of the standing committee of the Joint Consultative Machinery (JCM) called by the Cabinet Secretary.

NIHAR RAY DEAD

INTELLECTUALS AND EDUCATIONISTS bade a tearful farewell to Nihar Ranjan Ray, historian and art critic. Ray, ICHR chairman, was a staunch critic of the Left Front government’s education policy.

10 THE WORLD

TOPOF THE WORLD



Youtuber Shadi Srour

EGYPT

After months, Egypt frees reporter, activist, YouTube star

EGYPT HAS released an online comedian, a journalist and a political activist after they spent months in pre-trial detention, two lawyers said on Monday. It was the latest in a series of recent releases amid concerns by the United States and international rights groups over the arrests and harassment of rights advocates and critics of President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi's government. Youtuber Shadi Srour, journalist Shaimaa Sami and activist Ziyad Aboul-Fadel walked free late Sunday from a police headquarters in Cairo, said the two lawyers, Khalid Ali and Ismael el-Rashedi. **AP**

SOUTH KOREA

Lawmakers to vote on cameras in operating rooms after surgery deaths

SOUTH KOREAN lawmakers will vote as early as Monday on whether to require hospitals to place surveillance cameras in operating rooms after a series of medical accidents involving unqualified staff who stood in for surgeons. If the Bill is approved by parliament, South Korea will be the first developed country to require closed-circuit cameras to record surgical procedures. The push for having cameras in operating theatres intensified after a case in 2016 in which surgeons at clinics were accused of assigning nurses or under-qualified doctors to perform procedures, sometimes with fatal results. **REUTERS**

USA

US aims start to Bali bombing war crimes case at Guantanamo

THREE PRISONERS at the Guantanamo Bay detention centre are expected to get their first day in court after being held for 18 years in connection with the deadly 2002 Bali bombings and other plots in Southeast Asia. Indonesian prisoner Encep Nurjaman and two Malaysians are to be arraigned Monday before a military commission on charges that include murder, conspiracy and terrorism. It is the first step in what could be a long legal journey for a case that involves evidence tainted by CIA torture. **AP**

AMERICAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE TODAY

US shoots down rockets aimed at Kabul airport as final pullout looms

THE NEW YORK TIMES
AUGUST 30

AS THE US military raced toward a Tuesday deadline to withdraw from America's longest war, sporadic violence in the Afghan capital underlined the perils ahead for a country already buffeted by insecurity, a humanitarian crisis and a terrorist threat.

The US military shot down rockets aimed at the Kabul airport on Monday morning, a day after it said that one of its drones struck a vehicle full of explosives. The US has warned that more attacks, like the one last week outside the airport that killed nearly 200 people, are possible before it withdraws on Tuesday. Islamic State Khorasan claimed responsibility for that bombing, which also killed US troops.

A US official said the rockets aimed at the airport were brought down by a counter-rocket system, and that there were no initial reports of casualties. It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the rockets. The airport remained open, according to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss operational details.

It followed another US strike on Sunday, when the US military said it conducted a drone strike that blew up a vehicle in Kabul that officials said was laden with explosives and headed toward the airport. Afghans said the drone strike killed as many as 10 civilians, including children, and the US military said it was investigating.

Even as violence gripped Kabul, the United States was scrambling to prepare for its departure, including the evacuation of the 300 Americans who remain in the Afghan capital.

The US is unlikely to keep diplomats in Afghanistan after the US military departs, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Officials said they expected that the US would open a diplomatic mission for Afghanistan in a country elsewhere in the region, in part to continue helping the surge of expected refugees obtain necessary departure documents. That effort could be based in Pakistan or the United Arab Emirates, an official said.



Children walk in an area between tents at the Ramstein US Air Base in Ramstein, Germany, on Monday. The largest American military community outside the US houses thousands of Afghan evacuees in a tent city at the airbase. **AP**

Seven children among 10 killed in US drone strike, family says

MATTHIEU AIKINS
AUGUST 30

HOURS AFTER a US military drone strike in Kabul on Sunday, Defence Department officials said that it had blown up a vehicle laden with explosives, eliminating a threat to Kabul's airport from the Islamic State Khorasan group.

But at a family home in Kabul on Monday, survivors and neighbours said the strike had killed 10 people, including seven children, an aid worker for an American charity organisation and a contractor with the US military.

Zemari Ahmadi, who worked for the charity organization Nutrition and Education International, was on his way home from work after dropping off colleagues on Sunday evening, according to relatives and col-



Samia Ahmadi's (right) father and fiancé were both killed on Sunday in a US drone strike in Kabul. **NYT**

leagues interviewed in Kabul.

As he pulled into the narrow street where he lived with his three brothers and their families, the children, seeing his white Toyota Corolla, ran outside to greet him. Some clambered aboard in the street, others gathered around as he pulled the car

into the courtyard of their home.

It was then that they say the drone struck.

The missile hit the rear end of the Corolla in the narrow courtyard inside the walled family compound, blowing out doors, shattering windows and spraying shrapnel. Ahmadi and some of the

BRITAIN

CLIMATE PROTESTERS BLOCK TOWER BRIDGE

Demonstrators from the Extinction Rebellion group, which is demanding urgent action by governments and business to limit climate change, staged a sit-down protest that stopped traffic from using Tower Bridge in London on Monday. Extinction Rebellion is targeting London's financial district — located close to Tower Bridge — in a two-week series of protests.



Students at a school in Bay Harbor Islands, Florida. Florida school districts can legally require their students to wear masks, a judge has ruled. **AP**

US records a daily average of 100,000 Covid hospitalisations

DAN LEVIN
AUGUST 30

THE DAILY average for hospitalised Covid-19 patients in the United States is now more than 100,000. That average, calculated over the last seven days, is higher than in any previous surge except last winter's, before most Americans were eligible to get vaccinated.

The influx of patients is straining hospitals and pushing health care workers to the brink as deaths have risen to an average of more than 1,000 a day for the first time since March.

Hospitalisations nationwide have increased by nearly 500 per cent in the past two months, particularly across Southern states, where ICU beds are filling up, a crisis fueled by some of the country's lowest vaccination rates and widespread political opposition to public health measures like mask requirements.

In Florida, 16,457 people are hospitalised, the most of any state, followed by Texas, according to data from the US Department of Health and Human Services.

With the surge pummeling the nation and overwhelming hospitals, a shortage of bedside nurses has complicated efforts to treat hospitalised coronavirus patients, leading to longer emergency room waiting times and rushed or inadequate care.

This month, one in five American ICUs had reached or ex-

EU recommends travel curbs on US visitors

Brussels: The European Union recommended Monday that its 27 nations reinstate restrictions on tourists from the US because of rising coronavirus infections there. The decision by the European Council to remove the US from a safe list of countries for non-essential travel reverses advice that it gave in June, when the bloc recommended lifting restrictions on US travellers before the summer tourism season. The guidance is non-binding, however, and US travellers should expect a mishmash of travel rules across the continent. "Non-essential travel to the EU from countries or entities not listed... is subject to temporary travel restriction," the council said in a statement. **AP**

ceeded 95 per cent of beds full. Alabama was one of the first states to run out, and the crisis is concentrated in the South, with small pockets of high occupancy elsewhere in the country. As cases and hospitalisations surged, the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville on Thursday requested assistance from the National Guard. **NYT**

Demand surges in US for deworming drug despite no evidence it can treat Covid

EMMA GOLDBERG
AUGUST 30

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR ivermectin, a drug typically used to treat parasitic worms that has repeatedly failed in clinical trials to help people infected with the coronavirus, have risen sharply in recent weeks in the US, jumping to more than 88,000 per week in mid-August from a pre-pandemic average of 3,600 per week, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Ivermectin was introduced as a veterinary drug in the late 1970s, and the discovery of its effectiveness in combating certain parasitic diseases in humans won the 2015 Nobel Prize for medicine.

Though it has not been shown to be effective in treating Covid-19, people are now clamouring to get the drug, trading tips in Facebook groups and on Reddit. Some physicians have

compared the phenomenon to last year's surge of interest in hydroxychloroquine, though there are more clinical trials evaluating ivermectin.

While sometimes given to humans in small doses for head lice, scabies and other parasites, ivermectin is more commonly used in animals. Physicians are raising alarms about a growing number of people getting the drug from livestock supply centres, where it can come in highly concentrated paste or liquid forms.

Calls to poison control centres about ivermectin exposures have risen significantly, jumping fivefold over their baseline in July, according to CDC researchers, who cited data from the American Association of Poison Control Centers. Mississippi's health department said this month that 70 per cent of recent calls to the state poison control centre had come from people who ingested ivermectin from livestock supply stores. **NYT**

Worry over leading broadcaster's survival under Taliban

DAN BILEFSKY
AUGUST 30

OVER THE past two decades, the Afghan broadcaster Tolo has been known for provocative programmes like "Burka Avenger," in which an animated superheroine uses martial arts to vanquish villains trying to shut down a girls' school.

Millions of Afghans have also tuned in to its racy Turkish soap operas, its popular "6 pm News" and the reality show "Afghan Star," featuring female singers.

Since the Taliban captured Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, on Aug 15, however, Tolo's usual lineup is being supplemented by something else: educational programming about Islamic morality. Whether its menu of

pop music and female television hosts will survive in the Taliban's new Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will be a barometer of the insurgents' tolerance for dissenting views and values.

"To be honest, I'm still surprised we are up and running," said Saad Mohseni, Tolo's co-owner, an Australian-Afghan former investment banker who started Moby Group, which owns Tolo, in 2002. "We know what the Taliban stand for."

Keen to gain international legitimacy, the Taliban have been seeking to rebrand themselves as more moderate since they stormed Kabul, offering former rivals amnesty and urging women to join the government. They have vowed to support media freedom, on the condition that outlets subscribe to "Islamic values." A Taliban



Saad Mohseni, Tolo's co-owner, said, "To be honest, I'm still surprised we are up and running." **NYT**

spokesman even appeared on a Tolo news programme hosted by a female anchor just days after the group captured Kabul.

But journalists and human rights advocates say there are ominous signs that a violent media clampdown is underway.

Taliban fighters hunted a journalist from Deutsche Welle, the German broadcaster, who had already left the country, shooting dead a member of his family and seriously injuring another, according to the broadcaster.

Mohseni said Ziar Khan Yaad, a Tolo journalist, and a cameraman were beaten by five Taliban at gunpoint while out reporting on Wednesday. He said the Taliban jumped out of a Land Cruiser and confiscated their equipment and cellphones.

The Taliban have also barred at least two female journalists from their jobs at the public broadcaster Radio Television Afghanistan. And the female anchor at Tolo, who grabbed global headlines when she interviewed a Taliban spokesman, has since fled the country, along with

many other journalists.

Many Afghan social media influencers have also deactivated their Facebook and Twitter accounts and gone underground.

Khadija Amin, an anchor with the public broadcaster, said in a phone interview that, on the day the Taliban entered Kabul, one of the militants took her place at the station.

The Taliban also warned the women of Afghanistan that it might be safest for them to remain home until rank-and-file Taliban fighters have been trained how not to mistreat them.

"We are in a very bad situation," Amin said, adding that male journalists were now afraid to sit next to their female colleagues or even talk to them. "There is no longer space for us here," she said. **NYT**

China limits children to three hours of online gaming a week

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIJING, AUGUST 30

CHINA IS banning children from playing online games for more than three hours a week, the harshest restriction so far on the game industry as Chinese regulators continue cracking down on the technology sector.

Minors in China can only play games between 8 pm to 9 pm on Fridays, weekends and on public holidays starting Sept. 1, according to a notice from the National Press and Publication Administration.

That limits gaming to three hours a week for most weeks of the year, down from a previous

EXPLAINED Part of broader crackdown

THE LIMITS on gaming time come amid a broader crackdown by the Chinese government on technology companies, which have come to be seen as having too big an influence on society. China has also recently implemented regulations that target anti-competitive behaviour among the country's rapidly growing tech sector.

restriction set in 2019 that allowed minors play games for an

hour and a half per day and three hours on public holidays.

The new regulation affects some of China's largest technology companies, including gaming giant Tencent, whose Honor of Kings online multiplayer game is hugely popular globally, as well as gaming company NetEase.

Tencent's stock price closed down 0.6% at 465.80 Hong Kong dollars on Monday ahead of the regulator's announcement. Its market capitalisation of \$573 billion is down more than \$300 billion from its February peak, a decline equal to more than the total value of Nike or Pfizer.

New York-listed NetEase's stock was down about 9% at the market's open.

Renewed activity at N Korea nuclear reactor deeply troubling: IAEA

REUTERS
VIENNA, SEOUL, AUGUST 30

NORTH KOREA appears to have restarted a nuclear reactor that is widely believed to have produced plutonium for nuclear weapons, the UN atomic watchdog said in an annual report, adding that the findings were "deeply troubling".

The signs of operation at the 5-megawatt (MW) reactor, which is seen as capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium, were the first to be spotted since late 2018, the International Atomic Energy Agency said in its report dated Friday.

"Since early July 2021, there have been indications, including the discharge of cooling water, consistent with the operation," the IAEA report said of the reactor at Yongbyon, a nuclear complex at the heart of North Korea's nuclear programme.

More plutonium could help North Korea make smaller nuclear weapons to fit on its ballistic missiles, said David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security. While intelligence on North Korean nuclear weapons is limited, making it impossible to know their number, Albright estimated the country had the capacity to produce material for up to six bombs a year.

REBECCA SANTANA,
KEVIN MCGILL & JANET MCCONNAUGHEY
NEW ORLEANS, AUGUST 30

RESCUE WORKERS set out in hundreds of boats and helicopters to reach people trapped by floodwaters and utility crews mobilised Monday after a furious Hurricane Ida swamped the Louisiana coast and shattered a large swath of the state's electrical grid in the sweltering, late-summer heat.

One of the most powerful hurricanes ever to hit the US mainland weakened into a tropical storm overnight as it pushed inland over Mississippi with torrential rain and shrieking winds, its danger far from over.



A collapsed building in New Orleans on Monday. **AP**

Ida was blamed for at least one death — someone hit by a falling tree outside Baton Rouge — but with many roads impassable and cellphone service knocked out in places, the full extent of its fury was still coming into focus.

The hurricane "came in and did everything that was adver-

tised, unfortunately," Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards said.

All of New Orleans lost power right around sunset Sunday as the hurricane blew ashore on the 16th anniversary of Katrina, leading to an uneasy night of pouring rain and howling wind. The weather died down shortly before dawn, and people began carefully walking around neighbourhoods with flashlights, dodging downed light poles, pieces of roofs and branches.

"I had a long miserable night," said Chris Atkins, who was in his New Orleans home when he heard a "kaboom" and all the sheetrock in the living room fell into the house. A short time later, the whole side of the living room fell onto his neighbour's driveway. **AP**

ECONOMY

SENSEX: 56,889.76 ▲ 765.04 (1.36%) **NIFTY:** 16,931.05 ▲ 225.85 (1.35%) **NIKKEI:** 27,789.29 ▲ 148.15 **HANG SENG:** 25,539.54 ▲ 131.65 **FTSE:** 7,148.01 ▲ 23.03 **DAX:** 15,878.19 ▲ 26.44

International market data till 1900 IST

SECTOR WATCH AUTOMOBILES

‘High input costs’ weigh: Maruti to raise prices for third time in 2021

September hike could be up to 4%

SANDEEP SINGH
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30



Maruti Suzuki plant in Manesar. File

IN A move that may dampen consumer sentiment ahead of the festive season, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd announced that it will increase the price of its vehicles in September, following the sharp rise in input cost over the last 15 months. This will be the third price hike announcement by the market leader this calendar year.

While the company had announced a hike of 1.4 per cent in January, in April it raised the price of its vehicles by another 1.6 per cent. While the company did not disclose the quantum of increase in September, sources say it could be 3-4 per cent.

In its communication to the stock exchanges, the company said, “We wish to inform you that over the past year the cost of company’s vehicles continue to be adversely impacted due to increase in various input costs. Hence, it has become imperative to pass on some impact of the additional cost to the customers through a price rise. The price rise has been planned across models in September 2021.” Following the stock exchange announcement, the shares of MSIL rose on Monday and closed at Rs 6,797, a gain of 2.9 per cent.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Shashank Srivastava, senior executive director, marketing and sales at MSIL, said while input cost pressure has been there for last 15 months, MSIL did not raise prices proportionately and tried to avoid passing the input cost to the consumer as it hurts affordability and demand. “We tried improving our efficiency and manage it hoping that the prices would soften. But they have been hardening and we are left with no choice but to go for another hike. This time it would be a substantial hike,”

he said. Commodity prices have been rising over the last one year and it has been putting pressure on vehicle manufacturers. Almost all automobile manufacturers have raised prices of their vehicles over the last six months on account of the rising input cost.

Srivastava said prices of steel and copper, which are key input metals, have nearly doubled over the last 15 months and even the price of precious metals, such as rhodium, has risen from around Rs 18,000 per gram to over Rs 64,000 per gram now. “While prices of precious metals have gone up, it is important to note the quantum of precious metal used in vehicles has gone up since BS-VI switch-over; thus it has been a double whammy,” he said.

At a time when steep rise in fuel prices have hit the affordability of running a vehicle, Srivastava feels that the price hike of vehicles will also have an impact on consumer sentiment and revival of demand. “There has been some revival over the last couple of months but it is still far from where we were in 2017-18 and 2018-19. While there are worries over the third wave and rising cases in Kerala and parts of Karnataka, monsoon in August has also raised some concerns. The price hike will also have its impact. On the positive side though, we have been encouraged by rural demand,” he said, adding the chip shortage has been another area of concern.

GDP DATA FOR JUNE QUARTER TO BE RELEASED TODAY

Growth likely between 18-29%: Exports, govt spending key supports on low base

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

INDIA’S GROSS Domestic Product (GDP) growth is seen growing to a record high for the April-June quarter as the low base effect of last year’s sharp contraction of 24.4 per cent after the outbreak of the Covid pandemic comes into play. Most economists have projected GDP growth for April-June ranging from 18-29.4 per cent, the data for which will be released officially by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Tuesday.

The country’s GDP growth had been slowing for eight quarters after the January-March quarter of 2017-18 financial year, which was exacerbated in the April-June quarter last year, amid the impact of the nationwide lockdown imposed against the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though the first quarter GDP data for this fiscal will show a record high number, economists said the number is deceptively high as private consumption expenditure remains

‘GDP EXPECTED TO STAY BELOW PRE-COVID LEVEL’

‘DECEPTIVELY HIGH’: The GDP, however, is expected to stay below the pre-Covid level. “...the double-digit expansion expected in YoY terms in Q1 FY2022 is deceptively high, as it benefits inordinately from last year’s contracted base,” Icrs said

RECOVERY UNDERWAY: Some economists said the



expected damage from the second wave of the pandemic has been less and, hence, a recovery is now underway

low as households savings have dwindled and disposable incomes have shrunk with high expenditure on health and job losses in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Healthy Central and state government capital spending, strong merchandise exports and demand from the farm sector along with the low base effect are expected to support the GDP growth. Some economists stated that the expected damage from the second wave of the pandemic has been less and hence, a recovery

is now underway. Barclays India, which has projected a GDP growth rate of 21.2 per cent, said, “The second Covid wave acted as a stumbling block to the robust recovery that was underway. Still, the economic damage appears to be less than previously expected. With the second outbreak brought under control, a rapid recovery appears underway.” State Bank of India has projected a growth rate of 18.5 per cent for April-June, while Nomura has projected a growth rate of 29.4 per cent.

‘Overall hiring has touched pre-pandemic level’

Overall hiring activity has reached pre-pandemic baseline (February 2020) level and consumption economy will be key in driving job growth further, an Indeed report said



60% Growth in demand for housekeepers, caretakers, and cleaners amid sharpened focus on hygiene and sanitization for both employers and job seekers

Recovery in job market: The reopening of the economy and the efforts by businesses to work around the challenges presented by Covid-19 have pushed the Indian job market towards recovery

Consumption economy vital: While tech jobs continue to be of high relevance, the renewed demand for retail and food jobs indicates that the consumption economy will play a vital role in driving job growth further

Rise in job postings in IT sector between July 2020 and July 2021 amid digitisation:

19%: For software roles

8-16%: For other roles such as project head, engineer

Fall in job seekers' interest in industries or functions in July 2020-July 2021:

(-)25%: Aviation

(-)19%: Media

(-)8%: Accounting

(-)7%: Customer relations

(-)6%: Administration

Reopening boosts jobs: Sectors tied to the reopening of the labour market are leading the way, giving some hope that these gains can continue going ahead

The GDP, however, is expected to stay below the pre-Covid level. “...the double-digit expansion expected in YoY terms in Q1 FY2022 is deceptively high, as it benefits inordinately from last year’s contracted base. We forecast the GVA and the GDP to have shrunk by around 9 per cent each in Q1 FY2022, relative to the pre-Covid level of Q1 FY2020, highlighting the tangible distress being experienced by economic agents in the less formal and contact-intensive sectors,” Icrs said. It expects GDP in April-June to have grown by 20 per cent.

India Ratings said that the Indian economy had begun to witness a consumption slowdown even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit it. “On an annualised basis, PFCE growth had declined to 5.5 per cent in FY20 from 8.1 per cent in FY17. The decline was even sharper on a quarterly basis where PFCE growth declined to 2 per cent in 4QFY20 from 11.2 per cent in 3QFY17. The lockdown caused by Covid in FY21 only aggravated it as jobs, livelihoods and household budget were se-

verely dented,” it said.

The impact of the pandemic on GDP growth this year has been more severe in view of the spread of the pandemic to rural areas. “Unlike Covid 1.0, which was largely an urban phenomenon, Covid 2.0 spread to rural areas as well. Even if the agricultural output/income remains intact in view of the progress of monsoon so far, rural households are unlikely to loosen their purse strings in view of the Covid induced rise and/or a likely rise in the health expenditure as also the uncertainty/insecurity associated with the likely future waves of Covid. In fact, the largest chunk of the rural population consists of daily wage earners and not farmers. Rural wage growth both for agricultural and non-agricultural activities has declined lately. Wage growth even in urban areas has been muted. In fact, urban households, besides the rise in health expenditure, are facing the double whammy of income loss/stagnation coupled with high consumer inflation. All this has severely dented their disposable income,” it said.

PPP model of BharatNet: DoT likely to float bids by Sept-end

AASHISHARYAN
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

THE DEPARTMENT of Telecommunications (DoT) has started pre-bid meetings with various stakeholders with respect to the public-private partnership model implementation for BharatNet. The DoT has so far conducted two meetings and hopes to conduct some more to understand the needs of the projects before releasing the final bids, senior government officials said.

“We have also been taking feedback from some of the states which took the lead on the PPP model under BharatNet phase two. There is a need to understand what will work and what are the hindrances so that optimal utilisation of funds can be done to complete the project by August 2023,” a senior DoT official said.

The DoT hopes to come out with the bid for the PPP model implementation of BharatNet not

The DoT has conducted 2 meetings and hopes to conduct some more before releasing the final bids, said senior government officials

later by September end, the official said. Earlier this year in June, the Union Cabinet had approved a plan to rope in the private sector to complete the pending work on BharatNet, the Central government’s flagship scheme to provide internet connectivity to all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats in the country.

As part of the plan, under a PPP model, the concessionaire will be selected through a competitive international bidding process and will be responsible for creation, upgradation, operation, maintenance and utilisation of BharatNet. The revised strategy will be followed in 16 states for now.

‘Ola readies for up to \$1 bn IPO; scanning for banks’

ADITISHAH & SCOTT MURDOCH
NEW DELHI/HONG KONG, AUGUST 30

RIDE-SHARING COMPANY Ola plans to raise up to \$1 billion through an initial public offering (IPO) and is finalising banks to advise on the fundraise, three sources told *Reuters*, becoming the latest startup to join the capital markets boom. Ola, backed by Japan’s Softbank Group, has roped in Citigroup, two people with direct knowledge of the matter said.

It has also brought Kotak Mahindra and Morgan Stanley on board, said two other sources. The company, which competes with Uber Technologies, is also in talks with Bank of America and JP Morgan, one of the people said.

Ola, JP Morgan and Kotak Mahindra did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Bank of America, Citi and Morgan Stanley declined to comment.

Meanwhile, as per a separate report, MammyIndia, which powers Apple maps in India, will file draft papers for an IPO worth Rs 10-12 billion this week, a source said. **REUTERS**

BRIEFLY

AY21 refunds

New Delhi: The I-T Department has asked taxpayers to “quickly” send an online response to expeditiously process their pending assessment year 2020-21 refunds.

Bank directors

Mumbai: The RBI said the fair value of share-linked incentives paid to CEOs, who-le-time directors and other key functionaries by private banks should be recognised as an expense in the relevant accounting period.

Deposit insurance

New Delhi: Depositors of stressed banks will get up to Rs 5 lakh back from November 30 as the government has notified the amendment to the DICGC Act.

Nod to PhonePe

New Delhi: PhonePe said it has received in-principle approval from Irdai to be a broker to sell life and general insurance products.

SFB applications

New Delhi: Tally Solutions Pvt Ltd and Cosmea Financial Holdings Pvt Ltd have applied to the RBI for small finance bank licences.

Sebi banquashed

New Delhi: The SAT has quashed an order by Sebi that barred Yashovardhan Birla and others from securities market for two years. **PTI**

FUTURE-RELIANCE DEAL

Amazon to Sebi: Direct exchanges to withdraw ‘observation letters’

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

AMAZON HAS written to Sebi requesting the regulator to direct stock exchanges to withdraw the ‘Observation Letters’ that were issued related to the proposed Rs 24,713-crore Future-Reliance deal. It has also urged the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to take necessary action to comply with the recent Supreme Court judgment related to the deal.

In its letter dated August 17, Amazon.com NV Investment Holdings LLC noted that the SC had on August 6 held that the order of the Singapore-based Emergency Arbitrator in the case was an ‘order’ referable to and made

under Section 17(1) of the Arbitration and Conciliation (A&C) Act. Thus, the arbitration order can be enforced under the provisions of Section 17(2) of the Act.

In January, Sebi had given its go-ahead to Future Group’s sale of assets to Reliance with some riders, based on which the BSE granted its “no adverse observation” report for the Rs 24,713-crore deal. The BSE, in its observation letter on January 20, said it has “no adverse observations with limited reference to those matters having a bearing on listing/de-listing/continuous listing requirements within the provisions of Listing Agreement, so as to enable the company (Future) to file the scheme with Hon’ble National Company Law Tribunal.”

Dovish Fed stance gets Sensex thumbs up

Wall St at record

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, AUGUST 30

DOMESTIC STOCK markets on Monday rallied by 1.36 per cent after the US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said the central bank is not in a hurry to raise interest rates. While the benchmark Sensex surged by 765 points to a new peak of 56,889.76, the Nifty50 shot up 226 points, or 1.35 per cent, to 16,931.05 on sustained buying support.

The rupee also surged by 40 paise to close at 73.29 against the US dollar.

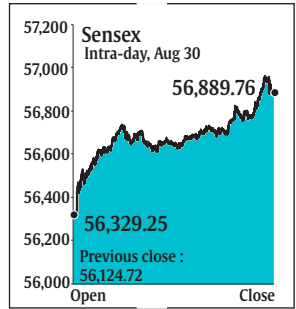
Meanwhile, US and global equity benchmarks hit all-time highs on Monday, as per a *Reuters* report. The Dow Jones rose 0.02 per cent to 35,461.80 and the S&P 500 gained 0.56 per cent to 4,534.56 by 02:50 pm ET. Separately, crude oil edged higher on Monday.

SANDEEP SINGH
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

WHILE THE anxiety around the US Federal Reserve’s Jackson Hole symposium has subsided, following the chairman’s remark on no rush on interest rate hikes, experts said domestic factors such as rise in vaccinations and control in fresh cases would lead to consumption demand and faster recovery of the overall economy, which was providing fresh impetus to the markets.

How much have the markets risen?

While the Sensex has jumped over 4,300 points, or 8.2 per cent, in August to date, broader indices have joined the rally over the last 10 days, even as they lagged in the



first half of the month. Since August 18, the mid- and small-cap indices have risen 2.3 per cent and 1.7 per cent, respectively, in line with Sensex’s gain of 2.3 per cent.

What is providing strength to the markets?

There is support from global markets. The Dow Jones Industrial

index on Friday rose 0.7 per cent to close at 35,455, and, on Monday, was trading in the green. Almost all Asian markets ended higher on Monday. On the domestic front, a control in rise of new Covid cases and an uptick in vaccinations have lifted sentiment. The anxiety around the Fed’s Jackson Hole Symposium has also subsided. Even as inflows by foreign portfolio investors have remained weak and they invested a net of only Rs 986 crore in August (till Friday), domestic retail and institutional participation has been very strong.

Will the momentum continue?

If strong earnings in June quarter provided a boost, an uptick in vaccination, alongside a control in fresh rise of cases, is adding to the improved sentiment.

Full report on www.indianexpress.com

HSBC Asia names Rajnish Kumar independent dir

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, AUGUST 30

HSBC HAS appointed former State Bank of India Chairman Rajnish Kumar independent non-executive director of its Asia entity. He will also be a member of HSBC’s Audit Committee and Risk Committee. Kumar retired from SBI in October 2020.

He is currently a director of India’s Lighthouse Communities Foundation, an independent director of Larsen & Toubro Infotech Limited, a senior advisor of Baring Private Equity Asia Pte Ltd in Singapore and an advisor of Kotak Investment Advisors Ltd in Mumbai.

Peter Wong, chairman of Board of HSBC, said: “Rajnish’s breadth of experience will be an invaluable addition to the Board of the Group’s flagship Asian entity.”

Go Airlines gets Sebi nod for ₹3,600-cr IPO

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

GO AIRLINES, which has re-branded itself as ‘Go First’, has received market regulator Sebi’s go-ahead for an initial public offering worth Rs 3,600 crore.

The airline plans to garner up to Rs 3,600 crore through sale of shares, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP). It also plans to raise up to Rs 1,500 crore by way of a pre-IPO (initial public offering) placement.

PRE-IPO PLACEMENT

■ **Go Airlines also plans to raise up to Rs 1,500 crore by way of a pre-IPO (initial public offering) placement.**

The carrier, which filed its preliminary papers in May, received its observations on August 26, according to Sebi’s latest update on processing status of the draft offer documents.

Aus plans laws for e-wallets by tech giants

Sydney: Australia is considering new laws that would tighten the regulation of digital payment services by tech giants like Apple, Google and WeChat.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, in a piece in the *Australian Financial Review*, said he would “carefully consider” recommendations of a government-commissioned report into whether payments system had kept pace with technology advances. Services like Apple Pay, Google Pay and WeChat Pay are not currently designated as payment systems. **REUTERS**

Indian cricket loses its *margdarshak*

VASOO PARANYPE 1938-2021

Since landing in England for the World Test Championship final, Pant has struggled. The 41 in the second innings of the WTC match best sums up his neither-here-nor-there approach. There were times in that innings he looked to buckle down, even resisting boundary balls, before, in a burst of madness, he would attempt a reverse-lap



Man of his own methods


More instructive is how he went about

A time when the madness and methods of his batting aligned in harmonious symmetry. It's this harmonious symmetry that he would look to reconquer when he reaches the venue of his first Test hundred, three years ago. And it's not Robinson that's eating him, rather his own cluttered mind.

BY PETER VIDAL

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sept 23)

 One very useful path to take is to develop any spiritual interests and mystical aspirations. These are the things that it is impossible to put into words, but a knowledge of them will help you establish your own sense of destiny and hence to manage your day-to-day affairs much better.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
 You may turn a blind eye to inconvenient facts if you wish. There is nothing to be gained from facing up to the unpleasant side of life if it is going to do you no good and benefit nobody. Besides, what is wrong with living a fantasy? Absolutely nothing.

Why was discus thrower Kumar’s bronze cancelled

MIHIR VASAVDA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 30

PARA-ATHLETE Vinod Kumar, who had won the bronze medal in the discus throw event (F52 category) at the Tokyo Paralympics on Sunday, had his result declared void following a re-assessment by a classification panel. Kumar, 41, produced a best throw of 19.91m to finish third behind Piotr Kosewicz (20.02m) of Poland and Velimir Sandor (19.98m) of Croatia. Kumar was found to be ineligible for the men’s F52 discus medal as the classification panel was ‘unable to allocate’ him a ‘sport class’ after observation and re-assessment, a statement issued by the Games’ technical delegates read. The decision meant Kumar did not win a medal.

What is classification in Para sports?
The purpose, according to the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), is to make sure the best athlete wins, based on criteria such as skill, fitness and tactics, instead of the athlete with the ‘lowest level of impairment.’ Athletes are classified according to the impact their impairment has on key sporting activities. To ensure a fair and level playing field all athletes competing must be given a sport class and sport class status.

How are athletes classified?
The athletes undergo evaluation on-site by classifiers who are trained by every sport’s respective international federation and they decide on the classification status based on the sport and impairment type.

What happens after the athletes are classified?
After the evaluation is over, the classification panel designates ‘sports class status’ to every athlete, which indicates if evaluations are required on the same athlete in the future.

What happened in Kumar’s case?
Kumar was evaluated on August 22 and cleared to compete in the F52 category at the time. According to the IPC, athletes who take part in the F52 category have ‘good shoulder muscles and mildly weak to full elbow and wrist muscles which are required for throwing an implement’.

“Finger flexor and extensor muscles are non-functional making grip of the implement difficult. The non-throwing hand usually requires strapping to the throwing frame,” the IPC rule states.

If Kumar was cleared on August 22, why was he classified again after Sunday’s event?
According to the World Para Athletics database, Kumar’s classification status for the current year was already under review. PCI president Deepa Malik could not be reached for a comment on this. However, she was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India: “Classifications done previously can be challenged during competitions and can be overruled also. There is nothing that India can do now.”

Why are athletes re-evaluated?
As per the World Para Athletics classification rules, a classification panel can decide to conduct further evaluation sessions on an athlete ‘based on a number of factors.’ These, the rules state, include but are not limited ‘to situations, where the Athlete has only recently entered Competitions, sanctioned or recognised by World Para Athletics; has a fluctuating and/or progressive Impairment/Impairments that is/are permanent but not stable; and/or has not yet reached full muscular skeletal or sports maturity.’

NOVAX CLUB

Despite a lot at stake, players have been stubbornly slow to get the jab

BEN ROTHENBERG
AUGUST 30

When the U.S. Tennis Association announced Friday that proof of coronavirus vaccination would be required for all spectators 12 and older to enter the grounds of the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, it widened a gulf between the spectators and the players they’ll be watching at the U.S. Open.

Adults in the stands will now be roughly twice as likely to be vaccinated as the players on court: The WTA said “nearly 50%” of its players were vaccinated, while the ATP said its vaccination rates were “just above 50%.”

Despite the possible consequences of not being vaccinated – illness, of course, but also the inability to play and make money – tennis players have been stubbornly slow on the uptake, even as many have lost opportunities to play in major tournaments because of positive tests. While some players are openly skeptical of the need for a vaccine as a healthy young person, some simply haven’t prioritized it. French veteran Gilles Simon, who was disqualified from the U.S. Open on Friday for “medical reasons,” confirmed in an interview

with L’Equipe that he was removed because he hadn’t been vaccinated. Simon’s coach, Etienne Laforgeue, tested positive for the coronavirus after arriving in New York, and Simon was disqualified because he was deemed a “close contact.”

“I was not against it to the point of never being vaccinated, I’m just saying I didn’t feel the need or the urge,” Simon told L’Equipe.

Simon would have remained eligible to compete in the tournament, with increased testing, if he had been vaccinated.

“I’m not very scared of COVID, actually,” Simon said. “My basic philosophy is: ‘If you’re afraid of it, you get vaccinated; if not, no.’ It’s still a choice.”

Simon must now isolate in his hotel room for 10 days, according to federal and New York City guidelines. Simon, 36 and ranked 103rd, rued that his hotel room, where he will stay during what he admitted might have been his last U.S. Open, lacks a nice view.

“If you’re last memory of a U.S. Open is 10 days in a room, it is not one you want to keep,” he said. The highest-profile tennis player to miss this year’s U.S. Open is fifth-ranked Sofia Kenin, who, despite disappointing results this year, remains the highest-ranked American



Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece caused an uproar after saying he would only be vaccinated if it were required to compete.

on either tour under the pandemic-adjusted ranking system. Kenin said she had tested positive despite being vaccinated.

“Fortunately I am vaccinated, and thus my symptoms have been fairly mild,” she said.

Many tennis players have been able to take advantage of on-site vaccination programs set up by tournaments as they travel on tour. Top-ranked Ashleigh Barty, whose native Australia has lagged in its vaccination rollout, was able

to get vaccinated in April at a tournament in Charleston, South Carolina. Before she did, Barty made sure that she wasn’t cutting in line.

“That was important to me, knowing that those who were the most vulnerable were able to get it first,” she said in April.

Simon’s contention that vaccination should remain a choice is supported by both tours, even as they urge players to choose vaccination. Other sports have been more successful at getting their athletes to get the shot. The WNBA said in June that 99% of its players were vaccinated. The MLS Players Association said in July that it was “approaching 95%.” This week, the NFL announced it had reached a player vaccination rate of nearly 93%. Michele Roberts, executive director of the National Basketball Players Association, said in July that 90% of NBA players were vaccinated. This month, the NHL said its player vaccination rate was at 85%, and its union warned that unvaccinated players might lose pay if they tested positive.

In tennis, where each player is an independent contractor, there is no player union to encourage unified behavior and no general manager or team owner to encourage vaccination for the team’s competitive benefit. Other individual sports are still ahead of ten-

nis, however: The PGA said early this month that its player vaccination rate was “above 70%.”

“While we respect everyone’s right to free choice, we also believe that each player has a role to play in helping the wider group achieve a safe level of immunity,” the ATP said in a statement. “Doing so will allow us to ease restrictions on-site for the benefit of everyone on Tour.”

The WTA said it “strongly believes in and encourages everyone to get a vaccine,” and has set a goal for 85% of players to be vaccinated by the end of the year. But it is “not requiring players to get a vaccine as this is a personal decision, and one which we respect.”

Third-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas caused an uproar in his native Greece earlier this month after he said that he would get vaccinated only if it were required to continue competing.

“I don’t see any reason for someone of my age to do it,” said Tsitsipas, 23. “It hasn’t been tested enough and it has side effects. As long as it’s not mandatory, everyone can decide for themselves.”

Giannis Oikonomou, a spokesperson for the Greek government, said Tsitsipas “has neither the knowledge nor the studies nor the re-

search work that would allow him to form an opinion” about the necessity for vaccination, and added that people like athletes who are widely admired should be “doubly careful in expressing such views.”

Top-ranked Novak Djokovic has drawn scrutiny for his approach to health issues throughout the pandemic, and has declined to disclose his own vaccination status. Djokovic said it was a “personal decision” when asked about vaccine protocols Friday. “Whether someone wants to get a vaccine or not, that’s completely up to them,” Djokovic said. “I hope that it stays that way.”

Andy Murray, a member of the ATP player council, said that “there’s going to have to be a lot of pretty long, hard conversations with the tour and all of the players involved to try and come to a solution” on the high number of players holding out on vaccination. He said he appreciated the privileges New York City regulations afforded him as a vaccinated person, such as eating indoors in restaurants.

“I feel like I’m enjoying a fairly normal life, whereas for the players that haven’t, it’s different,” Murray said. “I’m sure they’ll be frustrated with that.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Spear mints medals

Big day in javelin as Sumit Antil wins gold, Devendra Jhahharia silver and Sundar Singh Gurjar bronze in respective categories at Paralympics



(L-R) Sumit Antil broke the world record three times before winning gold in F-64 class with a throw of 68.55m; Devendra Jhahharia bagged a silver (F-46), his third medal at the Games while Sundar Singh Gurjar finished third in the same event. AP/Reuters/ @ParaAthletics

Paralysed from waist down, Jaipur’s rifle ace Avani wins gold

NITIN SHARMA
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 30

AS 19-YEAR-OLD Avani Lekhara won the gold medal in women’s 10m air rifle Standing event in the SH 1 category at the Tokyo Paralympics, father Praveen was filled with emotions.

In 2012, the whole Lekhara family met with an accident on their way to Dholpur from Jaipur. The then 11-year-old Avani suffered a spinal cord injury and was paralysed below the waist. As the teenager became Paralympic champion with a record score of 249.6 in the final, Praveen - who works in the Revenue Appellate Authority - remembered the fateful day.

“I was posted as ADM at Dholpur at that time and we were travelling from Jaipur to Dholpur when our car skidded and turned turtle. Avani suffered spinal cord injuries and was paralysed from waist down,” Praveen told The Indian Express.

In Tokyo on Monday, Avani fired a round of 621.7 in qualification after a shaky start but recovered to be placed seventh after the qualification round and make the final. In the final, she led from the start to win gold.

After the accident, Avani spent more than three months at SMS Hospital in Jaipur before another four at the Indian Spinal Injury Centre (SIC) in New Delhi. For the next two-and-a-half years, the family would take her for treatment at various hospitals in Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

In 2014, Praveen took his daughter to the Jagatpura Shooting Range to keep the youngster occupied as well as setting a target for herself. “I was in hospital when doctors told me that Avani has been paralysed below the waist. After initial treatment in Agra, she was shifted to SMS Hospital in Jaipur before spending time at SIC in Delhi. Doctors had told us that we have to keep her physically as well as mentally fit to have any chance of recovery and that’s why I got her enrolled at the shooting range in Jaipur,” remembers the father.



Avani Lekhara has won India’s first Paralympic gold in shooting. Reuters

In 2016, Avani started training under coach Chandra Shekhar and he made her focus on 50m rifle events apart from 10m air rifle events. Apart from winning titles in the National Para Shooting Championship, she would win a silver medal with a junior world record at the WSPS World Cup in Al Ain in 2017 and a bronze at the WSPS World Cup in Bangkok the same year. It took the coach some time to work on Avani’s technique but he found Avani’s mental fortitude as her biggest strength.

“Besides the physical or technical aspects, shooting remains a mental sport at the core and that’s what made Avani a good shooter even in her initial days. I understood that I cannot put her under more physical load so we would work on the basics in small sessions apart from training with a Feinwerkbau 800 junior rifle, which was much lighter compared to other rifles. Once she was comfortable shooting in the wheelchair and the adjustments, we went from 50 shots to 200 in a session. Slowly, she built accuracy. Later, she practised for 3-4 hours in the 50m rifle event too and it showed her physical strength too,” remembers the coach.