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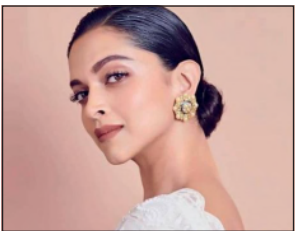
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India's Phogat returns stronger



India's Vinesh Phogat believes she has grown mentally stronger as she resumes her bid for an Olympic gold. **Page 20**

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India's pandemic death toll could be in the millions

By Sheikh Saaliq and Krutika Pathi

NEW DELHI - India's excess deaths during the pandemic could be a staggering 10 times the official COVID-19 toll, likely making it modern India's worst human tragedy, according to the most comprehensive research yet on the ravages of the virus in the South Asian country.

Most experts believe India's official toll of more than 414,000 dead is a vast undercount, but the government has dismissed those concerns as exaggerated and misleading.

The report released on Tuesday estimated excess deaths - the gap between those recorded and those that would have been expected - to be 3 million to 4.7 million between January 2020 and June 2021. It said an accurate figure may "prove elusive" but the true death toll "is likely to be an order of magnitude greater than the official count."

The report was published by Arvind Subramanian, the Indian government's former chief economic adviser, and two other researchers at the Center for Global Development, a nonprofit think tank based in Washington, and Harvard University.

It said the count could have missed deaths that occurred in overwhelmed hospitals or while health care was disrupted, particularly during the devastating virus surge earlier this year.

"True deaths are likely to be in the several millions not hundreds of thousands, making this arguably India's worst human tragedy since Partition and independence," the report said.

The Partition of the British-ruled Indian subcontinent into independent India and Pakistan in 1947 led to the killing of up to 1 million people as gangs of Hindus and Muslims slaughtered



Relatives carry a body for cremation past corpses partially exposed in shallow sand graves. In May, rains washed away the top layer of sand at a cremation ground on the banks of the Ganges River in Shringerpur, India.

each other.

The report on India's virus toll used three calculation methods: data from the civil registration system that records births and deaths across seven states, blood tests showing the prevalence of the virus in India alongside global COVID-19 fatality rates, and an economic survey of nearly 900,000 people done thrice a year.

Researchers cautioned that each method had weaknesses, such as the economic survey omitting the causes of death.

Instead, researchers looked at deaths from all causes and com-

pared that data to mortality in previous years - a method widely considered an accurate metric.

Researchers also cautioned that virus prevalence and COVID-19 deaths in the seven states they studied may not translate to all of India, since the virus could have spread more in urban versus rural states and since health care quality varies greatly around India.

Other nations are also believed to have undercounted deaths in the pandemic. But India is thought to have a greater gap due to having the world's second highest population of 1.4 bil-

lion and because not all deaths were recorded even before the pandemic.

The health ministry did not immediately respond to an Associated Press request for comment on the report.

Dr. Jacob John, who studies viruses at the Christian Medical College at Vellore in southern India and was not part of the research, reviewed the report for the AP and said it underscores the devastating impact COVID-19 had on the country's underprepared health system.

"This analysis reiterates the observations of other fearless investigative journalists that have highlighted the massive undercounting of deaths," Jacob said.

The report also estimated that nearly 2 million Indians died during the first surge in infections last year and said not "grasping the scale of the tragedy in real time" may have "bred collective complacency that led to the horrors" of the surge earlier this year.



Most experts believe India's official toll of more than 414,000 dead is a vast undercount, but the government has dismissed those concerns as exaggerated and misleading.

Thought of the Week: "Work like there is someone working 24 hours a day to take it all away from you." - Mark Cuban

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Indian opposition disrupts parliament, seeks probe into Pegasus



A view of the Indian parliament building is seen on the opening day of the budget session in New Delhi on July 2, 2009. India needs to focus on a calibrated approach of using monetary measures for returning to high economic growth at the earliest, a survey by the finance ministry said last Thursday.

By Manoj Kumar

NEW DELHI - Indian opposition parties disrupted parliament on Tuesday, demanding an investigation into reports that the government used Israeli-made Pegasus spyware to snoop on scores of journalists, activists and politicians, including the main opposition leader Rahul Gandhi.

Shouting out slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, the opposition members said they wanted an independent probe into the com-

plaints of spying and the resignation of Interior Minister Amit Shah.

An investigation published on Sunday by 17 media organizations, led by the Paris-based non-profit journalism group Forbidden Stories, said spyware made and licensed by the Israeli company NSO had been used in attempted and successful hacks of 37 smartphones belonging to journalists, government officials and human rights activists.

Indian news portal The Wire reported that smartphones of

politicians including Gandhi, a senior leader of the opposition Congress party, and two other lawmakers were among 300 verified Indian numbers listed as potential targets for surveillance during 2017-19 ahead of national elections.

NSO has said its product was intended only for use by vetted government intelligence and law enforcement agencies to fight terrorism and crime.

Opposition leaders said the Modi administration was spying on journalists, activists and

politicians who were opposed to its policies.

"It is an attack on the democratic foundations of our country," Congress said in a statement.

It said the government had illegally accessed the conversation of many people by hacking cell phones with the Pegasus spyware.

Ashwini Vaishnaw, the minister for Electronics and Information Technology, told lawmakers on Monday there was no substance to the reports of spying.

India had a well-established procedure in which lawful interception of electronic communication was carried out by federal and state agencies for the purpose of national security, particularly in the case of a public emergency or in the interest of public safety, he said.

Indian rules ensured that "unauthorised surveillance does not occur," he said.

News reports said the phone of Vaishnaw himself was also hacked, but it was not clear why.

Chile copper giant Codelco plans India, SE Asia push to trim reliance on China

By Fabian Cambero and Tom Daly

SANTIAGO - Chile state mining company Codelco, the world's largest copper producer, will seek to quadruple sales in Southeast Asia by 2023 and push further into the Indian market in an attempt to reduce a strong reliance on sales to China, the company told Reuters.

The firm will open a new office in Singapore in August to help lead the push around the region

to deal with clients in Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand, among others, and to lead the drive into India, it said.

The push by the world's top producer of the red metal comes with global copper prices elevated amid recovering demand worldwide and expectations that long-term shifts towards electric vehicles will drive future need for the metal.

In comments in response to questions from Reuters, Codelco said that these markets should

have the highest growth in copper consumption over the next 20 years.

"Southeast Asia and India today represent about 8% of refined copper consumption globally, and this percentage is expected to exceed 20% in 2040," Carlos Alvarado, a vice president for Codelco said in a statement.

China is the main buyer of Chilean copper and the top client for Codelco, which has a key office in Shanghai.

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24-year-old man killed by hit-and-run driver in New York street



Borkot Ullah

NEW YORK - On July 8, a 24-year-old bicyclist was killed when the driver of an SUV barreled through a red light in New York city on Houston Street, near Attorney Street, and fled from the scene.

Borkot Ullah was found in the street suffering severe trauma, with his e-bike by his side. He was rushed to Bellevue Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Ullah was a delivery worker and an activist with Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), a group that advocates for the rights of undocumented workers.

Ullah came to the U.S. from Bangladesh and was seeking asylum. A GoFundMe campaign

organized by DRUM has raised about \$13,000:

"We are working with the community to arrange Borkot's janaza, to have his body sent home to Bangladesh, and to have his body transported to his village. We are working with Borkot's friends and family to arrange a vigil along with the janaza and will share once it is set. 100% of donations will go directly to supporting Borkot's family both here and in Bangladesh whom he supported financially through his food delivery work."

As Streetsblog reported, the driver of a Subaru Outback SUV was apparently being chased by police:

"A video from the scene showed clearly that the cyclist had the light and that the driver swerved around stopped traffic to run the red light and strike Ullah. After the crash, the driver is seen racing away at a high rate of speed as two cops in an unmarked police car - which was right behind the hit-and-run driver and might have been pursuing the driver before the crash - pulled over to check on the victim. When Streetsblog sought more details about whether the officer was chasing the suspect

before the crash, NYPD spokeswoman Det. Sophia Mason said, "The circumstances of the pre-collision fact pattern are under full review."

The safe streets advocacy organization, Transportation Alternatives, pointed out that there

is no protected bike lane on East Houston Street - only a painted line. And City Council member Carlina Rivera, while noting that the city's Department of Transportation plans to install a protected bike lane this summer, added, "this hit-and-run

shows why protective measures are installed too slowly & why dangerous driving laws must be strengthened."

Cops have not found the driver. Anyone with information can call Crime Stoppers at 800-577-TIPS (8477).

Canadian man pleads guilty for his role in international marijuana conspiracy

BUFFALO, NY - U.S. Attorney James P. Kennedy, Jr. announced on Wednesday that Ranjodh Singh, 22, of Canada, pleaded guilty before Senior U.S. District Judge William M. Skretny to conspiring to possess with intent to distribute, and distributing, 100 kilograms or more of marijuana. The charge carries a mandatory minimum penalty of five years in prison, a maximum of 40 years, and a \$5,000,000 fine.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Misha A. Coulson, who is handling the case, stated that the defendant conspired with others, with others, including Amanpreet Gill, to distribute marijuana. In December 2020, Singh's co-conspirators purchased and arranged for a shipment of marijuana from



Canada to be delivered to Smartway Associates in Somerset, NJ. Unbeknownst to the defendant and his co-conspirators, on December 1, 2020, the shipment was intercepted by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the Peace Bridge Cargo Facility and was searched. Contained within the shipment was a large quantity of marijuana packaged in vacuum sealed bags.

Subsequently, investigators conducted a controlled delivery operation. A silver vehicle, driven by Singh, was observed following the shipment of marijuana and was observed at the two warehouses where the shipment was temporarily stored. After the shipment of marijuana reached its final destination and law enforcement secured the warehouse, the defendant arrived at the warehouse. Investigators seized a cell phone from the defendant which contained videos showing him identifying law enforcement personnel while he was driving around the warehouses.

Charges remain pending against defendant Gill.

Sentencing will be scheduled at a later date.

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Letters may be published or distributed in print, electronic or other forms.

Biden announces three nominations of Indian-Americans to key posts

WASHINGTON, DC - The White House this week announced several nominations of Indian-Americans to key posts in the administration.

President Biden's list of nominations he intends to send to the U.S. Congress includes Dr. Rahul Gupta, nominee for Director of National Drug Control Policy and Dr. Atul Gawande, nominee for Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Global Health, U.S. Agency for International Development.

Earlier the same day, President Biden sent the nomination of Michigan Circuit Court Judge Shalina Deborah Kumar in Oakland County to the position of U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan.

Rahul Gupta, Nominee for Director of National Drug Control Policy

Rahul Gupta, MD, MPH, MBA, FACP, is the Chief Medical and Health Officer and Senior Vice President at March of Dimes. In his role, Dr. Gupta provides strategic oversight for March of Dimes' domestic and global medical and public health efforts. He currently also serves as clinical Professor in the De-

partment of Medicine at Georgetown University School of Medicine as well as adjunct professor in the Department of Health Policy, Management and Leadership in the School of Public Health at West Virginia University and visiting faculty at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

A practicing primary care physician of 25 years, Dr. Gupta previously served under two Governors as the Health Commissioner of West Virginia. As the state's Chief Health Officer, he led the opioid crisis response efforts and launched a number of pioneering public health initiatives, including the Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Birthscore program to identify high-risk infants. Dr. Gupta also led the development of the state's Zika action plan and its preparedness efforts during the Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak.

Atul Gawande, Nominee for Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Global Health, United States Agency for International Development

Atul Gawande, MD, MPH, is the Cyndy and John Fish Distinguished Professor of Surgery at Brigham and Women's Hos-



Rahul Gupta



Atul Gawande



Shalina D. Kumar

pital, Samuel O. Thier Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School, and Professor of Health Policy and Management at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Dr. Gawande is also founder and chair of Ariadne Labs, a joint center for health systems innovation at Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and of Lifebox, a nonprofit organization making surgery safer globally. During the coronavirus pandemic, he co-founded CIC Health, which operates COVID-19 testing and vaccination nationally, and served as a member of the Biden transition COVID-19 Advisory Board. From 2018 to 2020, he was CEO of Haven, the Amazon, Berkshire

Hathaway, and JPMorgan Chase health care venture. He previously served as a senior advisor in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Clinton Administration.

Shalina D. Kumar, Nominee for Federal Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan

Chief Judge Shalina D. Kumar has served on the Oakland County Sixth Circuit Court since 2007. She was appointed Chief Judge of the Circuit Court by the Michigan Supreme Court in January of 2018. In addition to her chief judge duties, Judge Kumar retains a full caseload covering both civil and criminal matters.

Throughout her years on the bench, Judge Kumar has served as a presiding judge of the Adult

Treatment Court, the Chairperson of the Oakland County Criminal Assignment Committee, the bench liaison to the Oakland County Bar Association Circuit Court Committee, a member of the Michigan State Bar Professionalism Committee, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Michigan Judges' Association. Prior to taking the bench, Judge Kumar was a civil litigator in private practice from 1997 to 2007, including as an associate with Weiner & Cox P.L.C. from 2004 to 2007 and Sommers, Schwartz, Silver & Schwartz P.C. from 2000 to 2004. Judge Kumar graduated from the University of Michigan in 1993 and the University of Detroit-Mercy School of Law in 1996.





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Biden picks LA Mayor Garcetti to be U.S. ambassador to India



FILE PHOTO: Then Democratic 2020 U.S. presidential candidate Joe Biden and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti visit the United Firefighters of Los Angeles City headquarters in Los Angeles, California on January 10, 2020.

WASHINGTON - President Joe Biden has nominated Los Angeles mayor and climate advocate Eric Garcetti to be the U.S. ambassador to India, a country Washington sees as a key partner in its effort to push back against China's expanding power and influence.

Garcetti, a Biden loyalist who co-chaired the successful Biden-Harris 2020 election campaign, has served as mayor of Los Angeles since 2013.

The White House biography accompanying the announce-

ment of Garcetti's nomination highlighted his role in co-founding the bipartisan "Climate Mayors" network and in leading more than 400 U.S. mayors to adopt the Paris Climate agreement.

It said Garcetti is the current Chair of C40 Cities, which it described as "a network of 97 of the world's biggest cities taking bold climate action," and led the organization's engagement and expansion in India and its global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

India is the world's third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases after China and the United States, albeit with far lower emissions per capita than those countries. It is under pressure from the United States and others to commit to a target of decarbonizing its economy by 2050.

Garcetti issued a statement saying he was "honored" to accept the nomination, which has to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

Garcetti was a Rhodes Scholar who studied at Oxford and the

London School of Economics, and also lived and conducted field work on nationalism, ethnicity, and human rights in Southeast Asia and North-east Africa, the White House said.

It said he spent 12 years as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve Component, serving under the commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and with the Defense Intelligence Agency, before retiring in 2017 as a lieutenant.

Biden has sought to strengthen ties with India, particu-

larly through the Quad group of countries, which also includes Australia and Japan, all of which share concerns about China.

The White House says Biden will host a summit of Quad leaders this year focusing on infrastructure after a virtual meeting in March.

The grouping agreed at that meeting that Indian drugmaker Biological E Ltd would produce at least a billion vaccine doses by the end of 2022, mainly for Southeast Asian and Pacific countries.

Los Angeles City Clerk approves petition to recall councilwoman Nithya Raman

LOS ANGELES - A petition for the recall of Councilwoman Nithya Raman has been approved for circulation, the Los Angeles Office of the City Clerk announced.

Raman, who represents a number of central neighborhoods including Hollywood and Silver Lake, is facing the recall effort from constituents upset over her handling of the city's homelessness crisis.

Recall petitioners will have

until Nov. 4 to collect signatures from at least 27,405 qualified registered voters - 15% of the districts' registered voters.

A similar effort against Councilman Mike Bonin, whose district includes Venice and other westside neighborhoods, requires at least 27,387 signatures.

Both council members have led the effort to replace the city's mandatory encampment cleanups with a more service-based

approach. Back in April, they co-sponsored a motion to have the city develop a new method to replace the cleanups that passed unanimously.

Raman, who had been in office for only about six months, was served the recall notice last month. The effort is led by *Los Feliz Ledger* publisher Allison Cohen, who alleges that Raman has put her "personal homelessness ideology over constituent safety."

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Angry Indian growers gather near parliament to protest farm laws

By Mayank Bhardwaj

NEW DELHI - Indian farmers, protesting against new agriculture laws they say threaten their livelihoods, started a sit-in near parliament in the capital, renewing a push for repeal of the laws.

In the longest-running growers' protest against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, tens of thousands of farmers have camped

out on major highways leading to New Delhi for more than seven months.

On Thursday, police in New Delhi escorted 200 farmers from protest spots on the outskirts to Jantar Mantar, a large Mughal-era observatory in a central area that doubles as a protest site.

"We are here to remind the government again that the anti-farmer laws need to be rolled back

to protect Indian agriculture and millions of poor farmers from a complete takeover by large corporations," Rakesh Tikait, a leader of the Bharatiya Kisan Union, one of the largest grouping of farmers, told Reuters.

Farmers complained that before being allowed to gather at the central site, their identity cards were checked by police, who have tightened security, erecting bar-



Farmers shout slogans during a sit-in protest against the farm laws, near the parliament house in New Delhi, India on July 22, 2021.

India's Tata gets bullish on e-commerce just as rules threaten to transform market

By Aditya Kalra and Abhirup Roy

NEW DELHI - India's Tata Group is taking a more vocal interest in rules shaping online marketplaces, hinting at ambitions as it reappraises its retail strategy just as e-commerce reform threatens to muddy plans.

The \$106 billion conglomerate yet e-commerce minnow was far more vociferous in discussions than market leader Amazon.com Inc at a July 3 meeting with government officials about proposals such as the prohibition of sales of own-brand or affiliates' goods,

attendees said.

The rules would greatly increase the compliance burden of a conglomerate's numerous entities and interests, and hurt them far more than smaller rivals, Tata Vice President Poornima Sampath told the online gathering, according to two attendees.

Tata declined to comment for this article. Sampath did not respond to a request for comment.

Two weeks earlier, the government spooked the industry by proposing increased scrutiny of relationships between online marketplace operators and their partners. The plan was

widely regarded as an attempt to curb the dominance of Amazon and Walmart Inc's Flipkart and support high-street shops.

The 153-year-old Tata conglomerate is ubiquitous on Indian high streets, so its voice in favour of e-commerce at the July 3 meeting indicates the degree to which it is changing tack.

The firm is arguably best known internationally as owner of British luxury car brand Jaguar Land Rover, but it also makes cars at home under its own brand. The group is also active in steel-making, IT outsourcing, and hotel and airline operation.

ricades and check posts to deter violence.

The protest follows a clash with police by thousands of angry farmers late in January after they drove tractors into security barriers. One protester was killed and more than 80 police injured citywide.

"Throughout the monsoon session of parliament, 200 farmers will go to Jantar Mantar every day to hold a farmers' parliament to remind the government of our long-pending demand," said Balbir Singh Rajewal, another leader of the farmers.

Parliament ends its monsoon

session early in August, and the farmers have been allowed to gather until Aug. 9.

In parliament, key opposition leaders, such as Rahul Gandhi and Harsimrat Kaur Badal, asked the government to tackle the farmers' concerns and roll back the three controversial laws.

Many senior members of Gandhi's Congress party, which is the main opposition group, gathered in the compound of parliament, carrying placards that read "Save the country, Save the farmers," and shouting slogans of support.

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India watchdog accuses Amazon of concealing facts in deal for Future Group unit



A shipment moves on a conveyor belt at an Amazon Fulfillment Centre on the outskirts of Bengaluru, India.

By Aditya Kalra

NEW DELHI - India's anti-trust regulator has accused Amazon.com Inc of concealing facts and making false submissions when it sought approval for a 2019 investment in a Future Group unit, a letter to the U.S. e-commerce giant seen by Reuters showed.

The letter complicates Amazon's bitter legal battle with Future Group over the Indian firm's decision to sell its retail assets to Reliance Industries - a

matter that is now before India's Supreme Court.

Amazon has argued that terms agreed upon in its 2019 deal to pay \$192 million for a 49% stake in Future's gift voucher unit prevent its parent, Future Group, from selling its Future Retail Ltd business to Reliance.

In the letter dated June 4, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) said Amazon hid factual aspects of the transaction by not revealing its strategic interest in Future Retail when it sought approval for the 2019 deal.

"The representations and conduct of Amazon before the Commission amounts to misrepresentation, making false statement and suppression or/and concealment of material facts," the letter said. It also noted that its review of the submissions made had been prompted by a complaint from Future Group.

In the four-page letter, a so-called 'show cause notice', the CCI asked Amazon why it should not take action and penalise the company for providing false information.

Amazon has yet to respond, according to a source with direct knowledge of the matter who declined to be identified as the letter has not been made public.

Amazon said in a statement to Reuters it had received a letter, was committed to complying with India's laws and would extend its full cooperation to the CCI.

"We are confident that we will be able to address the CCI's concerns," it said.

Representatives for Future and the CCI did not respond to Reuters requests for comment.

Vaibhav Choukse, a competition law specialist and partner at J. Sagar Associates, said it was

rare for the CCI to issue such a notice and that if the CCI was not satisfied by Amazon's response, it could lead to a fine and even a review of the deal.

"The CCI has wide powers which includes directions to refile the approval application and even revoke the approval under exceptional circumstances," Choukse said.

The CCI's 2019 approval order states its decision "shall stand revoked if, at any time, the information provided" is found to be incorrect.

Shares in Future Retail jumped after Reuters published details of the letter, extending gains to be up nearly 5% in Thursday afternoon trade.

SUBMISSIONS COMPARED

The dispute over Future Retail, which has more than 1,500 supermarkets and other outlets, is the most hostile flashpoint between Jeff Bezos' Amazon and Reliance, run by India's richest man Mukesh Ambani, as they try to gain the upper hand in winning over the country's consumers.

Amazon also has a host of other challenges in India, a key growth market where it has

committed \$6.5 billion in investments, including a separate CCI probe into alleged practices that small businesses say have hurt them.

In addition, it faces the prospect of more regulations that would restrict the sale of private labels and would prohibit the U.S. firm from allowing its affiliates to list products on its website.

The CCI letter compared three sets of submissions Amazon made to it in 2019 with submissions made later to other legal forums, saying they were "contradictory."

In particular, it said Amazon had explained its interest in investing in Future's coupon unit as one that would address gaps in India's payments industry. But the letter stated Amazon had disclosed in other legal forums that the foundation of its relationship with Future Coupon was certain special rights it obtained over Future Retail.

"Amazon has concealed its strategic interest" in Future Retail, the letter said, adding: "Such interest and the purpose of the combination ... was not disclosed to the Commission despite specific requirements."

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Heavy rains cripple Indian cities; at least 35 killed

MUMBAI - India's capital New Delhi and the main financial centre of Mumbai were drenched with heavy rain on Monday, a day after at least 35 people were killed across the country in landslides and house collapses triggered by downpours.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted heavy to very heavy rain in north India, including New Delhi, over the next two

days. In Mumbai, the IMD has issued a heavy rain and thunderstorm alert for the city and surrounding districts.

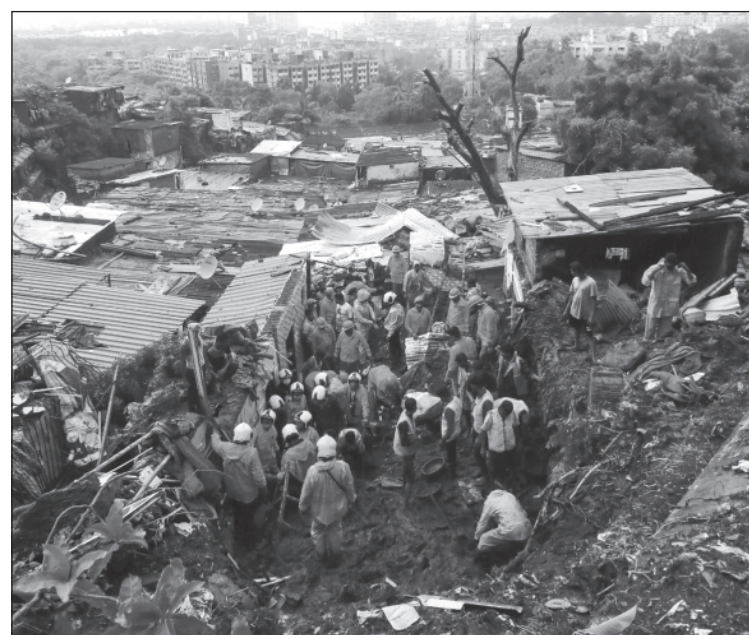
At least 30 people were killed on Sunday in three Mumbai suburbs when several houses collapsed in landslides after rain.

At least three people were also killed when a house collapsed in the northern state of Uttarakhand after a downpour, Reuters partner agency ANI reported.

In a separate incident on Sunday evening, a three-storey building collapsed in the city of Gurugram, bordering Delhi. Two people were killed and rescue operations were still underway.

Several low-lying areas of Delhi and Mumbai were flooded and Twitter was filled with images of submerged vehicles and people wading through waist-deep water.

Mumbai's water treatment



Rescue workers search for survivors after a residential house collapsed due to landslide caused by heavy rainfall in Mumbai, India on July 18, 2021.

India reports 3,998 COVID deaths after state corrects its data

MUMBAI - India reported its highest death toll in a month on Wednesday - at nearly 4,000 - after its richest state reconciled its death count with 3,509 previously unreported fatalities, the health ministry said.

Maharashtra, home to the financial capital of Mumbai, has reported 130,753 of the country's 418,480 coronavirus deaths, and added 3,509 earlier deaths to its tally, the federal health ministry said on Wednesday.

The ministry did not give a reason but authorities have in

the past attributed other instances of deaths going unreported to administrative errors, before the mistakes are discovered and the numbers appear in official data.

Last month, the poor northern state of Bihar raised its death toll by more than 5,000 in a day when it included some unrecorded data.

The sudden appearance of previously unrecorded deaths has lent weight to suspicion that India's overall death tally is significantly more than the official

figure.

India's tally of infections stands at 31.22 million, with a death toll of 418,480, according to official data.

But the Washington-based Center for Global Development estimated said in a report on Tuesday that India's real death toll from COVID-19 could be as high as 4.9 million.

On Wednesday, the government reported 42,015 new coronavirus infections in the previous 24 hours, health ministry data showed.

Bus crashes in Pakistan, killing 33 people and injuring 40

By Asim Tanveer

MULTAN - A jam-packed bus carrying mostly laborers traveling home for a major Muslim holiday rammed into a container truck on a busy highway in central Pakistan, police and rescue officials said. At least 33 people were killed and 40 others injured.

The bus, which was over passenger capacity, had left the city of Sialkot and was traveling on Taunsa Road in Punjab province. Its destination was the city of Dera

Ghazi Khan, said senior police officer Hassan Javed. The exact cause of the accident is still under investigation, he said.

Rescuers transported the dead and injured to a nearby hospital. According to Sher Khan, who was in charge of the rescue team at the site, some of the injured were in critical condition. He said the bus driver was among the 33 killed in the accident.

Khan said the passengers were traveling to their home district of Rajanpur to celebrate the

upcoming Eid al-Adha feast.

Injured passenger Haider Ali said the bus was overcrowded and some passengers were sitting on the roof at the time of the accident. However, police said they were still investigating whether some passengers were on the roof.

TV footage and photos circulating on social media showed rescuers trying to pull bodies from the badly mangled bus. In one image, some of the injured are seen sitting near the bus, waiting for medical help.

plant in the suburbs was flooded on Sunday forcing the municipal council to impose water cuts in some parts of the city.

India is in the midst of its annual rainy season but the downpours over the past few days

have been particularly heavy.

Extreme weather has hit several parts of the world in recent weeks with flooding in Europe, dam collapses in China and heatwaves in North America adding to worries about climate change.

U.S. eases COVID-19 travel advisory for India, Pakistan

By David Shepardson

WASHINGTON - The U.S. State Department has lowered its COVID-19-related travel advisory for India to "Level 3 - Reconsider Travel," the department said in a statement on Tuesday.

The advisory for Pakistan was similarly eased, it said. The COVID-19 advisories were previously the highest Level 4, "Do not travel."

India's daily coronavirus cases have fallen to four-month lows after a second wave that crippled the healthcare system. But experts have warned the authorities against swiftly reopening cities and voiced concerns about overcrowding at tourist sites.

The decision does not impact travel restrictions imposed in May that bar nearly all non-U.S. citizens from entering the United States who have been in India within the last 14 days.

Similar travel restrictions are in place for South Africa, China, Iran, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Ireland and 26 countries in Europe that allow travel across open borders.

Permanent U.S. residents and family members and some other non-U.S. citizens, such as students, are exempted.

The White House is holding a new round of high level meetings this week about the travel restrictions, sources told Reuters, but given no indication it plans to quickly lift them.

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Two-thirds of Indians have coronavirus antibodies, survey shows



A woman rides a scooter through a crowded market on a rainy day amidst the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Mumbai, India.

MUMBAI - Two-thirds of India's population have antibodies against the coronavirus, according to data released on Tuesday from a survey of 29,000 people across the nation conducted in June and July.

The fourth national blood serum survey which tests for antibodies, known as a sero survey, included 8,691 children aged 6-17 years for the first time. Half of them were seropositive.

The survey showed 67.6% of adults were seropositive, while more than 62% of adults were

unvaccinated. As of July, just over 8% of eligible adult Indians had received two vaccine doses.

About 400 million of India's 1.4 billion people did not have antibodies, the survey showed.

India's daily cases have fallen to four-month lows after a second-wave that crippled the healthcare system. But experts have warned the authorities against swiftly reopening cities and voiced concerns about overcrowding at tourist sites.

"The second wave is still

persisting. The danger of new outbreaks is very much there," Vinod Kumar Paul, a top government adviser, told a news conference.

"One out of three, wherever you are, ... is still vulnerable and therefore the pandemic is no

way over," he said.

The study also surveyed 7,252 healthcare workers and found 85% had antibodies, with one in 10 unvaccinated.

Last month, data showed at least half of under-18s in India's financial capital of Mum-

bai were exposed to COVID-19 and had antibodies against it.

Some experts have said a third wave could hit children. Mumbai has joined other cities in building huge paediatric wards in preparation.

Pakistan says needs Afghan cooperation for probe into envoy's daughter's kidnapping

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan said on Monday it was waiting for information from the Afghan government in an investigation into the brief kidnapping of the Afghan ambassador's daughter in Islamabad, after Afghanistan raised questions over the credibility of the probe.

Silsila Alikhil, 26, the daughter of Afghanistan's ambassador to Pakistan, told Pakistani police she was assaulted and held for several hours by unknown assailants on Friday, following which Kabul pulled out its diplomats from Islamabad.

"The investigation is ongoing and we are waiting for them to come and give their point of view; to say anything now would be premature," Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi

told a news conference on Monday in Islamabad.

Qureshi said Afghanistan should not have pulled out its ambassador and senior diplomats from Pakistan.

Earlier on Monday, Afghan Foreign Minister Haneef Atmar complained to Qureshi about the remarks of a senior Pakistani minister, according to a statement from Afghanistan's ministry of foreign affairs.

"Atmar said unprofessional remarks and premature judgments could strongly affect bilateral relations and the credibility of the ongoing, and still incomplete, investigation," it said.

On Sunday night, Pakistan's Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid, to whom the Islamabad police reports, told Pakistani television

channel Geo News that the probe so far had not shown that Alikhil was kidnapped.

"I want to tell the entire nation, this is an international racket, an international conspiracy," he had said.

The Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences state hospital where Alikhil was treated had confirmed she had swelling and rope marks on the wrists and ankles as well as swelling in the brain's rear occipital region.

Islamabad's top police official, Inspector General Qazi Jamil-ur-Rehman, told reporters on Monday that more than 350 people were working on the case, and more than 700 hours of footage from more than 300 CCTV cameras had been examined.

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Branco Ice Special \$45.99 sq.ft (Orig. \$49.99)	Magma Gold Granite Special \$49.99 sq.ft (Orig. \$54.99)	Titanium Granite Special \$49.99 sq.ft (Orig. \$59.99)
White Storm Dolomite Marble Special \$49.99 sq.ft (Orig. \$59.99)	Extreme White Special \$45.99 sq.ft (Orig. \$54.99)	
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GRANITE

India PM Modi warns against overcrowding at tourist spots

By Neha Arora and Ankur Banerjee

Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned last Tuesday against overcrowding at tourist sites and called for faster vaccinations against the coronavirus even as official figures indicated a slower spread of new infections.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) said last Monday it feared

gathering of tourists and pilgrims could become super spreader events that fuel a deadly third wave of infections and it warned against complacency.

“I will say very emphatically that it is not OK to have huge crowds in hill stations, markets, without wearing masks,” Modi said in comments posted on Twitter while acknowledging the tourism industry has been badly hit by

lockdowns.

India’s coronavirus caseload of 30.91 million infections is the world’s second-highest behind the United States.

Its official tally of deaths is 410,784, many of them coming in a brutal second wave of infections in April and May when people died outside hospitals as they waited for beds and bodies were washing up on the banks of the



Health workers wear personal protective equipment (PPE) as they prepare to carry the body of a person, who died from complications related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), for cremation at a crematorium in New Delhi, India, on June 10, 2021.

India tells China continuing border tensions not in either side’s interests

MUMBAI - The failure of China and India to resolve the standoff over their disputed border in the western Himalayas, despite an agreement last year, is not in the interest of either side, India’s foreign minister told his Chinese counterpart last Wednesday.

In accordance with last year’s pact, military commanders on both sides completed a pullout of troops, tanks and artillery from the Pangong Lake area in February in a first step towards full withdrawal from other friction points.

India’s minister of external af-

fairs, S Jaishankar, said friction in these other areas remained unresolved, however.

“(The minister) recalled that both sides had agreed that a prolongation of the existing situation was not in the interest of either side. It was visibly impacting the relationship in a negative manner,” India’s foreign ministry said in a statement.

Jaishankar and China’s Wang Yi met at the sidelines of a gathering of foreign ministers in Tajikistan last Wednesday.

Thousands of soldiers have been facing off since April 2020 on the Line of Actual Control

(LAC), or the de facto border, including at the glacial Pangong Lake, raising fears of a broader conflict between the two countries.

Both Indian and Chinese soldiers were killed in a clash in June last year - the first combat losses on the disputed border in more than four decades.

The two ministers agreed to seek a mutually acceptable solution to the problem and ensure stability on the ground by avoiding any unilateral action that could increase tension, the statement said.

holy Ganges river.

Last Tuesday, authorities reported 32,906 new cases - the lowest daily tally since mid-March - compared with some 400,000 a day at the height of the second wave.

The government last month launched a campaign to inoculate all adults, with a target of 950 million people by the end of the year, but the pace of the drive has faltered because of shortages

of vaccines and various logistical hurdles, and only 8% of the target is fully vaccinated.

Modi called for vigilance against new variants of the virus and a faster campaign to get the population protected.

The Delta variant that is spreading in many countries was first detected in India where experts have recently identified what they believe is a new variant they have called Delta plus.

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BOLLYWOOD Insider™

Bollywood Beat

Deepika Padukone opens up about her mental illness



Actress Deepika Padukone was diagnosed with depression back in 2014. Though initially she wasn't commenting on it, after sometime, she became very vocal about her diagnosis. She broke the stigma that a successful public figure can't admit to having suffered from any mental trauma and illness.

In a recent Clubhouse (a social chat room) session, Deepika Padukone opened up about the decision to bring out the reality of the mental illness she went through and what made her kept quiet initially. She shared that it wasn't easy for her to come out and the decision wasn't immediate. All the people around her advised her to keep the things confidential and not bring them into public.

She said, "At that point when I went through the entire experience, I felt like we were being extremely hush-hush about everything. We didn't want my name to go out. We were scared about which therapist to reach out to and who's going to keep this information confidential. At that point, I went with the flow because I wanted help."

On the work front, Deepika Padukone will be next seen in 83 opposite husband Ranveer Singh. She will also star in the espionage drama *Pathan* alongside Shah Rukh Khan. She has *Fighter* with Hrithik Roshan, Nag Ashwin and Shakun Batra's next, *The Intern* remake.

Suniel Shetty hints at daughter Athiya and cricketer KL Rahul's relationship by praising their pair

Multi-talented hero Suniel Shetty opened up when questioned about the dating rumors of his daughter Athiya and cricketer KL Rahul. The actor was frank enough and said that he loves to see them together and they make a cute pair. The couple are often seen sharing romantic pictures with each other on their respective Instagram handles and have always been cautious when it came to accepting their relationship. Suniel has come across as a cool father and seems to have approved of their relationship. He refrained from divulging any more details but praised Athiya and K L Rahul's eyewear ad, terming them as a 'good-looking couple'.

The alleged couple are said to be in London but have not uploaded any pictures on their social media handle. When asked about her daughter holidaying with the ace cricketer Suniel said that Athiya has gone with her baby brother Ahan to have a brother-sister outing in London.

In fact, K L Rahul was heard referring



to Athiya Shetty as his companion before he left with the Indian cricket team for the World Test Championship Final in England. Athiya Shetty was last seen in movies

like *Hero*, *Mubarakan*, *Nawabzaade* and *Motichoor Chaknachoor*. She is in talks to star in footballer Afshan Ashiq's biopic film, *Hope Solo*.

Ranveer Singh, not Ranbir Kapoor in *Baiju Bawra*



There are reports that Ranbir Kapoor has said no to Sanjay Leela Bhansali's proposed musical love story *Baiju Bawra*.

Sources close to Bhansali say, "Ranbir has not been offered *Baiju Bawra*. The only time Ranbir turned down a role in a Bhansali film was when he was offered *Guzaarish*. Bhansali offered him the role that was eventually played by Aditya Roy Kapur. Ranbir had a valid reason for

turning it down. He told Bhansali, 'How can I play a supporting role to Hrithik Roshan? It will typecast me as supporting actor.' And that was that."

About the casting of *Baiju Bawra*, the source close to Bhansali productions says, "It is Ranveer Singh who is being seriously considered for the part. Nothing has been finalized yet. Right now Bhansali's focus is on the casting of *Heera Mandi*."

Case registered over film casting through fake Instagram account posing as Rajkumar Hirani's son



A case has been registered after a fake Instagram account under the name of filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani's son advertised for an audition call for an upcoming film. The complaint was filed by the filmmaker's office after they got a mail inquiring whether the post about Teenage Cinema was true. The complaint has been registered with the Andheri police in Mumbai.

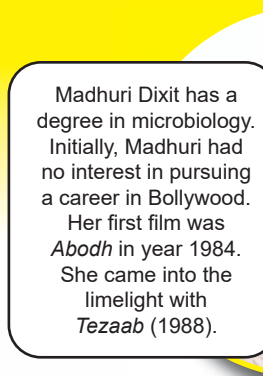
The fake post advertised that

there was an urgent requirement for male and female actors between the age of 18 and 25. The advertisement was for lead roles and negative roles for an upcoming film. It also said that even freshers can apply. The advertisement asked interested people to DM and even demanded an application fee. The advertisement also promised Rs. 20 crore to the selected candidate.

UNKNOWN FACTS ABOUT BOLLYWOOD CELEBRITIES



In 2013, when Sanjay Dutt was arrested, he was given duties just like every other prisoner. During his time in prison, he was assigned the duty of making paper bags for which he received a salary of Rs 50 per day.



Madhuri Dixit has a degree in microbiology. Initially, Madhuri had no interest in pursuing a career in Bollywood. Her first film was *Abodh* in year 1984. She came into the limelight with *Tezaab* (1988).

Bollywood Trivia

On which battle is the movie '*Tanhaji*' based on?

- 1) Battle of Panipat
- 2) Battle of Aligarh
- 3) Fort Sinhgad
- 4) Battle of Saragrh

Answer: 3

Which actor plays blind in movie '*Andhadhun*'?

- 1) Akshay Kumar
- 2) Vicky Kaushal
- 3) Ayushman Khurrana
- 4) Tiger Shroff

Answer: 3

BOLLYWOOD Insider™

MOVIE REVIEW

Toofan

Banner:
ROMP Pictures
Excel Entertainment

Producer:
Ritesh Sidhwani
Farhan Akhtar
Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra

Director:
Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra

Starring:
Farhan Akhtar
Paresh Rawal
Mrunal Thakur

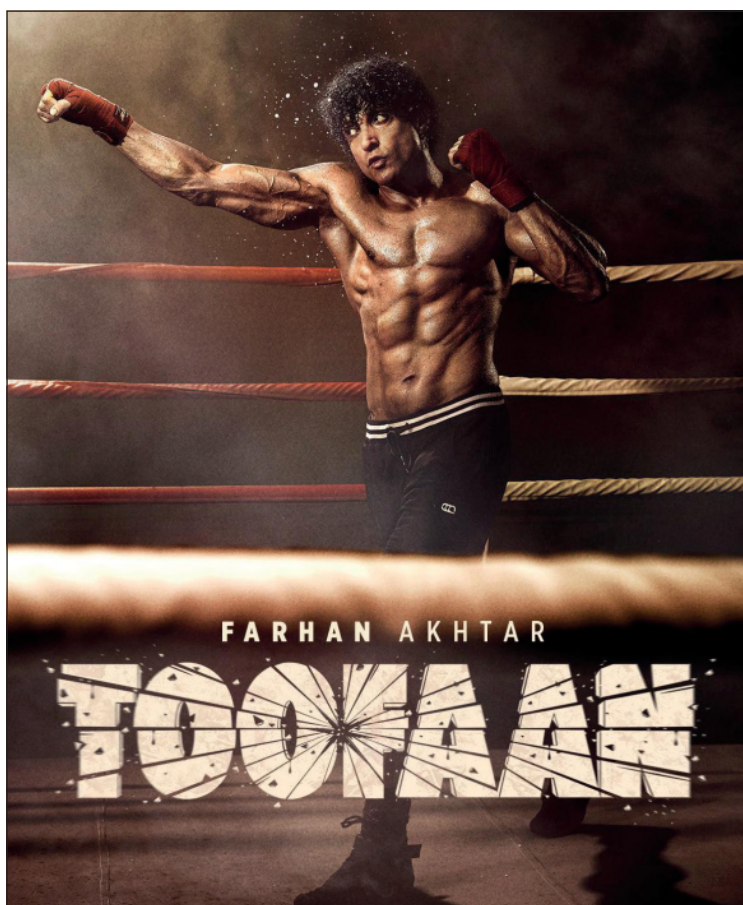
Music By:
Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy
Dub Sharma
Samuel-Akanksha
Daniel Lozinski

Released Date:
July 16, 2021

In 2013, actor Farhan Akhtar and director-producer Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra collaborated on *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*. The sports biopic of Milkha Singh got unanimous praise and it resulted in box office collections of Rs. 100 crore plus. 8 years later, both have joined hands once again for yet another sports film, *Toofaan*. This time, Farhan has stepped in as a producer as well, along with his partner Ritesh Sidhwani. So does *Toofaan* manage to be as compelling as their earlier film? Or does it disappoint? Let's analyse.

Toofaan is the story of a street brawler's transformation into a top-class boxer. Aziz Ali aka Ajju (Farhan Akhtar) is an orphan who was raised by Jafar Bhai (Vijay Raaz). Aziz now lives with his friend Munna (Hussain Dalal) in Dongri, Mumbai and does all the dirty work for Jafar bhai. While thrashing a restaurant owner (Imran Rashid) over a feud with Jafar bhai, Aziz gets injured. He goes to a charitable hospital for treatment where the doctor, Ananya Prabhu (Mrunal Thakur) ousts him after

learning that he's a goon. A few days later, Ananya witnesses Aziz buying gifts for children in an orphanage. This makes her realize that he's a good person at heart. One day, Aziz visits a gym in his neighbourhood, run by a man called Merchant (Deven Khote). Merchant trains boxing aspirants in his premises. Aziz witnesses it and gets into a brawl with a player practicing there, Parvez (Arhan Chowdhary). Instead of hitting back, Parvez praises him and says that he has a lot of strength. Aziz gets surprised and realizes that boxing can make him a better human. He starts his training. But he still continues working for Jafar bhai. One day, Ananya witnesses Aziz evicting a person from his shop violently. She admonishes him and insists that he should wholly focus on boxing. Aziz realizes she's right. When Merchant sees a potential in him, he takes Aziz to Nana Prabhu (Paresh Rawal), the best boxing coach in Mumbai. Nana gets Aziz to fight with his student. Aziz gets defeated and he asks Nana to train him. Nana, however, refuses at first due to Aziz's Muslim identity. Meanwhile, Aziz goes back to the hospital to get treated for the injury sustained in the match. This is when he tells Ananya that he met Nana sir, unknown to the fact that she is Nana's daughter. Soon, Nana agrees to train him and turns him into a top boxing player. Aziz also gets selected for the state championship where he manages to defeat a seasoned player, Dharmesh Patil (Darshan Kumar). This is also a time when Aziz starts dating Ananya. After his victory, Aziz is having a drink with Nana when he blurts out that he's in a relationship with Ananya and that he wants to marry her. Aziz had no idea that she's Nana's daughter. Nana, in a fit of rage, slaps Aziz and accuses him of conning his daughter. Nana then forces Ananya to end the relationship and remarks that Aziz is carrying out 'Love Jihad'. What happens next forms the rest



of the film.

Farhan Akhtar is in a superb form. He looks very convincing as a boxer but even in dramatic and emotional scenes, he rocks big time. After *Dil Dhadakne Do* [2016], he wasn't seen in memorable films and performances. Hence, it's a pleasure to finally see him in a film where he gets an opportunity to shine. Mrunal Thakur is the surprise of the film. She has a very important part to play in the happenings of the movie and she does total justice with her performance. Also, her hundred watt smile is infectious. Paresh Rawal is terrific and pulls off a challenging role with ease. He's missing in the beginning of the second half but makes up for it in the pre-climax and climax. Hussain Dalal is lovely as the sidekick and contributes to the film's humour quotient. Vijay Raaz doesn't have much to do surprisingly especially since his character seemed unhappy with Aziz's decision. Darshan Kumar is great as the baddie. But it seems

he's getting typecast. Dr. Mohan Agashe (Bala Uncle) is adorable and also is the voice of reason and sanity. This makes his character very special. Supriya Pathak (Sister DSouza) is alright. Gauri Phulka (Myra) steals the show as Aziz and Ananya's daughter. Gaganpreet Sharma (Prithvi Singh) is menacing as the dangerous opponent of Aziz. Deven Khote is confident while Arhan Chowdhary, Imran Rashid, RJ Anmol (State championship commentator) and Akashdeep Sabir (Mallik; match fixer) do well. Sonali Kulkarni (Sumati) is there for a scene while director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (IBF Secretary) is okay.

On the whole, *Toofaan* boasts of powerful performances along with some heart-touching and dramatic moments. But the film's lengthy runtime, poor soundtrack, clichéd plot and the predictable narrative diminishes the impact to a great extent.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Bollywood Beat

Shilpa's husband Raj Kundra arrested in pornography case



Shilpa Shetty's husband Raj Kundra has been arrested by the Mumbai Police as the 'key conspirator' in a pornography-related case.

The Mumbai Police Commissioner, Hemant Nagrale confirmed the arrest in a statement that read, "There was a case registered with Crime Branch Mumbai in February 2021 about the creation of pornographic films and publishing them through some Apps. We've arrested Mr Raj Kundra in this case on 19/7/21 as he appears to be the key conspirator of this."

He also went on to state, "We have sufficient evidence regarding this. The investigation is in progress."

Kundra has been slammed with IPC sections of cheating, indulging in the obscene act in public places and publicly exhibiting or circulating obscene books or literature and under the Information Technology Act.

According to a report, the cops filed two FIRs and apprehended nine people last week for allegedly "forcing" actors to shoot nude scenes for pornographic films. The report further stated that these films were released/streamed on paid mobile applications.

Reportedly, Poonam Pandey has filed a case against Raj Kundra and his associates in Bombay High Court. The model-actress stated that Kundra and his associates have been illegally using her content and added that the contract between them was terminated.

Celebrity Birthdays

July 28th Ayesha Jhulka (1972)	August 2nd Ruslaan Mumtaz (1982)	August 7th Sachiin Joshi (1984)
July 29th Sanjay Dutt (1959)	August 3rd Sunil Grover (1977)	August 9th Hansika Motwani (1991)
July 30th Sonu Sood (1973) Sonu Nigam (1973)	August 4th Shama Sikander (1981)	
August 1st Taapsee Pannu (1987)	August 5th Kajol (1974) Vatsal Seth (1980)	

Upcoming Films

Radhe Shyam Prabhas, Pooja Hegde and Krishnam Raju	Atrangi Re Hrithik Roshan, Akshay Kumar, Dhanush and Sara Ali Khan	Thalaivi Kangana Ranaut and Vijay Deverakonda
Maidaan Ajay Devgn, Priyamani and Keerthy Suresh	Gangubai Kathiawadi Alia Bhatt, Parth Samthaan, and Emraan Hashmi	Bhoot Police Saif Ali Khan, Fatima Sana Shaikh, and Yami Gauta
Bachchan Pandey Akshay Kumar, Bobby Deol and Riteish Deshmukh	Brahmastra Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt and Amitabh Bachchan	83 Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone

BIZ BRIEFS

FedEx to invest \$100 mln in Indian firm

FedEx Corp will make a \$100-million equity investment in Indian e-commerce logistics startup Delhivery as part of a long-term commercial agreement, the U.S. delivery firm said.

SoftBank-backed Delhivery will sell FedEx Express' international products and services in India, as part of the deal, and also provide pick-up and delivery services across the country.

FedEx will also transfer some of its assets from its India business to Delhivery, enabling broader access to the the Gurgaon-based startup's pan-India network.

Several Indian startups have spelt out plans to go public to cash in on liquidity by foreign funds. According to media reports, the startup which is eyeing a market debut as early as the fourth quarter is weighing a valuation of \$4 billion.

Swiggy raises \$1.25 bln from SoftBank

Indian food delivery startup Swiggy said on Tuesday it has raised \$1.25 billion in a funding round led by SoftBank's Vision Fund 2 and technology investor Prosus as foreign funds raise their stake in local internet-based consumer firms.

After the fund infusion, Swiggy will be valued at \$5.5 billion, technology news site TechCrunch reported. Swiggy did not immediately respond to Reuters request for comment on its latest valuation.

Goldman Sachs and Qatar Investment Authority were also among the notable investors in the latest fundraising.

Google expands India cloud services with new infrastructure push

By Sankalp Phartiyal

NEW DELHI - Alphabet Inc's Google is ramping up cloud infrastructure in India with a second cluster of data centres in and around capital New Delhi to meet increasing customer demands in a key growth market, senior company executives said.

The Google cloud region in Delhi and its outskirts is the U.S. tech giant's second such piece of infrastructure in the country and the tenth in the Asia Pacific.

"We have seen enormous growth in demand for Google cloud services in India so expanding our footprint in a new cloud region gives us the ability to offer more capacity for growth over many years," Thomas Kurian, CEO at Google Cloud, told a news conference this week ahead of a formal announcement last Thursday. "It's a large commitment from us in capital and infra-

structure investment and it's designed to allow us to capture the opportunity that we see around growth."

The new infrastructure will help provide solutions for problems such as disaster recovery within India and ensure low latency for many state-run enterprises in and around Delhi, Kurian added.

Google did not say how much it had invested to set up the new cloud facilities.

India's fledgling startup economy has also helped drive and accelerate the use of cloud services, said Bikram Singh Bedi, managing director at Google Cloud's India unit.

Google Cloud counts home-grown social network ShareChat, online travel firm Cleartrip and private sector lender HDFC Bank among its India customers.

Google has bet big on India. Last year, it invested \$4.5 billion



A Google Cloud logo outside of the Google Cloud computing unit's headquarters at the Moffett Place office complex in Sunnyvale, California.

in Jio Platforms, the digital unit of oil-to-telecoms conglomerate Reliance Industries, from a so-called \$10 billion digitisation fund targeted for the country.

In June, Google said it was

forging a partnership with Jio to help India's biggest wireless carrier with tech solutions for enterprise and consumer offerings ahead of the launch of 5G services.

Asia Gold Indian dealers offer discounts as price run-up softens demand

By Rajendra Jadhav and Brijesh Patel

Gold in India was sold at a discount this week for the first time in nearly a month as a jump in local prices curbed purchases, while buyers in other major Asian hubs were also put off by higher prices.

In India, dealers were offering a discount of up to \$5 an ounce over official domestic prices this week, inclusive of the 10.75% import and 3% sales levies, compared to last week's premium of \$1.5.

"Demand was slowly recovering after state governments eased lockdown restrictions but a sud-



A salesperson arranges 24K gold bracelets for Chinese weddings at Chow Tai Fook Jewellery store in Hong Kong, China.

den rise in prices disrupted the recovery," said Harshad Ajmera, the proprietor of JJ Gold House, a wholesaler in Kolkata.

Gold futures in India, the world's second biggest bul-

lion consumer after China, were trading around 48,300 rupees per 10 grams last Friday, after rising to its highest level in a month of 48,501 rupees last Thursday.

"The price rise has been confusing jewellers. They want to replenish inventory but are not sure about retail demand given that prices are firm," said a Mumbai-based bullion dealer with a gold importing bank.

In China, premiums were around \$1-\$2 an ounce over the benchmark compared with last week's premium of about \$1 an ounce, while Hong Kong dealers quoted premiums of between \$0.50 and \$1.8 an ounce.

"There is some selling for profit but most are waiting for a dip in gold prices to buy some gold," said Peter Fung, head of dealing at Wing Fung Precious Metals in Hong Kong.

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Biden says Facebook, others 'killing people' by carrying COVID misinformation

By Nandita Bose
and Elizabeth Culliford

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Joe Biden last Friday said social media platforms like Facebook "are killing people" for allowing misinformation about coronavirus vaccines to be posted on its platform, as the administration continued criticizing the company.

"They're killing people. ... Look, the only pandemic we have is among the unvaccinated. And they're killing people," Biden told reporters at the White House when asked about misinformation and what his message was to social media platforms such as Facebook Inc's.

COVID-19 misinformation has proliferated during the pandemic on social media sites including Facebook, Twitter and Alphabet Inc-owned YouTube. Researchers and lawmakers have long accused Facebook of failing to police harmful content on its platforms.

The company has introduced rules against making specific false claims about COVID-19 and vaccines for it, and says it provides people reliable information on these topics.

"We will not be distracted by accusations which aren't supported by the facts," Facebook spokesman Kevin McAlister said last Friday. "The fact is that more than 2 billion people have viewed authoritative information about COVID-19 and vaccines on Facebook, which is more than any other place on the internet."

"More than 3.3 million Americans have also used our vaccine finder tool to find out where and how to get a vaccine. The facts show that Facebook is helping save lives. Period," he said.

Twitter and YouTube did not respond to requests for comment.

The Delta variant of the coronavirus is now the dominant strain worldwide, accompanied by a surge of deaths around the United States almost entirely among un-

vaccinated people, U.S. officials said last Friday.

American cases of COVID-19 are up 70% over the previous week and deaths are up 26%, with outbreaks occurring in parts of the country with low vaccination rates.

Earlier last Friday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki also criticized Facebook.

"Obviously, there are steps they have taken. They're a private-sector company, Psaki told a White House briefing. "There are additional steps they can take. It's clear that there are more that can be taken."

Last Thursday, she said the Biden administration was in regular contact with Facebook and was flagging problematic posts.

Psaki said 12 people were responsible for almost 65% of anti-vaccine misinformation on social media platforms. The finding was reported in May by the Washington- and London-based nonprofit Center for Countering Digital



U.S. President Joe Biden talks to the media as he departs for a weekend visit to Camp David from the White House in Washington on July 16, 2021.

Hate, but Facebook has disputed the methodology.

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has also raised the alarm over the growing wave of misin-

formation about COVID-19 and related vaccines. Last Thursday, he said it was making it harder to fight the pandemic and save lives.

Walmart's Flipkart says Indian probe shouldn't treat it the same as Amazon



A mobile phone showing an image of Indian online retailer Flipkart is seen in front of a Walmart Inc logo displayed in this illustration picture.

NEW DELHI - Walmart's Flipkart should not be treated the same as rival Amazon in an Indian antitrust probe as the evidence against the two firms was "qualitatively different", Flipkart argued in a court filing seen by Reuters.

Both Amazon and Flipkart have challenged the Competition Commission of India (CCI) in court as they seek revocation of an Indian court's June decision to allow an antitrust probe against them to continue. The companies deny any wrongdoing.

India's government has called the U.S. firms arrogant and accused them of using legal routes to stall the investigation.

In final submissions made to a court in southern India's

Karnataka state, the Walmart unit argued that CCI and the court "confuse the facts" between the case of Amazon and Flipkart, and overlooked that they were "fierce competitors".

To back its arguments, it said that a business agreement examined by the CCI before ordering its probe was only between Amazon and its sellers, and there was no such evidence against the Walmart unit.

"The allegations and the evidence before the CCI against the Appellant were qualitatively different from those relating to Amazon ... The CCI should have independently examined the case against each of the two platforms," Flipkart said in its 46-page submission, which was not

public.

The Indian court is likely to pass a written order on the appeals in coming days.

Flipkart and Amazon did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The CCI didn't respond outside regular business hours on Sunday.

For years, Amazon and Flipkart have denied allegations from brick-and-mortar retailers about circumventing Indian law by creating complex business structures.

Trade minister Piyush Goyal last month lashed out on U.S. e-commerce giants for filing legal challenges and failing to comply with the CCI's probe, saying "if they have nothing to hide ... why don't they respond to the CCI?"

In February, a Reuters investigation based on internal Amazon documents showed the U.S. firm for years had helped a small number of sellers prosper on its platform in India, using them to bypass foreign investment laws. Amazon also has indirect equity stakes in two of its big online sellers, Cloudtail and Appario, which get "subsidized fees", Reuters reported.

The Walmart unit argued in its submission that "unlike in the case of Amazon", there were no structural links of any kind between Flipkart and its sellers.

U.S. Senate passes bill to ban all products from China's Xinjiang

By Michael Martina

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Senate passed legislation last Wednesday to ban the import of products from China's Xinjiang region, the latest effort in Washington to punish Beijing for what U.S. officials say is an ongoing genocide against Uyghurs and other Muslim groups.

The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act would create a "rebuttable presumption" assuming goods manufactured in Xinjiang are made with forced labor and therefore banned under the 1930 Tariff Act, unless otherwise certified by U.S. authorities.

Passed by unanimous consent, the bipartisan measure would shift the burden of proof to importers. The current rule bans goods if there is reasonable evidence of forced labor.

The bill must also pass the House of Representatives before it can be sent to the White House for President Joe Biden to sign into law. It was not immediately clear when that might take place.

Republican Senator Marco Rubio, who introduced the legislation with Democrat Jeff Merkley, called on the House to act quickly.

"We will not turn a blind eye to the CCP's ongoing crimes

against humanity, and we will not allow corporations a free pass to profit from those horrific abuses," Rubio said in a statement.

"No American corporation should profit from these abuses. No American consumers should be inadvertently purchasing products from slave labor," Merkley said.

Democratic and Republican aides said they expected the measure would get strong support in the House, noting the House approved a similar measure nearly unanimously last year.

The bill would go beyond steps already taken to secure U.S. supply chains in the face of allegations of rights abuses in China, including existing bans on Xinjiang tomatoes, cotton and some solar products.

The Biden administration has increased sanctions, and last Tuesday issued an advisory warning businesses they could be in violation of U.S. law if operations are linked even indirectly to surveillance networks in Xinjiang.

Rights groups, researchers, former residents and some Western lawmakers and officials say Xinjiang authorities have facilitated forced labor by detaining around a million Uyghurs and other primarily Muslim minorities since 2016.

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE

(August 1 - 7, 2021)

Aries (March 21 to April 20)

Everybody is a genius. But, if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it is a failure. This week, you should stop thinking about what you cannot do and rather focus on your core competence.

Taurus (April 21 to May 21)

Life is really simple; we ourselves create the circumstances that complicate it and this week, the complications that you create will be at their zenith. Most of the chaos and hurdles will be in your mind, and not in real world.

Gemini (May 22 to June 21)

It is difficult to soar with eagles when you work with turkeys and this week you will have a lot of turkeys around you. High time you should think of changing your workplace and be with people whose mindset and thought process match with yours.

Cancer (June 22 to July 22)

Life is a video game. No matter how good you get, you are always zapped in the end. The moral of the story is that enjoying life is even more important than improving life as the life spent solely making it good, is life wasted.

Leo (July 23 to August 22)

Take care of those who take care of you and if you do not do it, not many will care for you. This seemingly complicated, yet simple equation is something you should understand clearly.

Virgo (August 23 to September 23)

Worry is imagination misplaced and this misplacement is something which is troubling you a lot these days. It's high time you realise that that are a lot of things occupying your mind, which serve no purpose.

Libra (September 24 to October 23)

A good rule for going through life is to keep the heart a little softer than the head. While the circumstances have really troubled your peace since the last few days and made you much more irritable than you are, it's time to increase your tolerance level and be a little empathetic and compassionate with people around you.

Scorpio (October 24 to November 22)

The steeper the mountain, the harder the climb, the better the view from the finishing line. This week, the climb will be steeper and you will feel a little oblivious of your goals. Whatever you do, just keep moving ahead as any break here might halt your journey and long-term plans.

Sagittarius (November 23 to December 21)

Happiness is not perfected until it is shared, and this is the best time to share your happiness and joy with people who have been with you, through thick and thin. Time to enjoy, socialise and find happiness in leisure activities.

Capricorn (December 22 to January 20)

A smile is a curve that can set things straight and you kind of forgot to smile since the last few days. It has been a tough and bumpy ride for you lately, but it's high time you start living and stop being robotic.

Aquarius (January 21 to February 19)

Anything worth doing is worth doing well. This simple statement is easy to understand, but difficult to implement. This week, you should focus on excellence and quality and get out of your lazy mode, otherwise you might face issues at the workplace.

Pisces (February 20 to March 20)

Searching for that big happy moment in life, how many special little moments we let pass us by? This week, take a pause and enjoy the little things. The materialistic race has taken away a lot from you, so snatch back a few things like quality time with family and loved ones and doing seemingly unimportant things.

Death rates soar in Southeast Asia as virus wave spreads

By David Rising
and Eileen Ng

KUALA LUMPUR - Indonesia has converted nearly its entire oxygen production to medical use just to meet the demand from COVID-19 patients struggling to breathe. Overflowing hospitals in Malaysia had to resort to treating patients on the floor. And in Myanmar's largest city, graveyard workers have been laboring day and night to keep up with the grim demand for new cremations and burials.

Images of bodies burning in open-air pyres during the peak of the pandemic in India horrified the world in May, but in the last two weeks the three Southeast Asian nations have now all surpassed India's peak per capita death rate as a new coronavirus wave, fueled by the virulent delta variant, tightens its grip on the region.

The deaths have followed record numbers of new cases being reported in countries across the region which have left health care systems struggling to cope and governments scrambling to implement new restrictions to try to slow the spread.

When Eric Lam tested positive for COVID-19 and was hospitalized on June 17 in the Malaysian state of Selangor, the center of the country's outbreak, the corridors of the government facility were already crowded with patients on beds with no room left in the wards.

The situation was still better than in some other hospitals in Selangor, Malaysia's richest and most populous state, where there were no free beds at all and patients were reportedly treated on floors or on stretchers. The government has since added more hospital beds and converted more wards for COVID-19 patients.

Lam, 38, recalled once during his three weeks in the hospital hearing a machine beeping continuously for two hours before a nurse came to turn it off; he later learned the patient had died.

A variety of factors have contributed to the recent surge in the region, including people growing weary of the pandemic and letting precautions slip, low vaccination rates and the emergence of the delta variant of the virus, which was first detected in India, said Abhishek Rimal, the Asia-Pacific emergency health coordinator for the Red Cross, who is based in Malaysia.

"With the measures that countries are taking, if people follow



Indonesia has converted nearly its entire oxygen production to medical use just to meet the demand from COVID-19 patients struggling to breathe. Overflowing hospitals in Malaysia had to resort to treating patients on the floor.

the basics of washing the hands, wearing the masks, keeping distance and getting vaccinated, we will be seeing a decline in cases in the next couple of weeks from now," he said.

So far, however, Malaysia's national lockdown measures have not brought down the daily rate of infections. The country of some 32 million saw daily cases rise above 10,000 on July 13 for the first time and they have stayed there since.

The vaccination rate remains low but has been picking up, with nearly 15% of the population now fully inoculated and the government hoping to have a majority vaccinated by year's end.

Doctors and nurses have been working tirelessly to try to keep up, and Lam was one of the fortunate ones.

After his condition initially deteriorated, he was put on a ventilator in an ICU unit filled to capacity and slowly recovered. He was discharged two weeks ago.

But he lost his father and brother-in-law to the virus, and another brother remains on a ventilator in the ICU.

"I feel I have been reborn and given a second chance to live," he said.

With India's massive population of nearly 1.4 billion people, its total number of COVID-19 fatalities remains higher than the countries in Southeast Asia. But India's 7-day rolling average of COVID-19 deaths per million peaked at 3.04 in May, according to the online scientific publication Our World in Data, and continues to decline.

Indonesia, Myanmar, and Malaysia have been showing sharp increases since late June and their seven-day averages hit 4.37, 4.29 and 4.14 per million, respectively, on Wednesday. Cambodia and Thailand have also seen strong increases in both coronavirus cases and deaths, but

have thus far held the seven-day rate per million people to a lower 1.55 and 1.38, respectively.

Individual countries elsewhere have higher rates, but the increases are particularly alarming for a region that widely kept numbers low early in the pandemic.

With the Indian experience as a lesson, most countries have reacted relatively quickly with new restrictions to slow the virus, and to try to meet the needs of the burgeoning number of people hospitalized with severe illnesses, Rimal said.

"People in this region are cautious, because they have seen it right in front of them - 400,000 cases a day in India - and they really don't want it to repeat here," he said in a telephone interview from Kuala Lumpur.

But those measures take time to achieve the desired effect, and right now countries are struggling to cope.

Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation with some 270 million people, reported 1,449 deaths on Thursday, its deadliest day since the start of the pandemic.

Daily cases through about mid-June had been about 8,000, but then began to spike and peaked last week with more than 50,000 new infections each day. Because Indonesia's testing rate is low, the actual number of new cases is thought to be much higher.

As hospitals there began to run out of oxygen, the government stepped in and ordered manufacturers to shift most production from industrial purposes and dedicate 90% to medical oxygen, up from 25%.

Before the current crisis, the country needed 400 tons of oxygen for medical use per day; with the sharp rise in COVID-19 cases, daily use has increased fivefold to more than 2,000 tons, according to Deputy Health Minister Dante Saksono.

Delta variant behind more than 80% of U.S. cases, Fauci says



The Delta variant of the coronavirus is the cause of more than 80% of new U.S. COVID-19 cases, but the authorized vaccines remain more than 90% effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths, said top U.S. infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci during U.S. Senate hearing on Tuesday.

By Carl O'donnell and Mrinalika Roy

The Delta variant of the coronavirus is the cause of more than 80% of new U.S. COVID-19 cases, but the authorized vaccines remain more than 90% effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths, said top U.S. infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci during U.S. Senate hearing on Tuesday.

The hearing featured a pointed exchange with Republican U.S. Senator Rand Paul, in which he accused Fauci of lying about the National Institutes of Health providing funding for research at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology.

The Senator from Kentucky, who has sparred with Fauci during several pandem-

ic-related hearings, alleged that the research may have played a role in developing the novel coronavirus at the Wuhan Lab.

"If caught lying to Congress... the U.S. criminal code creates a felony and a five year penalty," Paul said to Fauci during the hearing.

Fauci, who has been mostly calm and diplomatic in past responses, this time shot back: "Senator Paul, I have never lied before the Congress... (and) you do not know what you're talking about." The exchange featured raised voices and pointed fingers.

The origin of the novel coronavirus has become a heated partisan issue in the United States, with Republicans urging further inquiries into whether it was developed in a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

Biden in late May called on aides to investigate the origins of the virus and to report back to him within 90 days. The more prevalent theory is that the virus originated in animals, possibly bats, and was passed on to humans.

The more contagious Delta variant was first found in India earlier this year. It has since become the dominant version of the virus in the United States and many other countries. It has been detected in more than 90 nations worldwide.

Deaths from COVID-19 in the United States have averaged 239 per day over the past week, nearly 48% higher than the previous week, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director

Rochelle Walensky said during the hearing.

States should continue to hold onto their inventories of unused vaccines as manufacturers are working to determine the shelf life of their shots, Janet Woodcock, the acting director of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, said during the hearing. Large quantities of unused U.S. vaccine supplies are facing expiration in the coming weeks if the shelf life is not extended.

The CDC is reviewing data from multiple groups of vaccinated people to determine how long protection from COVID-19 shots lasts and will use that information to make a determination on the potential role of additional booster shots, Fauci said.

U.S. life expectancy fell year and a half in 2020 due to COVID-19 says CDC

By Dania Nadeem

Life expectancy in the United States fell by a year and a half in 2020 to 77.3 years, the lowest level since 2003, primarily due to the deaths caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a U.S. health agency said on Wednesday.

It is the biggest one-year decline since World War Two, when life expectancy fell 2.9 years between 1942 and 1943, and is six months shorter than its February 2021 estimate, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

"Life expectancy has been increasing gradually every year for the past several decades," Elizabeth Arias, a CDC researcher who worked on the report, told Reuters. "The decline between 2019 and 2020 was so large that it took us back to the levels we were in 2003. Sort of like we lost a decade."

Deaths from COVID-19 contributed to

nearly three-fourths, or 74%, of the decline and drug overdoses were also a major contributor, the CDC said.

The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) last week released interim data showing that U.S. drug overdose deaths rose nearly 30% in 2020.

The latest CDC report is based on provisional mortality data for January through December of 2020.

Racial, gender and ethnic disparities worsened during the period, the report said. Life expectancy for Black people fell by 2.9 years to 71.8 in 2020, the lowest level since 2000. Life expectancy for Hispanic males dropped 3.7 years to 75.3, the largest decline of any group.

Disparity in life expectancy between men and women also widened in 2020, with women now expected to live 80.2 years, or 5.7 years longer than men - six months more than foreseen in 2019.

Canada to welcome fully-vaccinated U.S. tourists from August 9th

Canada will start allowing fully-vaccinated U.S. visitors into the country on Aug 9 for non-essential travel as the threat from the COVID-19 pandemic fades, Ottawa said on Monday.

Visitors from countries other than the United States who have been inoculated will be permitted to enter on Sept 7. The relaxation depends on Canada's

COVID-19 epidemiology remaining favorable, the government said on a statement.

Businesses on both sides of the border, particularly the travel and airline industries, are demanding an end to restrictions on non-essential travel between Canada and the United States which were first imposed in March 2020.

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Global quest underway to speed COVID-19 vaccine trials



Scientists are working on a benchmark for COVID-19 vaccine efficacy that would allow drugmakers to conduct smaller, speedier human trials to get them to market and address a huge global vaccine shortage.

By Julie Steenhuisen
and Ludwig Burger

CHICAGO - Scientists are working on a benchmark for COVID-19 vaccine efficacy that would allow drugmakers to conduct smaller, speedier human trials to get them to market and address a huge global vaccine shortage.

Researchers are trying to determine just what level of COVID-19 antibodies a vaccine must produce to provide protection against the illness. Regulators already use such benchmarks - known as cor-

relates of protection - to evaluate flu vaccines without requiring large, lengthy clinical trials.

"You could use it to predict efficacy from a vaccine, which will be more important as we are less able to conduct placebo-controlled trials," said Stanley Plotkin, inventor of the Rubella vaccine and an expert on correlates of protection.

"The information is flowing in," he said. "By the end of this year, I think there will be enough data to convince everyone." An established benchmark for COVID-19 would allow drugmakers to

conduct vaccine trials in just a few thousand people, about one-tenth the size of the studies conducted to gain authorization for currently widely-used coronavirus shots, researchers and drugmakers told Reuters.

Those studies, involving tens of thousands of volunteers, compared the rate of COVID-19 infections in people who received the shot with the rate in participants who got a placebo.

Such randomized, controlled trials may no longer be considered ethical in some countries, as researchers cannot give a dummy shot to people where an effective vaccine is widely available. In addition, many of the new shots are being developed by small companies that may not be able to conduct very large trials without government funding or a partner with deep pockets.

With an established correlate, drugmakers could test blood samples from a smaller number of trial participants who receive an experimental vaccine to see whether they produced that benchmark level of protective antibodies.

Such a benchmark is "urgently needed" to help overcome challenges faced by vaccine developers and boost availability of shots,

Dr. Florian Krammer, a virologist at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York wrote this month in the journal Nature.

Researchers at Oxford University late last month proposed a potential correlate of protection based on antibodies found in people who had received the AstraZeneca vaccine. The work awaits peer reviewed by other scientists.

Results from a U.S.-backed study of Moderna's vaccine are expected to be published in a medical journal later this summer. "We're writing the paper right now," said Dr. Peter Gilbert, a biostatistician from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

Some vaccine experts question whether antibody levels will be a strong enough indicator of protection. Other components of the immune system, such as T-cells and B-cells, are thought to provide important defenses against COVID-19, but are more difficult to measure.

That has been the contention of some top vaccine experts at Pfizer, maker along with BioNTech of one of the most effective COVID-19 vaccines, produced in the largest quantities globally.

It is also possible that each different type of coronavirus vac-

cine will require its own correlate, some experts said. Drugmakers working on a new type of vaccine likely would not be able to rely on the correlates based on Moderna's messenger RNA shot, they say.



BRIDGING THE GAP

Meanwhile, vaccine developers are trying to devise acceptable substitutes to huge, placebo-controlled trials. Some aim to show their shot provokes antibody responses at least as good as those seen with currently authorized shots.





European and UK health regulators are working with companies to set standards for these so-called "immunobridging" studies. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration declined to say whether it would accept such trials for next-generation vaccines.

"It doesn't have to be an established correlate of protection, but we have to ... arrive at the right pre-specified criteria, because we cannot risk that a second-generation vaccine ... is of low or modest vaccine efficacy," FDA vaccine official Dr. Marion Gruber told fellow regulators at a World Health Organization Meeting in May. "That would undermine confidence in the vaccine enterprise."

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Rising cases fuel resurgence fears as Biden ramps up vaccination push

By Maria Caspani
and Dan Whitcomb

Swiftly rising coronavirus cases across the United States and abroad fueled fears of a pandemic resurgence on Monday and sent shockwaves through stock markets as the highly contagious Delta variant appeared to be taking hold.

Many of the new outbreaks were in parts of the country where COVID-19 vaccinations have lagged, prompting political leaders to ramp up pressure on reluctant Americans to get the inoculations.

President Joe Biden, citing higher rates of COVID-19 in states with low vaccination rates, said during a speech that the nation's economic recovery hinged on getting better at controlling the pandemic.

"So please, please get vaccinated," Biden pleaded. "Get vaccinated now."

A federal judge on Monday ruled that Indiana University could require students to be vaccinated, rejecting claims in a lawsuit the mandate violated their rights under the U.S. Constitution.

The ruling could set a precedent for similar vaccination orders in schools and businesses. Attorneys for the plaintiffs have said they would appeal to a higher court.

Also on Monday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said fully vaccinated Americans could cross the border for the first time in 16-months from Aug. 9, easing a travel ban that many business owners complained was crippling them.

Vaccines and especially mandatory shots are deeply controversial among conservatives.

WALL STREET SELLOFF

The average number of daily new COVID-19 cases in the

United States has tripled in the past 30 days, according to an analysis of Reuters data, climbing to 32,136 on Sunday.

The average number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 has also risen 21% over the past 30 days to over 19,000, according to the same Reuters analysis. Deaths, which can lag behind other indicators, rose 25% last week to an average of 250 per day.

Wall Street saw a broad selloff of stocks as investors worried that the latest outbreaks could prompt state and local officials to impose new lockdowns and business closures.

Millions of Americans were thrown out of work and many small businesses were forced out of business due to nationwide clampdowns during 2020.

Already Los Angeles County has ordered residents to wear masks indoors again following a surge in cases across Southern



People wearing face protective masks walk on Hollywood Blvd during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Los Angeles, California on March 29, 2021.

California.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio told a news conference on Monday that the city had no plans to reimpose mask mandates despite a rise in cases. The mayor said he would redouble vaccination efforts.

Arkansas has been especially hard hit by the resurgent virus. All but two of the state's 75 counties have substantial or high levels of transmission, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The Delta variant is responsible for 90% of current new cases in Utah's Salt Lake County, state epidemiology manager Ilene Risk said.

To combat the rising infections, the county has enlisted faith leaders and doctors to persuade the roughly 40% of eligible people who are not fully vaccinated to accept the shots, she said.

The American Academy of Pediatrics on Monday released updated recommendations for schools that included mask-wearing for everyone over the age of 2, regardless of vaccination status.

Earlier this month, the CDC updated its own guidance for schools in an effort to help reopen in the fall, recommending masks indoors for everyone not fully vaccinated, among other guidelines.

Countries make COVID-19 vaccines mandatory

A sharp upturn in new coronavirus infections due to the highly contagious Delta variant and a slowdown in vaccination rates have pushed governments to make COVID-19 jabs mandatory for health workers and other high-risk groups.

A growing number of countries also stipulate that a jab, or a negative test, will be needed for dining out, among others.

Here are some countries' vaccine mandates:

AUSTRALIA

Australia decided in late June to make COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for high-risk aged-care workers and employees in quarantine hotels.

It has also made vaccinations obligatory for Paralympic athletes heading to Tokyo because unvaccinated members on the team could pose a health risk.

BRITAIN

It will be mandatory for care home workers in England to have coronavirus vaccinations from October.

English nightclubs and other venues with large crowds will require patrons to present proof of full vaccination from the end of September.

CANADA

Canadian Treasury Board Secretariat said on July 20 here it was considering whether COVID-19 vaccines should be required for certain roles and positions in the

federal government, according to CBC.

FRANCE

All health workers in France must get COVID-19 jabs and anyone wanting to get into a cinema or board a train will need to show proof of vaccination or a negative test under new rules announced by President Emmanuel Macron on July 12.

The government said on July 19 that the planned 45,000 euro fine for businesses that do not check that clients have a health pass will be much lower, starting at up to 1,500 euros and increasing progressively for repeat offenders. Fines will not be imposed immediately.

GREECE

Greece on July 12 made vaccinations mandatory for nursing home staff with immediate effect and healthcare workers from September. As part of new measures, only vaccinated customers are allowed indoors in bars, cinemas, theatres and other closed spaces.

INDONESIA

Indonesia made COVID-19 inoculations mandatory in February, with capital Jakarta threatening fines of up to 5 million rupiah (\$357) for refusing the vaccine.

ITALY

A decree approved by the Italian government in March mandates that health workers, including pharmacists, get vaccinated.

Those who refuse could be suspended without pay for the rest of the year.

KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan will introduce mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations or weekly testing for people working in groups of more than 20, the health ministry said on June 23.

POLAND

Poland could make vaccinations obligatory for some people at high risk from COVID-19 from August.

RUSSIA

The Russian capital has unveiled a plan bit.ly/2TWsroN requiring 60% of all service sector workers to be fully vaccinated by Aug. 15, according to the Moscow Times.

Moscow residents no longer have to present a QR code demonstrating they have been vaccinated or have immunity in order to sit inside cafes, restaurants and bars from July 19.

SAUDI ARABIA

In May, Saudi Arabia mandated all public and private sector workers wishing to attend a workplace get vaccinated, without specifying when this would be implemented.

Vaccination will also be required to enter any governmental, private, or educational establishments and to use public transportation as of Aug. 1.

U.S. issues 'Do Not Travel' advisory for UK over COVID-19

By David Shepardson

WASHINGTON - The U.S. State Department and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) both issued on Monday their highest warnings against travel to the United Kingdom because of a rising number of COVID-19 cases in that country.

Each raised the UK to "Level Four," telling Americans they should avoid travel there.

"If you must travel to the United Kingdom, make sure you are fully vaccinated before travel," the CDC said in an advisory, while the State Department said: "Do not travel to the United Kingdom due to COVID-19."

In May, the U.S. government had lowered the UK to a "Level 3" advisory rating.

COVID-19 cases are rising by more than 50,000 a day in the UK and hundreds of thousands of Britons are being asked to self-isolate for 10 days.

The United States since March

2020 has barred nearly all non-U.S. citizens who have recently been in the UK from the United States.

Britain allows American visits but requires a 10-day quarantine on arrival and two COVID-19 tests.

In June, the Biden administration said it was forming expert working groups with Britain, Canada, Mexico and the European Union to determine how best to restart travel safely after more than a year of restrictions.

U.S. and airline officials do not expect the restrictions on UK travelers to be lifted until August at the earliest - and warn it could be pushed back further.

Airlines and others have pressed the administration to lift the restrictions that bar most non-U.S. citizens who have been in Britain, the 26 Schengen nations in Europe without border controls, Ireland, China, India, South Africa, Iran and Brazil within the past 14 days from the United States.

India edge Sri Lanka in nervy run chase to clinch ODI series



India's Deepak Chahar, left, and Bhuvneshwar Kumar after scoring a boundary during the second one day international cricket match between Sri Lanka and India in Colombo.

COLOMBO - India beat Sri Lanka by three wickets in the second one-day international to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series after Suryakumar Yadav and Deepak Chahar guided the tourists home with maiden half-centuries on Tuesday.

Chasing 276 for victory, India found themselves in trouble after they lost Prithvi Shaw, Ishan Kishan and skipper Shikhar Dhawan cheaply to leave the tourists struggling at 65-3.

Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga picked up three wickets, including the two openers, but India's tail wagged at the death to deny Sri Lanka victory, overhauling the target with five balls to

spare.

Yadav rallied India with some sublime strokeplay to reach his fifty before he was eventually dismissed for 53, trapped leg before by Lakshan Sandakan with 116 runs required to win.

Hasaranga also removed Krunal Pandya, who was looking dangerous with a handy knock of 35 before he was bowled but Chahar dug his heels in with an unbeaten 69, supported at the other end by vice-captain Bhuvneshwar Kumar.

Earlier, a fighting 65 off 68 balls from middle order batsman Charith Asalanka propelled Sri Lanka to 275-9 in 50 overs.

Asalanka walked in to bat with Sri Lanka 124-3 and he held the

innings together with Chamika Karunaratne, who remained unbeaten with a quick-fire 44 off 33 balls.

Opting to bat after winning the toss, the hosts got off to a slow but steady start, with Avishka Fer-

nando (50) and Minod Bhanuka (36) constructing a 77-run opening stand.

But both fell in quick succession as the Indian attack made the most of a slow wicket where runs were hard to come by.

Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal was the pick of the Indian bowlers, finishing with figures of 3-50 from his 10 overs while Bhuvneshwar (3-54) picked up the crucial wickets of half-centurions Fernando and Asalanka.

Wrestling: India's Punia wants no drama in early rounds at Tokyo

NEW DELHI - India's Bajrang Punia is determined to avoid come-from-behind wins in his early bouts which could leave him exhausted even before reaching the medal rounds at the Tokyo Olympics, the freestyle wrestler said.

The 27-year-old is the second seed in men's 65kg category in Tokyo, the one on whose shoulders rest India's hopes of winning the country's first Olympic gold in wrestling.

"I want to come back with

a medal. I am working on not giving points early," Punia told in Sunday's Times of India newspaper.

"Coach (Emzarios Bentinidis) keeps on telling me that a come-from-behind victory requires a lot of effort and if I keep on doing that, I will be spent when I reach the medal rounds."

World champion Russian Gadzhimurad is the top seed in a strong group which, according to Punia, contained 10-12

wrestlers who could beat each other "on their day".

An Asian and Commonwealth Games gold medallist, Punia's leg defence is considered probably his only weakness, but the wrestler from Haryana was not too perturbed.

"Just focusing on leg defence is not the solution," he said.

"When the opponent starts getting tired and fatigue sets in him, that's when I pounce on and attack and accumulate points.

India's Phogat returns stronger, smarter to fulfil medal dream

NEW DELHI - Five years after being stretchered off the mat with a twisted knee in Rio, India's Vinesh Phogat believes she has grown mentally stronger and technically accomplished as she resumes her bid for an Olympic gold in Tokyo.

Phogat's dream of a medal in her first Olympics was cruelly cut short in 2016 when she hurt her ankle during her quarter-final bout against a Chinese opponent and left the mat in tears.

"I now have the experience of playing one Olympics. I know what to expect, how to prepare and how to conduct myself," the 26-year-old told the Times of India newspaper last Saturday.

"All these setbacks helped



Vinesh Phogat

me become stronger, and I feel I enter Tokyo as a much stronger athlete mentally.

"I want to finish what I have started."

Currently training in Hungary, Phogat is the world number one in women's 53kg category and also the top seed in Tokyo.

She has been training under Hungarian coach Woller Akos

since 2018 and the partnership had worked wonders for her, said the Commonwealth and Asian Games champion.

"People won't understand from outside but earlier my game had technical flaws.

"I can see that now I'm smoother and display clean wrestling on the mat. I don't feel stuck on the match anymore. There is motion in my game."

As for motivation, Phogat said she never forgot her pain in Rio.

"...every time I go on the mat for a match, that injury motivates me," said the wrestler from Haryana.

"It was one of the lowest points of my career. There was a lot of negativity from within.

Robinson back in England squad for first two India tests

Seamer Ollie Robinson has been recalled to the England squad for the opening two tests of a five-match series against India, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Wednesday.

The 27-year-old was handed an eight-match ban, five of which are suspended for two years, for a number of "offensive tweets" he had sent out between 2012-2014 that came to light during his England test debut against New Zealand in June.

Earlier this month, Robinson, who took seven wickets on his Lord's debut, was cleared to return to international duty.

The major absentee is Jofra Archer, who is still recuperating from an elbow injury. Chris Woakes is also out with a bruised heel. In their absence, the pace bowling unit will be led by James Anderson, Stuart Broad and Mark Wood.

England's 17-man squad also includes Jonny Bairstow, Jos Buttler and Sam Curran, all of whom were rested from the New Zealand series following their in-

volvement in this year's COVID-19-hit Indian Premier League.

All-rounder Ben Stokes, who captained a second-string 50-over English side to a thumping 3-0 series win over Pakistan earlier this month, also makes a comeback in the longest format. He sat out the New Zealand series due to a fractured finger.

"India are a quality team who have shown their ability to get results away from home. We are expecting a highly competitive series and have selected our strongest possible squad," said England coach Chris Silverwood.

"The returns of all-rounders Ben Stokes and Sam Curran provide balance that allows us to get back to a structure that has been successful in test cricket."

England squad: Joe Root (captain), James Anderson, Jonny Bairstow, Dom Bess, Stuart Broad, Rory Burns, Jos Buttler, Zak Crawley, Sam Curran, Haseeb Hameed, Dan Lawrence, Jack Leach, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Dom Sibley, Ben Stokes, Mark Wood

TOKYO (AP) - The low numbers came in from across the globe and covered most every distance, from 100 meters through the marathon. The reasons behind all the improving times throughout the sport of track and field were every bit as diverse: better shoe technology, better running surfaces, less wear and tear on bodies during the COVID-19 pandemic and just a good old-fashioned itch to start running for real again.

Another possibility: For the better part of three months during the pandemic, testing for performance-enhancing drugs came to a virtual standstill worldwide. Only in recent months has it begun to ramp back to normal.

It's one of the uncomfortable realities of the Tokyo Olympics. Not a single one of the approximately 11,000 athletes competing over the next 17 days has been held to the highest standards of the world anti-doping code over the critical 16-month period leading into the Games.

Statistics provided by the World Anti-Doping Agency pointed to a steadily improving situation as the

Olympics approached, but they do not mask the reality that over the entirety of 2020, there was a 45% reduction in testing around the world compared with 2019 - a non-Olympic year in which the numbers wouldn't normally be as high anyway. In the first quarter of 2021, there was roughly a 20% reduction in overall testing compared with the same three months of 2019.

"Unless you're a fool, you'd have to be concerned," said Travis Tygart, the CEO of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

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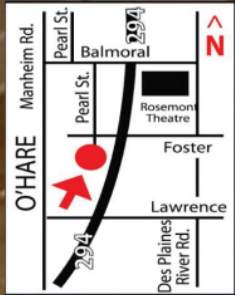
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