

DECCAN Chronicle

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ANANTAPUR | WEDNESDAY | 26 AUGUST 2020



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Greta too wants NEET, JEE exams put off


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WEATHER

 **Max:** 35.0°C
Min: 18°C
RH: 57%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 35/18 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+67,104)	(+1,066)
32,31,612	59,609
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+2,579)	(+9)
TS: 1,08,670	770
(+9,927)	(+92)
AP: 3,71,639	3,460

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

 2,39,50,822
DEATHS
 8,20,005
COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
 213

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Bharapada Shuddha Ashtami till 10.42 am
Star: Anuradha till 1.06 pm
Varjyam: 6.36 pm to 8.10 pm
Durmuhurtam: 11.53 am To 12.42 pm
Rahukalam: 12 noon To 1.30 pm
HUJRI CALENDAR
Muharram 6, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.31 am
Zohar: 12.26 pm
Asar: 4.28 pm
Maghrib: 6.05 pm
Isha: 7.21 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.52 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.00 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 7.38 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 7.34 AM

COUNTER POINT



IN BRIEF

More leaders test positive for Covid

Chandigarh: Punjab industries and commerce minister Sunder Sham Arora on Tuesday tested positive for Coronavirus ahead of the Vidhan Sabha session on August 28. Congress MLA from Rajpura Hardial Kamboj and Akali MLA from Sanaur Harinderpal Singh Chandumajra also tested positive for Covid-19. Meanwhile, in Assam, legislators Ajanta Neog of the Congress and Ramendra Narayan Kalita of the AGP tested positive for Coronavirus. In Mysuru, Police Commissioner Chandragupta also tested positive for Covid-19, according to sources.

₹2,000 notes not printed in '19-'20

Mumbai: Currency notes of ₹2,000 denomination were not printed in 2019-20 and the circulation of these notes have declined over the years, according to the RBI's annual report. The number of ₹2,000 currency notes in circulation has come down from 33,632 lakh pieces at end-March 2018 to 32,910 lakh pieces at end-March 2020. The number of pieces constituted 2.4 per cent of the total volume of notes at end-March 2020.

■ **Report on Page 7**

Miracle boy



Mohammed Bangi, 4, was pulled out alive from the rubble of the collapsed five-storey apartment building at Mahad in Raigad, Maharashtra, on Tuesday. The building collapsed on Monday. Locals chanted Ganpati Bappa Morya after the child who suffered minor injuries was lifted on to a stretcher. ■ **Report on Page 4**

— PTI

Bhushan counsel wants SC to recall its conviction order

AG asks top court to take 'compassionate view', forgive lawyer

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, AUG. 25

The Supreme Court on Tuesday reserved its verdict on the quantum of punishment against senior advocate Prashant Bhushan who has been convicted of criminal contempt for his two tweets. Even as the Supreme Court lamented the tendency to criticise sitting and retired judges and imputing motives to them publicly, the court said that Bhushan did not tender an apology for his offending tweets and neither did he reconsider his affidavit submitted to the court last week.

Tuesday's proceedings began with attorney general K.K. Venugopal again appealing to the apex court to take a "compassionate view" and forgive

Bhushan case sent to another bench

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 25

The Supreme Court on Tuesday decided to refer to another bench the 2009 contempt case against Prashant Bhushan and journalist Tarun Tejpal, editor of *Tehelka* to deal with certain larger questions related to freedom of speech and levelling of corruption charges against the judiciary.

Bhushan. However, the court said Bhushan has not apologised and in fact made disparaging remarks in the affidavit filed in his defence. The

A bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra was told by senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan, appearing for Bhushan, that 10 questions of constitutional importance had been raised by him.

Justice Anil Mishra, who is retiring on September 2 this year, said the matter will need time and observed "let us leave this to an appropriate bench."

Bench took the AG through the affidavit. "Prashant Bhushan says SC has collapsed, is it not objectionable?" the bench as Bhushan's lawyer

Rajeev Dhavan argued that an apology cannot be coerced and said, "This institution must take criticism, and not just criticism but extreme criticism. Your shoulders are broad enough."

Dhavan added that the judgment convicting Mr Bhushan should be recalled and no sentence be imposed on him.

When Justice Mishra asked, "If we decide to punish him, what should be the punishment?" Dhavan said, "If the top court wants to bar Bhushan from practise, it will have to hear him first... If you want to impose a jail term, my advice would be don't make Prashant Bhushan a martyr. Like what happened after Babri was demolished and Kalyan Singh was convicted of contempt."

Few Adivasis contract Covid-19

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 25

It is traders and non-Adivasis settled in agency areas, who account for 70 per cent of Covid-19 cases in the region, health officials have disclosed.

The agency, consisting of 11 mandals, has reported 704 positive Coronavirus cases till Tuesday of whom four persons have succumbed to the disease. Officials said non-tribals in these mandals are more mobile and move from one place to another, often

interacting with friends and relatives. Non-tribals also make trips to their native places and their relatives too visit them in agency areas because of the beautiful surroundings.

During the lockdown, not a single Covid-19 case was reported, as the entire agency area had been sealed from the outside world. Hotels and tourist spots were closed and most people remained indoors. Not a single soul was seen on the roads, recalled Joint Action Committee

convener Rama Rao Dora. The moment agency areas were thrown open, outsiders, mostly students, traders and employees, began entering the agency. Along with them arrived the deadly Covid-19 virus, Dora complained.

"Two senior officials from Genco office at Sileru went to Vijayawada for a conference. Subsequent to their returning home, they hosted parties and attended weddings. Both these officials tested positive and infected over 50 employees, confessed addi-

tional district medical and health officer Dr. Kimidi Leela Prasad.

He said among those affected by Coronavirus, only 6-8 are Adivasis. Rest are all from plain areas. Similarly, 11 police personnel of Hukumpeta police station alone had contracted the virus. All of them are non-tribals.

"According to rough estimates, around 70 per cent of the cases could be attributed to the non-tribals," Dr. Prasad stated.

■ **Page 2: No MNREGA reason for few cases**

BROKEN IDEALS

V.K.L. GAYATRI | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 25

Covid-19 has brought new challenges to senior citizens, particularly pensioners. After losing employment, a large number of families have rushed to their native places, failing to cope with the expenditure in the urban areas, and are economically pressuring their old parents.

Senior citizens, hoping to lead their retired lives peacefully with pensions and other income sources, including rents and inter-

Affected by slowdown, families return home, nag elderly parents for help

Adult 'kids' pile on pensioner parents

ests, are facing tough times taking care of their adult children and minor grandchildren.

A majority of adult children are now forcing their parents to provide financial help.

The Centre had in 2007 brought in the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, which looks after the welfare of the senior citizens.

According to the Act, the head of a police station should maintain a register of senior citizens' names,

addresses and phone numbers residing in that jurisdiction. The station house officer should conduct periodic meetings with senior citizens, enquiring about their welfare. However, enforcement authorities have not been following the provisions of the Act.

"I do not know about Acts and laws. In the first week of June, my son his wife and their two children back home saying they have lost everything due to Covid-19. I welcomed them and am maintaining the

● **A number of pensioners are being harassed for money and other needs. Dependents, leading independent lives before Covid-19, never looked after their parents.**

family with my pension. There are silent disturbances in the family as their demands increase every day. I never expected a single rupee from my son, as I am a pensioner. Not looking at my welfare and my spouse, my son and his in-laws are harassing

me for money to kick-start a new business," said Visweswara Rao, a Central government pensioner, lamented.

A number of pensioners are being harassed for money and other needs. Dependents, leading independent lives before Covid-19, never looked after their parents. Even when their parents are in an emergency, in the name of 'no leave and busy,' they do not even come to help but now want money and help. "How can I lodge a complaint against my son and

grandsons? Covid-19 is challenging for senior citizens. At the age of 65 now I am again running my son's and daughter's families since June. During our evening walks, there are plenty of such stories, who will listen," asked D.L. Murty, a retired co-operative bank official.

The police department says that if anyone lodges complaints, the department would surely take action. Unless there is a complaint, what can the police do, ask police officials.

Jagan tells hosps not to overcharge

Have humanitarian approach to patients: CM

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy expressed anger over overcharging of Covid-19 patients by private hospitals and directed collectors to take action against those violating norms.

Conducting a Spandana videoconference with collectors on Tuesday, Reddy said that the government had fixed the fee for Covid-19 treatment which should be followed by private hospitals.

Efforts should be made to look after Covid-19 patients on humanitarian grounds and severe action should be taken against hospitals which were charging more than what was stipulated in the government order, said the CM.

Expressing happiness that the state stands first in conducting Covid-19 tests, he added that those with risk factors can be saved if tests are conducted in clusters rapidly. He said the sooner Covid-19 cases are identified the better as patients can be treated. He asked collectors to speed up the identifying process for the pan-

WG hospital seized for fleecing patients

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN I DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

The state government must strengthen its monitoring mechanism to regulate overcharging of Coronavirus-infected patients at the designated private Covid-19 hospitals.

This aspect came to light after West Godavari district medical and health officer Dr K.M. Sunanda on Tuesday issued orders seizing a private hospital at Bhimavaram for overcharging Covid-19 patients while providing treatment under YSR Arogyasri scheme. Doctors say this might

only be the tip of the iceberg, wherein many hospitals are charging patients more than the unauthorised.

Certain senior state health officials are of the opinion that though the government has efficiently taken up Covid-19 management in government hospitals and government designated Covid-19 hospitals, lack of proper monitoring system is reflecting negatively on the government. They point out that though the state has fixed rates, with no proper monitoring, patients are being charged excessively.

■ **Page 2: Overcharging getting bad name to state**

democ so that the patients can be discharged at the earliest. Directing collectors to have complete scrutiny of Covid-19 hospitals so that testing is speeded up and beds provided within half an hour, Reddy said the top priori-

ty should be given to 104, 14410 and other call centres where calls are received from the patients and where collectors monitor the functioning regularly.

■ **Page 2: Help desks must be eyes, ears**

PG 3 | AP RECORDS 9,927 NEW COVID CASES, 92 DEATHS

State's Srisaillam power plant has no fire clearance

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC
KURNOOL, AUG. 25

The AP Genco power plant on the Srisaillam right bank, the largest producer of hydroelectric power in Andhra Pradesh, is not safe should there be any short circuit causing a fire. The right bank power house has seven units each generating 110 MW, for a total of 770 MW.

AP disaster management officials who conducted fire safety checks at the facility in the aftermath of a fire that killed nine people on the Srisaillam left bank power plant in Telangana state recently, said the AP plant does not have a no objection certificate from the fire department.

Despite this, the power plant is producing 18MU of power daily, using 30,000 cusecs of water. About 50 to 70 people work in every shift at the plant.

Kurnool district fire officer Srinivas Reddy said that the Srisaillam right bank power plant is not safe to carry on operations as it is highly haz-

ardous if any fire breaks out. He said the plant doesn't have a smoke management system or fire safety equipment.

The equipment was found to be not usable as it was submerged during last year's floods. Fire department officials said that a report is being submitted to the collector about the fire safety shortcomings at the plant.

The power plant needs an automatic high velocity water spray fire-fighting system (MLC fire system) for 21 numbers and 42.5 MVA generator transformers, Reddy said.

In high risk power plants like the one at Srisaillam, a high velocity water spray system along with relevant fittings, deluge valves, isolation gate valves, spray nozzles, quartzite bulb detector and pressure switches must be installed. This system is equipped with the provision of automatically detect, control and extinguish any fire.

■ **Page 2: Genco says it will get fire certificate**

HC STOPS ACTION ON RAMESH HOSP DIRECTOR

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

The AP High Court has issued interim orders stopping all further action against Ramesh Hospitals managing director Dr P. Ramesh Babu and its chairman M.S. Rama Mohan Rao while hearing a quash petition filed on Tuesday by the duo in Swarna Palace hotel fire mishap case.

A single judge bench of Justice D. Ramesh issued the interim order in this regard.

Petitioners' counsel D. Srinivas contended before the court that the district medical and health officer had given permission to Ramesh Hospitals to run the Covid Care Centre at Swarna Palace hotel. Thus, DMHO was aware of facilities at the hotel. Thus, it is not fair to hold petitioners responsible for the fire mishap.

Public prosecutor Srinivasa Reddy informed the court that negligence on part of Ramesh Hospitals management was the cause for fire mishap.

■ **Page 2: PP: Hosp responsible for facilities**

SERO-SURVEY TO BE HELD IN 9 MORE DIST

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

Andhra Pradesh will take up sero-surveillance on Covid-19 to find out the spread of Covid-19 in nine districts from August 26.

Sero-surveillance will help the state government find out how many people have been infected with coronavirus and got cured without their knowledge as the infected persons develop antibodies.

■ **Full report on Page 2**

IN BRIEF

FLOODS FAIL TO IMPEDE POLAVARAM WORK

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

Execution of Polavaram irrigation project works will go on uninterrupted notwithstanding Godavari floods as the authorities have planned in advance for such an eventuality.

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has been continuously monitoring the progress of the project. So far, 44 girders have been set up on 11 blocks and shuttering and deck sheeting works have been taken up for facilitating concrete and road works.

Though the Godavari river was hit by about 21 lakh cusecs of floods, the project work continued without any hindrance.

Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited project in-charge A. Satish Babu said that two lakh cubic meters concrete works were completed on spillway and 1.10 lakh cubic metres of concrete works on spill channel so far.

JAGAN'S ADVISER RAMACHANDRA RESIGNS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

Senior journalist and advisor (public policy) to the AP government, K. Ramachandra Murthy, submitted his resignation from the post of advisor on Tuesday.

Murthy was appointed as advisor soon after Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had taken over, after a landslide victory in the year 2019 elections.

In his resignation letter stated, Murthy stated that he is submitting resignation due to personal reasons and sent his resignation to the principal advisor to the government, Ajey Kallam.

Murthy is the first advisor to quit on his own in the YSRC government.

According to the sources, he was unhappy about not being given any work and being sidelined by Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy.

LEASE TO GOTTIPATI, POTHULA GRANITE UNITS CANCELLED

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, AUG. 25

The department of mines and geology cancelled the lease licences to the granite units belonging to Addanki legislator Gottipati Ravikumar and former legislator Potula Rama Rao late on Monday night citing irregularities in the mining of granite.

The mining department officials in Ongole rushed to the granite units and pasted the notices on a war-footing.

VERDICT ON ATCHANNAIDU BAIL PLEA ON AUG. 28

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

The arguments in the bail petition of Telugu Desam MLA, K. Atchannaidu, were concluded in the AP High Court on Tuesday. The HC reserved its verdict and postponed the judgment to August 28.

Atchannaidu's advocate, Maguluru Haribabu, said that the court asked ACB about proof of Atchannaidu collecting money.

He said the court further questioned ACB about Atchannaidu's involvement in the ESI multi-crore scam.

Advocate-General, S. Sriram, during the arguments, mentioned that 12 witnesses so far have not spoken directly about Atchannaidu's personal money, but it is a line of investigation being pursued by ACB.

There are 60 more witnesses to be examined. ACB would file a charge sheet by the first week of September. The effect of the scam is on the public health and marginal sections. A deep offence with prior conspiracy among various people, the layered nature of the offence means that the conspiracy needs further time to be unravelled.

Mr Sriram further stated that the petitioner has spent time in the hospital as no one else would. The reports periodically submitted tell a story. This is not a case for grant of bail.

Atchannaidu is an influential person with the backing of a political party and therefore the investigation is much more difficult.



Officials inspect the rusted fire safety equipment at the Srisaillam right bank power plant.

— DC

AP Genco says it will get certificate from fire wing

From Page 1

Kurnool district fire officer Srinivas Reddy said the system will allow hydraulically open the deluge valve thus allowing water to be sprayed on the

area through projector nozzles in the form of a solid conical emulsifying spray.

When contacted, AP Genco Managing Director B. Sridhar said whatever shortcomings are found

would be rectified. Asked whether he was aware that the Srisaillam power plant does not have a fire safety no objection certificate, Sridhar said he was not aware but said that any requirement that

needed to be complied with would be done immediately.

Meanwhile, officials from AP Genco arrived at Srisaillam to assess the readiness of the power plant to face fires.

NO MNREGA WORKS REASON FOR FEW CASES

From Page 1

While non-tribals suffered, Adivasis kept away from major towns and villages, confining themselves to their homes and working in their own agricultural fields. Even MNREGA works have been stalled since July midweek due to rains. This too kept tribals isolated.

Dora said their campaign in all mandals on self-lockdown turned fruitful. Weekly markets in all mandals too have remained cancelled till date. These markets are the only places where Adivasis congregate in large numbers to purchase essential goods from traders coming from different places of the state. Given the inadequate health services, the poverty-stricken Adivasis realised contacting the virus would be fatal for them, the activist pointed out.

Asked about the health services available for Covid, ITDA PD Dr. S. Venkateswar said as of now all serious cases are being sent to VIMS or KGH in Visakhapatnam.

Help desks must act like eyes, ears to collectors: CM

From Page 1

He said the help desks at the hospitals should function like eyes and ears to the collectors.

All Covid-19 hospitals should be fully equipped with oxygen supply and other paraphernalia for the treatment of patients and hospitals should be rated accordingly, the CM said adding that all hospitals should maintain quality in services and should also have CCTV cameras to monitor day-to-day functioning.

Ward village volunteers and mandal-level committees should monitor whether the hospitals have proper equipment to face any fire, said the CM, pointing out that lessons should be learnt from the recent fire mishap at a Covid-19 hospital in Vijayawada. With reference to Arogyasri, Reddy said that help desks should be created at all PHCs, CHCs and area hospitals and Arogya Mitra posts created to monitor the situation in the centres. He

OVERCHARGING GETTING BAD NAME TO AP

From Page 1

Health officials say some private hospitals are charging patients heavily for allotment of bed, supplying oxygen, fixing ventilator, or giving life-saving injections beyond a limit. As a result, a lot of patients and their family members are unhappy and are even blaming the government for failing to curb such illegal practices.

A senior official said this is bringing a bad name to the state government.

● Ward village volunteers and mandal-level committees should monitor if the hospitals have proper equipment to face any fire

said efforts should be made to treat all Arogyasri patients on humanitarian grounds. In case the hospital concerned doesn't have the expertise to treat the patient, ambulances should be provided to take

her/him to the nearest hospital. The Arogya Asara scheme should also be strengthened and implemented earnestly by giving the patient ₹225 daily or ₹5,000 at the time of leaving in a month, felt Reddy. He stated that priority should be given to the appointment of doctors and nurses in Covid-19 hospitals to ensure that they are not under-staffed.

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Atrocities against Dalits won't be tolerated: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

Asserting that nobody is above law, Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy said his government had set an example by booking cases under SC and ST Atrocities (Prevention) Act against an SI and a CI for assaulting Dalits.

Speaking at the Spandana review meeting with SPs and district collectors, Mr Jagan said this was not the case during the previous regime when atrocities against Dalits were overlooked. "My government is committed to equality of justice and booked cases against SIs and CIs."

Four or five such cases took place and immediate action was initiated against the guilty. "We should ask ourselves if we would keep quiet if any atrocity is perpetrated on our own relatives?" We should act impartially and ensure justice is done to the victims," said the CM and called for changes at the grass-root level in the police department.

"Nobody should be spared if atrocities are committed against weaker sections."

In this connection, he recalled that the police department had taken prompt action against the guilty in a Dalit man's torturing case. He said all the

policemen down to constables should be given orientation classes and sensitised on important issues.

"The home minister, DGP and additional DG should take immediate action in such cases to bring about a change of attitude in the society. Our home minister is a Dalit and our DGP is an ST. It is our responsibility to protect backward classes. There is a need for bringing about a qualitative change in the attitude of police."

CM Jagan said that a special department was created to deal with illegal liquor manufacture and sand mafia. Even ministers, MLAs and other peo-

ple's representatives were not above the law. There should be no room for corruption anywhere, he stressed.

Meanwhile, reviewing the flood situation, the Chief Minister said by God's grace the flood situation in Godavari river decreased and said that the inflows were less than 10 lakh cusecs. The flood situation in Krishna river also eased and at Srisaillam they started closing the crest gates. He said crop loss should be estimated before September 7 and an additional compensation of Rs 2,000 each should be paid to the victims of Godavari floods.

Housing: Jagan hopeful of giving 30L women pattas

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy once reiterated that the distribution of house pattas to 30 lakh women will take place in a few days.

He directed officials to complete the development of plots, marking and other processes. Reddy conducted a review meeting on various development programmes and issues in the CM camp office at Tadepalli on Tuesday.

Maintaining that house sites worth ₹22,000 crore will be registered in the name of 30 lakh women belonging to weaker sections in the state, the CM expressed hope that the state government would get a favourable verdict from the Supreme Court so that it can go ahead with the distribution of house-site pattas to the poor very soon.

Directing the officials to complete the process related to layouts, markings and lottery to select beneficiaries, Reddy asked officials to focus on layouts not done properly and plant saplings in the layouts and to conduct review meetings with MROs and ensure the collection of all details, including photos, boundaries of plots and others required for registration of house site pattas.

On NGREGS, the CM

● District collectors and JCs were asked to focus on the Nadu-Nedu programme in schools and ensure quality in the work and complete all the work by September 5 as the government is planning to re-open the schools by then.

● The state has signed MoUs with Amul, HUL, Procter & Gamble, ITC, Reliance, Jio and Allana groups aimed at providing sustainable livelihood to women

said the material component expenditure should be ₹10 crore per week in every district in the state. He said construction of buildings of village/ward secretariats should be completed by March 2021 and the government has focused on strengthening anganwadi centres in the state.

Anganwadi centres will be changed to YSR pre-primary schools and 10 types of facilities will be provided in the schools. An action plan will be prepared by next week to re-vamp 55,000 anganwadi centres under the Nadu-Nedu scheme.

District collectors and JCs were asked to focus on the Nadu-Nedu programme in schools and ensure quality in the work and complete all the work by September 5 as the government is planning to re-open the schools by then.

Responding to reports that bank managers are creating problems by not giving YSR Cheyutha amount deposited in unencumbered accounts of women, Reddy directed district collectors to speak

to bank managers and ensure the money is given to the women.

The state has signed MoUs with Amul, HUL, Procter & Gamble, ITC, Reliance, Jio and Allana groups aimed at providing sustainable livelihoods to women, said Reddy, adding that 19 lakh women have selected their livelihood options to utilise the money in various ways. A group of eight ministers will review these activities fortnightly at the state level and district collectors along with bankers, SERP officials and representatives of companies will review them weekly.

Beneficiaries of YSR Aasara will be linked to these activities in September and YSR Cheyutha beneficiaries should set up their options before YSR Aasara starts, said the CM, directing district collectors to guide revenue assistants and surveyors in village secretariats and complete the crop booking at any cost and also to focus on completion of joint Ajamaishi records.

PP: HOSPITAL RESPONSIBLE FOR FACILITIES

From Page 1

Public prosecutor Srinivasa Reddy said that it was the responsibility of hospital management to check whether the hotel was having all requisite facilities. Any lacunae in its maintenance should have been rectified before entering into an agreement with the management of Swarna Palace hotel.

The prosecutor underlined that though the management of Ramesh Hospitals knew that the hotel did not even have 'no objection certificate' from Fire Department, it entered into agreement with the hotel to run the Covid Care Centre.

The public prosecutor informed the court that the state government had served a show-cause notice to DMHO on the issue and the inquiry into the fire mishap is going on. It would help investigators get additional information if the court permitted police to take the petitioners into custody for questioning.

Following the High Court order, it is learnt that the state government has decided to approach the Supreme Court on the issue.

In a related case, fifth additional metropolitan sessions judge V. Srinivasa Anjaneya Murthy on Tuesday dismissed the bail petition moved by three executives of Ramesh Hospitals on grounds that they may tamper records and evidence pertaining to investigation in the case in case they were released on bail.

Ex gratia given to Swarna victims

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

Minister for medical and health, Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas, affirmed that no one would be spared in the Swarna Palace fire mishap case and warned about tough actions against private hospitals for violation of norms in running of Covid-19 care centres (CCC) and Covid extension centres.

He distributed ₹50 lakh each as compensation to the kin of ten victims who died in the fire in Vijayawada on Tuesday. He said that notice had been issued to Ramesh Hospitals on cancellation of their license and action would be taken after receiving a reply by August 30.

Recalling the Swarna Palace hotel fire, Srinivas said that it was very unfortunate and said that the Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, responded and announced ₹50 lakh exgratia to the family members of the deceased, immediately.

Along with ministers Velampalli Srinivas and Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao and Krishna district collector, A. Md. Imtiaz, Srinivas distributed cheques each worth ₹50 lakh to the family members of the victims who perished in the fire accident in Swarna Palace Hotel converted as CCC.

Holding Ramesh hospitals responsible for the mishap, Srinivas said that the management was not only irresponsible but also collected high fees from the Covid-19 patients. He said that

● Holding Ramesh hospitals responsible for the mishap, Srinivas said that the management was not only irresponsible but also collected high fees from the Covid-19 patients. He said two notices were issued to the management

two notices were issued to the management asking it to give clarification by August 30 and they were awaiting a response. The police were conducting searches to nab Dr Ramesh Babu who has been absconding since the Swarna Palace incident.

Six families of the victims were handed over cheques in Vijayawada and the rest of the families would be given the cheques at their respective homes.

The family members of Swarna Palace fire mishap victims, Maddali Ramesh, Sunkara Babu Rao, S. Abraham and his spouse, Raja Kumari, D. Venkata Jayalakshmi and Kosaraju Suvarna Lata were given cheques at Vijayawada on Tuesday.

The family members of the rest of victims, Dokku Sivabrahmahiah, Majji Gopi, Potluru Poornachandra Rao and D. Venkata Narasimha Pavan Kumar would be given cheques at their homes.

MLAs Malladi Vishnu and Samineni Udaya Bhanu, joint collectors, Dr. K. Madhavi Latha, L. Sivasankar, K. Mohan Kumar and others were present.

COVID | FIGHT

Children aged less than 10 yrs will also be selected for the exercise

AP to take up sero-survey of virus in 9 districts

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

Andhra Pradesh will take up sero-surveillance on Covid-19 to find out the spread of Covid-19 in nine districts from August 26.

Sero-surveillance will help the state government find out how many people have been infected with Coronavirus and got cured without their knowledge as the infected persons develop antibodies in their body to fight with the virus.

This exercise also helps the state to find out the percentage of the population who developed com-

munity immunity from the virus.

With the new guidelines, health authorities will collect 5,000 samples in each district, totalling to 45,000 samples in nine districts in the state. The districts where such exercises are to be held are: West Godavari, Guntur, Prakasam, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Kurnool, Chittoor and Kadapa. The state government had already carried out similar surveys as a pilot project earlier in four districts: Anantapur, East Godavari, Krishna and Nellore.

In each district, 5,000 persons were selected for

● In each district, 5,000 persons were selected for sero-surveillance, their blood samples collected and tested for antibodies. Out of them, 4,000 will be picked up from the general population while the remaining 1,000 will be from high risk groups

sero-surveillance, their blood samples collected and tested for antibodies. Out of them, 4,000 will be picked up from the general population while the remaining 1,000 will be from high risk groups,

including healthcare professionals, police personnel, municipal workers, migrants, prisoners, foreign returnees, industrial workers, persons from common borders in mandals in the districts and others.

Out of the 4,000, 60 per cent of them will be selected from containment zones and 40 per cent from non-containment zones. Thirty per cent of them will be from urban areas while 70 per cent will be from rural areas.

Selection of persons in containment zones will be in such an order that they will be picked up from four wards in two revenue

divisions in urban areas and from 16 villages in rural areas. Again, in non-containment zones, persons will be picked up from two wards in urban areas and from eight villages in rural areas. One person will be selected for the survey, for every tenth house either in urban or rural areas.

Children aged less than 10 years, visitors and guests in the houses will be selected for conduct of sero-surveillance.

Dr K. Rambabu, professor of medicine and AP Covid-19 state coordinator, said, "We are expecting to complete the exercise in about 10 days' time."

IN BRIEF

Private hospital sealed in B'varam

Kakinada: The medical and health officials of West Godavari seized Gayatri Hospital in Bhimavaram on charges of collecting medical expenses from the Aarogyasri holders. The DMHO of West Godavari Dr K.N. Sunanda said that the department received complaints against the hospital and made an inquiry. She said that the hospital received permission for Aarogyasri from the government recently and admitted the Covid-19 patients for treatment. She said that any hospital which gets permission to treat the Aarogyasri patients should not take any fees from them as the government has fixed the prices. However, she said that the hospital management allegedly was collecting fees in the name of different tests and also deposits from the patients. She said that the department officials inquired about 30 patients, who have been shifted to other hospitals for further treatment. Further inquiry is currently underway.

TTD RELEASES SEPT. QUOTA OF VIP BREAK TICKETS

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, AUG. 25

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams management released the online booking quota of donation-linked VIP break darshan quota under the SRIVANI trust pertaining to the month of September on Tuesday.

Devotees who are willing to avail VIP break darshan can book the same through the TTD's website. About 100 VIP break darshan tickets are available for booking per day under the online quota. However, VIP break darshan under this quota will not be available for devotees on September 19 in view of Dwajaroohanam fete and on September 23 in view of the Garuda seva procession.

It may be recalled that TTD has extended the one-time VIP Break Darshan facility for Srivani trust donors. The break darshan availing facility for the contributions they have made to the Trust have also been extended from six months to one year in view of Covid-19 restrictions.

KOIL ALWAR TIRUMANJANAM PERFORMED

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, AUG. 25

Ahead of the annual Pavitrotsavam festival, scheduled to be conducted from August 31 to September 2, with Ankurarpanam on the first day, the traditional Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam was performed at Sri Padnavathi Ammavari temple in Tiruchanoor on Tuesday morning.

After the morning rituals of Suprabatham, Sahasra Namarchana and Shuddhi, the holy task of cleansing the temple premises began at 6 am and lasted till 9 am. The roofs, temple prakaram, pillars, puja materials were all cleansed with herbs and perfumed water amalgamation called "Parimalam".

The three-day agama ritual of Pavitrotsavam will be performed once in a year to ward off any lapses committed either by the staff or by the devotees during festivals and utsavs in the temple. As part of the event Pavitra Pratista will be done on August 31 and Pavitra Samarpana on September 1 and Purnahuti the next day. Given the Covid-19 restrictions, the Pavitrotsavam festival will be performed in Ekantham at Sri Padmavati temple.

CHALK OUT A MASTER PLAN IN TIRUPATI: MCT

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, AUG. 25

Municipal Commissioner Mr P.S. Girisha directed the concerned officials to chalk out a better master plan for improving the road network in Tirupati, given the future needs of the busiest pilgrim city in the country. Given the ever-increasing traffic in the city due to the constant arrival of a massive rush of pilgrims daily, the municipal commissioner held a review on the existing road network and master plan with town planning wing officials at the corporation office on Tuesday.

State records 9,927 new Covid cases, 92 deaths

A total 33,56,852 samples were tested so far and 2,78,247 discharged

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

State registered 9,927 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, raising the tally to 3,71,639 and 92 deaths, taking the toll to 3,460.

The state health authorities released a Covid-19 bulletin here on Tuesday. According to it, of the 64,351 samples tested, 9,927 persons tested Covid-19 positive.

A total 33,56,852 samples were tested so far and 2,78,247 discharged from hospitals after recovery, while 89,932 patients are undergoing treatment.

Of the 9,927 cases recorded on Tuesday, East Godavari topped with 1,353 positive cases followed by 967 in Chittoor, 949 in Nellore, 917 in Guntur, 853 in West Godavari, 846 in Visakhapatnam, 781 in Kurnool, 705 in Prakasam, 667 in Vizianagaram, 552 in Srikakulam, 521 in

Kadapa, 494 in Anantapur and 322 in Krishna.

Cumulatively, East Godavari recorded the highest number of 52,039 cases followed by 40,100 in Kurnool, 36,220 in Anantapur, 31,776 in Guntur, 31,561 in Visakhapatnam, 31,292 in Chittoor, 31,179 in West Godavari, 24,275 in Nellore, 21,683 in Kadapa, 19,486 in Srikakulam, 17,875 in Prakasam, 16,907 in Vizianagaram, 14,351 in Krishna, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

East Godavari registered 33,946 recovery cases followed by 33,270 in Kurnool, 30,021 in Anantapur, 25,741 in West Godavari, 24,985 in Visakhapatnam, 24,782 in Guntur, 22,126 in Chittoor, 18,687 in Nellore, 16,189 in Kadapa, 13,608 in Srikakulam, 12,143 in Krishna, 10,308 in Prakasam, 9,546 in Vizianagaram, 2,461 from other states and 434 from



Children react while a medical staff collects the swabs from them for Covid testing in the presence of their mother at Sanjeevini bus which was set up at Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

other countries.

Chittoor district recorded 16 deaths followed by 11 in Anantapur, 10 each

in Kadapa and Prakasam, eight each in East Godavari and West Godavari, six each in

SVU to conduct exams for final semester of UG, PG

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, AUG. 25

The Sri Venkateswara University (SVU) in Tirupati has decided to conduct exams for the final semester undergraduate and postgraduate students for the 2019-20 year tentatively from September 15 in around 208 affiliated colleges.

The varsity is said to be contemplating conducting the exams at the centres where the students study, in view of the Covid-19 situation and their vulnerability.

According to varsity officials, there will be no examination centre in Covid-19 containment zones, students from those colleges will have to write exams in nearby colleges. Centres with few students would be merged with the nearest

college.

Though the varsity is yet to take a call on conducting exams at the students' own colleges, sources said the examination committee had framed guidelines for the purpose.

According to the guidelines, to avoid cheating, the varsity will deploy chief invigilators at each centre in addition to invigilators and sitting squads and around 4-6 flying squads will be deployed within the district.

Speaking to DC, SVU's Registrar P. Sreedhar Reddy said they were taking recommendations from the higher education department, principals, parents and students and the committee will soon finalise on how the exams can be conducted.

"The students' health

is paramount to us, so we will take an appropriate decision and announce the procedures soon. In all, about 2,000 students from around 80 PG colleges and 25,000 students from around 128 UG colleges will take the final exams from September 15. Exams for degree programmes will be conducted in two sessions in a day," he added.

The Registrar said that the varsity had sent communiques to colleges heads to verify the availability of resources for conducting exams by following Covid-19 protocols. Colleges were instructed to follow UGC guidelines and make arrangements like providing masks, sanitisers and thoroughly disinfecting the centres before and after the sessions, he added.

Maoist weapons dump found in forest near AOB

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 25

For the first time in recent years, the armed special police of Odisha and Border Security Force personnel unearthed an arms manufacturing unit being run by Maoists inside the forest near Kuruba and Sudhakunta villages under Kalimela police limits of Malkangiri district of Odisha on Tuesday. The haul included arms, their accessories and explosives.

The police said that during the routine raid carried out by a joint team of Malkangiri police, District Voluntary Force and BSF 76 Battalion, they unearthed the dump in the forest area located close to AP border. They raided the area after learning that Kalimella Dalam held a meeting with the villagers two days ago.

The security forces recovered two live and 48

empty cartridges of 12-bore guns, 93 detonators, two gas cylinders, lathe machine, carbide gas welding cylinder, lathe accessories, iron scrap material and Maoist literature.

Superintendent of police, Malkangiri, Rishikesh Khilari told newsmen that based on the concrete information about the presence of Maoists and militia members of the outfit, the BSF and DVF launched a joint combing operation in the forest area. It was the biggest seizure in recent times, he added.

The police are suspecting that the Maoists were manufacturing firearms as well as repairing defective arms and ammunition to be used for subversive activities.

The police have further intensified the combing operations along Andhra Odisha Border (AOB) suspecting that the Maoists may resort to violence in the region.

GODAVARI FLOOD WATER RECEDE, FIRST-LEVEL WARNING WITHDRAWN

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, AUG. 25

With floods receding in Godavari, 9.89 lakh cusecs excess water was discharged from Sir Arthur Cotton Barrage into the sea on Tuesday.

Irrigation officials withdrew the first level warning also. Meanwhile, the search for the missing man, Ch. Pentaiah, in Sabari river

after a boat capsized near Chinturu, was suspended.

Rampachodavaram ITDA project officer C.V. Adhitya Praveen said that essential commodities like one kilo onions, one kilo potato, and one litre oil were being distributed to the flood victims in the Rampachodavaram division through Girijan Cooperative Society.

Man arrested for killing wife, lover

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

A person murdered his wife with the help of his lover and later eliminated his woman partner in Guntur district. Bandlamudi Lakshmi Narayana had smothered his wife Priyanka to death with the help of his lover Sri Lakshmi. Later, he plotted the murder of Sri Lakshmi with the help of two of his friends.

The mystery behind the gruesome murders was solved by the police following a complaint from Lakshmi's husband Gonam Bhaskar. The police arrested Lakshmi Narayana his accomplices, Godapati Sateesh and Kotapati Ganesh of Kondepadu in Guntur rural mandal on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference at Guntur on Tuesday, urban SP R.N. Ammi Reddy said that Lakshmi Narayana killed his wife Priyanka by gagging her neck with a towel with the support of Lakshmi. He and Lakshmi had developed illicit relationship while they were working in a private school. The accused explaining about the illness of his wife and asked Lakshmi to help him eliminate Priyanka.

After successfully implementing his diabolical plot, he managed to portray his wife's murder as natural death.

Later, borrowed ₹1.07 lakh from Lakshmi and proposed a live-in-relation to her, which was accepted initially by Lakshmi, but later she turned it down. Lakshmi started distancing herself from Lakshmi Narayana stirring in his mind suspicion about her fidelity. He insisted on Lakshmi living with him, but she refused and threatened to expose his hand in the murder of his wife. It's at this stage he decided to kill Lakshmi, too.

Narayana asked Lakshmi to meet him at Karnuthala for a talk. The accused with the support of his friends Godapati Sateesh and Kotapati Ganesh strangulated Lakshmi to death on May 3 soon after she came there.

The police conducted an investigation into the disappearance of Lakshmi following a complaint lodged by her husband Bhaskar and unearthed the double murders.

They arrested the three persons on Tuesday.

SP Ammi Reddy appreciated DSP K. Kamalakhar, circle inspector M. Madhusudana Rao and police team for solving the murder mystery.

State police bags 10 awards: DGP

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 25

The Andhra Pradesh police department, at the forefront in adopting new technology, has received 10 awards for making the best use of technology and setting up the best training institute at the national level for the year 2020 at the Technology Sabha Awards 2020.

AP DGP, Goutam Sawang, said that the AP police department already bagged 26 awards this year. He men-

tioned that seven awards were received in technical categories, two awards for Anantapur district, one award for CID 4S 4U category. He said that the Andhra Pradesh police department is the only government department to have won a record 36 awards during the year.

During a celebration on winning the 10 awards, Sawang said that they could achieve this feat only with the encouragement given by the AP Chief Minister.

TRIBALS' BID TO BUILD HOUSES IN FOREST FOILED IN KUNAVARAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, AUG. 25

Tension prevailed in Kunavaram mandal when forest department officials prevented tribals from cutting plants on a hillock to clear the way for building homes on Tuesday.

According to sources, over 150 flood-affected people from Pandrajapalli and Kondrajupet in Kunavaram mandal on Monday started cutting down plants raised by the forest department in five acres on the hillock, close to their villages that were inundated in recent rains.

They claimed they had the right over the land and the trees. They argued that the government had failed to construct rehabilitation

colonies and provide resettlement and rehabilitation packages. Hence, they said they had the right to build houses on the hillock. But, the forest officials objected to it and informed Kunavaram police. Led by sub-inspector Guna Sekhar, a police team rushed to the spot and pacified the tribals. Forest officer of the Chinturu area V.Saibaba said that the tribals destroyed plantations in five acres of land. "They may have a genuine grievance, but it's a crime to destroy trees in forest and, hence, they filed a case against the tribal people."

Meanwhile, ITDA project officer A.Venkata Ramana said that rehabilitation colonies were getting ready.

Rottela Panduga to be a low key affair

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, AUG. 25

In view of the pandemic looming large over the region, the popular annual festival Rottela Panduga at Bara Shaheed dargah in Nellore, is going to be held without usual fanfare and public participation from August 30 to September 3. The celebrations related to the famous jataara at goddess Poleramma shrine in Venkatagiri is also under a cloud.

Six to 10 lakh people throng the Bara Shaheed dargah every year in what is a state festival, from different parts of the country as well as some Gulf countries to offer prayers at the dargah.

The unique custom of the festival is that people exchange rotis in lieu of their fulfilled desires and those with the same wants pick them up. The exchange takes place at Swarnala Cheruvu (Nellore tank) which is located adjacent to the dargah.

However, the pandemic has put paid to these religious rituals and the authorities made it clear

that exchange of rotis is not allowed as crowding is prohibited as per Covid-19 protocols.

Only 20 persons are being allowed to take part even in the Gandham festival (applying sandalwood paste to the tombs of 12 warriors) this time, according to district revenue officer O.V. Ramana.

With respect to the Poleramma jatra in Venkatagiri, Gudur sub collector, R. Gopala Krishna, announced the cancellation of the jatra after a review with officials concerned late on Monday night.

A shanthi homam will be performed at the Poleramma temple on September 10 in lieu of the jatra. He appealed to the people to co-operate with the administration while pointing to rules against crowding as per Covid-19 protocols.

Meanwhile BJP district unit vice president, K.T. Mani, questioned the rationale behind cancelling the jataara. The jatra was first held 400 years ago to drive away cholera which claimed hundreds of lives then.

SHORT TAKES

MAMATA WRITES TO MODI ON JEE/NEET EXAMS

Kolkata, Aug. 25: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the Centre should go in appeal against the Supreme Court order for holding the JEE and NEET examinations during the Covid-19 outbreak to ensure the aspirants are free from “mental agony”.

She wrote to Modi after the state government received a letter from the National Testing Agency on Tuesday to conduct the JEE/NEET examinations starting from September 1, 2020.

“I am aware that the Supreme Court has given a verdict on holding JEE/NEET examinations and the central government has been issuing instructions to go ahead with it accordingly. However, I would like to request for your kind intervention and to consider the central government making an appeal to the apex court to review its decision in the interest of the student community, so that they are free from mental agony and mental disaster. Such intervention is very much essential in the larger interest of the students to facilitate creating a situation whereby the students will neither be subjected to grave health risk nor they will be facing a career risk,” Banerjee wrote in the letter that was also released to media.

“We are really worried and concerned,” she said.

FIRE AT PROTOCOL OFFICE OF KERALA SECRETARIAT

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 25

Dramatic scenes were witnessed in the state secretariat on Tuesday after some files and documents got destroyed in a fire that broke out in the protocol wing of the complex.

The fire incident took place in the protocol office housed in the North sandwich block of the secretariat.

While some files and documents were gutted, there was no report of injury to anyone. However, an official of the secretariat said that no important files were damaged in the fire. Fire and rescue service personnel rushed to the spot and put off the fire.

“Only some files relating to booking rooms in government guest houses were destroyed. The fire was caused by an electric short circuit,” a senior official of the General Administration Department told media persons.

The destruction of files and documents in the fire triggered protests by Opposition - Congress and BJP. Leaders of the two parties rushed to the secretariat and alleged there was a conspiracy to destroy evidence linked with the gold smuggling case. The case is currently being investigated by the central agencies.

BJP MEMBERSHIP DRIVE IN MP RATTLES CONG

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, AUG. 25

The just concluded membership drive of the BJP in poll-bound Gwalior-Chambal region in Madhya Pradesh reportedly wooed 76,361 Congress workers, mostly loyalists of Rajya Sabha member Jyotiraditya Scindia, into its fold. The move has ‘rattled’ the grand old party in the state.

The Congress, however, asked the ruling party to make public the list of Congress workers in the region who joined the saffron outfit.

“The BJP has hyped its whole exercise of membership drive in Gwalior-Chambal region. The party showed its existing members as new members. I challenge BJP to come out with a list of Congress workers who joined BJP”, senior Congress leader and former minister P.C. Sharma told reporters here on Tuesday. Sharma said Congress continued to enjoy a mass base in the region and it would be reflected in the upcoming Assembly by-elections in the area.

The BJP countered Sharma saying that the party was ready to provide addresses and names of the Congress workers in Gwalior-Chambal who joined BJP. “Congress is rattled by the mass exodus of party workers in Gwalior-Chambal to join BJP”, BJP spokesman here Rajneesh Agrawal said.

Saw building pillars breaking before I ran out, says eyewitness

The building had issues related to substandard work and incidents of falling of plaster

Mumbai, Aug. 25: Mustafa Chaphekar and his family members, all residents of the ill-fated building that collapsed in Raigad, had a narrow escape as they rushed out just in time before the structure came crashing down.

They had barely reached the gate of the five-storey building when they saw some pillars of the ground floor breaking into pieces, Chaphekar said.

The building, which had around 40 flats, collapsed on Monday evening in Maharashtra's Raigad district.

According to police, a man, who was not a resident of the building, died of cardiac arrest on Monday night after he was hit by a stone from the falling building, and 19 persons were still missing.

Chaphekar said he was at home when he suddenly felt “tremors”, following which he ran out into the balcony of his flat and asked others what was happening.

Some people asked him to come out as the building was on the verge of collapse, he said.

Chaphekar then quickly rushed out along with his family members. Before leaving, he knocked the door of his neighbour and alerted him, he said.

“As my family members and I left the building, I heard a loud sound. When I turned back, I saw two-three pillars of the ground floor breaking into pieces,” he said.

Chaphekar said since he and his family came to live in the building in 2013-14, there were issues related to substandard work and incidents of falling of plaster.

The problems increased in the next two years, following which the residents had a meeting with the builder, but he was reluctant to carry out repair work, he said.

“The builder told us that he had constructed the building and given it to us, now it was up to us what to do with it,” he added.

Riyaz Mulla, a relative of one of the missing families, said the incident shocked him.

His brothers wife and three children, aged



Relatives mourn the death of a victim near the site of the five-storey building collapse in Mahad on Tuesday.

— PTI

● **THE BUILDING**, which had around 40 flats, collapsed on Monday evening in Maharashtra's Raigad district.

between 1.5 and 5 years, were still missing, a teary-eyed Mulla said.

His brother worked in Dubai and left from there to reach home after getting to know about the incident, he added.

A day after the building collapsed, rescue personnel continued to sift through the rubble in search of survivors, while police said 19 persons are still missing.

An official at the Mantralaya State Control Room of the State Disaster Management Unit said the Tarek Garden building at Kajalpura in Mahad tehsil collapsed around 7 pm.

There were around 40 flats in the building, the official said, adding those rescued were shifted to a local hospital at Mahad, which is around 170 km from Mumbai. — PTI

Toll climbs to 12, 4-yr-old rescued

DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, AUG. 25

The toll in the Mahad building collapse incident rose to 12 on Tuesday.

Rescuers sifting through the rubble of a five-storeyed building in Raigad district found a four-year-old boy alive and his mother dead beneath the debris.

The dead include the boy's 30-year-old mother and two sisters, aged seven and two years. A man died of cardiac arrest on Monday night after he was hit by a stone from the falling building. The dead — five men and five women — include two teenagers.

A video shared by NDRF showed the rescuers taking out the boy from the

rubble on a stretcher amid claps by onlookers. NDRF Director General S.N. Pradhan termed the rescued boy as god's child. “Miracle child rescued alive — God's Child. @NDRFHQ teams find a 4-year-old boy. Ops will continue, canines used. Lets all pray for more miracles,” Pradhan tweeted.

Police on Tuesday registered an offence against five persons, including the builder and architect of Tariq Garden in connection with collapse.

The offence was registered against builder Farooq Kazi, RCC consultant Bahubali Dhamne, and architect Gaurav Shah under sections 304, 304A and 338 of the Indian Penal Code.

64-yr-old searches for daughter, 3 grandkids

Mumbai, Aug. 25: Sixty four-year-old Muhammad Ali reached Mahad immediately after hearing news of a building there collapsing like a pack of cards. Ali, a resident of Mandangad in Raigad district, said he is clueless about the fate of his daughter, who lived in the ill-fated Tarek Garden building with her three children.

“My son, who lives in Mumbai, called me on Monday night and said the building had collapsed. I immediately set out from Mandangad,” he said. Ali reached Mahad, which is around 40 km from Mandangad, on Monday night and is camping near the collapse site, frantically trying to know the whereabouts of his kin.

“My daughter lives in

the building along with her two daughters aged five and two years and a son who is three years old. I don't know their fate. Officials are not allowing me to search for them in the debris,” he said.

A day after the five-storeyed building collapsed, rescue personnel continued to sift through the rubble in search of survivors, while police said 19 persons are still missing.

An official at the Mantralaya State Control Room of the State Disaster Management Unit said the Tarek Garden building at Kajalpura in Mahad tehsil collapsed around 7 pm.

There were around 40 flats in the building, the official said. — PTI

Security in Eastern Ladakh beefed up

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, AUG. 25

Indian Armed forces have deployed troops equipped with shoulder-fired air defence missiles on the crucial heights in Eastern Ladakh to keep in check the activity of Chinese attack helicopters in the sector.

India had already deployed quick reaction air defence missiles including the Akash missile system in June in Ladakh which can take down fighter jets and armed drones in few seconds.

It was modified to make it suitable for deployment in the high mountainous terrain.

After this, now Indian troops armed with the Russian-origin Igla air defence system have been deployed on the crucial heights along the border to take care of any enemy aircraft trying to violate the Indian air space.

The Russian-origin air defence systems are used by both the Indian Army and the Air Force and they can bring down enemy fighter jets or copters which come close to Indian locations or deployments during hostilities.

The air defence systems of both Army and the Air Force have been deployed in Ladakh to take on any aerial threat.

Parliament monsoon session likely from Sept. 14; 18 sittings planned

New Delhi, Aug. 25: The Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs has recommended that the Monsoon Session of Parliament be held from September 14 to October 1, sources said on Tuesday.

According to them, there will be in total 18 sittings and its dates will be notified later in the day.

Hectic preparations are underway for the Monsoon Session of Parliament with several first-time measures because of the Covid-19 pandemic such as staggered sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and use of both chambers and galleries to accommodate members while following

physical distancing norms, officials had said.

According to the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, members of the Upper House will be seated in both chambers and galleries during the session.

This is the first time in the history of Indian Parliament since 1952 that such an arrangement will be in place, where 60 members will be seated in the chamber and 51 in the galleries of Rajya Sabha and the remaining 132 in the chamber of Lok Sabha.

Similar seating arrangements are being worked out by the Lok Sabha Secretariat as well.

For the first time, large display screens and con-

soles for participation from galleries, ultraviolet germicidal irradiation, special cables between the two Houses and polycarbonate separators will be in place.

Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla at a meeting on July 17, after detailed examination of various options for holding the session, decided on using the chambers and galleries of both the Houses.

Naidu has directed officials to complete preparations for the session by the third week of August when testing, rehearsal and final inspection would be carried out. The Rajya

Sabha Secretariat has been working overtime to ensure full preparedness, officials said.

While both the Houses usually function simultaneously, this time due to extraordinary circumstances, one House will sit during morning hours and the other in the evening, sources say.

The last Budget Session of Parliament had to be curtailed because of the Covid-19 pandemic and both Houses were adjourned sine die on March 23.

As per precedent, Parliament has to be convened before the end of six months from the last session. — PTI

KARNATAKA CONG CHIEF TESTS POSITIVE

Bengaluru, Aug. 25: Karnataka Congress President D.K. Shivakumar on Tuesday said he has tested positive for coronavirus and has been hospitalised.

Several leaders including Congress national president Sonia Gandhi, senior party leader Rahul Gandhi, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa have wished Shivakumar a speedy recovery.

“I had fever and tested positive for the coronavirus. I am doing well, but as a precaution have been hospitalised and I am under the good care of doctors. — PTI

COVID-19 | VACCINES

VINEETA PANDEY | DC with agency inputs NEW DELHI, AUG. 25

Even though the trials for the Covid-19 vaccines are on track in India, the government is simultaneously engaging with Russia on the possible use of its Sputnik V vaccine.

“India and Russia are in communication on Sputnik V. Some initial information has been shared. Some detailed information is awaited,” said union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan on Tuesday.

The government may not be in a real hurry to import the Russian vaccines given the fact that

three vaccine candidates are already in the advanced stages of clinical trials in India.

However, since the two countries are also strategic partners, the possibility of having Sputnik V vaccine to boost the vaccination drive for the huge Indian population cannot be ruled out.

“The Serum Institute of India (Oxford University trials) vaccine studies consisting of 1,700 persons are in phase 2 and 3, the one by Biotech has completed phase 1 with 375 persons while that of Zyventus Cadilla has entered Phase 2 with about 50 persons being tested. These are two dose vaccines and

antibody response is checked after two to four weeks,” said Dr Balram Bhargava, chief of ICMR.

As per Union health ministry, the total number of cases of Coronavirus in India so far reached 31,67,323 till Tuesday morning with nearly 61,000 fresh cases being detected. The toll was 58,390 out of which 848 fatalities were recorded in the last 24 hours.

Bhushan said that for the first time, active cases have reduced in the last 24 hours. “Active cases are only 22 per cent of the total cases we have had so far. There is also a steady decline in positivity rate despite very high increase

in testing,” Bhushan said. He added that in the first week of August, the positivity percentage on a seven day rolling average was 11% which came down to 8% on Tuesday.

The ICMR chief said the report of the second national level sero survey is expected soon that will give an idea about the prevalence of the virus in the population.

The health ministry is keenly following the reports of possibly world's first case of Covid-19 “re-infection” in Hong Kong though the ICMR chief said that the possibility of a virus infection recurring is very rare.

“We have read with inter-

est the reports of reinfection in Hong Kong. This may depend on the immune status of the person and whether the virus has mutated and become more virulent. But it is just one case and I do not want to be alarmed. Normally it does not happen in viral diseases. For example measles, in which immunity is developed for life,” Dr Bhargava said.

Meanwhile, Puducherry health minister Malladi Krishna Rao on Tuesday indicated that the Union Territory may have 2-day lockdown every weekend, as part of the government's efforts to contain spread of Coronavirus. The Minister told a vir-

SUSHANT DEATH CASE: CBI MAY QUESTION MUMBAI POLICE

DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, AUG. 25

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) may record statement of some of the officials of Mumbai police team who were conducting enquiry into suicide of actor Sushant Singh Rajput.

The CBI on Tuesday grilled Rajput's flatmate Siddharth Pithani, cook Neeraj Singh and house help Deepesh Sawant whose versions of the sequence of incidents showed some differences. The officials also questioned the actor's former chartered account Rajat Mewati again.

The police officials would be asked about their line of investigation and the questioning of the movie industry bigwigs in connection with the probe. Those city policemen who are likely to be questioned would include the team members who were closely involved in the suicide enquiry.

The trio have been questioned on several occasions by the CBI citing the inconsistencies in their statement. The officials sought clarity on their statement at the DRDO guest house in Santacruz.

The trio's statement is of great importance in the probe as they were present in the Bandra apartment when the actor committed suicide.

“Rhea Chakraborty and family members may be summoned next for questioning in the suicide probe,” said an officer privy to the investigation.

The CBI is also rummaging through the deceased actor's phone and other gadgets to ascertain his state of mind in the days prior to his suicide.

The details of the messages and other details exchanged by Rajput with whoever was in touch with him will be in prime focus of the investigation agency.

The CBI earlier questioned the staffers at the Waterstone Resort in Andheri about the actor's stay at the resort. The CBI asked the staff about who was accompanying him and if there were any visitors whom he met during his stay. They are also verifying if there is any relevant CCTV camera footage that could be useful to the probe.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on the other hand is probing the alleged money laundering that the actor's father has accused Chakraborty of. The family alleged that at least ₹15 crore was fraudulently transferred from his bank account.

The ED is investigating the companies that were floated with the actor, Chakraborty and her brother Showik of which they were directors.



IN BRIEF

Pakistan arrests two militants

Lahore: Pakistan's counter-terrorism officials have arrested two militants of the banned Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), a splinter terrorist group of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, in the country's Punjab province, the police said on Tuesday. According to the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab Police, an intelligence-based operation was conducted in Sahiwal city, some 175 kms from here, on Monday. The terrorists were carrying weapons and explosive material as they had planned to attack the personnel of the law enforcement agencies in the city. The CTD team raided and arrested them, the police said.

Philippines ultra leader 'killed'

Manila: Abu Sayyaf militants may have staged suicide bombings that killed 14 people to avenge the death of a Filipino leader of the Islamic State group in the southern Philippines following a clash with troops last month, the army chief said Tuesday. Army commanding general Cirilito Sobejana said Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan was wounded in a July 6 gunbattle in a jungle near Patikul town in Sulu province and most likely died a few days later. Troops have been searching for his buried remains, he said. Two Islamic militants blew themselves up in suicide attacks Monday that killed at least 14 people, including soldiers.

\$424 mn surplus in July: Pak

Islamabad: Cash-strapped Pakistan has shown a surplus of \$424 million in July after posting a deficit of \$100 million in June, the country's central bank has said. The State Bank of Pakistan said "this is the fourth monthly surplus since last October". The SBP said that the strong turnaround in the remittances and exports is achieved "with support from several policy and administrative initiatives taken by the bank and the federal government, the *Express Tribune* reported. The export of goods increased to \$1.89 billion in July compared to \$1.58 billion in June. It was, however, 14 per cent lower than \$2.22 billion export in July 2019.

FB blocks group on Thai monarchy

Bangkok: Facebook has blocked in Thailand a group with more than a million members that engages in open discussion about the Thai monarchy, an institution that is staunchly protected from criticism by strict laws. The Facebook group, "Royalist Marketplace", was blocked late Monday after the social media giant bowed to pressure from the Thai government. Facebook said that it is still available in other places, adding that the company plans to "legally challenge" the government's request. "After careful review, Facebook has determined that we are compelled to restrict access to content which the Thai government deemed to be illegal," the company said.

ACTOR SABA SAHER SHOT AT, CRITICAL

Kabul, Aug. 25: A roadside bombing killed a police officer while a policewoman and her driver were wounded when unknown attackers opened fire on them in Kabul, said Ferdaws Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief. The policewoman, Saba Saher, is also a well-known actress, and she was said to be stable.

A wave of attacks across Afghanistan on Tuesday left at least 17 people dead and scores more wounded, officials said, including a Taliban truck bombing that targeted a commando base for Afghan forces. The bomber struck in Balkh province, killing three people, including two Afghan commandos and a civilian. According to Hanif Rezaie, the spokesman for the Afghan army corps in the north, initial military report said at least six commandos and around 35 civilians were wounded in that explosion, which also destroyed or damaged dozens of nearby houses.

In a separate attack in Balkh, gunmen shot dead five people, including former warlord Abdul Raouf, two of his sons ages 10 and 11 and two other men. Also on Tuesday, an attack on a checkpoint of pro-government forces in western Ghor province killed eight troops and wounded five.

Haley: US not racist, reject Dem's 'fashion' statement

Will speak at GOP meet that will renominate Trump as poll candidate

Washington, Aug. 25: Describing herself as a proud daughter of Indian immigrants who wore a turban and a saree, top Republican politician Nikki Haley has narrated her story to the American voters, urging them to strongly reject the Democratic Party's "fashionable" statement that "America is racist". The 48-year-old former US Ambassador to the United Nations, Haley is the only Indian-American listed so far to be speaking at the Republican National Convention which on Thursday would formally re-nominate President Donald Trump as its candidate for the November 3 presidential election. President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence will be challenged by the Democratic Party's presidential nominee Joe Biden and his Indian-American running mate Senator Kamala Harris.

Twice elected as the Governor of South Carolina, Haley said, "In much of the Democratic Party, it's now fashionable to say that America is racist. That is a lie. America is not a racist country." "This is personal for me. I am the proud daughter of Indian immigrants. They came to America and settled in a small southern town. My father wore a turban. My mother wore a sari. I was a brown girl in a black and white world," she said on Monday at the mostly-virtual four-day convention during which she fully backed President Trump and his policies. Born as Nimrata Randhawa in South Carolina, she is the daughter of Ajit



Delegates cheer as US President Donald Trump (L) and Vice President Mike Pence stand on stage during the first day of the Republican National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina on Monday. — AFP

Singh Randhawa and Raj Kaur Randhawa, who emigrated from Amritsar in Punjab. Haley said her family faced discrimination and hardship but her parents never gave in to grievance and hate.

"My mom built a successful business. My dad taught 30 years at a historically Black college. And the people of South Carolina chose me as their first minority and first female governor," she said. "America is a story that's a work in progress. Now is the time to build on that progress, and make America even freer, fairer, and better for everyone," Haley said.

— PTI

Trump lauds India after American pastor released

Washington, Aug. 25: US President Donald Trump has appreciated India for listening to his request to release an American pastor who was arrested last October on charges of carrying \$40,000 of undeclared currency. Tennessee pastor Bryan Nерren, who was released by India after intervention from Trump this May, attended a round table with the President in the Oval Office of the

White House along with several other American citizens who were released from overseas abductions and detentions.

"India responded very well to my request. Appreciate that," Trump said as he appeared in a taped meeting with a group of US citizens who were abducted or detained overseas and the Trump Administration helped them to return home. The taped round-

table was broadcast during the first night of the four-day Republican National Convention on Monday. In his brief remarks, Nерren explained that he had been arrested by the Indian officials while travelling in the country.

Nерren from the International House of Prayer Ministries was arrested in Bagdogra, West Bengal last October.

— PTI

False plasma data: US health official sorry

Washington, Aug. 25: Dr Stephen Hahn, the commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration, apologised Monday after misrepresenting a key statistic on how effective blood plasma is for treating Covid-19 when announcing an emergency approval measure. The US on Sunday issued emergency approval for plasma taken from recovered Coronavirus patients, so that more people can get access to the exper-

imental treatment.

But Hahn and other senior health officials came under fire from experts after repeating a claim made by President Donald Trump that blood plasma from recovered Covid-19 patients reduced mortality rates by 35 percent.

"What that means is — and if the data continue to pan out — 100 people who are sick with Covid-19, 35 would have been saved because of the administra-

tion of plasma," Hahn said Sunday, after Trump had called it "a tremendous number". Health secretary Alex Azar added: "I just want to emphasise this point, because I don't want you to gloss over this number. We dream in drug development of something like a 35 percent mortality reduction. This is a major advance in the treatment of patients. This is a major advance." Such a reduction would indeed be a game

changer in the fight against the pandemic — but the statistic is false.

The officials said these results came from a study of 35,000 patients conducted by Mayo Clinic, but Dr Scott Wright, the study's leader, told *AFP* it did not come from his institution's research. He said he believed it might be an "integrated analysis" the FDA had arrived at by looking at both Mayo's work and other studies.

FDA spokeswoman Emily Miller later tweeted that 35 percent referred to the relative difference in mortality risk between those patients in Mayo's study who received a high level of antibodies against those who received a low level of antibodies.

"I have been criticized for remarks I made Sunday night about the benefits of convalescent plasma," said Hahn in a tweet thread on Monday. — *AFP*

Postpone NEET, JEE exams: Greta

London, Aug. 25: Swedish teen climate change campaigner Greta Thunberg on Tuesday threw her weight behind postponing the NEET and the JEE exams in India in view of the Coronavirus, saying it is "deeply unfair" that students are asked to appear in the tests during the pandemic.

Several students and political leaders across the country, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and DMK President M.K. Stalin, have urged the central government to postpone the examination until the spread of the Covid-19 was brought under control.

Voicing her support to the calls for the deferment of the key national examinations, Thunberg took to Twitter, saying it is deeply unfair for the students. "It's deeply unfair that students of India are asked to sit national exams during the Covid-19 pandemic and while millions have also been impacted by the extreme floods. I stand with their call to #PostponeJEE, -NEETinCOVID," she said in a tweet.

Thunberg, 17, has become a leading voice for action on climate change, inspiring millions of students to join protests around the world. She was named *Time* magazine's Person of the Year for 2019. Two years ago, she started missing lessons most Fridays to protest outside the Swedish Parliament building, in what turned out to be the beginning of a huge environmental movement.

● THE JEE (Main) is scheduled to be held between September 1 and 6, while the JEE (Advanced) on September 27. The NEET will be held on September 13.

The chorus for postponing the various examinations, including NEET and JEE, grew louder on Sunday with over 4,000 students observing a day-long hunger strike to press for the demand in view of the rising Covid-19 cases. The protest came on a day Gandhi said the government must listen to the 'mann ki baat' of students and arrive at "an acceptable solution" and his party demanded that the NEET and the JEE be deferred. According to the leftist All India Students Association (AISA), over 4,200 students observed the day-long hunger strike at their respective home demanding that CBSE compartment exams of Classes 10 and 12 be cancelled and entrance exams such as the UGC-NET, CLAT, NEET and JEE be postponed. Aspirants appear in the JEE for admission into the premier engineering colleges and the NEET for undergraduate medical courses.

The JEE (Main) is scheduled to be held between September 1 and 6, while the JEE (Advanced) on September 27. The NEET will be held on September 13. With 60,975 people testing positive for the Coronavirus infection in a day, India's Covid-19 tally on Tuesday rose to 31,67,323. — *PTI*

Kenosha protesters, cops clash again after man shot

Kenosha, Aug. 25: Anger over the shooting of a PoC by police spilled into the streets of Kenosha for a second night Monday, with police again firing tear gas at hundreds of protesters who defied a curfew, threw bottles and shot fireworks at law enforcement guarding the courthouse. The southeastern Wisconsin city became the nation's latest flashpoint in a summer of racial unrest after cellphone footage of police shooting Jacob Blake — apparently in the back, as he leaned into his SUV while his three children sat in the vehicle — circulated widely on social media Sunday.

The 29-year-old was hospitalised in serious condition. The shooting drew

condemnation from Democratic Gov Tony Evers, who also called out 125 members of the National Guard on Monday after protesters set cars on fire, smashed windows and clashed with officers in riot gear the previous night.

Police first fired tear gas Monday about 30 minutes after the 8 p.m. curfew took effect to disperse protesters who chanted, "No justice, no peace" as they confronted a line of officers who wore protective gear and stood shoulder-to-shoulder in front of the courthouse entrance.

But hundreds of people stuck around, screaming at police and lighting fires, including to a garbage truck near the courthouse. Tensions had flared anew earlier Monday after

a news conference with Kenosha Mayor John Antaramian, originally to be held in a park, was moved inside the city's public safety building.

Hundreds of protesters rushed to the building and a door was snapped off its hinges before police in riot gear pepper-sprayed the crowd, which included a photographer from *The Associated Press*. Police in the former auto manufacturing centre of 100,000 people midway between Milwaukee and Chicago said they were responding to a call about a domestic dispute when they encountered Blake on Sunday. They did not say whether Blake was armed or why police opened fire, they released no details on the dispute. — *AP*

NZ survivor to mosque gunman: 'You are the loser'

Christchurch, Aug 25: A man who was shot and wounded in the New Zealand mosque attacks had a simple message for the mass-murderer responsible: "You are the loser, and we are the winners." Mirwais Waziri was among the survivors and family members who spoke on the second day of a four-day sentencing hearing for white supremacist Brenton Harrison Tarrant, who killed 51 worshippers at two mosques during the March 2019 attacks. Waziri said Tarrant had not shown any remorse during the hearing and so instead of giving a victim's impact statement he wanted to deliver the gunman a message.

Coming from Afghanistan, Waziri said, he was sometimes associated with terrorism but now he'd been freed. "You took that name from me," Waziri said.

"Today, you are the terrorist." His comments elicited spontaneous applause from other victims in the courtroom. Others told Tarrant during their statements that he was a coward, a monster, a rat. Tarrant broke his impassive facade a

couple of times to smirk at survivors when they made fun of him — one told him he should read the Quran during his plentiful free time, another said he was still alive because Tarrant didn't know how to shoot, except from point-blank range. The 29-year-old Australian gunman in March pleaded guilty to murder, attempted murder, and terrorism, reversing an earlier not guilty plea. He could become the first person in New Zealand to be sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, the toughest sentence available. Tarrant is noticeably thinner than when he was first arrested.

At the current hearing, he hasn't shown the brazenness he did at his first court appearance the day after the attacks, when he made a hand gesture sometimes adopted by white supremacists. During Tuesday's hearing, relatives and survivors described how more than a year after the attacks, they were still having trouble sleeping, enjoying life and providing for their families.

— AP

Navalny poisoning blame just 'empty noise', says Kremlin

Moscow, Aug. 25: The Kremlin on Tuesday rejected accusations of involvement in an alleged attack on Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny who is in a coma in a German hospital, a day after doctors said tests indicated that he was poisoned.

The politician's allies say the Kremlin is behind the illness of its most prominent critic, with some demanding an investigation into whether Russian President Vladimir Putin was involved. "These accusations absolutely cannot be true and are rather an empty noise," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Tuesday. "We do not intend to take it seriously."

Peskov saw no grounds for launching a criminal investigation into Navalny's condition, saying that it could have been triggered by a variety of causes, and determining one should come first. "If a substance (that caused

the condition) is found, and if it is determined that it is poisoning, then there will be a reason for an investigation," Peskov said. Navalny, a politician and corruption investigator who is one of Putin's fiercest critics, fell ill on a flight back to Moscow from Siberia on Thursday and was taken to a hospital in the city of Omsk after the plane made an emergency landing.

Over the weekend he was transferred to the Charité hospital in Berlin, where doctors on Monday said they have found indications of "cholinesterase inhibitors" in his system. Cholinesterase inhibitors act by blocking the breakdown of a key chemical in the body, acetylcholine, that transmits signals between nerve cells.

Navalny is being treated with the antidote atropine. Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, has been visiting her husband daily and made no comment.

— AP

Imran wants Nawaz back immediately

SHAFQAT ALI | DC ISLAMABAD, AUGUST 25

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday while directing to review the legal aspects said that former prime minister and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) supreme Nawaz Sharif should be brought back to Pakistan immediately.

The meeting of the federal cabinet was held in Islamabad with Prime Minister Imran Khan in chair. During the meeting, matters pertaining to the country's current political situation came

under discussion. Sources said that the meeting discussed bringing back PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif to Pakistan and the recent political activities of party vice president Maryam Nawaz.

Federal Minister for Water Resources Faisal Vawda while expressing concern for failing to arrest Maryam Nawaz, said that she should have been arrested for what she did outside the National Accountability Bureau office, adding that no matter what happens, Maryam Nawaz will not be allowed to leave the country.

UNDER | WATER

Officials yet to reveal why vessel came so close to the island

Ship behind Mauritius oil spill sunk

Port Louis, Aug. 25: The broken stem of a Japanese-owned ship which ran aground causing a devastating oil spill in pristine waters off Mauritius, has been successfully sunk in the open ocean.

Nagashiki Shipping, which owns the MV Wakashio, said on Tuesday (Aug 25) it had completed scuttling of the front part of the vessel at sea on Monday as instructed by local authorities.

The bulk carrier ran aground on a coral reef off the Indian Ocean island on Jul 25 and began leaking

oil two weeks later, prompting a race against the clock to pump all the fuel off the bulk carrier before it broke in two.

The operation was successful and two tugboats last week began towing the larger, forward section of the vessel some 15km out into the open ocean, where it has been sunk to a depth of 3,180m.

The smaller section remains wedged on the reef where the shipwreck occurred.

"The planned sinking of the stem (forward) section of the casualty has been

completed and at around 3.30pm was no longer visible on the sea surface," read a statement on Monday from the Mauritius crisis committee.

Greenpeace opposed the plan, warning last week that sinking the vessel would "risk biodiversity and contaminate the ocean with large quantities of heavy metal toxins".

More than 1,000 tonnes of oil spilled into the pristine waters that have long been a major draw for honey-mooners, and contain precious mangroves and coral reefs. Last week a team of

British scientists arrived to co-ordinate an impact assessment on what damage has been done to the island and how to help the eco-system recover.

International experts from Japan and France are also on the ground assisting the archipelago nation in the wake of the spill.

Senior British marine monitoring scientist Dr Sue Ware told *AFP* the team would help "determine the footprint of the oil both on the shoreline and ... whether it has managed to reach any areas of

the seabed" and how it has impacted mangroves, coral reefs and different marine species.

She said efforts by Mauritius to place booms in the water appeared to have been successful in preventing oil from reaching the protected Blue Bay wetlands area.

The captain of the ship and his second-in-command were arrested last Tuesday. Officials have yet to reveal why the ship, which was making its way from Singapore to Brazil, came so close to the island. — *Agencies*

DECCAN Chronicle

26 AUGUST 2020

Restore democracy to reinvent Congress

The meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) held on Monday evoked only the usual interest among the people, party workers and in political circles. The CWC, once one of the most powerful and representative bodies in the pre- and post-Independent India, has ceased to make news when it meets. There are two important reasons for it. One, the body filled with nominated people reflected the loss of democratic moorings in the party and symbolised the sycophancy that runs in the organisation from top to bottom; the last proper election to the CWC was conducted in 1991. Second, the committee with its elected president used to control the affairs of the nation as the ruling or a major Opposition party at the Centre and in most of the states; it no more holds such power strings now. It has been reduced to such a position that its leader in the Lok Sabha cannot legitimately lay claim to the post of the leader of the Opposition for he lacks the support of one tenth of the members of the House. The party has only four Chief Ministers now.

An elected leadership is a pre-condition if the party were to regain its legitimacy and popularity and the Congress president must set in motion the process aimed at that

The sudden interest in the CWC meeting has its origin in the letter 23 senior leaders wrote to the party leadership seeking a change at the helm. The letter created heartburn in the circles close to the party high command but the party will do well to seize the opportunity the letter-writers have offered. It is highly unlikely that they will launch an open revolt against Sonia Gandhi who has been retained as president until a new incumbent arrives or former president Rahul Gandhi, though they have succeeded in stopping Mr Gandhi from returning as party chief for now. Ms Gandhi who has said she has no plans to initiate disciplinary action against them must do more and accommodate them in the new committee which will be formed to help her run the party. Ms Gandhi must resist the temptation of the coterie around her which would want every crisis to end with a declaration that the “hands of the leadership must be strengthened”. Such self-serving exercises are unlikely to help the party.

An elected leadership is a pre-condition if the party were to regain its legitimacy and popularity and the Congress president must set in motion the process aimed at that; the easy way out of foisting string-pullers under the garb of “consensus” must be jettisoned. The AICC has been talking of making itself an elected body for decades, and this crisis gives it a golden opportunity, what with Ms Gandhi, who commands respect among all sections of the party, at the helm. It is important that the grand old party of Indian politics reinvents and renovates itself and makes itself a worthy Opposition party this nation deserves. Shortcuts and courtroom dramas are not the way to achieve it; returning to basic democratic practices is.

No state for journalists

What was the egregious misdeed of 42-year-old television reporter Ratan Singh for which he was beaten up by villagers at the home of the panchayat head in Ballia, eastern UP, before being shot dead? Why was there no deterrence of note in the face of this flagrant crime? Instead, the police, who should be in the dock for birthing this culture of impunity by repeatedly failing to do their job, are now busy playing down the murder as one that occurred as a result of a property dispute, a conjecture denied by none other than the family of the victim.

Sadly, this is the second murder of a journalist in about a month’s time in the state of Uttar Pradesh. In July, Vikram Joshi was shot in Ghaziabad for reporting the harassment of his niece to police who waited and then effectively watched the crime take place. And in June, Shubham Mani Tripathi, a newspaper reporter from Kanpur, was shot in Unnao at the behest of a local real estate and sand lord after his reports led to the demolition of an illegal structure and he shared it on Facebook.

Tripathi’s killing coincided with the Varanasi police’s hounding of Scroll’s executive editor for reporting that people in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s constituency had gone hungry during the Covid-19 lockdown. This time, the police acted with alacrity. Indeed, 60 journalists from all over India, including some prominent names, have been arrested in this period, or booked or been confronted with other tactics of intimidation for simply doing something the police aren’t — which is their own job of reporting on the pandemic and how the people have suffered through it.

As the lockdown and recession afflict millions of jobs nationwide, journalists, too, have come under financial stress and distress. But some of them have continued to face down both the virus and crime, as also an uncooperative and very often vindictive government, in order to report, investigate and be the first to get the news. The government, in its turn, has changed kitchen utensils in their honour, and then promptly turned a blind eye even as police blithely brushed crimes under the carpet.

The headline, therefore, is an ironic one. As for the police-mafia-state crackdown on news and commentary, it is not completely successful.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

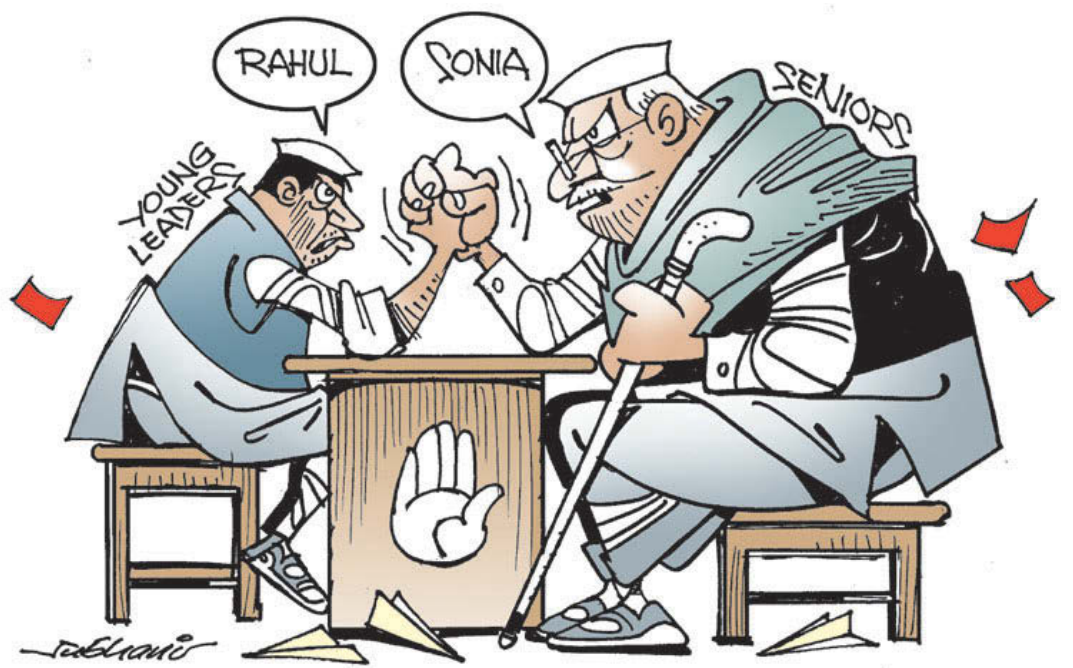
ADITYA SINHA
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234
Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208
Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904
Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalpally Colony, Jagitayala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433
Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348881/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580
Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325
Bengaluru: 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Feet Road, Koramangala, Bengaluru-560 095 Ph: 080-43460500; Fax: 080-22960552
Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255
Kochi: No.3-B, 3rd Floor of DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408
Thiruvananthapuram: St Joseph’s Press, TC 15/1040, Cotton Hill, Thycaud (PO), Thiruvananthapuram 695 014
Kozhikode: Door No 6/1002 E, First Floor of City Mall, Opp. YMCA, Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001, Fax : 0495 4019 018
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Subhani



Dawood, D-Company & Pakistan’s terror links



Syed Ata Hasnain

In the early 1970s the name Haji Mastan used to trigger much fear in India. He was among the early smuggler kings who lived by crime and exploited criminal networks — gold, some drugs, electronics and liquor, which mainly formed contraband those days. There were vast smuggling networks to evade the authorities, but their main effect was a marginal negative impact on the economy and a few inter-gang shootouts. These were people who did what they did for self-enrichment, and the power that went with it.

Smuggler kings usually invested in the urban property market. As India progressed, these holdings began to emerge as virtual gold. The Bollywood film *Deewar* captured this very well in 1974. It was n’t until 1993 that crime syndicates involved in running contraband across borders went beyond the ordinary. They got involved with terrorism, as Mumbai saw in the 1993 bombings, when a series of 12 bomb explosions on March 12, 1993 resulted in 257 fatalities and 1,400 injuries. The bombings were ascribed to Dawood Ibrahim, leader of a Mumbai-based international crime syndicate called “D-Company”. Dawood was assisted by subordinates Tiger Memon and Yakub Memon. D-Company became a well-known name across India as it deeply involved itself with Pakistan-sponsored transnational proxy terrorism in India. Dawood Ibrahim, who had lived in the UAE since 1986, found a safe haven in Karachi too. Since then, he has been behind several high-profile terror acts in different parts of India outside Kashmir. He is listed as an “international terrorist” by the UN and the United States and carries a bounty of \$25 million on his head.

The recent Financial Action Task Force (FATF) pressure on Pakistan has led to the partially admitted presence of Dawood in Karachi. However, his networks continue to flourish in India despite the marked success of India’s intelligence agencies.

What is the linkage between crime syndicates and transnational terrorists? To comprehend this, take the example of Pakistan. In 1989 it chose to target India through what is called asymmetric or sub-conventional war. Terrorism forms the core of this, with many other domains forming part of the low-intensity conflict spectrum. Pakistan chose to launch its strategy in Kashmir and over a period of time established an efficient network of local underground workers from different segments of society. The network covered civil society members, lawyers, businessmen, politicians, media persons, members of the clergy, faculty and students of universities, and much more. Due to the prevailing sub-nationalist trends in J&K it was not difficult doing this. However, Pakistan’s strategy desired extension of the hand of proxy conflict to hinterland areas and important cities of India to give substance to its chosen strategy of “war by a thousand sands”. It was not easy doing this. Finding reliable proxies, creating networks, embedding sleeper agents, transporting warlike material, having access to large-scale finances and creating empathy in some elements of society is never a simple set of tasks. It takes years to build these through networks. In search for the means to take the proxy war into the rest of India, Pakistan got a shot in the arm with the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 and the communal riots that fol-

lowed; both acting as facilitators for the extension of its strategy. Its target was not difficult to choose, as Mumbai offered itself due to its strategic significance as India’s financial capital. Mayhem by violence would disrupt investments, lead to serious suspicions of the minority community, create cleavages in society and cultivate a resultant trust deficit that would assist Pakistan to exploit at will. However, the other major consideration for the selection of Mumbai as the target was the pre-existence of criminal networks, with the D-Company leading them. A foreign hand could ride on these networks for a cost. With networks on its side, Pakistan thus had available human resources, weapons, finances, communications and local knowledge. With explosives supplanted, it was a ticking bomb. Criminal networks got their first major experience of terror that did not differentiate between targets; every incidental target is justified in the rationale of terrorists, especially those with ideological orientation. People of all faiths died or were maimed in the acts on March 12, 1993 and thereafter.

Dawood Ibrahim, who evaded the hand of Indian law, managed to create a reported network of 5,000 criminal elements with an annual turnover of \$2 billion. The D-Company is suspected of having provided the logistics for the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba’s terror attack on Mumbai on November 26, 2008, besides a host of other attacks in 2002, 2006 and 2011. A total of 600 people died in these various attacks in Mumbai. With each event, Dawood

With international success against the ISIS and Al Qaeda, a renewed and energetic Indian campaign to nail Dawood Ibrahim is the call of the hour so that the FATF can effectively take note and place Pakistan on notice

Ibrahim’s criminal-cum-terrorist profile enhanced a couple of notches and he has been known to keep the company of international terrorist outfits like Al Qaeda and the Taliban. In 2006, India submitted a list of 38 most wanted terrorists, including Dawood Ibrahim, to Pakistan, but the latter continued to play a hedging game knowing that the D-Company and its head was an invaluable asset for it.

With the FATF investigation against Pakistan, India in recent months has mounted pressure at the UN. On August 6, 2020, India highlighted the nexus between international terrorism and organised crime, quoting the case of UN-designated terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, who has been living in Pakistan ever since his involvement in the 1993 Mumbai blasts. India went on to state: “If the international community can successfully defeat the Islamic State, a similar focus on addressing threats posed by proscribed individuals and entities such as Dawood Ibrahim and his D-Company, the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammad will serve humankind well.”

The continuous Indian diplomatic campaign to highlight Pakistan-sponsored criminal and terrorist links which have acted as its proxies in India is apparently bearing fruit, with Pakistan reportedly admitting the existence of Dawood Ibrahim in Karachi. However, Pakistan is a past master at subterfuge and evasion of responsibility. Its admission on one day and denial the next is part of an old strategy which it continues to play with the FATF. With international success against the ISIS and Al Qaeda, a renewed and energetic Indian campaign to nail Dawood Ibrahim is the call of the hour so that the FATF can effectively take note and place Pakistan on notice to deliver or perish on the blacklist. But only time can tell if it will happen this time.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps

LETTERS

CONG TROUBLES

The Congress seems to be wasting precious time by not sorting out its leadership question. The CWC meeting against the backdrop of an unusual letter by 23 Congressmen turned out to be a prolonged slamming session without any substance. Instead of discussing the theme and wording of that letter, the CWC debated the intentions and timing of letter writers. Rahul Gandhi could have read the message and come up with his ideas rather to shoot the messengers.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

The Congress is definitely headed for a split even as the Nehru-Gandhi family is trying everything to keep its stranglehold on it. A reluctant Rahul Gandhi being one of the main causes for the situation, it is also pertinent to note that the party has outlived itself and can’t take on the BJP, which is growing in strength day by day.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

In the last two national elections, the Congress has lost its astonishing capacity for drawing strength from the people (*Letter a wake-up call to Congress on its future, DC, Aug. 25*). The top leadership should know its fault too well. The self-perpetuating clique within the party saps the morale of the young Turks. Talented leaders should be allowed to thrive for the revitalisation of the organisation, otherwise the party will be reduced to a shell.

Niranjan Sahoo
Bhubaneswar

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

CM leaving for Japan on Aug. 31

HYDERABAD, August 25. Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi, Chief Minister, will leave by plane for Japan from Calcutta on August 31 on a 15-day visit at the invitation of the Japanese Government.

Mr. Brahmananda Reddi will be accompanied by Mrs. Raghavamma Brahmananda Reddi his Security Officer, Mr. S. Seethapathi Naidu, Mr. Sushil Kumar, managing director of the State Industrial Development Corporation and Mr. Maddi Sudarshanam, a well known industrialist of the State.

The Chief Minister and party will visit the Expo-70 and will also visit Hong Kong, Osaka, Tokyo, Bangkok and Singapore. The party will return to Hyderabad on September 16.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Audit service is unhappy over Murmu as CAG

The appointment of former lieutenant governor of Jammu & Kashmir G.C. Murmu as India’s Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has not been welcomed by the Indian Audit & Accounts Service (IA&AS) officers. It is being seen as yet another instance of the dominance of the IAS cadre over other all-India services. Not that it’s been known to make any difference to this Sarkar, once it’s made up its mind!

Sources say that in becoming CAG, Mr Murmu who is from the 1985-batch Gujarat cadre of the IAS, has superseded at least six IA&AS officers. But he is not the first IAS officer to become the nation’s top auditor. Mr Murmu’s immediate predecessor, Rajiv Mehrotra, was from the 1978 IAS cadre, and he too had followed Shashikant Sharma, who belonged to the 1976 batch. Many would also remember CAG

Vinod Rai, a 1972-batch IAS officer. Apparently, the last IA&AS officer to become CAG was A. Bakshi whose tenure ended back in 1978.

Since then, CAGs have been from the tribe of the “heaven-born”, but clearly the IA&AS officers who have lost the race to become CAG are unwilling to accept the IAS “outsiders”. Will the current resentment subside “naturally” or will Mr Murmu face rough weather? We’ll have to wait and see.

ASTHANA IS NEW BSF CHIEF

Two years after his highly publicized ouster from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), its former special director Rakesh Asthana has been named director general of the Border Security Force (BSF).

Interestingly, he continues to hold additional charge of director general, Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). Checking narcotics smug-

gling remains a big concern and in the BSF, which patrols the borders, Mr Asthana as DG is back in a position where he can play a more active role.

Mr Asthana has served both in the state government and at the Centre, where he served twice in the CBI. The 1984-batch IPS officer from the Gujarat cadre also did a low-profile stint at the Bureau of Civil Aviation and Security.

At the CBI, he was involved in investigating many high-profile cases. During his first stint in the agency, he investigated the fodder scam, which resulted in the conviction of former Bihar chief minister Lalu Yadav. He also achieved signal success in building a water-tight case for the extradition of escaped liquor baron Vijay Malhiya from the UK. He led CBI’s case in the UK courts. In Gujarat, he served in crucial posts such as Vadodara’s police commissioner

under then chief minister Narendra Modi.

TELL-ALL TALES

The arrival of “tell-all” books by Viral Acharya and Urjit Patel has whetted the curiosity of many who are looking to find some skeletons tumble out.

Both economists did stints at the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and left in more or less similar circumstances — before the end of their terms. While Mr Patel was RBI Governor, Mr Acharya is a former deputy governor of RBI, who quit six months before his tenure ended in 2019.

According to Mr Acharya, Mr Patel quit because of several attempts to undermine the autonomy of the bank by the government. It was something that was widely discussed in the media at the time. However, Mr Patel had claimed that he had resigned for “personal rea-

sons”, although it was widely speculated that one reason he disagreed with the government was on the issue of parting with the central bank’s reserves. However, he seems to have mended fences now as he has been appointed as Chairman of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy.

Mr Acharya, too, quit after a series of spats with government officials. His book was published close on the heels of Mr Patel’s own book which provides a glance into how India’s bankruptcy code was weakened by several stakeholders within the broader banking system. Mr Acharya has argued that numerous policies “regressed” the economic climate in the country while he was deputy governor between early January 2017 and mid-July 2019.

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quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,843.88	0.12
Nifty 50	11472.30	0.05
S&P 500*	3,428.93	-0.07
Dollar (₹)	74.33	-0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.27	-0.02
Euro (₹)	87.83	-0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	51,081.188	0.37
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	45.92	0.79
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.157	-0.065
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.700	0.054

* As of 9:30 PM IST

LIC Housing rises eight per cent after Q1 results

Shares of LIC Housing Finance Ltd (LICHFL) on Tuesday closed with 8 per cent gains after the company reported a 34 per cent jump in its net profit for the quarter ending June. The stock rose by 8.06 per cent to close at ₹299 on the BSE. On the NSE, it jumped 8 per cent to close at ₹298.95. In volume terms, 21.07 lakh shares were traded on the BSE and over 4 crore shares on the NSE during the day.

Flipkart to shift to 100% Electric Vehicles by 2030



Walmart-owned Flipkart on Tuesday said it will transition completely to the usage of electric vehicles (EVs) by 2030 as part of its sustainability efforts, and has joined the Climate Group's global electric mobility initiative, EV100. EV100 brings together companies committed to accelerating the transition to electric vehicles (EVs) and making electric transport the new normal by 2030.

Satyam investor relations head fined by Sebi

Sebi on Tuesday levied a fine of ₹10 lakh on Satyam Computer Services Ltd's head of investor relations for indulging in insider trading in the firm's scrip. The head of investor relations of Satyam Computer Services Ltd, T.A.N. Murti, violated Prohibition of Insider Trading norms, Sebi order said adding that he had dealt in shares of SCSL while in possession of unpublished price sensitive information.

ICICI Bank uses satellite data to assess agri loans

For the first time in domestic banking, ICICI Bank is deploying satellite data to power farm credit assessment, which it claims will reduce cost for both farmers as well as the lender. The second-largest private sector lender on Tuesday said it has been piloting the project in a few select villages for the past two years and is extending the same to 500 villages in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat now.



RBI stops printing ₹2,000 notes

■ No ₹2,000 note printed in 2019-20; ₹2,000 notes in circulation are on decline

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, AUG. 25

Without announcing a formal demonetisation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) appears to be phasing out ₹2,000 currency notes from circulation if one goes by data published in the RBI Annual Report 2019-20, which was released by the central bank on Tuesday. In its report, the RBI said the ₹2,000 denominated currency note, which was launched after the demonetisation in November 2016, has not been printed in financial

year 2019-2020. The number of ₹2,000 currency notes in circulation is also gradually coming down since 2018. At the end of March 2018, there were 33,632 lakh pieces of ₹2,000 currency notes in circulation. This number came to 32,910 lakh pieces at end-March 2019 and further down to 27,398 lakh pieces at end-March 2020. The ₹2,000 denominated notes constituted 2.4 per cent of the total volume of notes at the end of March 2020, down from three per cent at the end of March 2019 and 3.3 per cent at the

VERY CLEARLY without demonetisation, the RBI maybe phasing out ₹2,000 currency notes. We are not getting any new supply of ₹2,000 notes.

SENIOR BANKER

end of March 2018. In value terms also, the share has come down to 22.6 per cent at the end of March 2020, from 31.2 per cent at the end of March 2019 and 37.3 per cent at the end of March 2018. The share of ₹2,000 notes was

50 per cent in 2017, as the major focus was on remonetising the economy. On the other hand, the circulation of currency notes of denomination of ₹500 and ₹200 has gone up substantially, both in terms of volume and value over the three years beginning 2018. Bankers believe that the RBI is gradually withdrawing ₹2,000 notes from the circulation by not printing notes afresh. Unlike demonetisation, the method would gradually withdraw the notes while allowing them to remain a lender tender.

A senior banker told *Deccan Chronicle*, "Very clearly without demonetisation, the RBI maybe phasing out ₹2000 currency notes. We are not getting any new supply of ₹2,000 notes." A former banker said, "There may be some people who are hoarding ₹2,000 currency notes but the number may not be large. Banks are not reissuing ₹2,000 notes; maybe banks have been told by the RBI not to reissue ₹2,000 notes. It is also easy to calibrate the ATMs with lower currency notes such as ₹500."

SHAKY GROUNDS

THE RBI'S ANNUAL REPORT SHOWS THAT THE INDIAN ECONOMY WAS ON A SHAKY GROUND EVEN BEFORE THE CORONAVIRUS DEALT A SEVERE BLOW.

- The general government fiscal deficit of 25 states and the central government has increased from 5.4 per cent of GDP in 2018-19 to 6.5 per cent in 2019-20. The revised figure is expected to deteriorate further to about 7.5 per cent in 2019-20.
- On a year-on-year basis, direct tax collection has declined by 7.7 per cent in 2019-20 as against a 13.4 per cent increase in 2018-19.
- Indirect tax growth has slowed to 1.7 per cent from 2.9 per cent a year ago.
- Estimates for gross tax revenue in 2019-20 were brought down by ₹ 4.51 lakh crore vis-a-vis budget estimates.

RBI foresees higher food prices despite surplus crop

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs HYDERABAD, AUG. 25

The country's headline inflation is expected to firm up further in the coming months largely due to disruptions in food and manufactured items' supply chains, the RBI said in its annual report for 2019-20. In the same report, the central bank also claims that surplus foodgrain management has become a major challenge for the country. One hand, the RBI said headline inflation picked up strongly during the closing months of 2019-20 and the short-term outlook for food inflation has turned uncertain. On the other hand, the RBI claims that the total production of foodgrains has

ONE HAND, the RBI said the short-term outlook for food inflation has turned uncertain. On the other hand, the RBI claims that the total production of foodgrains has reached a record 296.65 million tonnes in 2019-20.

reached a record 296.65 million tonnes in 2019-20, while total horticulture production — accounting for about 40 per cent of gross value added (GVA) in the farm sector — also reached an all-time high of 320.48 million tonnes. India is now among the leading producers of milk, cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, cotton, sugarcane, fish, poultry and livestock in the world. But the RBI claims that disruptions in the supply

chains of food and manufactured items could amplify sectoral price pressures, thus posing an upside risk to headline inflation. The RBI also stressed on agricultural exports that expose the Indian farmer to international terms of trade and technology; and public and private capital formation in the farm sector. Experience shows that in periods when the terms of trade remained favourable to agriculture, annual average growth in agricultural GVA exceeded 3 per cent. Otherwise, the main instrument of incentive has been minimum support prices, but the experience has been that price incentives have been costly, inefficient and even distortive, the RBI report added.

Difficult to gauge Covid impact: RBI

New Delhi, Aug. 25: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday said it is difficult to accurately assess the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic as the dynamics are still evolving. "Covid-19's epidemiological dynamics are still rapidly evolving in India, rendering difficult an accurate assessment of its full macroeconomic effects," RBI said in its annual report. It said government consumption will have to fuel demand till the economy comes out of the Covid-19 shock and regains pre-Covid-19 momentum. Private consumption, which has lost its discretionary elements across the board, particularly transport services, hospitality, recreation and cultural activities, will come

in later as "behavioural restraints may prevent the normalisation of demand for these activities", RBI said in the annual report. Going forward, it said, "government consumption is expected to continue pandemic-proofing of demand, and private consumption is expected to lead the recovery when it takes hold, with non-discretionary spending leading the way until a durable increase in disposable incomes enables discretionary spending to catch up." The RBI's survey for the month of July indicates that consumer confidence fell to an all-time low, with a majority of respondents reporting pessimism relating to the economic situation, employment, inflation and income. — PTI

Bank frauds double to ₹1.85 lakh cr in 1 year

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, AUG. 25

Bank frauds of ₹1 lakh and above have more than doubled in the previous year to ₹1.85 lakh crore from ₹71,543 crore in 2018-19 period, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its Annual Report 2019-20 released on Tuesday. The number of such cases increased by 28 per cent to 8,707 in 2019-20 from 6,799 in 2018-19 said the RBI report. "Frauds have been predominantly occurring in the loan portfolio (advances category), both

in terms of number and value. There was a concentration of large value frauds, with the top 50 credit-related frauds constituting 76 per cent of the total amount reported as frauds during 2019-20. Incidents relating to other areas of banking, like off-balance sheet and forex transactions, fell in 2019-20," said the RBI said in its report. However, the date of occurrence of these frauds are spread over several previous years and are accounted for in the financial year when they are reported. — PTI

NIPPON INDIA RAISES ₹720CR FROM FIRST NFO

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, AUG. 25

Nippon India Mutual Fund has collected ₹720 crore through its first new fund offer (NFO) after the rebranding of its fund house. The NFO which was conducted digitally and saw a large participation with over 80,000 applications. Nippon India Multi Asset Fund is a unique fund which allows investors to take exposure to four distinct asset classes — domestic equity, foreign equity, commodities and fixed income. The NFO closed on August 21, 2020 and would reopen for subscription from September 2, 2020. "This was the first open ended actively-managed NFO after the brand change, launched under Nippon India Mutual Fund. The overwhelming response strongly reflects our strong distribution capabilities, sound digital infrastructure and trust in newly established brands," said Saugata Chatterjee, co-chief business officer, Nippon India Mutual Fund. "Over 80,000 investors spread across 370 locations invested in the NFO through both digital & offline mode. The fund also received 25,000 SIP applications," it said.

TERI for ₹40L cr green stimulus

New Delhi, Aug. 25: The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) has proposed to revive the Indian economy by exploiting potential of around ₹40 lakh crore in clean energy projects over the next 10 year through government policy interventions but with minimum public spending. TERI has released a discussion paper on 'A Fiscally Responsible Green Stimulus' to revive the Indian economy by creating demand and jobs with policy and regulatory interventions using minimal government spending.

ing, a TERI statement said. The Green Stimulus proposed by the TERI is about ₹40 lakh crore (or \$540 billion), spread over this decade by 2030. TERI suggested to incentivise cleaner transport, which has the investment potential of ₹1.6 lakh crore per annum. It suggested to subsidise fleet modernisation of existing vehicles to BS-VI, use of electric vehicles and provision of buses for public transport. The Institute has also pitched for producing renewable energy from agricultural residues which

have an investment potential of ₹22,470 crore per annum. TERI suggested that the government should announce a commercially viable procurement price for the next five years for briquettes made from crop waste. It has also asked for creating renewable energy from animal husbandry waste, which has investment potential of ₹88,000 crore per annum. The study suggested to introduce a commercially viable feed-in tariff for purchase of electricity generated from animal

husbandry waste (excreta from cattle, poultry, pigs, etc.) by power distribution companies. The institute also says that promoting solar generation in rural India has an investment potential of ₹27 lakh crore. It made a case for a commercially viable feed-in tariff for purchase of electricity generated from rural areas by power distribution companies. Supporting MSMEs to become more green and competitive has savings potential of ₹15,000 crore every year. — PTI

Jack Ma's Ant offers world's biggest IPO

Hong Kong, Aug. 25: Billionaire Jack Ma's Ant Group filed for an initial public offering (IPO) in Hong Kong and Shanghai to bankroll its expansion in financial services and bolster its lead as China's largest online payments platform.



The Hangzhou-based company will issue no less than 10 per cent in new shares of its total capital, according to its filing with the Shanghai exchange. Ant generated 72.5 billion yuan (\$10.5 billion) in revenue in the first half, after full-year sales of 120.6 billion yuan in 2019, it said. The firm posted a profit of 21.2 billion yuan in the first half.

WITH DATA from a billion users of its Alipay app at its back, Ant is pushing broadly into financial services, delivering technology such as artificial intelligence, robo investing and lending platforms.

The crown jewel of the sprawling Alibaba empire, Ant has been accelerating its evolution into an online mall for everything from loans and travel services to food delivery, in a bid to win back shoppers lost to Tencent Holdings Ltd. With data from a billion users of its Alipay app at its back, Ant is pushing broadly into financial services, delivering technology such as artificial intelligence, robo investing and lending platforms. The simultaneous listing could mark one of the biggest debuts in the market, and even top Saudi Aramco's record \$29 billion IPO, a person familiar has said. The firm is targeting a valuation of about \$225 billion, based on an IPO of about \$30 billion if markets are favourable, people familiar with the matter have said. The company will use the proceeds to expand cross-border payments and enhance its research and development capabilities.

ties, according to the filing, which didn't provide a share price range or the amount it intends to raise in the IPO. Unlike Chinese tech giants such as Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., Ant decided against listing in the US at a time of increased scrutiny by the Trump administration of Chinese companies and warnings to US endowment funds to offload their stakes in US-listed Chinese businesses. Ant's Shanghai listing marks a victory for the city's exchange, and is part of an effort by China to establish its own capital markets as tensions with the United States escalate. Alibaba is Ant's largest shareholder, with a 33 per cent stake. Hangzhou Junao, an entity that is owned by key Ant and Alibaba executives, owns 20.66 per cent, while Hangzhou Junhan, which holds shares on behalf of Ant employees, owns a 29.86 per cent stake. — Bloomberg

APPLE IN INDIA

- Apple's first physical store is expected to be opened in Mumbai in 2021. The mobile phone maker is also planning to launch its second Indian store in Bengaluru.
- Apple has already assembling handsets in the country through its manufacturing partners Foxconn and Wistron Corp. Its another partner Pegatron Corp. is also planning to set its first plant in India.

Apple to open online

Bengaluru, Aug. 25: Apple Inc is set to open an online store in India next month, *Bloomberg News* reported on Tuesday, citing a person familiar with the matter. The iPhone maker currently sells its products in the country through third-party vendors and e-commerce firms such as Amazon.com Inc and Walmart Inc-owned Flipkart. The company's online store will be ready for operation in time for the festive season that culminates in Diwali, the biggest spending season in the country, *Bloomberg* said. Apple did not immediately

respond a *Reuters* request for comment. Apple chief executive officer Tim Cook had said here earlier this year that Apple would open its first Indian retail store in 2021. With more than 1 billion wireless subscribers, of which about a third rely on basic handsets, India provides huge growth prospects for smartphone makers, as well as cheap labor to manufacture the devices. Apple also assembles some smartphones, including the iPhone 11, at Foxconn and Wistron's plants in two southern Indian states. — Reuters

Lower demand for API and normalisation of operational expenses expected

Pharma sector's profitability likely to decline

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 25

Pharma, which has been one of the very few sectors that have performed well in the past quarter, may not be able to sustain the performance in the coming quarters. While domestic sales will improve with lifting of the lockdown, moderation in API demand and normalisation of operational expenses will affect profitability. The quality performance of Q1 FY21 is attributed to the strong revenue

growth in the API business and lower operating expenses. The API business revenue grew 31 per cent year-on-year basis and 18 per cent q-o-q in Q1FY21 as demand from global and Indian formulation players remained robust, aided by higher pricing opportunities, according to India Ratings and Research. Indian API players benefited due to the thrust on supply chain continuity from customers and better inventory management in view of supply disruptions

from China and the run up in the prices of API. Increased stocking by different channels also supported growth. However, the growth in the API business will taper off in the near term as companies normalise their buying patterns. India also expects a price correction as the sudden demand normalises. Further, operating expenses, primarily led by the 19 per cent q-o-q decline in the selling expenses, too would normalise. The restricted movement

of medical representatives and other cost savings like lower promotional expenses due to the lockdown led to the operating expenses declining 8 per cent y-o-y and 19 per cent q-o-q in Q1FY21 and had aided profitability. According to Fitch Ratings, focusing on optimising direct costs and reducing fixed costs, including those related to travel and sales and marketing, helped many companies report resilient margins in Q1FY21. Post-lockdown, as com-

petitive pressures rise, companies will eventually revert to in-person engagement with prescribers. Though the companies had cut some expenses with manpower rationalisation and expense curtailment, the overall sustainable cost reduction is unlikely to exceed 10-20 per cent finds Ind-Ra. However, Fitch Ratings believes that sales will rise after a gradual easing of the lockdown measures that caused disruptions across most markets in

April-June. The gradual easing has led to a rise in doctor visits and elective procedures since May in key markets. This will benefit sales, particularly in acute therapy areas. Nevertheless, sustained price erosion in the US generic pharmaceutical market continues to weigh on profitability. "Focus on conserving cash by limiting capex and R&D spending in the near term will support their financial flexibility in the current environment," finds Fitch.

SHORT TAKES

Man U captain to be tried for crime

Thessaloniki, Greece: The trial of Manchester United captain Harry Maguire on charges of “assault”, “bodily harm”, “verbal abuse” and “attempted bribery” opened on Tuesday in the criminal court on the Greek island of Syros, according to a judicial source. According to some British and Greek media on the spot, Maguire’s lawyers raised procedural issues which could lead to the trial being postponed. The international defender was not present, but was simultaneously named in Gareth Southgate’s England squad for matches against Iceland and Denmark next month. Maguire’s lawyers told local media that he had left the Cyclades last week. He could face a maximum prison sentence of seven years, Greek radio station *Skai* said. The 80 million (88 million euros) defender was arrested late on Thursday after a fight with another group at a nightclub in Mykonos. Greek media reported that the fight started when someone in the other group hurt Maguire’s sister. — *AFP*

Ronaldinho out after five months

Asuncion, Paraguay: Retired Brazilian football star Ronaldinho was released from house arrest after spending five months detained in Paraguay for entering the country with a false passport. Paraguayan judge Gustavo Amarilla handed down a suspended sentence of two years in prison for Ronaldinho and his brother Roberto de Assis Moreira, and granted their release. The brothers will also have to pay a fine of \$200,000 between the two of them. Both were arrested last March for possession and use of false Paraguayan passports with which they entered the country to conduct business activities. The retired soccer star was earlier released from a high-security jail in Paraguay but ordered to serve house arrest at a luxury hotel while he was investigated. Ronaldinho will be able to return to Brazil immediately. Defense attorneys Tarek Tuma and Alcides Ceres said their clients will establish residence in Rio de Janeiro. — *AP*

Afghans fail to arrest sex abuser

Kabul: Supporters of the former head of Afghanistan’s football federation, who is accused of sexually assaulting and harassing several players on the women’s national team, prevented Afghan special forces from arresting him, officials said. FIFA imposed a life ban and a fine of 1 million Swiss francs (\$1.06 million) on Keramuddin Karim last year, and Afghan authorities issued an arrest warrant, but he remains at large. The inability to arrest him reflects the lingering power of local warlords and authorities’ failure to uphold women’s rights nearly two decades after the U.S.-led invasion that toppled the Taliban. Amin Sediqqi, the deputy governor of the northern Panjshir province, said the arresting forces were met with a reaction by armed men. He said provincial authorities were not aware of the operation and are now working through local elders to calm the situation. — *AP*

JUDOKA GIVEN 22-MONTH BAN FOR DOPING

New Delhi: Indian judoka Deepanshu Balayan has been handed a 22-month suspension by NADA’s Anti Doping Disciplinary Panel (ADDP) for consumption of prohibited substance Furosemide, which is a diuretic medicine. Balayan had tested positive for the banned substance after his sample was collected during trials held in Bhopal in June last year. Since NADA failed to establish that Balayan’s dope offence was intentional, the panel shot down agency’s recommendation of a harsher punishment of four years. — *PTI*

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ASH STOKES FIRE

Seals details of ‘Mankad’ talk with Ponting

Dubai, Aug. 25: Ravichandran Ashwin says he has spoken to his IPL coach Ricky Ponting on the contentious issue of running out batsmen who back up too far at the non-striker’s end but will reveal the contents of the telephonic conversation only next week.

The issue became a talking point when Ponting, head coach of Ashwin’s team Delhi Capitals, said he would have a discussion with Ashwin on the controversial manner of getting a batsman out ahead of the IPL starting September 19 in the UAE.

Ashwin ran out England batsman Jos Buttler at the non-striker’s end last season when he backed up too far, drawing criticism for his act as many called it against the ‘spirit of the game.’ While Ashwin has reached Dubai, Ponting is set to arrive next week and the two will talk in person before the Indian reveals what transpired between them.

“Ricky Ponting hasn’t yet reached (Dubai). After he comes, we will sit for a chat with him. He said he wants to have a conversation. We have already talked over the phone. It was a very interesting chat,” Ashwin said on his *YouTube* channel.

Ashwin said it’s better to have a face-to-face conversation since the message of the heavily-accented Australians can get lost in translation. “What happens sometimes is Australians’ messages in English get lost in translation and reach us with a different meaning. Even some of their jokes become news. That’s what it is and next week I will reveal a bit more about my conversation with Ricky.”

Ashwin on Monday suggested the introduction of a “free ball” for bowlers if non-strikers back up too far, saying there was nothing wrong with running such batsmen out. “Make it a free ball for the bowler. If the batsmen gets out of that ball, the batting team will be docked five runs. Free hit adds to the drama for a batter, let’s give a chance to bowlers too,” Ashwin had tweeted. — *PTI*

Jimmy first pacer to 600 Test wkts

Southampton, Aug. 25: England paceman James Anderson cemented his place in cricket history by taking his 600th Test wicket when he dismissed Pakistan captain Azhar Ali (caught by England captain Joe Root) in the rain-marred third and final Test at Southampton on Tuesday.

The 38-year-old struck with his 14th ball of the day. And there was enough time left in the day for England, 1-0 up in the three-match contest and on the brink of a first series win over Pakistan in a decade, to press for victory.

Anderson is only the



Ravichandran Ashwin of Delhi Capitals in this file photo.

Rahul banks on coach Kumble

Dubai, Aug. 25: K. L. Rahul expects head coach Anil Kumble to do bulk of the planning, which he feels will help him immensely in his debut as captain of Kings XI Punjab in the IPL, beginning in UAE on September 19.

Like the other seven teams, KXIP players are undergoing a six-day mandatory quarantine in the UAE.

The squad is heavy on players from Karnataka including the captain himself, Mayank Agarwal and Karun Nair. The head coach too is from Karnataka.

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To have someone like Anil *bhai* around helps me immensely this season. I think he (Kumble) will make my life as captain very easy. I know that he would be doing most of the planning and I just have to go out there and carry out the plans.

— **K. L. RAHUL**
Kings XI Punjab captain

me immensely this season. I share a very good relationship with him off the field, coming from the same state,” Rahul told the IPL website.

“I think he (Kumble) will make my life as captain very easy. I know that he would be doing most of the planning and I just have to go out there and carry out the plans,” said the 28-year-old.

Rahul was in red hot form in the past two seasons while batting alongside Chris Gayle, scoring 659 and 593 and in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

“Maxi has been with Kings XI before and has had a successful run with the team. He was one player we were very clear we needed going into the auctions.

“On a given day, he will

9-MAN TEAM WILL CONDUCT DOPE TESTS

New Delhi, Aug. 25: Three high-ranking National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) officials, along with six empanelled Dope Control Officers (DCOs), will be travelling to the UAE for sample collection during this year’s Indian Premier League, which starts on September 19.

According to sources in the NADA, the agency is targeting collection of at least 50 samples during In-Competition (IC) and Out-of-Competition (OOC) testing during the 60-match event which will run till November 10.

“NADA will have nine people in UAE and they will also take help of the UAE’s National Anti Doping Organisation if they require further manpower in this case chapter-ones who help in sample collection,” a senior BCCI official confirmed.

The National doping agency will have three teams with one official and two DCOs at each of the three venues along with local NADO staff in each of the units. — *PTI*

take down any bowling attack and we’ve felt that the last couple of seasons we have missed that impact player in the middle order,” said Rahul.

In Rahul and Gayle, KXIP make one of the most destructive opening pairings in IPL. The captain expects the West Indian to keep winning games for the team.

“I have played for several years with him and share a great friendship with him. He’s a great guy to have in our team. He will be part of our core group and with the kind of experience he has, he will definitely be somebody that wins a lot of games for us,” he added. — *PTI*

Bolt tests Covid+ after B’d day party

Kingston (Jamaica), Aug. 25: Jamaica’s Minister of Health says legendary sprinter Usain Bolt has tested positive for the novel Coronavirus.

Minister Christopher Tufton said Bolt was aware of the results and his recent contacts were being traced.

“It is now public knowledge that Mr Bolt has tested positive. He has been formally notified, I’m told by the authorities,” Tufton told reporters.

“It triggers an approach to questioning, interrogation if you will, which we follow through with contact tracing,” he added.

According to reports, a surprise birthday party was thrown for Bolt by his family and friends when he turned 34 on August 21, with Manchester City star Raheem Sterling and Bayer Leverkusen winger Leon Bailey in attendance. Cricketer Chris Gayle is also said to be present at the event, which was described as a “big, mask-free” gathering that failed to observe health safety measures.

In some videos that surfaced, Bolt was seen dancing with his visitors as they seemed to disregard proper social distancing.

Jamaica’s Prime Minister Andrew Holness also said police are investigating the circumstances surrounding Bolt’s birthday party. “There are reports of an activity related to Usain Bolt. These matters are all being thoroughly investigated and the police will give a report on these matters in near future,” Holness told a virtual news conference.

Bolt said on social media on Monday that he was awaiting the result of a Coronavirus test and was quarantining himself as a precaution.

The 34-year-old retired sprinter who won gold in the 100 and 200 metres at the last three Olympics posted a video on social media to explain the situation. “Good morning everybody. Just waking up. Like everybody, checked social media and saw that social media says I’m confirmed of Covid-19. I did a test Saturday, because I



Usain Bolt

● **According to reports, a surprise birthday party was thrown for Bolt by his family and friends when he turned 34 on August 21, with Manchester City star Raheem Sterling and Bayer Leverkusen winger Leon Bailey in attendance. Cricketer Chris Gayle is also said to be present at the event, which was described as a big, maskless gathering that failed to observe health safety measures.**

work. I’m trying to be responsible, so I’m going to stay in and stay here for my friends,” he said.

Bolt, who appeared to be lying in bed in the video, said he has no symptoms. “Just to be safe, I’ll quarantine myself and just take it easy,” he said.

Jamaica has had fewer than 1,700 cases, a relatively low number in a country of nearly 3 million.

On the track, Bolt was known for his poses — his “Lighting Bolt” became iconic — and of course his post-race celebrations. His speed and charisma made his sport can’t-miss viewing whenever he lined up in the blocks.

Bolt set the world records in the 100 and 200 metres at the 2009 World Championships in Berlin. He last competed internationally at the 2017 World Championships in London.

Bolt and partner Kasi Bennet welcomed the birth of a daughter, Olympia, in May. — *Agencies*

FORMULA ONE ADDS FOUR RACES TO 2020 CALENDAR

Paris, Aug. 25: Four Grand Prix races, in Turkey, Bahrain (two) and Abu Dhabi, have been added to the 2020 Formula One calendar, but the postponed Chinese GP has been cancelled, F1 organisers said.

The addition of the four races and the elimination of the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai bring the race total to 17 for the Coronavirus-affected season.

Formula One returns to Turkey for the first time since 2011, with the Turkish Grand Prix to be run at Istanbul Park on November 15. That is followed by a back-to-back double header in Bahrain, with the Bahrain Grand Prix on November 26 and the Sakhir Grand Prix on December 6. The season-concluding Abu Dhabi Grand Prix will take place at the Yas Marina Circuit on December 13. — *AFP*

Ostapenko pulls out of US Open

New York, Aug. 25: Jelena Ostapenko, the 2017 French Open champion, pulled out of the U.S. Open, citing a change of schedule.

She is the latest woman with a Grand Slam title or high ranking to withdraw from the tournament that begins next week amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Six of the top eight women in the WTA rankings already were out, including No.1 Ash Barty, the reigning champion at Roland Garros, and No.6 Bianca Andreescu, the 2019 winner at Flushing Meadows.

DJOKOVIC BATTLES NECK PAIN FOR A WIN

World number one Novak Djokovic battled through neck pain on the way to a 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 victory over Ricardas Berankis at the Western & Southern Open, where second seed Dominic Thiem crashed out. Djokovic made it through to the Round of 16 despite the sore neck, for which he received treatment on court.

Djokovic twice went down a break in the second set, but broke back both times. He let out a roar

when he broke for a 5-4 lead then calmly served it out. He next faces American Tennys Sandgren, a 6-7 (4/7), 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) winner over 15th-seeded Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime.

The upset of the day was at the opposite end of the men’s draw, as 32nd-ranked Filip Krajinovic of Serbia toppled Austria’s Thiem 6-2, 6-1.

Krajinovic lined up a meeting with Hungarian Marton Fucsovics, who ousted 14th-seeded Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov 7-5, 4-6, 6-2.

Meanwhile, Andy Murray also notched an upset, surprising world number seven Alexander Zverev 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 for his first win over a top-10 player in more than three years.

SERENA MADE TO WORK HARD FOR VICTORY

In women’s action, third-seeded Serena Williams bucked the upset trend that saw top seed Karolina Pliskova and number two Sofia Kenin ousted on Sunday. Serena battled back from the brink against qualifier Arantxa Rus to win 7-6 (8-6), 3-6, 7-6 (7/0). — *Agencies*



Khaleel Ahmed (below) and Siddharth Kaul of the Sunrisers Hyderabad pose for a photograph outside their rooms at a Resort in Dubai on Tuesday.

Kashyap questions training selection

New Delhi, Aug. 25: Former Commonwealth Games champion Parupalli Kashyap on Tuesday questioned his omission from the ongoing national badminton camp in Hyderabad, saying that restricting it to just eight Olympic hopefuls is “illogical”.

The 33-year-old, a former World No.6, insisted that he too has an outside chance of qualifying for the Tokyo Games but he has no way to pursue it as he can’t train at the camp. “I have a couple of questions regarding the camp. I find it illogical to allow only eight people to train. Also, how are these eight, Olympic hopefuls because I think only three have almost confirmed their slot and rest have an outside chance including Srikanth and the women’s doubles pair,” Kashyap

said. “I am ranked 23rd in the world ranking after Sai (B. Sai Praneeth) and (Kidambi) Srikanth, then why haven’t I been considered,” he asked.

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) had allowed resumption of training at the SAI-Pullela Gopichand Academy from August 7 following the Telangana government’s approval on August 1.

Kashyap, who along with wife and fellow shuttler Saina Nehwal, has been training at a separate facility near the academy, said he shared his thoughts with SAI but didn’t get a satisfactory response.

“Gopi *bhaiya* (Pullela Gopichand) advised me to speak to SAI as they made the list. So I spoke to SAI DG and asked him what is the logic behind it? Why

I find it illogical to allow only eight people to train. Also, how are these eight Olympic hopefuls, because I think only three have almost confirmed their slots and rest have an outside chance including Srikanth and the women’s doubles pair.

— **PARUPALLI KASHYAP**
World No.24 badminton player

am I not in the camp? Who decided that we don’t have a chance to qualify when seven-eight tournaments are still left,” he said.

“A day later, a SAI assistant director called me and said this is a directive which has come from higher officials and they have spoken to BAI and SAI, who believe only

these people have a chance to qualify which I found to be strange,” he added.

“I was told that only eight people will train till the Tokyo Games to keep the Olympic hopefuls safe. Now no one is staying at the centre, all are using gyms at different centres, they are meeting people outside, so I don’t understand their explanation of keeping them safe.”

Kashyap reiterated that the SAI-Pullela Gopichand academy is equipped with enough courts to accommodate more players.

“The national centre has nine courts and currently only four people are training. There are nine coaches and two physios for four players who are training for a maximum of two and a half hours.

“So rest of the time the court is empty. Why can’t

other players train for the rest of the time? It makes no sense to me,” he said.

“Everywhere else all are training together, in Bangalore, Lakshya (Sen), who also has an outside chance like me, is training with the rest. If I can’t train at the camp, how will I pursue Olympic qualification?”

World champion P. V. Sindhu, along with Praneeth, former world No.1 Srikanth and women’s doubles player N. Sikki Reddy have resumed training under strict safety protocols at the Gopichand Academy, ending a four-month-long forced hiatus.

Among other Olympic hopefuls, the men’s doubles pairing of Chirag and Satwiksairaj are wary of the Covid-19 threat and have decided to wait.

— *PTI*