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## Prayers at Amarnath



J&K Lt Gov. Manoj Sinha, who is also the chairman of the Amarnathji Shrine Board, pays his obeisance at the holy cave shrine of Amarnath. The annual yatra has been cancelled this year due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. — PTI

## Curfew eased in 8 districts

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 28

The state government has decided to further relax curfew timings by further three hours in eight districts from July 1 to 7. It will now be from 6 am to 9 pm.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy took the

decision during a review meeting on Covid-19 and vaccination on Monday. He said that the positivity rate in Krishna, West Godavari, East Godavari, Prakasam and Chittoor districts is more than five per cent and hence the relaxation.

The Chief Minister said that a decision about the remaining five districts

would be taken after analysing the Covid situation.

Reddy said that the pediatric tele medical services should be available 24 hours for children through the 104 toll free number in the wake of the third wave.

Briefing mediapersons, Sitharaman said, "We are announcing about eight economic relief measures, of which four are absolutely new and one is specific to health infrastructure. A stimulus package worth ₹6,28,993 crore will be spent to support the Indian economy in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

■ Page 2: Jt Collectors must monitor 104 services: CM

## Nirmala gives ₹6.2L-cr boost

### FM announces new stimulus

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO | DC  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

Keeping the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic in view, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday announced a stimulus package worth ₹6.29 lakh crore through eight economic measures to provide relief to individuals as well as businesses in the country.

In the current package, the government said it has focused on health, tourism and others sectors, exports and employment, which were affected by Covid, to boost growth.

Apart from this, an additional ₹1.5 lakh crore under the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) has been announced.

For Covid-affected areas, we are announcing a ₹1.1 lakh crore credit guarantee scheme, out of which ₹50,000 crore for the health sector and ₹60,000 crore for other sectors. This credit guarantee scheme will facilitate new lending among the smallest borrowers and stated that this includes the stressed borrowers."

For the health sector, she said that a maximum loan amount of ₹100 crore would be given and a maximum interest rate is capped at 7.95 per cent. "For other sectors, the interest rate is capped at 8.25 per cent. The coverage will be changed based on evolving needs," she added.

■ Page 2: Small borrowers to get more loans

## T20 WORLD CUP TO SHIFT FROM INDIA TO UAE

New Delhi: The T20 World Cup scheduled to be held in India is being shifted to the UAE owing to the health safety concerns posed by Covid-19, BCCI president Sourav Ganguly said on Monday.

■ Full report on Page 8

## Army foils drone attack bid in J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC  
SRINAGAR, JUNE 28

The Army said Monday that its alert jawans had averted two separate drone activities in the Ratnuchak-Kaluchak belt close to the border with Pakistan in the Jammu region, thereby foiling a possible threat in this sensitive military zone.

This comes a day after two bombs believed to have been dropped by one or two drones rocked the high-security technical area of the Jammu Air Force Station. Two security personnel got minor injuries in these blasts, one of which ripped off the roof of a barracks and the other took

place on an open ground on the night of June 26-27.

The Army said on the intervening night of June 27-28 two separate drone activities — one at 11.45 pm and the second at 2.40 am — were spotted over the Ratnuchak-Kaluchak military area by troops who opened fire at the unmanned aerial vehicles or un-

announced aircraft systems.

Defence spokesman Lt. Col. Devender Anand said: "After the drone activities were noticed, a high alert was sounded and Quick Reaction Teams engaged them (drones), following which both flew away."

■ Page 2: IAF wishes to conduct its own probe

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## WEATHER



Max: 36.8°C  
Min: 27.8°C  
RH: 55%  
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: clear.  
Max/Min  
temp. 36/27 °C

## ASTROGUIDE

**Plava:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Jyeshtha Bahula Panchami till 1.28 pm  
**Star:** Satabhisham till 1.04 pm  
**Varjyam:** 8.07 am to 9.44 am  
**Durmuhurtam:** 8.24 am to 9.17 am;  
11.13 pm to 11.57 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 3 pm to 4.30 pm  
**HILARI CALENDAR**  
**Zeeqad** 17,1441 AH  
**PRAYERS**  
**(SHAHI MASJID)**  
**Fajar:** 4.23 am  
**Zohar:** 12.13 pm  
**Asar:** 4.49 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.43 pm  
**Isha:** 8.02 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY** 6.42 PM  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 5.44 AM  
**MOONRISE TODAY** 10.56 PM  
**MOONSET TOMORROW** 10.55 AM

## COUNTER POINT



Our server has been crashing frequently because the virus is mutating!

## SHORT TAKES

## FAPCCI TO OFFER FOOD PROCESSING EDP COURSE ONLINE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 28

The Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FAPCCI) is organising a 15-day online certificate course on 'Entrepreneurship Development Programme in Food Processing' from July 1.

For further details, the aspirants can contact mobile No: 80085-79624 or vjwfapccci@gmail.com. Alternatively they can call Sruthi on mobile No. 91214-48547/sruthifapcci@gmail.com for details and registrations.

## VSEZ FETCHES ₹1.14L CRORE IN EXPORTS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 28

The Vizag Special Economic Zone (VSEZ) has made exports of the order of ₹1,13,975 crore during the 2020-21 fiscal and recorded an annual growth of 14.05 per cent so far, its development commissioner ARM Reddy stated here on Monday.

This financial year, the exports were of ₹20,172 crore in the first quarter with a 21 per cent and contribution from the pharma sector, at ₹4,240 crore. The export growth would be more impressive if the pandemic is brought under control, he said.

While talking about the virtual unit approval committee (UAC) meeting on Monday, Reddy said no proposal for new units in the VSEZ came up due to the continuing uncertain pandemic situations. However, on the positive side, the pandemic encouraged pharma units to go for corona-related drugs.

The UAC gave approvals for pharma units located in the state, he said.

Eisai Pharma was given the nod for trading of Zonisamide of 1,000kg. Dr Reddy's Srikakulam unit will make 1.95 million tablets of various doses of gastro-resistant medicines for export worth ₹28.83 crore. Divis labs sought nod for broad banding of nutraceuticals related to animal health and colouring agents and will have annual capacities of 69MTs. It will achieve a Net Foreign Exchange (NFE) earning of ₹122 crore in the next five years.

Lee Pharma and Reddy's Lab in Duvvada were given approval to make Covid-related drugs such as Doxycycline, Favipiravir, Esomeprazole, Paracetamol of 14 lakh tablets, Diazepam and Lacosamide of 1.2 lakh injections of various doses. Divis Labs was approved for making 150MTs of Vitamin D2 (nutraceuticals) to earn NFE of ₹244crore.

# YSR's dream of rail line to Bengaluru remains on paper

## Railways to take up works after AP deposits its share of funds

NAGESWARA RAO  
BALLEDA | DC  
KADAPA, JUNE 28

None can say when construction of Kadapa-Bengaluru railway line, the dream project of late Chief Minister Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, will be completed. Of the 268-km long railway line, whose construction started in January 2013, only 21.3 km has been completed so far.

When conceived, both central and state governments decided to equally share the cost of the proposed line, then fixed at ₹2,132 crore. The project deadline was 2018. Currently, the only way to reach Bengaluru from Kadapa by rail is through Renigunta. With completion of the new railway line, the distance to Bengaluru will be reduced to 266 km.

Last January, Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured the state govern-

ment that forest clearances for Kadapa-Bengaluru broad gauge railway line will be expedited. In March 2021, railway minister Piyush Goyal informed that the project has been held up as the state government has not released its share of funds.

Responding to a question raised by YSR Congress Rajya Sabha MP V. Vijay-asai Reddy, Goyal had pointed out that AP government consented to share 50 per cent cost of the Kadapa-Bengaluru railway line via Madanapalle. But the state government had deposited only ₹132.29

crore so far towards its share of the project. With this, 21.3-km-long Kadapa-Pendlimarri section had been completed and commissioned in April 2017. The railway minister maintained that further execution of works will be taken up only after the state deposits its relevant share of funds.

Meanwhile, the estimated cost of the project is rising. Some officers say ₹3,037 crore will be required if the railway line is to be completed by 2027. However, the state government's budgetary allocations do not indicate if the project could be

completed even by 2027.

Telugu Desam leader from Pulivendula Bhumi-reddy Ramagopal Reddy criticised area MP Midhun Reddy, who is YSR Congress leader in Parliament, for failing in building the line of about 150 km running through his own constituency. The TD leader said Kadapa MP Y.S. Avinash Reddy must also take responsibility for completion of the railway line.

Ramagopal Reddy pointed out that an electronics manufacturing cluster is being set up in Kadapa. Along with the proposed steel plant and cement industries, completion of the railway line will be very beneficial for the area.

The TD leader urged Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to act at least now and fulfil the dream of his late father Rajasekhara Reddy.

# CM objects to 'baseless' reports, seek legal action

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 28

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has objected to the "baseless" reports being published by a section of the media and said that they were written out of jealousy, as the state is being applauded for its effective handling of the Covid19 scene.

During a review meeting on Covid here on Monday, the Chief Minister said the stories were written in such a way as to create panic among the people and that legal action must be taken on the two media houses.

Officials said legal action will be taken against two media houses in this respect.

The CM said a publication had highlighted that patients died due to lack of oxygen in Ashram Hospital. In reality, medical oxygen is abundant in the state, he said.

Jagan said the reports were "completely baseless, written with a mischievous mindset, with-

● The Chief Minister said the stories were written in such a way as to create panic among the people and that legal action must be taken on the two media houses.

out any humanity." "People would have believed such reports if they were written during the peak of the pandemic spread. Now, the cases are declining, registering an average positivity rate of less than five per cent. In the current scenario, over 70 per cent of oxygen beds and ventilators are available for the needy in the state."

The officials informed the CM that 750 tonnes of medical oxygen was used when Covid was at its peak. Now, the daily usage has come down to just 180tonnes. All the oxygen allocations given to the state are being stored at the Visakhapatnam steel plant and can be used when required.

The CM questioned how there could be a shortage

of oxygen when the production is surplus in the state.

He criticised a media house for publishing a report misquoting him. "The post of Chief Minister is being devalued and degraded by such writings."

He said while the government is seriously conducting Covid review meetings, such media houses are making fun as if the officials are attending the review meets by way of time-pass.

The CM said the state has a good reputation in dealing with Covid by successfully controlling it. This was possible only because of the efforts put in by all the officers and staff. Starting from the village level to state level, this was made possible by the ANM, volunteers, collectors, district and zonal officers, and medical staff, he stressed.

The officials said legal action will be taken against the two media houses for defaming the government.

## NURSES BODY WANTS GOVT TO GIVE INSURANCE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 28

The AP Government Nurses Association sought the state government to provide an insurance scheme to contract and outsourcing nurses to help their families.

APGNA state president G. Manjula Devi and general secretary R. Siva Kumari said that nurses were the worst sufferers due to the pandemic crisis as many nurses died of Covid-19 while performing duties in government hospitals.

The two APGNA leaders lauded Jaganfor giving top priority to filling vacant posts in the medical and health department in the job calendar.

They requested the CM to provide a government insurance scheme and pay revision to contract and outsourcing nurses working in state hospitals.



Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu along with AP tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao pays floral tributes at the statue of former prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao to mark his birth centenary celebrations at Siripuram in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

# Venkaiah pays tributes to PV, calls him a pioneer of reforms

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 28

Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu said the bold reforms initiated by Narasimha Rao have helped in accelerating the country's development over the past 3 decades.

He said the bold reforms initiated by Narasimha Rao have helped in accelerating the country's development over the past three decades. Former prime minister AB Vajpayee had implemented the reforms started by Narasimha Rao in both letter and spirit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi speeded up the reforms.

"Reforms are the need of the hour and we must adopt the best practices," Venkaiah Naidu said. Praising PV for ending the Licence Raj, the vice president said Rao was

the architect of India's economic liberalization. "Importantly, it was Rao who facilitated India's entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO)," he pointed out.

Recalling that PV had great love for languages, Naidu noted that among the deceased's many works, he translated the epic Telugu novel 'Veyi Padagalu' into Hindi titled as 'Sahasra Phan' and also published 'Abala Jeevitam', a Telugu translation of the famous Marathi novel, 'Pan Lakshai Kon ghetu'.

Expressing his disappointment that a great leader like Narasimha Rao did not get the recognition he deserved, the VP said, "Let us highlight his contributions for nation-building on his birth centenary celebrations."

# Small borrowers to get more loans

FROM PAGE 1

This is additional to the ₹3 lakh crore announced under the scheme last year. "The new credit guarantee scheme will give loans to small borrowers, through Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs), where the maximum loan to individuals will be ₹1.25 lakh at an interest rate below two per cent — as prescribed by the RBI. Our focus will be new loans, stressed borrowers except NPAs to be covered and the loan duration of three years under the scheme," she said.

The finance minister also announced job benefits, extending the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana and loan guarantees for Covid-affected sectors such as tourism.

For the tourism sector, the finance minister unveiled a new scheme to revive the sector. "Financial support will be ext-

ended to more than 11,000 registered tourist guides and travel & tourism stakeholders (TTS). These TTS will receive up to ₹10 lakh loan, while licensed tourist guides will get up to ₹1 lakh loan," Sitharaman said.

"In the tourism scheme, free tourist visas will be offered to five lakh tourists. This scheme is applicable till March 31, 2022, or till the first five lakh tourist visas get covered, whichever is earlier. One tourist can avail benefit only once," she added.

Besides, the finance minister also announced an additional ₹23,220 crore for short-term emergency preparedness with an emphasis on paediatrics care. This is on top of ₹15,000 crore provided in the Budget. Further, she also said that measures have been announced relating to North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Ltd, Digital India, and PMGKY.

# '1.83L jobs created in 2 yrs of YSRC govt'

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 28

Government adviser on Public Affairs Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has slammed a section of the media for "conspiring against the state government and writing baseless reports and articles" with the sole agenda of tarnishing the image of the YSRC government.

Speaking to the media here on Monday, he rubbished an article in a vernacular media alleging that the government had left teacher posts vacant. Some 8,000 schools are being operated with each having a single teacher, it was alleged. He claimed that the state government has created 1.83 lakh jobs in two years since its formation in mid-2019.

## FACULTY | SHORTAGE Vacancies rampant in most medical colleges in the state

# Cash-crunch forces varsities to close depts

NAGABHUSHANAM  
HOSKOTE | DC  
ANANTAPUR, JUNE 28

Human anatomy, a key subject in medical teaching, faces an acute shortage of professors in medical colleges. After a senior professor of the anatomy department succumbed to Covid a few days ago, there is no one to teach the subject in Anantapur Government Medical College. In fact, this situation prevails in

most medical colleges in the state.

Shortage of faculty is forcing varsities and technical institutions to close some departments from the next academic year.

For instance, in the absence of recruitments, Sri Krishnadevaraya University in Anantapur is closing 10 departments next year.

Already English department has been closed in many universities following the retirement of the

existing faculty.

JNTUs at Anantapur and Kakinada face serious shortage of faculty, including key departments in both graduation and post graduation. More than 400 vacancies exist in JNTUA alone. Professional courses such as agriculture, pharma and diploma colleges are bearing the brunt.

"Even after completing the six-year Pharm D course, many students are struggling for jobs as there

are no campus recruitments", lamented members of the student association.

Several universities are unable to go about fact-finding committee inspections for grant of affiliation to private degree colleges.

Interestingly, more than 300 PhD thesis books submitted in 2019 have not been cleared for adjudication in Rayalaseema University reportedly due to staff crunch.

AISF leader Manohar demanded the government to fill up the vacancies and maintain quality failing which the entire system could collapse. As it is, companies are not keen on hiring students from these varsities, and only five engineering colleges in the region attract recruiters.

A senior JNTUA professor called for reforms in the system based on which they should go about recruitment of faculty.

He added: "As a result of the alertness and proactive approach of our jawans, a major threat was thwarted in the area. The security forces are on high alert and the search operation is in progress."

Reports said one of the drones was hovering over the brigade HQ of an Army unit located in the Kaluchack garrison.

The probe by the Indian Air Force into the disquieting blasts at its overly sensitive airbase in Jammu, with the incident seen as a major security lapse by the authorities, is now rolling. A National Investigation Agency team had visited the scene on Sunday morning to gather initial evidence and there is a possibility that the NIA, the country's premier counter-terrorist task force, will be asked to take over the probe.

However, sources told this newspaper that the IAF authorities have told the government that it is capable enough of probing the incidents and take them to their logical conclusion on its own.

The Air Chief, Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria, is likely to visit the Jammu airbase either on Tuesday or Wednesday after he returns from a three-day official visit to Bangladesh for an on-the-spot assessment of the situation arising out of the blasts. Late Sunday, he had telephoned the two IAF personnel injured in the twin blasts, Arvind Singh and S.K. Singh, to enquire about their wellbeing.

Explaining the NIA team's visit to the blast site, the sources said that at the National Investigation Act 2008 gives the NIA powers to take suo motu cognisance of terror activities in any part of the country and register a case. In 2019, this law was amended to expand the type of offences the agency could investigate and prosecute, including the ones coming under the Explosive Substances Act 1908, the sources added.

The J&K police have also taken up the investigation into the blasts after an FIR was filed at the Satwari PS.



## SHORT TAKES

## 4 youths drown in Vasishta Godavari

**Kakinada:** Four students from Lankala Gannavaram drowned in the Vasishta Godavari in P. Gannavaram mandal of East Godavari district. They had gone to the river to celebrate clearing the SSC exam. The victims were identified as Bandaru Naveen Kumar, Yerramsetty Ratnasagar, Panthala Pavan and Khandavilli Vinay.

## MAN HELD FOR MURDER OF WIFE AT RUIA

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JUNE 28

The mystery over spotting the burnt body of a woman packed in a suitcase and set on fire at a secluded spot in the Ruia Hospital area here last week has been cracked. Police zeroed in on her husband based on evidence he killed her.

The body was first spotted by passers-by who quickly called the police on Wednesday. A team from Alipiri station led by CI Devendra Kumar launched an investigation. Some 85-90 per cent of the body surface had been charred.

Forensic teams confirmed that it was a woman. Cops checked about missing cases from the nearby areas, but could obtain no lead.

However, after days of investigation, police established her identity as Bhuvaneswari, 27, a native of Punganur's Ramasamudram in Chittoor district. She was married to Srikanth Reddy, a native of Badvel in Kadapa district, two and a half years ago and the couple has an 18-months-old girl.

Three months ago, the couple shifted their base from Hyderabad to an apartment in Tirupati.

"Srikanth Reddy was currently unemployed. He used to quarrel with his wife. As per evidence we obtained, he killed his wife and packed her body in a suitcase. He left it at a secluded spot in the Ruia hospital premises. Later, at night, he went there, poured petrol on the suitcase and burnt it," a senior police officer said.

The police took the woman's husband into custody. They also arrested the driver of a vehicle who helped the man transport the body to the hospital area in his taxi cab.

## 1,953 AREAS VULNERABLE IN PRAKASAM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, JUNE 28

As part of an exercise to contain the spread of Covid virus, Prakasam district authorities identified 1,953 areas in the district that are vulnerable as they are frequented by people from other districts and states.

Officials have been planning to conduct a special drive to conduct 26,000 Covid-19 tests in these areas within one week.

During a review on containing the Covid-19 pandemic in industries in Ongole on Monday, Collector Pravin Kumar told the medical and health officials to carry out special Covid testing drive in granite quarries and industries, brick and construction industries and transport sector.

## MANTRALAYAM OPERATIONAL, SAYS MUTT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, JUNE 28

Mantralayam Sri Raghavendra Swamy Mutt authorities on Monday clarified that devotees can have darshan, blessings and prasadam without any problems as no water has entered the Muth premises.

In a press release, Raghavendra Swamy Mutt pointed out that rituals, including procession of Lord Prahladaraja and samstahana pooja of Sri Subhudendra Theertha had been conducted as usual on Monday.

The clarification came after videos of water logging in many parts of Mantralayam had gone viral following heavy rainfall in the town on Sunday. Devotees from various parts of the state contacted Mutt authorities whether the situation is as bad as when heavy floods hit the temple eight years ago.

The press release pointed out that only low-lying areas of Mantralayam have been waterlogged.

## Protest against government



Contract and outsourcing nursing staff of King George Hospital display placards as they stage a protest against the government demanding the regularisation of their jobs, at the King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

— DC

## Amid vital installations, drones not authorised

## Doubts over safety after 'drone bombing' at Jammu IAF base

V. KAMALAKARA RAO |  
DC  
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 28

Is Andhra Pradesh at large and Visakhapatnam in particular safe from drones? Doubts arise in the wake of twin bomb blasts triggered by drones on Sunday in Jammu and Kashmir.

Vizag, projected as executive capital of AP, has several places of high-security concern, including the Eastern Naval Command, airport and many key and vital establishments.

When *Deccan Chronicle* checked on latest status of drones owned by government and private operators, apart from regulations that authorities have put in place, it learnt that the state has approximately over 2,000 drones, half of them in Visakhapatnam itself. However, less than 10 per cent of drones are authorised. *DC* also found that AP Police Head Office does not maintain a proper register on drone operations being carried out in the state. Police, however, possess 54 drones.

Mostly youngsters, like college students, software engineers and wedding video-photographers, among others, operate drones for film shoots and academic purposes. A few drones are also being used for agricultural operations, mainly sprinkling pesticides and fertilisers.

Then tech-savvy chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu

## DRONE TRACK



- AP has more than 2,000 private drones, the police has 54
- Vizag city has more than 1,000 private drones
- Drones being used for agriculture purposes also
- Less than 10% of drones are registered
- A drone weighing more than 249 grams must be registered with DGCA
- Drone operation is strictly prohibited at red zone areas like government buildings, schools and hospitals
- Drones can be operated with permission from local police in yellow zones
- Drones can be flown freely in green zones
- The state has only one green zone at Puttaparthi in Anantapur district

## No drone has police permission in Vizag

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM,  
JUNE 28

No drones were officially registered and none of the drone operators have taken permission from the Vizag City Commissionerate of Police so far, said Commissioner of Police Manish Kumar Sinha.

"We will start tracking the drones and the operators from now onwards. We will also have to conduct awareness cam-

paigns on the usage of drones. We will do it from now," Sinha told *DC*.

The city with a population of nearly 25 lakh is a hub of many defence wings like Eastern Naval Command, shipyard, Visakhapatnam and Gangavaram ports, airport apart from the largest beach in south India. People here use drones for various purposes like film shoots, short films, wedding photography among others.

encouraged drones under a special project - Made in AP - Drones during 2018.

It is learnt police are not much aware of DGCA rules. There have hardly been any orientation programmes so far. As per Directorate

General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), a drone that weighs more than 249 grams must be registered with DGCA. The drone operator must be trained by an authorised training agency. Not just that, local police must issue permission to

operate a drone in the designated Red, Yellow and Green zones.

Drones are strictly prohibited over Red zone areas like government buildings, schools and hospitals. They can be flown only with prior permission in Yellow zones but only if okayed by local police. Andhra Pradesh has only one green zone at Puttaparthi in Anantapur. No permission is required to operate drones there. Drones are strictly prohibited in Tirumala without valid permission from the state government.

An Andhra University's law professor said, "It will be legally problematic if drones land in wrong hands or hover over sensitive places."

When contacted, AP deputy inspector general of police (technical services) G. Pala Raju told *Deccan Chronicle* that they are tracking details of drone operations across the state following the incident in Kashmir.

## DELTA VARIANT CASE FOUND IN VZM DISTRICT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM,  
JUNE 28

A case of a 23-year-old woman getting infected with the Delta variant from Vizianagaram district was reported on Monday. However, the district medical and health officer Dr S.V. Ramana Kumari said this was not Delta Plus and the people need not panic.

The DMHO said the woman and her husband tested positive and were undergoing treatment at their home. Her in-laws tested negative. She said all the four were healthy and the infected couple has recovered from the virus.

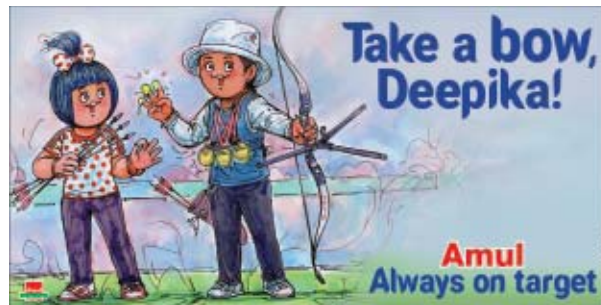
She said as a matter of routine, the samples of suspected patients were sent to Hyderabad every fortnight and only her case surfaced as Delta variant. But she is healthy and no complaints so far, the DMHO said, appealing to the people not to lower their guard and maintain all the Covid-19 protocols.

## SHARP FALL IN CORONAVIRUS CASES IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 28

The number of Covid-19 infections saw a major drop in Andhra Pradesh on Monday with the registration of 2,224 new infections on its daily chart, against the 4,250 cases on Sunday. Earlier, the daily chart used to see above 4,000 cases per day. The testing of samples has also decreased to 71,758 against the second wave normal of nearly one lakh a day. As many as 4,714 patients were discharged after recovery from the infection in 13 districts. Of the 71,758 samples tested, 2,224 were found infected. AP conducted a total 2,18,04,691 Covid-tests so far. The state's test positivity rate dropped to 3 per cent and recovery rate is 97 per cent as of now.

The total Covid-19 infections in AP were 1,88,2096 and total recoveries were 18,27,214. Some 29 more deaths were registered on the daily chart, raising the death toll to 12,630. Six new Covid deaths were reported in Chittoor district, five in Krishna, four each in East Godavari, Guntur and Srikakulam districts and two each in Anantapur and Nellore.



## Genome facility to trace Delta plus at SVIMS

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC  
TIRUPATI, JUNE 28

The facility for genome sequencing to identify new variants of Covid-19 is to start soon in the virology laboratory of the Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS) here. This will make it the first lab in the state to achieve self-reliance for complete sequencing, which helps in identifying mutations of the virus at the state level.

Even before the state's first case of Delta plus variant was found here, SVIMS has been urging the state government, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and private testing labs to get an inventory of infrastructure, technical expertise and machinery to start genome sequencing of Covid-19 samples at a local level.

SVIMS currently sends samples to the National Institute of Virology in Pune and CCMB in Hyderabad. Also, samples from across the state were so far being sent to various institutes but reports always invariably came late.

For instance, with regard to the first Delta plus variant case, the sample of the person was sent to CCMB on April 5 and the result was out on June 23.

● **EVEN BEFORE** the state's first case of Delta plus variant was found here, SVIMS has been urging the state government, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and private testing labs to get an inventory of infrastructure, technical expertise and machinery to start genome sequencing of Covid-19 samples at a local level.

Considering the gravity of the situation, SVIMS, led by its Director Dr B. Vengamma, purchased the genome sequencing machine, with TTD funds. The machine is to be installed soon. A team from the vendor and the ICMR will provide special training to SVIMS lab technicians.

Confirming the development, SVIMS Director Dr Vengamma told *DC* that the facility will be made available in the SVIMS lab soon for getting information about the new variants of the virus at the local level.

"The upcoming facility may augment capacity for testing and identification of mutations and variations of SARS-CoV-2. Thereafter, appropriate training will be provided to the staff and samples will be tested as per ICMR guidelines", she said.

## HC ORDERS INVESTIGATION INTO COVID PATIENTS' DEATHS IN RUIA HOSPITAL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 28

Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday heard a petition on deaths of Coronavirus patients at the Ruia Hospital in Tirupati.

Counsel for petitioner Y. Balaji sought to point out that though the deaths had occurred due to negligence on part of government and hospital officials, no FIR has been registered as yet. Further, there is no clarity on how many people died due to shortage of oxygen.

Counsel also pointed to inequality in payment of ex-gratia. While ₹1 crore had been announced for victims of LG Polymers in Visakhapatnam, it is only

● **THE HIGH** Court adjourned hearing on the petition for two weeks after asking the government, police and hospital to file their counters.

₹10 lakh for those who died at Ruia Hospital.

The High Court agreed with petitioner's contention that a case should be registered into deaths at the hospital and investigated. The court directed state government to inquire as to whose negligence led to the deaths at Ruia Hospital.

The High Court adjourned hearing on the petition for two weeks after asking the government, police and hospital to file their counters.

## STAGE SET FOR BRAHMOTSAVAS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, JUNE 28

Stage set for Brahmotsavas at Sri Guruvayoor Maha Vishnu shrine at Nellore, which is the only Guruvayoorappa temple in South Coastal Andhra

Pradesh, from Tuesday.

The six days festival will commence at the temple located in the premises of Ayyappa temple with Mahabhishekam to the presiding deity and his consorts Maha Lakshmi and Goda Devi at 8 am on Tuesday.

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SHORT TAKES

13-YEAR-OLD GANGRAPED IN UTTAR PRADESH

**Mahoba (UP), June 28:** A 13-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped four months ago and a health worker colluding with the criminals gave anti-abortion pills to the pregnant minor, police said on Monday.

Three of the four men who allegedly raped the girl in a village under Srinagar Police Station area of the district and the health worker have been arrested, they said.

The incident came to light on Friday when the condition of the girl, who became pregnant, deteriorated after she was given anti-abortion pills by the Accredited Social Health Activists (Asha) worker named Sushila, police said.

In her statement to police, the victim alleged that B.P. Singh, Ram Babu Singh, Raghu Raikwar and Shatrughan Singh had raped her while Sushila was part of a conspiracy to cover up the crime.

After a case was registered on Sunday, the four accused including the Asha worker were arrested while the hunt is on for the fifth culprit, SHO of Srinagar Police Station Sanjay Sharma said. The victim's statement will be recorded in the court soon, he added.

TOP LASHKAR COMMANDER ARRESTED

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, JUNE 28

Two officers and a jawan of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) have been injured in a fierce gunfight with militants, raging in Malhoora area on the peripheries of Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar since Monday afternoon. An earlier report had said that a suspected Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) cadre was killed in the clash but the officials did not confirm it.

Earlier during the day on Monday, the J&K police had arrested what it claimed is a top commander of the LeT from a car after it was stopped at a makeshift checkpoint laid by it at Parimpora neighbourhood.

It is believed that the LeT commander Nadeem Abrar, who the police said has been involved in several militancy related incidents, identified the place where the militants' group currently engaged in the gunfight with the security forces was hiding.

The police and CRPF sources said that the injured CRPF Assistant Commandant Satendra Kumar and Constable Muhammad Waseem who were injured in the clash were immediately taken to the 92-Base Hospital of the Army in Srinagar's Badami Bagh Cantonment.

DIDI ALLEGES DHANKHAR HAS 'TAINTED' PAST

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JUNE 28

Describing West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar as "corrupt", Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday alleged in an explosive outburst that he was earlier charge-sheeted for his role in the infamous 1996 Jain hawala scam.

The Trinamul Congress boss also claimed while Dhankhar's name was later dropped after "the court was managed", a PIL was filed later and has since been pending against him in the court.

She further challenged the Centre, if it was unaware of Dhankhar's tainted past, to check the chargesheet in the high-profile financial scam.

Retaliating over Banerjee's unprecedented attack within hours, a "disappointed" governor denounced her claims for creating a "sensation" and accused her of lying.

Banerjee told the media at Nabanna, the state secretariat: "Someone, who was a journalist, told me the present governor's name was in the Jain hawala case in 1996. He was charge-sheeted. But they went to court to clear his name. Again, a public interest litigation was filed there. It is still pending. He is a corrupt man, a corruption-oriented man. What more do you want to know?" She added: "Why does the Central government allow a Governor like him to continue? If the Central government is unaware of his involvement, I can explain it. Let the chargesheet of the Jain hawala case be brought out to check whether his name was there or not. The court was managed... But another case was filed later. It is yet to bear any outcome."

Militants kill cop, his wife and daughter

SPO's son is in the Army; IGP says perpetrators of this 'act of cowardice' could be foreign militants

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, JUNE 28

A special police officer (SPO) was shot dead, and his wife and daughter critically injured by suspected militants in J&K's Pulwama district late on Sunday night.

The mother-daughter duo succumbed to their injuries in hospital later. The SPO's son is reportedly serving in the Army.

The police said two to three gunmen barged into the house of SPO Fayaz Ahmed at Hariparigam village of Awantipora area of Pulwama and started indiscriminate firing, resulting into the on-the-spot death of the police official and grievously injuring his 45-year-old wife Raja Banoo and daughter Rafia Jan, aged 23.

Local sources said the SPO's wife and daughter had tried to save him from the assailants' bullets.

The trio was rushed to a nearby healthcare facility, where doctors declared Ahmed brought dead while as his wife and daughter were shifted to the Government Medical College Hospital in Anantnag district.

However, Banoo succumbed to her injuries within a few hours, the police and hospital sources said.

As the condition of the SPO's daughter deteriorated, she was brought to Srinagar's Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences for specialised treatment, but she too died around 4 am on Monday, the hospital said.

Reports said Ahmed's son is serving in the Territorial Army and was on duty when the attack took place.

IGP (Kashmir range) Vijay Kumar, who with other police officers visited the family on Monday, said the perpetrators of this "act of cowardice" could be foreign militants of Jaish-e-Muhammad.

"The J&K police will soon identify and neutralise the terrorists involved in this barbaric act soon. We are saddened by this incident. There is a movement of Jaish-e-Muhammad in this area, and it must be them," he told reporters, adding: "Targeting the wife and daughter of a policeman is an act of cowardice."



Army personnel patrol during a high alert after two drones were noticed hovering over Ratnuchak-Kaluchak military station area on Sunday night in Jammu on Monday. — PTI

More than 300 drones sighted after Aug. 2019 along border with Pak

New generation Agni Prime missile test fired successfully

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 28

India on Monday successfully test-fired new generation nuclear capable Agni Prime, an advanced version of Agni-1 missile off the Odisha coast.

The surface-to-surface short-range ballistic missile was fired at 10.55 am from the Abdul Kalam Island in Bhadrak district. Various telemetry and radar stations positioned along the eastern coast tracked and monitored the missile, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) official sources said.

The nuclear-capable missile has been designed and developed by the DRDO.

With a range of 1,000 km to 2,000 km, Agni-Prime can carry a payload of 1000 kg. The missile is

● **WITH A RANGE** of 1,000 km to 2,000 km, Agni Prime can carry a payload of 1000 kg. The missile is lighter and much sleeker than Agni-1.

lighter and much sleeker than Agni-1.

Agni 1, 2, 3 and Prithvi are already in the arsenal of armed forces. All these missiles which have a strike range of over 3,000 km have given India an effective deterrence capability.

On September 30, 2020, India had successfully test-fired an extended version of surface-to-surface supersonic cruise missile BrahMos. The missile was tested from Chandipur Integrated Test Range in Odisha's Balasore district.

BrahMos is capable of hitting targets at more

than 400-km range. Source said that the airframe and booster of the missile have been developed indigenously.

BrahMos Aerospace is a joint venture between India's DRDO and Federal State Unitary Enterprise NPO Mashinostroyeniya of Russia.

The missile can be launched from submarines, ships, aircrafts, as well as from land platforms. BrahMos is regarded as the fastest supersonic cruise missile in the world. It is operational with Indian Army, Navy and Air Force.

On November 17, 2020 when India was facing border tension with China, the DRDO had flight-tested indigenously-developed Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM) air defence system from the same ITR.

two Union Territories.

There were 167 sightings of drones along the western front (largely Jammu and Punjab) in 2019, 77 last year and about 60 this year till now, as per the data.

"These are minimum or to say the confirmed sightings by BSF troops and other security agencies personnel along the India-Pakistan border," a senior officer in the security establishment said.

There could be 50-60 more such sightings

which are not included in the data for reasons like capturing only the whirring sound of the drone, difficulty to differentiate between a balloon and a drone and unspecified suspicious flying objects, the officer said.

Officials said the BSF also tested a prototype of a counter-drone system along this front in October, 2019 while some similar trials were held at its campus in Bhondsi near here around the

same time.

The latter was part of a multi-stakeholder national conference held by the central police think tank—the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD).

"What is largely available technology at present is a circular counter-drone security system that is suited well to secure a military installation or campus," another officer said on the condition of anonymity. — PTI



Rajnath Singh

INDIA NEVER RESORTS TO AGGRESSION, SAYS RAJNATH

**New Delhi, June 28:** In a clear message to China from eastern Ladakh, defence minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said India is a peace-loving nation that never resorts to any kind of aggression but is always prepared to give a befitting reply if provoked or threatened.

Addressing soldiers in a forward location on the second day of his visit to the region, Singh said India wants to resolve disputes with the neighbouring countries through dialogue but asserted that the nation's safety and security will not be compromised at any cost.

The defence minister also paid glowing tributes to the 20 soldiers killed in the Galwan Valley clashes in June last year and said the country will never forget their sacrifices.

Singh's three-day visit to the region comes in the midst of a stalemate in resolving over a year-long standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in several friction points in eastern Ladakh though they withdrew troops and weapons from Pangong lake areas in February.

The defence minister said India is a peace-loving country and does not threaten anyone but the country will not tolerate if anyone threatens it, seen as a direct message to China.

"We had to face a big challenge along the Northern border last year. But our armed forces displayed their courage and dedication to deal with it...Our Army has the capability to give a befitting reply to every challenge," he said.

The minister said disputes can be resolved through dialogue if there is a clear intent for it. "We have always worked for world peace. We never attack anyone. Our objective has never been to achieve victory against anyone. India has neither attacked any country nor occupied an inch. Our intention is very clear," he said. — PTI

TIES | VITAL

Lieutenant Governor asks cops to speed up probe into suspicious interfaith marriages

Lens on interfaith marriages in Valley

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, JUNE 28

The Jammu and Kashmir police has stepped up investigation into alleged manoeuvring in a recent case of interfaith marriage which has caused considerable suspicion and mistrust between the majority Muslim and minority Sikh communities of the Valley.

An 18-year-old Sikh girl from Srinagar's Chatti Patshahi, Rainawari area who, the community leaders suspect, was forcibly converted to Islam and then married to a Muslim man almost thrice of her age has been restored to her parents.

But the Sikh leaders are

wary of the police's role in this case and a similar marriage reported earlier from the city's Mehjoor Nagar. They are unhappy also at the silence being maintained by Kashmir's Muslim leadership and the civil society vis-a-vis such happenings.

The official sources said that Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, has asked senior police officers to hold fast investigation into the incidents. The police officers - Inspector General of police, Vijay Kumar, and SSP Srinagar, Sandeep Chaudhary- were present at a meeting of joint delegation of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and members of several Sikh



Members of Jago Party stage a protest outside J&K House over the abduction of a Sikh woman in Srinagar, in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Gurdwara Management Committees of Kashmir had had with Sinha to raise the issue.

The delegation led by

DSGMC president, S. Manjinder Singh Sirsa, in the backdrop of the latest and previous incidents of Sikh women's embracing

Islam either before or after marrying Muslim men demanded official ban on conversions in J&K. While the Sikh community leaders allege that these women were converted to Islam and married to Muslim men in "suspicious manner" and the police and other authorities "appeared to be part of such manipulations rather apparently acted as facilitators", some couples and their families have publicly claimed that these interfaith marriages were solemnised at the own sweet will of these Sikh women.

The Sikh leaders said that in the latest incident the police made the parents of the girl sit at the

outer gate of a court here while the judge was hearing the case.

"Not only that, the police made the parents of the girl married to a 50-year-old man who has already been through two divorces to sign some papers which caused suspicion not only in the couple but the entire community," said a Sikh leader.

Former CM Omar Abdullah tweeted, "Any move to drive a wedge between Sikhs & Muslims in Kashmir will cause irreparable harm to J&K. The two communities have supported each other through thick & thin, having withstood countless attempts to damage age old relationships."



SHORT TAKES

1 DEAD, 13 HURT IN TWO CHICAGO SHOOTINGS

**Chicago:** Two separate shootings left one person dead and at least 13 others injured on Sunday night in Chicago, police said.

A woman died, and four men and a teenager were wounded when an SUV drove by and shots were fired in the South Shore area just before 9 pm, news outlets reported. The group of six was standing outside when the gunfire erupted. The woman was shot six times and taken to a hospital where she was later pronounced dead, police said. The four men and a 15-year-old boy were taken to hospitals where their conditions were said to be stable.

About two hours later, a separate shooting in the Marquette Park area wounded eight people, Chicago fire officials said. A vehicle collision was also reported nearby in which two people were injured.

It was not immediately clear how the shooting and the crash may be related.

UKRAINE, U.S. BEGIN BLACK SEA DRILLS

**Kiev:** Ukraine and the United States launched joint naval exercises in the Black Sea on Monday in a show of Western cooperation with Kiev as it faces off with Russia.

The drills come just days after the British navy's HMS Defender passed near Russian-annexed Crimea in the Black Sea, with Moscow saying it fired warning shots at the destroyer to ward it off.

The Sea Breeze drills — which have taken place 21 times since 1997 — will involve some 5,000 military personnel from more than 30 countries. The exercises will last two weeks and involve around 30 ships, including the missile destroyer USS Ross.

Ukrainian navy commander Oleksiy Neizhpapa said during an opening ceremony in Odessa that the exercises would send a "powerful message to maintain stability and peace in our region." Russia said it fired warning shots last Wednesday at the HMS Defender after what it said was a violation of its territorial waters.

U.S. NORTHWEST, CANADA RECORD HIGHEST TEMP.

**Ottawa:** Swathes of the United States and Canada endured record-setting heat on Sunday, forcing schools and Covid-19 testing centers to close and the postponement of an Olympic athletics qualifying event, with forecasters warning of worse to come.

The village of Lytton in British Columbia broke the record for Canada's all-time high, with a temperature of 46.6 degrees Celsius (116 Fahrenheit), said Environment Canada.

And in Eugene, Oregon, a temperature of 43.3 degrees Celsius (110 degrees Fahrenheit) forced organisers to postpone the final day of the US Olympic track and field trials, moving afternoon events to the evening.

On Sunday in Seattle, Washington state, the temperature hit 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), a record that surprised residents not used to warmer climes.

SWEDISH PM RESIGNS AFTER NO-TRUST VOTE

**Stockholm:** Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Lofven resigned on Monday, one week after he lost a vote of no confidence, leaving it up to the speaker of parliament to begin the search for a replacement.

Lofven could have either called a snap election or resigned following the no-confidence vote last week.

He told a press conference that a snap election was "not what is best for Sweden", pointing to the difficult situation the Covid-19 pandemic posed, coupled with the fact that the next general election — which would go ahead regardless — is a year away.

"With that starting point, I have requested the speaker to relieve me as prime minister," Lofven said.

The Social Democrat leader — a master of consensus for some, a dull and visionless party man for others — had seven days after the confidence vote to contemplate his options and try and secure a parliamentary majority for a potential reforming of his government.

US attacks Iran-backed forces

Air strike marks Biden admin's second military action in region

Iraq slams air strikes by US on pro-Iran armed groups

**Washington, June 28:** The US military, under the direction of President Joe Biden, conducted air strikes on Sunday against what it said were facilities used by Iran-backed militia groups near the border between Iraq and Syria.

Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said that the militias were using the facilities to launch unmanned aerial vehicle attacks against US troops in Iraq.

Kirby said the US military targeted three operational and weapons storage facilities two in Syria and one in Iraq.

He described the air strikes as defensive, saying they were launched in response to the attacks by Iran-backed groups.

The United States took necessary, appropriate, and deliberate action

**Baghdad, June 28:** Iraq on Monday condemned overnight US air strikes against Iran-backed armed groups on the Syrian-Iraqi border that killed at least seven fighters and sparked calls for revenge from Iraqi armed factions.

The second such raid on pro-Iran targets since US President Joe Biden took office, described by the Pentagon as "retaliatory", led to fears of a new escalation between Tehran and Washington and came

despite faltering efforts to revive a key deal over Iran's nuclear programme.

Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi condemned the attack as a "blatant and unacceptable violation of Iraqi sovereignty and Iraqi national security".

"Iraq reiterates its refusal to be an arena for settling scores," Kadhemi added in a statement, urging all sides to avoid any further escalation.

The Hashed, an Iraqi

paramilitary alliance that includes several Iranian proxies and has become the main power broker in Baghdad, said the strikes killed four of its fighters in the Qaim region, some 13 kilometres (eight miles) away from the border.

The fighters were stationed there to prevent jihadists from infiltrating Iraq, the group said, denying that they had taken part in any attacks against US interests or personnel.

—AFP

the region. In February, the US launched airstrikes against facilities in Syria, near the Iraqi border, that it said were used by Iranian-backed militia groups.

The Pentagon said those strikes were retaliation for a rocket attack in Iraq in February that killed one civilian contractor and wounded a US service member and other coalition troops.

At that time, Biden said Iran should view his decision to authorise US airstrikes in Syria as a warning that it can expect consequences for its support of militia groups that threaten US interests or personnel.

You can't act with impunity. Be careful, Biden said when a reporter asked what message he had intended to send.

—AP

designed to limit the risk of escalation but also to send a clear and unambiguous deterrent message, Kirby said.

Sunday's strikes mark

the second time the Biden administration has taken military action in

the second time the Biden administration has taken military action in

Threatened scribes



Journalists protest outside the United Nations office in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah on Monday, demanding protection following attacks by Palestinian security forces on their colleagues. — AFP

Iran yet to finalise on camera deal

**Tehran, June 28:** Iran has not made a decision yet about whether to extend an agreement with the UN atomic watchdog over access to surveillance footage at its nuclear sites, the country's foreign ministry said on Monday.

The remarks by Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh come after a three-month deal between Tehran and international nuclear inspectors to preserve video data at the country's atomic installations expired last

week, following a one-month extension. "No decision, either negative or positive has been made," Khatibzadeh told reporters. "Neither the continuation of the deal nor the erasure (of data). We are in the previous position for the time being."

Iran began limiting the access of UN atomic watchdog inspectors to its nuclear sites earlier this year, part of a pressure campaign on the West over its tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world

powers. Tehran was trying to push European powers to provide relief from oil and banking sanctions imposed three years ago when then-President Donald Trump withdrew America from the landmark accord. As part of that effort, Iran abandoned the accord's enrichment limits and is now enriching uranium to 60 per cent purity, its highest ever levels, although still short of weapons grade 90 per cent.

In order to limit diplo-

matic damage amid ongoing negotiations in Vienna to resurrect the nuclear deal, Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency reached a last-minute February agreement over Tehran's newly imposed limits on inspections.

The move to erase the surveillance footage would steeply escalate tensions, complicating diplomatic efforts to find a path for America to lift sanctions and Iran to reimpose curbs on its nuclear program.

—AP

Russia, China extend 20-yr-old friendship ties

**Moscow, June 28:** The leaders of Russia and China on Monday hailed increasingly close ties between their countries and announced the extension of a 20-year-old friendship treaty, a show of unity amid their tensions with the West.

Speaking in a video call with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that the treaty signed

in July 2001 in Moscow helped take relations between Moscow and Beijing to an "unprecedented height" and would be extended for another five years. The Russian leader noted that the coordination of foreign policy efforts by Russia and China has played a "stabilising role in global affairs."

Xi in his opening remarks emphasised the

importance of a "strategic cooperation" between Moscow and Beijing in defending their common interests on the global stage. He added that Russia and China have worked to uphold a "true multilateralism and global justice."

Putin and Xi have developed strong personal ties to bolster a "strategic partnership" between the two former Communist rivals

as they vie with the West for influence and face soaring tensions in relations with the US and its allies. While Moscow and Beijing in the past rejected the possibility of forging a military alliance, Putin said last fall that such a prospect can't be ruled out entirely.

During Monday's call, Putin congratulated Xi on the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of

China celebrated Thursday, saying that China is marking it with "new achievements in the country's social-economic development and on the international stage" and recalling Soviet support for the Chinese communists.

Moscow marked the CPC's centennial by sharing historic documents on Soviet-Chinese links with Beijing.

—AP

GLOBAL INFLUENCE

Communist Party of China seeks control over Chinese nationals who have moved abroad

Ahead of centenary, China heralds CPC's impact

**Beijing, June 28:** China is marking the centenary of its ruling Communist Party this week by heralding what it says is its growing influence abroad, along with success in battling corruption at home.

Party officials on Monday heaped praise on President Xi Jinping, who has established himself as China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, and has eliminated any limits on his term in office. China has seen huge improvements in living standards over the past four decades, accompanied

by rising international economic and political heft. Yet, while many countries have benefited from that relationship, China is also seen eroding democracy and human rights in nations over which it holds economic sway.

"The Chinese Communist party's international influence, appeal and attraction have continually increased, placing it at the forefront of world politics," Guo Yezhou, deputy head of the party's external liaison department told reporters at a news conference held at

the opening of a media centre for the centenary celebrations.

With 92 million members and a solid lock on power at home, the party has

sought to expand its control over Chinese who have moved abroad for

of the July 1 centenary celebrations of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC).

The hydropower station is located on the Jinsha River, the upper section of the Yangtze River, and straddles the southwestern provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan.

China has already built the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River and approved plans to build another massive dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to Arunachal Pradesh.

The dams cost about 220 billion yuan (USD 34 billion), according to media reports.

—PTI

Current vax less effective against Beta variant: Study

**Boston, June 28:** A study of the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2, the virus which cause Covid-19, suggests that current vaccines may be less effective against the Beta variant first identified in South Africa.

Present on the surface of SARS-CoV-2, spike proteins enable the virus to attach to and enter our cells, and all current vaccines are directed against them. The study, published in the journal Science on June 24, used cryo-electron microscopy (cryo-EM) to compare the spike protein from the original virus found in China in 2019, with that of the Beta variant, and the Alpha variant first identified in the UK.

Cryo-Em is an imaging technique used to determine the biomolecular structures at near-atomic resolution. The findings led by researchers at Boston Children's Hospital in the US indicate that mutations in the Beta variant, also known as B.1.351, change the shape of the spike surface at certain locations. As a result, neutralising antibodies induced by current vaccines are less able to bind to the Beta virus, which may allow it to evade the immune system even when people are vaccinated.

"The mutations make antibodies stimulated by the current vaccine less effective," said Bing Chen, from the division of Molecular Medicine at Boston Children's.

"The Beta variant is somewhat resistant to the current vaccines, and we think a booster with the new genetic sequence can be beneficial for protecting against this variant," Chen added. The researchers also found that mutations in the Beta variant make the spike less effective in binding to ACE2 — suggesting that this variant is less transmissible than the Alpha variant.

—PTI

UK DEFENCE MIN., TOP BRASS BEGIN SELF-ISOLATION

**London, June 28:** Britain's senior military commanders and the defence secretary are self isolating after the head of the armed forces tested positive for Covid.

Ben Wallace, secretary of defence, and the heads of the Navy, the Royal Air Force and Strategic Command were all ordered to isolate for a 10-day period last week, the Telegraph newspaper reported late on Sunday.

It added that the head of the Army, General Mark Carleton-Smith, also spent the weekend in self-isolation as he awaited the results of a Covid test.

They had all come into close contact with the Chief of the Defence Staff Nick Carter at a summit in Shrivenham in southern England on Thursday.

—AFP

ITALY BECOMES MASK-FREE, 'LOW-RISK' ZONE

**Rome, June 28:** All of Italy became a mask-free, "low-risk" zone for Coronavirus on Monday, marking a dramatic milestone for the first European country to be hit by the global pandemic in February 2020.

In a decree that took effect on Monday, the health ministry for the first time classified each of Italy's 20 regions as "white", signifying low risk, under the country's colour-coded classification system that evaluates Covid-19 risk.

That means face masks will no longer be compulsory in outdoor areas.

—AFP



Pope Francis meets US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the Vatican on Monday. — AFP

Blinken meets Pope as US bishops dare Biden

**Vatican City, June 28:** Pope Francis on Monday met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in the pontiff's first face-to-face interaction with the new administration of President Joe Biden, who has been challenged by US bishops.

Blinken, on a tour of Europe, had a private audience with the Argentine pope after meeting with senior Vatican officials including Archbishop Paul Gallagher, who handles foreign relations.

Vatican spokesman

Matteo Bruni said the 40-minute meeting with the Pope took place in a "friendly atmosphere", adding that the pontiff recalled his 2015 trip to the United States and expressed "his affection and attention to the people of the United States".

Biden says he personally opposes abortion but, like most of his Democratic Party, supports the right to choose abortion guaranteed in a 1973 Supreme Court decision that remains deeply divisive in US politics.

—AFP



# DECCAN Chronicle

29 JUNE 2021

## Jammu drone attacks carry ominous signals

Did India see its first terrorist attack through the use of drones, in the early hours last Sunday, when the technical area of Jammu airport — namely the Air Force Station — saw two explosions go off? The picture is not clear yet. Fortunately, the explosions caused only very minor damage. Fighter planes were parked at a different location, but even Indian Air Force helicopters, in hangars nearby, not were affected. This is a matter of relief.

Had a helicopter been damaged, the consequences by now are likely to have been kinetic, sparking anxieties and fears of a wider military conflagration. It is to be borne in mind that the Air Force Station is barely 14 kilometres from the India-Pakistan border. However, the presumption of drones cannot be ruled out and will remain the working hypothesis until the investigators have had time to examine the episode from every possible angle and rule out the possibility. At any rate, the presumed dropping of two improvised explosive devices from “an aerial platform” does raise the spectre of drones coming into play in the India-Pakistan dynamics even if investigations eventually discount the possibility that drones were indeed used in the Jammu explosions.

**Had a helicopter been damaged, the consequences by now are likely to have been kinetic, sparking anxieties and fears of a wider military conflagration.**

In recent years drones — unmanned air vehicles (UAVs) which are barely 20 kilogram in weight and can fit into a small space — have carried deadly military payloads. In September 2019, the Houthis rebels of Yemen attacked oil processing plants in Saudi Arabia, causing an international geo-strategic scare. More recently, in May this year, the Houthis claimed to have dropped bombs just inside the Saudi border using drones. From the Afghan theatre, the Americans were sending out military drones into the tribal areas of Pakistan to target fighters of extremist factions.

Drones from Pakistan are known to have airdropped cargos of arms and ammunition for use by terrorists inside J&K as well as in Punjab. But the Jammu incident suggests that the authors of the airdropping of explosives near high-value military targets are playing a game of brinkmanship, if they have the sanction of a government. In case the unloading of explosives from the air was done by terrorist elements, then the exercise puts at risk the tenuous calm that obtains in J&K. In that event the political processes under consideration in the Union Territory can potentially be derailed as the security grid is intensified manifold by the government and overt oppression of the populace once again becomes the norm. In that case, the military-to-military agreement of February 25 between the defence establishments of India and Pakistan, which had led to the sincere observance of ceasefire, is likely to come under serious strain.

The June 27 airdropping of explosive devices in Jammu could conceivably be a trial run, with better targeted attempts to follow. At any rate, India would do well to refine its tactics in neutralizing this new technique being used by terrorists or an unfriendly power. When attack drones come into play, putting more troops on the ground and the use of anti-aircraft guns are not the answer. The electromagnetic spectrum warriors will need to step up to neutralise the GPS fittings on the hostile drones. A new dimension in counter-terrorism measures, even warfare, is at hand.

## Who spied on UK minister?

UK health secretary, Matt Hancock, had to go. Political authority needs legitimacy and his actions in an extramarital affair in which he was seen hugging an aide in his office were the very epitome of flagrant disregard of normal rules of morality as well as poor timing. In a democracy that prides itself on very old foundations even within a ceremonial monarchy, there can't be one rule for the suffering public and another for privileged rulers.

Hancock, who had had the unenviable task of leading the battle against waves of the Coronavirus pandemic, had imposed such severe lockdown restrictions on the British public that they could not even hug their near and dear ones, not even at a funeral, which they were in most cases forbidden to attend anyway. The pressure that was brought upon the “hugging” Tory minister to do the decent thing and hand in his papers was impressive and succeeded despite Prime Minister Boris Johnson being inclined towards keeping him in the job.

Hancock's authority to lead the NHS and decide on health policies and order Covid restrictions had been eroded. But the real issue is who ordered the placing of spy cameras inside Whitehall, the seat of UK government. Was the camera, which was hidden inside a smoke detector, placed there by spy agencies like MI 5 or MI 6 without the authority of the bosses? That brings us back to whether these spy games are being played without the knowledge of the leaders of a democratically elected government.

The thought that Big Brother may be watching everyone all the time, especially in CCTV camera-obsessed Britain which has one of the world's highest density in cameras placed in public places, gains greater currency in the light of l'affaire Hancock involving aide Gina Coldangelo. It is strange that UK authorities are probing how the footage from the CCTV device was leaked to The Sun rather than how a minister's office came to be spied upon like this. The acceptance at this level that secret taping is going on appears ludicrous and it is by no means restricted to the UK.

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Subhani



## After J&K olive branch, will Pak ties normalise?



K.C. Singh

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed the absence of “dil ki doori” between his government and 14 Kashmiri mainstream leaders at his first meeting with them after August 2019, when his government had revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370 and downgraded and divided the state into two Union territories. Questions naturally arise about what lies behind this softening of the Modi government's approach, far removed from the demonising of traditional political parties over the past two years.

While the foreign policy of any democracy gets impacted by its domestic politics, it is more so with this Indian government. After Mr Modi's convincing re-election in 2019, the government decided to pursue its core agenda with vigour. The Jammu and Kashmir decision was taken in August 2019, followed in December by the Citizenship Amendment Act's passage, creating discriminatory, religion-based and nation-specific exceptions for refugees to gain Indian citizenship. In February 2020, US President Donald Trump visited India on a highly calibrated visit to massage his ego. To avoid appearing partisan, such visits are not usually scheduled when the incumbent faces re-election in nine months. Prime Minister Modi had in the preceding years personally cultivated relations with the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, besides of course the United States.

Thus, when implementing its majoritarian BJP agenda domestically, the government calculated that Pakistan's protests over J&K's rejig could be contained without too much diplomatic damage. Similarly, the friendly government of Bangladesh could be appeased to ensure that it ignored

the rhetoric of senior BJP leaders dubbing illegal immigrants as “pests”. The US under President Trump was also expected to downplay the issue, as he demonstrated by ignoring the communal incidents in New Delhi on the last day of his visit in February 2020.

However, the US as well as its Gulf allies Saudi Arabia and UAE had been closely watching developments in South Asia. The escalation of tensions after the Pulwama terror attack and India's airstrike on Balakot in Pakistan, followed by Pakistan's retaliatory strike and dogfight resulting in the capture of an IAF pilot, saw the behind-the-scenes role played by these three nations. The fact that the Indian pilot was handed back almost immediately, giving a filip to Mr Modi's popularity just two months before the Lok Sabha election, earned these three nations goodwill and possible leverage in India-Pakistan affairs. C-Voter polling data found that between January 1 and March 7 the net approval rating of the Modi government rose from 32 per cent to 62 per cent. While some of the bump came after the Budget, the real spike was after Balakot. The popularity of Rahul Gandhi fell from 23.3 per cent to 8.2 per cent, while that of Mr Modi rose from 32.4 per cent to 63.2 per cent.

However, the BJP's assessment about the international reaction to its domestic agenda getting easily mangled came up against unforeseen factors. First, the outbreak of Covid-19, beginning soon after Mr Trump's India visit, distracted India and even affected India's image abroad after the poor handling of its second wave. Second, China protested strongly after the J&K changes, claiming that India could not alter the status quo unilaterally as China was a party to the dispute. Thus, India

should have been alert to Chinese mischief at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), especially as China had quickly managed to contain the epidemic. Instead of showing contrition for letting the virus escape and cause a global health and economic crisis, China chose to push its People's Liberation Army at multiple points in Eastern Ladakh up to its claim lines, upsetting the status quo. While it has agreed to a mutual withdrawal in the Pangong Tso and Kailash Hills sectors, its intrusions remain in Depsang Plains, Gogra and Hot Springs, etc.

The third unforeseen factor was the defeat of President Donald Trump in November 2020. After Joe Biden assumed the presidency, India realised that his Democratic Party's left wing had evangelistic interest in human rights and freedom of faith and expression. Ironically, two Indian-origin members of Congress, Pramila Jayapal and Ro Khanna, are among the strongest critics of the BJP majoritarian agenda, including its draconian Kashmir policy. President Biden too strongly advocated an alliance of democracies to counter the challenge from the strategic convergence of Russia and China. It was because of this that at the recent G-7 summit in Cornwall, four democracies were invited as “guests” — Australia, India, South Korea and South Africa.

Critics would say US foreign policy rests on pragmatic considerations, often ignoring its own advocated values of democracy and human rights. However, the times have changed, and Cold War arguments may now be inapplicable, particularly after Mr Trump's attempt at undermining US democracy itself. Moreover, China presents a different challenge from the one

the former Soviet Union held. It posits a hugely successful model resting on restricted political and personal freedoms in exchange for prosperity, material growth and economic security. To challenge its lure, liberal democracies are being compelled to argue the relevance of their own model. Thus, the US and other Western democracies cannot ignore the continued debasement of liberal democracy in Asia, and certainly in India as they look towards this country as a role model.

The PM's session with the Kashmiri political leaders is a recognition that the government's Kashmir policy has yielded poor results at home and abroad. The restoration of Article 370 seems unlikely as its revocation has been a core BJP demand and which has popular support. That leaves delimitation, elections and statehood. Views on their sequencing differ, but the road to statehood is clear. This clears the path for a calibrated resumption of normal relations with Pakistan. Pakistan's Prime Minister

Imran Khan in an interview has sought “civilised relations” with India. He also interestingly argues that even Pakistan doesn't want the Taliban to continue its onslaught in Afghanistan to depose the government as a civil war will only have more refugees streaming into an already economically challenged Pakistan. The national security advisers of India and Pakistan will both be at the coming Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting. Hopefully, the Indian government has realised that its Pakistan policy should be delinked from electoral considerations and strategically its Kashmir policy has only deepened Sino-Pakistan relations. If Pakistan too realises that terror is a dangerous instrument to wield against India as it begets global condemnation, besides singeing the user, the region might actually stand to gain.

*The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.*

### LETTERS

#### COVID GOALPOSTS

The Centre is frequently shifting goalposts since the pandemic hit India (*Don't shift goalposts, meet jab deadlines, DC, June 28*). The latest being the gap for the 2nd jab in case of Covishield being shifted to 12-16 weeks from 28 days initially. Even though the second wave is on the wane, the third one is looming large along with the dreaded Delta plus mutation. The only remedy is vaccination for at least 90 crore population. This must be ensured under all circumstances according to the Centre's own timeline by December 31.

**K. Nehru Patnaik**  
Visakhapatnam

#### PROPERTY TAX

The critics of the Andhra Pradesh government calling some of its policies akin to that of Tughluq are partially correct. The proposal to hike property tax based on the capital value of the property is one example. I am sure that the state government would not be able to satisfactorily answer all the questions raised by taxpayers in this regard. According to a conservative estimate approximately ₹10,000 will be the additional burden on property owners. Even a lay man will understand the urgent “need” of the state government to increase the tax. It is to meet the expenditure of several socio-economic schemes that are a drain on the exchequer.

**Govardhana Myneedu**  
Vijayawada

### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

#### India may take Bangla issue to UN

NEW DELHI, JUNE 28.

The Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Swaran Singh, told the Lok Sabha today that India had already initiated consultations with various Governments and depending upon the support we get, we will definitely raise (the issue of) Bangla Desh at an appropriate United Nations body. “But these efforts would be “ancillary and supplementary to our main effort to realise our objectives” — to secure a political settlement acceptable to the elected representatives of Bangla Desh. Led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and return of the six million Bangla Desh citizens to their hearths and homes.

Aakar Patel



## As world keeps growing, India's sinking, going back to the past

Will four years ago, the Indian government would use the phrase “fastest growing economy”. Prime Minister Narendra Modi would repeat the phrase “one bright spot in the global economy” to describe the country, and used it last at 8 pm on Tuesday, November 8, 2016, when he gave us the demonetisation speech.

Since then, we have not heard much about the fastest growing bright spot. There is not much talk about the economy and has not been for the past four years. When it looked like India's economy had run into trouble, the boasting paused. Now that it is clear that India's economy has been ruined, we have stopped speaking about it entirely. Of course, just because the government does not speak about something does not mean that the problem does not exist. It does and we must try and understand what has happened to India.

According to the government data, our economic growth began braking sharply before January 2018. From here, for some reasons which we need

not speculate about today, we fell into a decline which we could not pull out of. For the four quarters of 2018 and for the next four quarters of 2019 and for the first quarter of 2020, we fell. This was before the Covid-19 pandemic and by the time the nationwide lockdown was announced, we had stopped growing completely.

The government did not tell us why our economy had imploded. The PM simply stopped speaking on the subject. On October 14, 2019, the *Hindu* published a piece written by Parakala Prabhakar, who is finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's husband. Assessing the economy, he wrote: “There is anxiety all over about the economic slowdown in the country. While the government is still in denial mode, data flowing uninterrupted into the public domain show that sector after sector is staring at a seriously challenging situation. Private consumption has contracted and is at an 18-quarter low of 3.1 per cent; rural consumption is in a deep southward dive and is double the rate of the urban slowdown; the credit offtake by micro and small

industries remains stagnant; net exports have shown little or no growth; GDP growth is at a six-year low with the first quarter of FY20 registering just five per cent; and unemployment is at a 45-year-high. The government, however, is yet to show any signs that it has come to grips with what ails the economy. Much less evidence is available to believe that it has a strategic vision to address the challenges.”

This was 20 months ago and before the pandemic, and before the recession of 2020 and before the second wave of Covid-19. I received a newsletter from a business daily this week which listed what the position was for the last financial year, which ended a few weeks ago in April. Consumer spending had contracted by nine per cent and investments contracted by more than 10 per cent. Manufacturing, services and construction lost value somewhere in the range of eight per cent. What happened in the last financial year was that we went back to the past. We slowed down, then we stopped growing and then we started going back. The rest of the world kept growing and left us behind.

The reason the average Indian is today poorer than the average Bangladeshi is to be found in the last 48 months. By April 2021, manufacturing, trade, transport and communications was down at the same level that it was in 2018. That is three years of growth lost. Construction has lost two years.

The output of core industries such as cement, refineries, steel is the same as it was in March 2017. That is four years India lost while the rest of the world produced more. The sales of passenger vehicles, including cars, have gone back to their 2016 levels. That's a loss of five years. This is not an anomaly. The auto sector has been hammered for many years now and it is clear that the middle class has stopped growing. Two-wheeler sales are today at the same point that they were 10 years ago. The sales of commercial vehicles, meaning the trucks that carry around goods, are today below where they were when Narendra Modi first became Prime Minister.

Is this some new data that I am referring to? No, this is publicly available and has been known to all who are part

of the sector. If some of us have not known that the situation is this grim, it is purely because it has not featured in a “Mann Ki Baat” yet.

If you don't acknowledge a problem, as Dr Manmohan Singh said about the economy in an interview last year, then you cannot begin to solve it. This is why we will not solve this problem. India's leader has too much pride to admit to us that he has failed us on the economy. His Cabinet of *chamchas* dare not say it either. His finance minister's husband must write an article in one of India's most reputable newspapers to bring to the notice of the world that we are sunk.

The impoverishing of Indians and the wrecking of our economy is happening at the same time when the concentration of our wealth is being skewed towards a few. The two richest men in Asia are not from China, whose economy is six times bigger than India's. They are two Gujarati men who represent the model of “growth” in India.

*The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist*



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52735.59	-0.36
Nifty 50	15814.70	-0.29
S&P 500*	4,281.34	0.01
Dollar (₹)	73.87	0.28
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.18	0.31
Euro (₹)	88.36	0.19
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,337.116	0.25
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	75.08	-1.44
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.056	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.490	-0.046

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Dr Reddy's Lab launches Covid drug 2-DG

Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) has launched Covid drug 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG), developed by the DRDO as an adjunct therapy to treat mild to severe coronavirus infections. Trials revealed the drug will reduce the patient's dependency of supplemental oxygen and ensures his faster recovery by over two days. The company will sell the drug under the brand name 2DG for a retail price of Rs 990 per sachet.

Emirates may resume flights to India from July 7



Dubai's flag carrier Emirates may resume its flights from India to Dubai from July 7, over two months after the UAE suspended its operations owing to the surge in coronavirus cases in India, the *Khaleej Times* reported. The airline is awaiting exact travel protocols and guidelines from the government regarding the resumption of the flight operations. The airline's website shows seats are available for booking from July 7.

Dodla Dairy up 42% on debut, KIMS gains 22%

Hyderabad-based Dodla Dairy and Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) Hospitals listed on the bourses at premiums of 28.50 per cent and 22.3 per cent to the issue price. Dodla Dairy shares opened at Rs 550 against the IPO price of Rs 428 and touched a high of Rs 652, up 52.33 per cent, but closed at Rs 609.90, up 42.5 per cent. KIMS closed at Rs 996.95, gaining 20.84 per cent, against the IPO price of Rs 825.

Rohini Nilekani to retire from own foundation

Arghyam Foundation said Rohini Nilekani will retire from the foundation as chairperson and member of the board on Sept. 30 and will be succeeded by Sunita Nadhamuni, a member of the board and head of Digital LifeCare at Dell Givani and Social Innovation. Nilekani had set up Argyham in 2001 as a vehicle for her personal philanthropy. Argyham has been working exclusively on water sector issues since 2005.



■ Paediatric care gets ₹23,220-cr funds Focus on health infra for children

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

Making a proactive move, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday provided Rs 23,220 crore of additional funding for setting up paediatric care/paediatric beds at hospitals to prepare healthcare infrastructure to deal with any emergency in the event of the next Covid wave affecting children.

Experts have warned that a third Covid wave in the country may affect children more than adults.

Announcing a set of measures for reviving the economy battered by the severe second Covid wave, Sitharaman also unveiled a Rs 50,000-crore credit guarantee scheme for setting up of medical or health infrastructure by private hospitals in cities other than eight metropolitan cities.

"We are now providing Rs 23,220 crore more, primarily focussing on children and paediatric care. This Rs 23,220 crore will be spent this financial year itself.

"It will also focus on funding of HR augmentation so that medical students, interns, nurses can also be brought in for helping in such emergencies, ICU beds will be made available, oxygen supply at central, district and subdistrict level will be ensured and also making sure that equipments and medicines, tele-consultation and ambulance service... all of that will be taken care of with primary focus on children.

CENTRE TO PAY PF SHARE TILL MARCH

New Delhi, June 28: The government extended the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana, which was launched in October last year to encourage employment generation, by nine months till March 31, 2022.

Under the ABRY, the Government of India is crediting for a period of two years both the employees' share (12 per cent of wages) and employers' share (12 per cent of wages) of contribution payable for establishment strength up to 1,000 employees and giving a salary of up to Rs 15,000 a month. In case of establishment strength of more than 1,000 for all those with Rs 15,000 per month salary, only employee's share (12 per cent of wages) is credited by the government to the EPFO. The scheme is being implemented through the Employees Provident Fund Organisation.

— FC Bureau

GUARANTEE ON TRAVEL & TOURISM LOANS

New Delhi, June 28: Announcing free visas to 5 lakh tourists visiting India this fiscal, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday financial support would be provided to more than 11,000 registered tourist guides and travel & tourism stakeholders. She said the total financial implication of free visa

would be Rs 100 crore. The scheme would be applicable till March 31, 2022, or till 5 lakh visas are issued, whichever is earlier.

Sitharaman said loans will be provided with 100 per cent guarantee with a limit of Rs 10 lakh for travel & tourism stakeholders and Rs 1 lakh for registered tourist guides.

— FC Bureau

dren. So paediatric care is the emphasis," Sitharaman said at a press conference.

She said last year a Rs 15,000 crore emergency health systems project was implemented. Using that Rs 15,000 crore, there was a 25-fold increase in Covid-dedicated hospitals.

Besides, 7,929 Covid health centres and 9,954 Covid care centres were set

up, and oxygen supported beds increased by 7.5 times. There was also an increase in isolation beds and ICU beds by 42-fold and 45-fold, respectively.

"The Rs 15,000 crore which was used till March 2021 aiming at providing additional infrastructure and facilitating Covid care had good response," the minister said.

CENTRE WANTS BANKS TO GIVE SMALL LOANS TO BORROWERS

From Page 1

This is additional to the ₹3 lakh crore announced under the scheme last year. "The new credit guarantee scheme will give loans to small borrowers, through Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs), where the maximum loan to individuals will be ₹1.25 lakh at an interest rate below two per cent — as prescribed by the RBI. Our focus will be new loans, stressed borrowers except NPAs to be covered and the loan duration of three years under the scheme," she said.

The finance minister also announced job benefits, extending the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana and loan guarantees for Covid-affected sectors such as tourism.

For the tourism sector, the finance minister unveiled a new scheme to revive the sector. "Financial support will be extended to more than 11,000 registered tourist guides and travel & tourism stakeholders (TTS). These TTS will receive up to ₹10 lakh loan, while licensed tourist guides will get up to ₹1 lakh loan," Sitharaman said.

"In the tourism scheme, free tourist visas will be offered to five lakh tourists. This scheme is applicable till March 31, 2022, or till the first five lakh tourist visas get covered, whichever is earlier. One tourist can avail benefit only once," she added.

She also announced an extra ₹23,220 crore for short-term emergency preparedness with an emphasis on paediatrics care.

Indians invest nearly \$40 bn in crypto assets

SUVASHREE GHOSH & RONOJOY MAZUMDAR JUNE 28

The cryptocurrency aficionados' mantra that Bitcoin is equivalent to digital gold is winning converts among the world's biggest holders of the precious metal.

In India, where households own more than 25,000 tonnes of gold, investments in crypto grew from about \$200 million to nearly \$40 billion in the past year, according to Chainalysis. That's despite outright hostility toward the asset class from the central bank and a proposed trading ban.

Richi Sood, a 32-year-old entrepreneur is one of those who swerved from gold to crypto. Since December, she's put in just over Rs 10 lakh—some of it borrowed from her father—into Bitcoin, Dogecoin and Ether.

And she's been fortunate with her timing. She cashed out part of her position when Bitcoin smashed through \$50,000 in February and bought back in after the recent tumble, allowing her to fund the overseas expansion of her education startup Study Mate India.

"I'd rather put my money in crypto than gold," Ms Sood said. "Crypto is more transparent than gold or property and returns are more in a short period of time."

She's part of a growing number of Indians—now totalling more than 15 million—buying and selling digital coins. That's catching up with the 23



million traders of these assets in the US and compares with just 2.3 million in the UK

The growth in India is coming from the 18-35 year old cohort, says the co-founder of India's first cryptocurrency exchange. Latest World Gold Council data indicated Indian adults under age 34 have less appetite for gold than older consumers.

"They find it far easier to invest in crypto than gold because the process is very simple," said Sandeep Goenka, who co-founded ZebPay and spent years representing the industry in discussions with the government on regulation. "You go online, you can buy crypto, you don't have to verify it, unlike gold."

One of the biggest barriers preventing wider adoption is the regulatory uncertainty. Last year, the Supreme Court quashed a 2018 rule banning crypto trading by banking entities, resulting in a trading surge.

However, authorities show no signs of embracing cryptocurrencies. The nation's central bank says it has "major concerns" about the asset

class and six months ago the Indian government proposed a ban on trading in digital coins—though it has been silent on the topic since.

"I am flying blind," said Ms Sood. "I have a risk-taking appetite, so I'm willing to take a risk of a ban." It's not the only country where regulators are cracking down. The UK's financial watchdog has just banned Binance Markets Ltd from doing any regulated business in the country.

The official hostility though means many bigger individual investors are reluctant to speak openly about their holdings. One banker Bloomberg spoke to who invested more than \$1 million into crypto assets said with no clear income tax rules at present he was concerned about the possibility of retrospective tax raids if he was publicly known to be a big-ticket crypto investor.

He's already got contingency plans in place to move his trading to an offshore Singapore bank account if a ban was to be introduced.

To be sure, the value of Indian digital asset holdings remain a sliver of its gold market. Still, the growth is clear, especially in trading—the four biggest crypto exchanges saw daily trading jump to \$102 million from \$10.6 million a year ago, according to CoinGecko. The country's \$40 billion market significantly trails China's \$161 billion, according to Chainalysis.

— Bloomberg

Second wave impact milder: CEA

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, JUNE 28

The impact of the Covid-19 second wave on the economy was much milder than the first wave because of its shorter duration and the resilience of Indian businesses to adapt to the situation, said India's chief economic adviser, Krishna-murthy V. Subramanian.

Speaking at a virtual conference organised by FTCCI on Monday, he said, "The second wave had impacted the economy in April and May. But it peaked very fast and also declined at the same pace. So it impacted the economy for a much shorter duration. Unlike the first wave when the national lockdown was imposed, restrictions were asynchronous during the second wave and have impacted only 30 per cent of the economy."

He also observed that the interstate movement of goods was never stopped during the second wave, which allowed companies to continue functioning.

Though he admitted that small companies were impacted by the pandemic more than larger companies, he said the macro-economic impact of sec-



K. V. Subramanian

ond-wave would not be large during the current financial year.

Stating the worst is over for the economy, the CEA said he is cautiously optimistic about the economic growth of the country for the next five to six months and highly optimistic about the growth in the subsequent years.

Subramanian defended the government's decision to boost the economy by increasing capital expenditure rather than revenue expenditure or freebies.

Explaining the rationale, he said every rupee spent by governments on "freebies" would add only Rs 0.98 to the country's economy as against Rs 4.50 when spent on capital expenditure.

Highlighting the reforms in labour, agriculture, financial markets, and production-linking incentives for exports, Dr Subramanian exuded con-

fidence that the Indian economy would be one of the top high-growth economies of the decade because of the reforms undertaken by the government.

Claiming the government's policy is on enabling and empowering the private sector, Subramanian said the government would meet its target of raising Rs 1.75 lakh crore through disinvestment of public sector companies.

"Remember that of Rs 1.75 lakh crore, a good part of it will be from LIC's IPO (initial public offering). The second is the privatisation of Bharat Petroleum (BPCL). And these two together can account for a large part of disinvestment target," he said.

He also rejected concerns about the government crowding out the borrowing space with a higher fiscal deficit. He called the crowding-out concept as an old and incomplete argument.

Dr Subramanian said the government is working with RBI to get Indian government bonds included on the global bond index, which would allow the government to raise money directly from foreign investors.

SKODA PRICES KUSHAQ SUV AT ₹10.49 LAKH



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JUNE 28

Skoda, the Czech car maker, on Monday entered the mid-size SUV space by introducing the 'made-in-India for the world' model Kushaq with the starting price of Rs 10.49 lakh at pan India showroom.

The Kushaq is Skoda's determined effort to make a solid mark in the mid-size SUV space that is dominated by Hyundai Creta and Kia Seltos.

"The SUV market in India is growing and we are here for a long haul," Zac Hollis, brand director at Skoda Auto India told *FC*, adding that bookings for the Kushaq were coming strong. "The new Kushaq's design, uncluttered lines, quality and safety elements are strong to deliver numbers in the competitive market," he said, targeting 60,000 sales annually.

ALGORITHMS | RULE Machines are often the boss; hiring, rating and firing with no human oversight

How does it feel to be sacked by a bot?

SPENCER SOPER JUNE 28

Stephen Normandin spent almost four years racing around Phoenix delivering packages as a contract driver for Amazon.com Inc. Then one day, he received an automated email. The algorithms tracking him had decided he wasn't doing his job properly.

The 63-year-old Army veteran was stunned. He'd been fired by a machine.

Normandin says Amazon punished him for things beyond his control that prevented him from completing his deliveries, such as locked apartment complexes. He said he took the termination hard and,

priding himself on a strong work ethic, recalled that during his military career he helped cook for 250,000 Vietnamese refugees at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas.

"I'm an old-school kind of guy, and I give every job 110 per cent," he said. "This really upset me because we're talking about my reputation. They say I didn't do the job when I know damn well I did."

Normandin's experience is a twist on the decades-old prediction that robots will replace workers. At Amazon, machines are often the boss—hiring, rating and firing millions of people with little or no human oversight. Amazon became the



world's largest online retailer in part by outsourcing its sprawling operations to algorithm-sets of computer instructions designed to solve specific problems. For years, Amazon has used algorithms to manage the millions of third-party merchants on its online marketplace, drawing com-

plaints that sellers have been booted off after being falsely accused of selling counterfeit goods and jacking up prices.

Increasingly, the company is ceding its human-resources operation to machines as well, using software not only to manage workers in its warehouses but to oversee contract drivers, independent delivery companies and even the performance of its office workers. People familiar with the strategy say CEO Jeff Bezos believes machines make decisions more quickly and accurately than people, reducing costs and giving Amazon a competitive advantage. Amazon started its gig-

style Flex delivery service in 2015, and the army of contract drivers quickly became a critical part of the company's delivery machine. Typically, Flex drivers handle packages that haven't been loaded on an Amazon van before the driver leaves. They ensure the packages are delivered the same day. They also handle a large number of same-day grocery deliveries from Amazon's Whole Foods Market chain. Flex drivers helped keep Amazon humming during the pandemic and were only too happy to earn about \$25 an hour shuttling packages.

But the moment they sign on, Flex drivers discover algorithms are mon-

itoring their every move. Did they get to the delivery station when they said they would? Did they complete their route in the prescribed window? Did they leave a package in full view of porch pirates instead of hidden behind a planter as requested? Amazon algorithms scan the gusher of incoming data for performance patterns and decide which drivers get more routes and which are deactivated. Human feedback is rare. Drivers occasionally receive automated emails, but mostly they're left to obsess about their ratings, which include four categories: Fantastic, Great, Fair or At Risk.

— Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## BWF cancels India &amp; Hyderabad Open

**New Delhi:** The India Open Super 500 and Hyderabad Open Super 100 tournaments were on Monday cancelled by the Badminton World Federation (BWF), which announced a revamped international calendar to salvage the remaining season affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The \$400,000 India Open, which was supposed to be one of the qualifiers for the Tokyo Olympics, was scheduled to be held from May 11 to 16 but was postponed in April due to rising Covid cases in the national capital. The \$1,00,000 Hyderabad Open was slated to be held from August 24 to 29. “A number of tournaments previously classified as postponed from Q1 and Q2 or originally slated for Q3 and Q4 of 2021 have subsequently been cancelled,” BWF said in a statement. — *PTI*

## Lankans banned for bubble breach

**Colombo:** Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) on Monday suspended three players, including batsman Kusal Mendis and wicket-keeper Niroshan Dickwella, for breaching the bio-bubble during their ongoing tour of England and ordered their immediate return to the country. The two, along with opener Danushka Gunathilaka, were seen roaming the streets of Durham after the final T20 international on Sunday night, which Sri Lanka lost by a massive 89 runs. “Sri Lanka Cricket executive Committee has suspended Kusal Mendis, Danushka Gunathilaka & Niroshan Dickwella for breaching the bio-bubble and they will be immediately recalled to Sri Lanka,” SLC secretary Mohan De Silva said. — *PTI*

## Deepika reclaims world no.1 ranking

**Paris:** Star Indian archer Deepika Kumari on Monday regained the number one position in global rankings following her hat-trick of gold medals at the World Cup Stage 3 here. The 27-year-old from Ranchi, who had achieved the top spot for the first time in 2012, on Sunday claimed gold medals in three recurve events — women's individual, team and mixed pair. “This is going to take Deepika to the number one spot in the world rankings on Monday,” World Archery had tweeted on its official handle after Deepika's gold rush. — *PTI*

## SA level series against Windies

**St George's (Grenada):** South Africa turned the tables on the West Indies in the second match of their Twenty20 series, winning by 16 runs to level the five-match series at 1-1. Only 24 hours after losing the opening match by eight wickets, an unchanged South Africa lineup produced an improved but still imperfect bowling and fielding performance to restrict the West Indies to 150-9 in reply to their 166-7 on Sunday. — *PTI*

**Brief scores:** South Africa 166/7 (Reeza Hendricks 42, Temba Bavuma 46; Obed McCoy 3/25) bt West Indies 150/9 (Andre Fletcher 35, Fabian Allen 34; Kagiso Rabada 3/37).

## Shot putter Toor hits a purple patch

**Patiala:** Olympic-bound shot putter Tajinder Pal Singh Toor continued his impressive form as he produced yet another big throw while winning gold on the fourth and penultimate day of the National Inter-State Athletics Championships here on Monday. Toor came up with a best effort of 21.10m to win the gold in the event. The Olympics direct qualifying mark is 21.10m, exactly the same distance he cleared on Monday, which meant that he has produced 21m-plus throw twice in a week. — *PTI*

## Live on TV

**EURO**

**Round of 16:** England vs Germany from 9.30 pm; Sweden vs Ukraine from 12.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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## THOR'S THUNDER

## Hazard strikes as Belgium knock Portugal out of Euro

<b>Belgium</b>	<b>1</b>
(Thorgan Hazard 42)	
<b>Portugal</b>	<b>0</b>

**Seville (Spain), June 28:** A rocket from Thorgan Hazard knocked reigning champions Portugal out of Euro 2020 on Sunday and earned Belgium a blockbuster quarter-final with Italy.

Hazard's swerving shot before half-time sealed a 1-0 win for Belgium and settled a scrappy contest in Seville that never really lived up to its billing as the stand-out tie of the last 16.

But it could prove a statement victory for Belgium, whose chief concern now will be the fitness of Kevin De Bruyne and Eden Hazard, who both hobbled off injured and will undergo scans on Monday.

De Bruyne suffered an ankle injury while coach Roberto Martinez said Hazard's problem was “more of a muscle feeling”.

Cristiano Ronaldo tested Thibaut Courtois with a dipping free-kick in the first half but the 36-year-old neither broke the international goals record nor added to his five for the tournament.

Raphael Guerreiro went closest to a late equaliser when his shot came back off the post, one of 29 shots Portugal had, six of them on target.

But before the late rally, Belgium were the braver, more fluid team and Martinez hailed his side's fighting spirit to hold on.

“We showed our talent in the first half and in the second half we showed an aspect that wasn't there two or three years ago,” said Martinez. “This is what a winning team needs.”

For all the superstar names on the pitch, it was Eden Hazard's less heralded brother Thorgan who proved decisive, the Borussia Dortmund winger who Eden once



(from left) Belgium's Axel Witsel, Eden Hazard and Thorgan Hazard celebrate after scoring a goal against Portugal in the round of 16 match at the La Cartuja stadium in Seville, Spain on Sunday. — *UEFA*

said had even more talent than him.

“In these games if you have a chance you have to have a go,” Thorgan said. “It went in, with a bit of luck and it was the goal that got us through. It's a dream for me.”

Eden Hazard started in Belgium's front three again after playing 90 minutes against Finland on Monday. Portugal's Diogo Dalot came in at right-back for the injured Nelson Semedo.

Hazard skied an early shot over after a neat exchange with Romelu Lukaku while Diogo Jota skewed wide, slipped in down the left by the impressive Renato Sanches.

The closest Ronaldo came to an all-time record 110th international goal was a dipping free-kick from 30 yards which Courtois parried away.

— *AFP*

## England, Germany to renew age-old rivalry

**London, June 28:** When you train on the Sir Bobby Charlton Pitch, it's hard to escape the burden of past glory. And when Gareth Southgate is your coach, it's even harder for the England players to escape the anguish that can come from playing Germany at a tournament. It was Southgate's penalty miss in a shootout against Germany that prevented England from reaching the 1996 European Championship final at the old Wembley Stadium.

There had already been the loss to Germany on penalties at the 1990 World

Cup. Twenty years later came more World Cup agony against Germany, laced with the injustice of a wrongly disallowed goal.

No wonder the renewal of the rivalry with Germany on Tuesday in the round of 16 at this year's Euro is rousing so many memories of past meetings in England. But it can seem to be a lop-sided rivalry.

There's little sense in Germany about righting any wrongs of the past, despite the still inconclusive debate over whether Geoff Hurst's decisive goal really did cross the

line before Charlton and Co. lifted the World Cup in 1966 at Wembley.

## SWEDISH CHALLENGE FOR UKRAINE

Andriy Shevchenko's Ukraine might be disappointed by the fact that they only reached the knockout phase of the Euro for the first time thanks to good fortune.

But ahead of Tuesday's last-16 game against Sweden, the 44-year-old coach may draw inspiration from a past encounter against the same opponents, the swansong of his career as a player. — *Agencies*

## INDIAN TEAM TOUCHDOWN AT COLOMBO

**Colombo, June 28:** The India white-ball team led by Shikhar Dhawan, featuring as many as six uncapped players, arrived here from Mumbai for their four-week tour which will feature six limited overs games against Sri Lanka, starting July 13.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya shared an *Instagram* story captioned: “Touchdown, Sri Lanka, Colombo.”

The Dhawan-led team will play three ODIs and three T20Is in the island nation. The BCCI had named a 20-member squad for the tour that has the senior spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal. — *PTI*

## CR7 proud of Portugal effort

**Lisbon, June 28:** Captain Cristiano Ronaldo said on Monday he was “proud” of holders Portugal's efforts despite bowing out of Euro 2020 after the weekend's 1-0 last 16 loss to Belgium.

“We did not get the result we wanted and we leave the competition sooner than expected,” the 36-year-old Juventus star and five-time Ballon d'or winner admitted as his side failed to match their 2016 exploits.

“But we are proud of our showing. We did everything we could to retain the title of European champions and this group proved it could still give the Portuguese people much joy,” the former Manchester United and Real Madrid attacker posted on social media after Sunday's loss.

“Congratulations to all the teams left in. As for us, we shall return stronger,” vowed the veteran who at least could console himself with having matched the 109 international goals record of Iran's Ali Daei during the tournament.

Ronaldo scored five times during the competition to take his European Championship tally to a record 14, matching Daei's achievement with his goal in the 2-2 group game draw with world champions France.

Portugal coach Fernando Santos said his players were crying in the changing room after their “unfair” defeat.

“I think it's an unfair result but they scored and we didn't,” said Santos after the game. — *AFP*

### ECUADOR HOLD BRAZIL TO ENTER COPA QUARTERS

**Goiania, Brazil, June 28:** An Ecuador side fighting to keep their Copa America hopes alive managed to hold a previously perfect Brazil — playing without a resting Neymar — to a 1-1 draw Sunday and reach the quarter-finals.

Seeking to extend a 10-match winning streak, Brazil came out pressuring in Goiania on the group's final match day. Coach Tite opted to rest Neymar, but the “Selecao” still dominated the first half.

A free kick in the 37th minute set up Eder Militao, who headed the ball at a sharp angle into the top right corner of the net, well clear of

#### COPA RESULTS

<b>Brazil</b> (Eder Militao 37)	1
<b>Ecuador</b> (Angel Mena 53)	1
<b>Peru</b> (Andre Carrillo 48)	1
<b>Venezuela</b>	0

Ecuador keeper Hernan Galindez's outstretched arm.

**PERU WIN**

Peru meanwhile defeated Venezuela 1-0 in the other Group B match to send the Covid-decimated “Vinotinto” team packing from the South American championships. — *AFP*



(from left) France's Mathilde Lamolle (silver medal), India's Rahi Sarnobat (gold) and Vitalina Batsarashkina of Russia (bronze) on the women's 25M Pistol podium at the ISSF Shooting World Cup in Osijek.

## Sarnobat clinches gold in 25m pistol

**Osijek, June 28:** Olympic-bound Rahi Sarnobat displayed sensational form to clinch the women's 25m pistol gold medal at the ISSF shooting World Cup here on Monday but teen sensation Manu Bhaker ended seventh in the same event.

Sarnobat's gold is India's first in the ongoing edition after the country secured one silver and two bronze medals earlier in the tournament.

The 30-year-old Sarnobat fired a final score of 39 after qualifying second with a total of 591. Her stupendous performance in the final included perfect scores in the third, fourth, fifth and the sixth series.

“After I got assurance about the gold, it was more about technicalities for me in the last few series as I wanted to try out a few things so I was doing that,” she said.

“This competition was absolutely not about performance or medal because I was trying out a few things which I am going to do in the Olympic Games and this is the final competition before that.”

“It was more about trying out things and finalising every thing before the Olympics for the last time and that was just that,” she added.

Nonetheless, winning a gold here has given Sarnobat the belief that her preparations are on the right track for the Tokyo Games.

“I have to keep working on this up to and after the Olympic as well.” — *PTI*

## Olympic briefs

## Japan ups health controls

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged on Monday to strengthen health controls at airports after a Ugandan Olympic team member tested positive for Covid-19 at the town hosting their training camp, triggering concerns that the upcoming games will spread infections. A Ugandan team member, reportedly a coach, tested positive on Saturday at Tokyo's Narita airport and was quarantined there.

## USA Basketball reveal roster

Experience mattered to USA Basketball when putting together a roster for the Tokyo Olympics. The Americans formally revealed their roster on Monday, one that will be third-oldest U.S. men's team in Olympic history for the Tokyo Games. The 12-man list includes five players — Kevin Love, Kevin Durant, Jrue Holiday, Damian Lillard and Draymond Green — already in their 30s.

## UAE to host T20 World Cup

**New Delhi, June 28:** The T20 World Cup scheduled to be held in India is being shifted to the UAE owing to the health safety concerns posed by Covid-19, BCCI President Sourav Ganguly said on Monday, ending weeks of speculation surrounding the mega-event in October-November.

“We have officially intimated the ICC that the T20 World Cup can be shifted to the United Arab Emirates. The details are being chalked out,” Ganguly said.

“The decision was taken keeping health safety concerns of all stakeholders in mind,” he added.

The BCCI will, however, remain the hosts of the showpiece.

Asked if October 17 has been finalised as the start



**We have officially intimated the ICC that the T20 World Cup can be shifted to the United Arab Emirates. The details are being chalked out.**

— **SOURAV GANGULY**  
BCCI President

date of the tournament, Ganguly said: “We will be able to finalise itinerary details in some days. October 17 start hasn't yet been finalised.”

Even an ICC spokesperson confirmed that the global body is yet to zero in on a final schedule.

The ICC, at the start of the month, had given BCCI a four-week window to decide and inform whether India could host

the marquee event considering the Covid-19 situation in the country.

This was after the pandemic forced the postponement of IPL, the second part of which is also being held in the UAE in September-October.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah, in a letter to all state units, said that the decision was taken keeping in mind that “safety of players and other stake-

holders is of paramount importance...”

“It was not an easy decision and we mulled over it for months, constantly keeping an eye on Covid situation all along.”

“However with the second wave causing such devastation, the decision ultimately boiled down to the safety and well being of the players and organizers,” Shah admitted.

“There is nothing more that we could have wanted than to host this prestigious tournament in India, but it was not to be.”

It was a foregone conclusion that India will find it difficult to host a 16-country tournament across nine cities with so many layers of health security concerns being there. — *PTI*

## Greek tragedy: Tsitsipas bows out

**London, June 28:** Novak Djokovic overcame an early wobble before getting his bid for a sixth Wimbledon and record-equalling 20th Grand Slam title off to a winning start on Monday and then saw potential semi-final opponent Stefanos Tsitsipas crash out.

One year after the 2020 tournament was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, defending champion and world number one Djokovic claimed a 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 win over Britain's 253rd-ranked Jack Draper.

Third seed Tsitsipas, however, beaten by Djokovic in the French Open final just two weeks ago, slumped to his third first round defeat in four visits to the tournament.

America's Frances Tiafoe, ranked 57, stunned the Greek star 6-4, 6-4, 6-3.

Djokovic, 34, struggled on the slippery Centre Court surface with the roof closed above it due to the rain which had



Frances Tiafoe of the US celebrates after defeating third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas on Day 1 of the Wimbledon on Monday. — *Twitter*

delayed play on outside courts for five hours.

Left-handed Draper, playing just his fifth match on the main tour, saved seven of seven break points in the opener

to stun the top seed.

But Djokovic soon snuffed out any danger of him becoming only the third defending champion to lose in the first round, by sweeping through the

remainder of the tie.

He finished with an impressive 25 aces and 47 winners as his 19-year-old opponent, who grew up just six miles (9.5km) from the All England Club, wilt-

## RESULTS

**Men's first round:** Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Jack Draper (GBR) 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2; Frances Tiafoe (USA) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) 6-4, 6-4, 6-3.

**Women's first round:** Sloane Stephens (USA) bt Petra Kvitova (CZE x10) 6-3, 6-4; Lauren Davis (USA) bt Jodie Burrage (GBR) 6-2, 6-1; Madison Keys (USA x23) bt Katie Swan (GBR) 6-3, 6-4; Lesley Kerkhove (NED) bt Svetlana Kuznetsova (RUS) 6-3, 6-3; Garbine Muguruza (ESP x11) bt Fiona Ferro (FRA) 6-0, 6-1; Ekaterina Alexandrova (RUS x32) bt Laura Siegemund (GER) 6-1, 6-3; Maria Camila Osorio (COL) bt Anna Kalinskaya (RUS) 1-6, 6-0, 6-4; Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x2) bt Monica Niculescu (ROM) 6-1, 6-4.