

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | WEDNESDAY 19 | AUGUST 2020

WEATHER



Max: 33°C
Min: 24°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Aavani 3
Tithi: Prathamai
Star: Magam
Rahukalam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm
Yamagandam:
7.30 am to 9 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.43 am
Zohar: 12.19 pm
Asar: 3.21 pm
Maghrib: 6.30 pm
Isha: 7.44 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.28 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.58 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 4.58 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 6.56 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+62,383)	(+1,093)
27,63,985	53,018

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+5,709)
TN: 3,49,654 **6,007**

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

2,21,74,653

DEATHS

7,79,998

COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
213

worldometers.info

Ashok Lavasa resigns as Election Commissioner; to join ADB as VP

New Delhi: Ashok Lavasa, who was next in line to head the poll panel, on Tuesday resigned as Election Commissioner and would soon be joining the Asian Development Bank as vice president, sources said.

Congress writes to Zuckerberg on bias at FB over hate speech

New Delhi: The Congress on Tuesday wrote a letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, demanding a probe into the alleged 'bias' and interference of the social media giant's India leadership team in the country's electoral democracy, even as the BJP took a swipe at the opposition party, saying any organisation that does not work to its liking is accused of acting under BJP-RSS pressure.

COUNTER POINT



Stop playing games... the party has given us these phones only to spread fake news!

100% quota: MP govt jobs only for residents, says CM

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, AUG. 18

In a major populist decision, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced Tuesday that his government will bar “outsiders” from taking up state government jobs and said that necessary legal provisions will be made to ensure that there is 100 per cent reservation in state government services for the residents of MP.

In a video statement, Mr Chouhan said that necessary amendments to the relevant

law would be made to implement this decision soon.

“The state government has taken a major decision today. Government jobs in the state will only be open for people from the state. We are taking necessary legal steps to enforce the decision. Residents of MP will have sole rights on resources of the state”, Mr Chouhan said.

The announcement came three days after Mr Chouhan indicated in his Independence Day address that the people of MP would be given preference in government jobs in the state.

STATE | 3

CM seeks Centre's help in improving water resources



deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle, google.com/+deccanchronicle

FIGHT OVER FUNDS

SC rejects plea to transfer PM CARES funds to NDRF

New Delhi, Aug. 18: Holding that financial planning is in the domain of the Centre, the Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to direct transfer of contributions made to the PM CARES Fund for battling the Covid-19 pandemic to the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).

The top court also ruled that at this need of the hour no exception can be taken to the constitution of a public charitable trust PM CARES Fund to have necessary financial resources to meet the emergent situation, adding this fund and the NDRF are entirely different funds with separate object and purpose.

The fund was launched by the Centre after the Covid-19 outbreak.

The court verdict prompted several BJP leaders and union ministers to target the Congress with party president JP Nadda saying it was a “resounding blow to the nefarious designs” of its leader Rahul Gandhi and his “band of rent a cause” activists.

Rubbishing the Congress' criticism on the issue, another BJP leader and Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said “transparency is writ large in the PM CARES Fund”. But the Congress said the judgement is a “body blow to transparency and accountability” of the government to the people.



● **A three-judge bench headed by justice Ashok Bhushan held that the two funds can exist separately and individuals and organisations are free to contribute to NDRF but funds from PM Cares need not be transferred to NDRF**

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the apex court let go an opportunity to bring in transparency in the fund which has “its own opaque and murky rules” and, thereby, deviated from the belief that “sunlight is the best disinfectant”.

Speaking to reporters, Prasad said the PM CARES Fund is a registered public trust created to fight emergencies like the coronavirus, and added it has so far contributed ₹3,100 crore in the battle against the pandemic. Out of this, ₹2,000 crore was spent on procuring over 50,000 ventilators, ₹1,000 crore was given to states to help migrant labourers and ₹100 crore for vaccine research, he said. This is the highest number of ventilators made available for critical care in one go since independence, he added.

The verdict was given on a petition by an NGO, Centre for Public Interest Litigation seeking a direc-

tion that all the money collected under the PM CARES Fund for the Covid-19 pandemic should be transferred to the NDRF. The petitioner had submitted that this new fund should not have been constituted when the NDRF is already in place to take care of disasters.

“The funds collected in the PM CARES Fund are entirely different funds which are funds of a public charitable trust and there is no occasion for issuing any direction to transfer the said funds to the NDRF.”

“The prayer of the petitioner to direct all the funds collected in the PM CARES Fund till date to be transferred to the NDRF is refused,: a bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan said in its 75-page verdict. The court said when the Centre is providing financial assistance to the States to contain Covid-19 it is not for any PIL petitioner to say it should give amount from this fund or that fund.

—PTI

Covid-19: EC to frame guidelines for polls within three days

New Delhi, Aug. 18: The Election Commission (EC) would come up with ‘broad’ guidelines within three days for holding elections during the Covid-19 pandemic.

An EC statement said the matter of issuing broad guidelines for elections and by-elections during “Covid-19 period” was discussed at the commission meeting on Tuesday.

The commission considered the views and suggestions given by the political parties.

It also considered the suggestions and recommendations made by chief electoral officers of states and union territories.

“After considering all these, the commission directed to frame broad guidelines within three days,” it said.

The commission also directed that on the basis of these guidelines, chief electoral officers of election-going states should also prepare a comprehensive plan for state or district concerned for Covid-19 related measures, taking into account the local conditions, while holding elections.

—PTI



India records highest single-day recovery from coronavirus

New Delhi, Aug.18: India has reached a record 57,584 recoveries in the past 24 hours — the highest in a single day, data from the health ministry showed. This is higher than the confirmed coronavirus cases added during the same period (55,079).

The overall Covid-19 recovery rate is now 73.18 per cent, according to the Union health ministry data.

“India has also recorded the highest single-day recoveries of 57,584 in the last 24 hours. This is higher than the confirmed cases added during the same period (55,079) Government of India,” ANI tweeted.

—PTI

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, AUG. 18

Paralympic gold medallist Mariyappan Thangavelu will become the second sportsperson from Tamil Nadu, after chess king Viswanathan Anand, to win the prestigious Khel Ratna award when the sports ministry gives its stamp of approval to the recommendations made by a committee of members. The 25-year-old from Salem, whose right leg was crushed in a road accident at a young age, is one of five names recommended

This is the first time in the history of awards that five athletes have been recommended for the top sporting accolade with the final decision resting on sports minister Kiren Rijiju

for the country's highest sporting honour. India opener Rohit Sharma, wrestler Vinesh Phogat, women's hockey captain Rani Rampal and table tennis player Manika Batra are the others.

Sports ministry awards

Sterlite copper plant to stay shut: HC junks plea to reopen

J. STALIN | DC CHENNAI, AUG. 18

The Madras high court has upheld an order of the Tamil Nadu government, directing permanent closure of Sterlite Plant in Thoothukudi district.

A division bench comprising Justices T.S. Sivagnanam and V.Bhavani Subbarayan dismissed the petitions filed by Vedanta Limited, which sought a direction to the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board to facilitate the immediate opening of its Sterlite Plant in Thoothukudi by immediate de-sealing of the plant with restoration of supply of electricity.

The bench also declined to entertain a plea from Vedanta to suspend the operation of the order for two weeks to enable it to file SLP in the Supreme Court.

The bench said the litigation commenced in 1996 as a Public Interest Litigation to protect the environment. The matters were entertained. The Supreme Court in the 2013 judgment appreciated the efforts of the public interest litigants that they had the courage to face the petitioner and conduct the litigation to save the environment. Even when setting aside the order of closure directed by the Division bench of this court, the Supreme Court left it to the decision of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board to take a decision including order of closure.

The litigation having had a chequered history, the question as to whether in the process of deciding these petitions whether there is going to be a direction for enforcement of a directive principle is a far-fetched argument deserves to be out rightly rejected, the bench

● **The verdict comes as a huge relief for residents in villages around the plant who have been protesting against it for over two decades. Political leaders who have spoken up against the Vedanta-owned copper smelter in recent years, especially following the May 2018 police firing, called the verdict a victory for environmental justice in the state**



added.

The bench said, “It was argued by the senior counsel for the petitioner that the inability of the state to maintain law and order or to avert a situation of breach of peace can never be a ground to throttle the fundamental right guaranteed to the petitioner under Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution. In this regard, reliance was placed on the decision in S.Rangarajan and Sony Pictures Releasing of India. Firstly, the petitioner not being a person, is not entitled to the guarantee under Article 19 (1) of the Constitution. The petitioner seeks to make out a case as if the shooting incident was the sole reason for the orders of closure and permanent sealing.

Forgetting for a moment the past litigation, the orders passed by the Board, the directions issued, the orders passed by Courts, by Tribunals, etc.

The Senior counsel for the 9th respondent is right in her submission that any action taken in public interest is a reasonable restriction on the right under Article 19 (1) (g) of the Constitution, which right does not endure in favour of the petitioner, as it is not a citizen. ■ **P3**

Politicos united in praise for verdict

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, AUG. 18

Political leaders cutting across party lines in the State welcomed the Madras high court's Tuesday verdict not allowing the Sterlite Copper plant in Thoothukudi to reopen.

Deputy Chief Minister O. Pannerselvam tweeted his approval of the judgment upholding the decision of the AIADMK government to close down the Sterlite Copper plant as per the sentiments of the people.

“The verdict is an exemplary one aimed at saving mankind,” said DMK president MK Stalin, urging the Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to place it before his ministerial colleagues and pass a Cabinet resolution in praise of that.

It gives respect to people's feelings, Stalin said in a statement. However, he regretted that no justice had been rendered to the victims of police firing that killed 13 people for taking part in a democratic struggle aimed at protecting them and the environment.

Calling it an important milestone, PMK founder S Ramadoss welcomed the judgment but told the State government not to be complacent about it but put up a strong fight in the Supreme Court when the matter goes there.

Ramadoss said that the company that had been violating norms since it was started in 1996 had caused the death of many people through gas leaks and accidents.

Though the factory was ordered to be closed in 2010 by the High Court, the Supreme Court allowed it to be opened after paying a fine of ₹100 crore. Yet the company did not follow the regulations that came after that, he said.

MDMK general secretary Vaiko called it a victory for people's struggle and said it was the sacrifice of the 13 people who were killed in police firing in 2018 that protected justice. ■ **P3**

Both dead as rowdy throws bomb at cop

M. ARULOLI | DC THOOTHUKUDI, AUG 18

The use of crude bombs to settle scores has come to light with the death of a cop in the hands of an accused here, on Monday.

A police head constable was killed in a bomb attack, while he chased to nab murder accused. The accused, who hurled a country bomb at the chasing policeman also was severely injured, and he died on the way to hospital in Thoothukudi district.

Acting on a tip off that a history-sheeter, Duraimuthu of Vellore village near Srivaikundam was hiding in a forest area in the Vallanadu hills, a special police team led by sub-inspector Murugaperumal and four others, went in search of Duraimuthu on the direction of Srivaikundam DSP Venkatesan.

Duraipandian and his three accomplices who were hiding in the forest, however, tried to escape. While police managed to nab three men, head constable Subramanian (26) of Pandaravilai, went on chasing Duraipandi, who in his attempt to escape, hurled a country bomb at Subramanian.

Since Subramanian was following Duraipandi very closely, the bomb injured both the cop and the accused. Having sustained severe head injuries, Subramanian died on the spot, while the accused Duraipandi died on the way to the Tirunelveli medical college hospital, said Thoothukudi SP, Jeyakumar. Duraipandi had two murder cases on him in Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli districts, and four attempt to murder cases, added Jeyakumar.

An enquiry with the three aides of Duraipandi revealed that he had bought the country-made bomb to avenge the killing of his brother, Kannan, by some rival gangsters in Eral.

At 5,709, new Covid cases still rule high, deaths 121

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs CHENNAI, AUG. 18

Fatalities due to Covid-19 crossed the 6,000 mark with 121 persons succumbing to the disease on Tuesday, 24 of them in Chennai alone, and taking the total number so far to 6,007.

Those dead include 108 with co-morbidities and 13 had no chronic diseases.

The days' fresh infections state-wide was 5,709 indicating the continuing spread of the disease unabated.

Everyday, Tamil Nadu has been reporting 100 plus deaths in recent times.

Even in Chennai the number was 1,182 while in the adjoining districts it continued to shoot —

Death cases in Chennai on Tuesday 24

Total number of death cases in TN 2,501

Number of active cases 53,860

Chengalpattu 344, Kanchipuram 249 and Tiruvallur 489.

Some of the other districts where the numbers were high were Coimbatore 392, Cuddalore 250, Salem 286 and Theni 295.

With 5,850 patients getting discharged from various hospitals, the recoveries outnumbered the new infections and in total

In 2016, four athletes - **star shuttler PV Sindhu, gymnast Dipa Karmakar, shooter Jitu Rai, and wrestler Sakshi Malik** - were collectively given this award



Rohit Sharma will only be the fourth cricketer after Sachin Tendulkar, just-retired MS Dhoni and current skipper Virat Kohli to be conferred with the Khel Ratna

and controversies go hand in hand and it's no different this year. Javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, gold medallist in Asian, Commonwealth Games and World junior events, has been ignored and it has become a raging

debate. TN's Mariyappan who won Paralympic gold in 2016 and the Arjuna and Padma Shri awards had a murder charge against him in 2017. A petition was filed in the Madras High Court to implead him in a

youth's death case. However, the Superintendent of Police of the Salem district, Rajan, had said the Paralympian had no connection with the case.

The charge had been withdrawn subsequently. “There is no case or charge pending against me. I have submitted all the documents to the awards committee. The sports ministry also conducted an enquiry,” said Mariyappan, adding that the Khel Ratna would inspire him to win another medal at the Tokyo Paralympics next year.

SHORT TAKES

Four bikes burnt in Pallikaranai, again

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

The mystery of burning bikes seems to have surfaced in Chennai's Pallikaranai in recent days. According to the police, in the early hours of Tuesday, four motorbikes parked outside the Perumbakkam slum clearance board apartment went up in flames. Arun, Edward, Anitha and Gopi — the owners of the vehicles — were alerted by the residents and the four could do nothing but watching helplessly as their vehicles burnt to ashes. The Pallikaranai police registered a case of accidental fire and began an investigation to track down the culprits.

It may be noted that two weeks ago, in the same area, 11 motorbikes were found burnt. Police said that at least 30 incidents of two-wheelers being set ablaze have been reported in the last months. Further investigations are on.

Gold seized at Chennai airport

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

The customs department seized gold worth ₹10 lakh from a passenger who landed in Chennai in a repatriation flight. According to airport sources, a 28-year-old passenger from Chennai, who was stranded in Dubai was brought to Chennai along with 176 passengers by an Air India express evacuation flight.

Based on suspicion, the man was intercepted and his belongings were checked. During his personal search, officials found a gold piece concealed inside the rectum. The gold piece, weighing 190 grams, valued at ₹10 lakh was seized under the customs act of 1962. Further investigations are on.

Two boys drown in lake

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC
SALEM, AUG. 18

Two boys who went to bathe in a lake near Konganapuram next to Edappadi on Tuesday, drowned. Sources said Santosh (12), is son of Venkatesh of Rakiyampatti area of Konganapuram. He was a class 7 student in the local government high school. Another boy, Dianish (12), is son of Senthil of Elachipalayam Ponnayaru area, Namakkal district. He was class 7 student in a private school in Maravaneri, Salem.

Dianish had been staying at his granny Sellammal's house in Rakiyampatti. On Tuesday, Santosh and Dianish had gone for a bath in a small water body in Moriwala area. The two waded into deep water and drowned. Those nearby immediately pulled them out and admitted them to the Konganapuram PHC where doctors declared them brought dead.

Lurking danger



An open manhole on a footpath on Thiruneermalai main road poses danger to pedestrians. — DC

Dalit woman civic chief stopped from hoisting flag

SHRC directs government to file report in two weeks

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has directed the government to file a report on a Dalit civic chief prevented from hoisting the tricolour during the 74th Independence Day celebrations in Tiruvallur district.

Based on newspaper reports, the SHRC initiated suo motu proceedings and directed the Director, Rural Development, the Collector and the SP of Tiruvallur district to file the report in two weeks.

According to reports, V. Amurtham, president of Athupakkam panchayat, was stopped from hoisting

the national flag by non-Dalits at the panchayat elementary school in Tiruvallur district.

She first got a call from school headmistress Dhanalakshmi to hoist the flag to mark the Independence Day celebrations. While she was getting ready to go to the school, she got another call from the headmistress, requesting her not to attend the function and that they would celebrate the day on their own.

Since the school building is adjacent to the panchayat office, the panchayat office-bearers conduct the flag-hoisting ceremony at the school and not at the panchayat office.

She has been facing discrimination for long. During Republic Day celebrations also, she faced a similar problem.

When she stepped on the podium, former panchayat president V. Haridoss allegedly abused her in front of everyone and prevented her from hoisting the National Flag. Vice-president Revathy's husband Vijay allegedly intimidated Amurtham in her office. Non-Dalits have not allowed her to keep her name board in the panchayat office. Amurtham had won the local body election in the SC (woman) reserved category. It was a general category seat earlier.

Ganja peddler killed, buried in forest

Chennai: In another incident in the city suburbs, a 33-year-old ganja peddler was killed and his body was buried in a forest area in Murugambakkam.

A few residents of Old Mambakkam in Maduranatakam spotted a machete soaked with blood in an empty ground in their vil-

lage. They informed the police, who recovered the weapon and sent it for a forensic examination. Based on the inputs from the locals, police rounded up a few ganja peddlers who were usually seen in the ground during the wee hours. During an investigation, it was found that

one Sabari (30), also a ganja peddler murdered Karthik (33) due to enmity over ganja peddling. Police recovered the body of Karthik and sent it to the Chengalpet government hospital for post-mortem. Police arrested Sabari and are investigating him. — DC

IIT-Madras tops in Atal ranking again

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

The Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) was adjudged as the top innovative educational institute in the country in the Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) for the second consecutive year.

M. Venkaiah Naidu, Vice-President, announced the results on

Tuesday. Around 674 institutions had participated in the ARIIA this year compared with 496 Institutions last year. ARIIA was launched last year by the innovation cell of the ministry of education in 'Institutions of national importance, central universities and centrally-funded technical institutions'.

IIT-M excelled in ARIIA owing to its strong entrepreneurial ecosystem that

encourages students to become job-generators. The IIT-Madras Incubation Cell (IITMIC) is India's leading deep-technology startup hub with innovation.

IITMIC houses incubators such as Healthcare Technology Innovation Centre, Rural Technology and Business Incubator and Bio-Tech incubators. IITMIC has incubated over 200 deep tech start-ups till June that have attracted

Tasmac reopens Chennai outlets, tipplers not enthused

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

The Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (Tasmac) received a cold response from tipplers after re-opening its 640 outlets across the city on Tuesday after almost five months.

It was on March 25, as part of national lockdown, liquor shops in the city were shut down. The Tasmac kept its outlets in the city closed even after reopening its outlets in the neighbouring districts including Chengalpet, Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur.

An employee at the Poonamallee outlet, when contacted, said there was no rush at the shop on the re-opening day. "Things were normal here. I think people don't have money to spend on liquor due to pandemic," he said.

The Tasmac as well as city police had made elaborate arrangements at the outlets to maintain social distancing norms and law and order. Pandals with barricades were erected in front of the shops to prevent traffic congestion and unruly crowd.

The Tasmac officials of Chennai North and Central regions said no brisk sales occurred in their regions as well. "All arrangements were made as we expected a rush for coupons in the morning itself. Circles were drawn to maintain social distancing and barricades were placed to regulate the customers. Yet, there were only a few takers for coupons," they added.

Tasmac reopened its outlets in the city after the apex court endorsed the direct sale of liquor during the lockdown. The Supreme Court order on June 12 allowed the state government to come up with ways to sell liquor, online or through outlets. As a result, Tasmac agreed to formulate the standard operating procedure for the sale of liquor in retail shops. On May 15 the top court, however, had stayed the high court's order on May 8 to close all state-run liquor shops in Tamil Nadu, with immediate effect to maintain social distancing norms



Tasmac shops in Pallavaram, Chromepet and Tambaram areas wear a deserted look on Tuesday. — DC



Tipplers buy liquor at a Tasmac outlet at Purasawalkam on Tuesday.

A resident of Ramapuram said he did not see even a hundred people in front of the Tasmac outlet near his

house. "People are not enthused by the reopening of liquor shops as they are getting enough stuff in the black market. Though shops in the city were shut, tipplers used to smuggle liquor from the neighbouring district and sell it to the needy. Apart from this, nobody wants to take the risk of contracting Covid-19 by queuing up in front of the shops," he said.

Meanwhile, the state government continued to draw criticism on reopening of Tasmac outlets from various quarters including opposition leader M. K. Stalin. He

said the reopening would result in spike of Covid-19 cases.

Rajeshwari Priya, leader of Anaithu Makkal Arasial Katchi, staged a dharna outside a Tasmac outlet in Anna Nagar to register protest.

The Tasmac had earlier maintained that its outlets will be open from 10 am to 7 pm and only 500 tokens will be issued at a store a day. In the pre-lockdown period, Tasmac sold liquor worth ₹15 crore a day in the Chennai market alone while it accumulated an average ₹130- ₹140 crore a day across the state.

IIT-M excelled in ARIIA owing to its strong entrepreneurial ecosystem that encourages students to become job-generators. The IIT-Madras Incubation Cell (IITMIC) is India's leading deep-technology startup hub with innovation

versities primarily on innovation-related indicators. It aims to inspire Indian institutions to reorient their mind-set and build ecosystems to encourage high quality research, innovation and entrepreneurship.

More than quantity, ARIIA focuses on quality of innovations and measures the real impact created by these innovations nationally and internationally.

PIL against agent for withholding cancelled flight fare

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

An advocate has approached the Madras high court to direct the ministry of civil aviation to take appropriate action against the VIA.COM EBIX Travel Private Ltd, Bangalore, for withholding cancelled flight fare and consequently frame suitable guidelines for online travel agents carrying on business through website.

Justice K.Ravichandrababu before whom the petition filed by advocate R.Chandrasudan came up for hearing, ordered notice, returnable by four weeks, to the ministry of civil aviation, the Indigo Central Wing, New Delhi and the managing director, VIA.COM EBIX Travel Private Ltd.

According to petitioner, in order to spend time with family members during the summer recess, he had booked a ticket in the Indigo Central Wing's flight service for the group consisting of six persons to undertake a journey from Chennai to Bagdgora on April 30, 2020, in similar way return ticket also booked for the same route through VIA.COM EBIX Travel Private Ltd, who is the authorized agent of Indigo fully operating through online portal. He was issued with booking reference number and Airline PNR No and he paid a sum of ₹65,992 towards the total cost of the airfare, which

includes the service charges of VIA.COM and separate tax invoices were issued by the Indigo, he added.

He said while so, in view of Covid-19 pandemic complete lockdown has been announced by the central government in the month of March 2020 initially for 21 days and thereafter it was extended periodically. As a result of which, the Indigo had cancelled flight tickets in view of suspension of flight services. Under normal circumstances, if the flight was cancelled beyond the control of the passenger or operational reasons, at any event the airways were bound to refund the airfare without any deduction. This was the normal procedure and norms in the field of flight services offered by private carriers. But contra, instead of refunding the flight fares for cancelled tickets, initially Indigo adopted the novel practice in the form of credit shell for the entire ticket amount and issued a credit shell for PNR with an assurance that the booking remains safe and the same can be used within one year, he added.

He said taking note of the plight of passengers after detailed examination of the grievances received from various quarters, the ministry of civil aviation issued circular directing the airlines to refund tickets booked during the corona virus lockdown within three

weeks. However, for the reasons best known, the circular was restricted to travel between 1st and 2nd period of lockdown and the booking made during the relevant point of time. The ministry of civil aviation did not take into account the larger sect of the passengers who booked ticket much prior to lockdown to have their air travel which was interdicted by the lockdown imposed on account of Covid-19 leading to suspension of travel in any mode. Viewed from the present scenario, it was highly not viable for the same persons to be grouped together to use a credit shell for the next travel and economic condition also should not afford to do so.

The purpose of a family tour may or may not happen among the family members of the same group in future. Hence, he sought a refund from Indigo citing the circular of the ministry of civil aviation. Indigo had processed full refund to the VIA.COM. Further, he was directed to contact VIA.COM agent for any queries related to refund. However, for the reasons best known, the VIA.COM did not choose to refund the flight fare which has been duly credited by Indigo. Therefore, he lodged a complaint before the ministry of civil aviation. But there was no progress. Hence, he has filed the present petition, he added.

HC directive on convict seeking to get married

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

In a bid to prevent women getting married with convicts without their consent and by coercion, the Madras high court has said if any marriage is to be conducted with any convict, the process should be devised by which any convict who seeks to get married should apply to the women commission and the women ommission shall enquire the girl as to whether her consent has been obtained by coercion or not.

A division bench comprising Justices N.Kirubakaran and V.M.Velumani was passing interim orders on a habeas corpus petition filed by a 55-year-old woman, which sought a direction to the prison authorities in Vellore to grant 30 days ordinary leave to her husband, aged about 58 years, a convict prisoner, now confined in the Central Prison, Vellore.

The bench said the present petition has been filed by the wife of the convict,

seeking parole for 30 days to arrange funds for her son's higher studies. In para 3 of the affidavit, it has been specifically stated by the wife that at the time of marriage in the year 1992, she was not aware that her husband was a convict. The husband of the petitioner was convicted under section 302 IPC (murder) by the judgment dated March 30, 1985. It seems that after coming out on bail, the petitioner's husband got married to the petitioner, without disclosing the pending case. Be that as it may, in many cases, the parole applications are filed for the purpose of celebration of marriage and also for delivery of child. Those petitions are filed by the wife of the convicts who are being convicted for life imprisonment. Therefore, this court suo motu impleads the National Commission for Women, New Delhi and State Commission for Women, Chennai, as party respondents to the proceedings. Assistant Solicitor General G.Karthikeyan and Additional

Public prosecutor R.Prabhavathi takes notice on behalf of the newly impleaded respondents 3 and 4, the bench added.

The bench said, "Since the marriages are conducted when the convicts are in prison, it is not known as to whether the consent of the girl for marriage is taken by force or by coercion or for religious or communal reasons. Therefore, if any marriage is to be conducted with any convict, the process should be devised by which any convict who seeks to get married should apply to the Women Commission and the Women Commission shall enquire the girl as to whether her consent has been obtained by coercion or not. Usually, no lady will come forward to get married to the convict who has to spend his life time in jail. Prima facie, it appears that it is a violation of fundamental rights as well as human rights of the lady who is getting married to a life convict". The bench posted after two weeks, further hearing of the case.

Man kills friend over affair with his wife

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

A 25-year-old man was arrested along with his two accomplices for allegedly killing his friend, two months back and dumping the body in a well in Oragadam in Kanchipuram district, police said.

The matter came to light on Monday after the victim's parents filed a complaint with the Kanchipuram Superintendent of Police that their son, Pratap (20) was missing. After the family raised suspicion, the Oragadam police registered a man missing case and began inquiries.

Three of Pratap's friends were called in for investigation. During interrogation, the trio confessed to murdering Pratap and dumping his body in a well.

Based on their information, police rushed to a field in Oragadam and pulled out the decomposed body from a well there. The body has been sent to the Chengalpet government hospital for a post-mortem.

According to the police, Pratap, a native of Villupuram, worked in a private company in Oragadam. He lived in

Pratap's friends were called in for investigation. During an investigation, the trio confessed to having murdered Pratap and dumped his body in a well

rented accommodation with his work-mates, Nithyananthan (25), Poovarasam (19) and Philip (23). Police said a few months back, Nithyananthan was arrested on the charges of robbery. When he was away from home, Pratap developed an illicit affair with his wife, Sathya. However, a few days later, Nithyananthan who was released on bail got to know about their affair and hatched a plan to eliminate Pratap.

As planned, on July third week, Nithyananthan invited Pratap to booze with him. He took him to the fields in Oragadam and murdered him with the help of Poovarasam and Philip. They allegedly tied the body to a rock and threw it in the well.

Police arrested the trio based on their confession. They were produced in the Sriperumbudur court and lodged at the prison.

SHORT TAKES

₹50 lakh relief for cop killed in actionDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami announced a relief of ₹50 lakh for the family of police constable Subramanian killed while trying to apprehend a murderer accused in Thoothukudi district on Tuesday.

An official press release said that accused Duraimuthu from Melamangalakurichi threw a country bomb on the police team, led by Murugaperumal, sub-inspector of Srivaikundam police station, that was giving him a hot chase.

A family member of the deceased policeman will also be given a government job, the release said.

1,241 cases booked for denying I-Day leaveDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

The state labour department had taken action against 1241 establishments for not giving its employees leave on Independence Day on August 15 this year.

The crackdown, ordered by labour commissioner R. Nandagopal, led to the authorities finding out that 647 shops, 580 restaurants, six transport companies, seven estates and one beedi company had not given leave on Independence Day.

As per the rules, companies are mandated to declare leave for nine days in a year – Republic Day, Labour Day, Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanthi, besides five religious festivals – and those working on those days should be given compensatory off or double salary, an official press release said.

TN nominee for panel on OBC quota namedDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

The state government has named Dr P. Umanath, who is the managing director of Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation, as the nominee for the committee to be formed by the Centre to implement the 50 per cent reservation for Backward Classes in medical admissions.

The committee, to be formed on the instructions of the Madras High Court, which heard the case relating to the denial of reservation for OBC students in medical and dental courses, will implement the reservation for Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Denotified Communities from next year.

The 50 per cent reservation would be in the admission to the seats surrendered by Tamil Nadu to the all-India quota in undergraduate, postgraduate and diploma medical and dental courses in the State's medical and dental colleges.

Police torture alleged**CB-CID probe sought into man's suicide**B RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, AUG. 18

Following the suicide of a 38-year-old farmer soon after police enquiry at Denadcombai police station near here, the Baduga Desa Party (BDP), has written to the Nilgiris Collector J Innocent Divya, to recommend to the government a CBCID enquiry, as they suspected police torture on the deceased farmer.

Police said P. Srinivasan, hailing from Puduvedu hamlet near Denadcombai village, was found riding a two-wheeler in an inebriated condition on Saturday evening, when a Denadcombai police patrol, stopped him. He was found to be riding his friend's bike.

The cops took him to the police station, filed a case against him, and seized the bike and asked him to pay the

The cops took him to the police station, filed a case against him, and seized the bike and asked him to pay the fine following the necessary procedures to retrieve the bike. He was allowed to go home on Saturday night

fine following the necessary procedures to retrieve the bike. He was allowed to go home on Saturday night.

But on Sunday evening, he committed suicide by hanging in a shed in Arakuchi area near his village. An ADSP has now been entrusted with the job of investigating the incident, police sources said.

However, Manjai Mohan, president, BDP, citing reports

in some vernacular dailies, alleged that the police administration in the Nilgiris is trying to downplay the issue saying that Srinivasan committed suicide due to some other reasons.

"Reports in a section of the media allege that the Denadcombai police team led by sub-inspector Loganathan had rebuked Srinivasan using foul language, and demanded hefty amounts to avoid further action in this case, and to also retrieve the bike. As this was impossible for a poor farmer like Srinivasan, he committed suicide on Sunday. It is also alleged that the cops have been intimidating Srinivasan's family, urging them not to flare up the issue. Hence, the need of the hour is to hold a CB-CID enquiry, to unearth the facts and render justice to the victim's family," Mohan added.

Vedanta failed to establish that TN decisions are malafide: HCJ. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

Holding that the petitioner has not been able to establish that the impugned decisions are malafide or on account of extraneous consideration or political consideration or a colourable exercise of power, the Madras high court has dismissed the petitions filed by Vedanta Limited, challenging the order of the Tamil Nadu government and the State Pollution Control Board, closing its Sterlite Plant in Thoothukudi district.

Passing orders on a batch of petitions filed by Vedanta Limited, a division bench comprising Justices T.S. Sivagnanam and V. Bhavani Subbarayan said the petitioner being the biggest in the area cannot plead that they have been singled out and victimised when they have been found to be a violator.

The bench said the state is right in their submission that the 2013 judgment arose out of an order of the court directing closure whereas, the impugned orders, in these writ petitions are orders refusing to renew the consent to operate by the TNPCB and an order of permanent closure by the government followed by further orders by the TNPCB. Therefore, the 2013 judgment of the Supreme Court cannot be a bar for the authorities issuing directions for closure, the bench added.

The bench said a reading of the impugned government order shows that the government under section 18 (1) (b) of the Water Act, in the larger public

Shocked over judgment, says Sterlite CEOM. ARULOLI | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, AUG. 18

The Madras HC's dismissal of Vedanta's plea, challenging the government's order to close its Sterlite copper smelter plant here, came as a shock to the Sterlite administration, said Pankaj Kumar, CEO, who in his response to the high court order said, "It is very much against our expectations."

Pankaj Kumar said the HC's judgment is a big let-down of over 50,000 people who have lost their livelihood, and to another around one lakh more

interest, endorsed the closure direction of the TNPCB and also directed the TNPCB to seal the unit and close the plant permanently. There were three facets to the impugned G.O. The first of which being, it was in exercise of power under section 18 (1) (b) by which, the state government was empowered to issue directions to the state board, which shall be bound by the direction.

The second facet was that the government thought it fit to invoke such power in larger public interest and precisely for such reason, in para 2 of the impugned G.O, Article 48A of the Constitution was referred to where under, the state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment. The third facet has two limbs to it. The first of which being, a direction endorsing the closure direction of TNPCB. The second was a direction of the state government to the TNPCB to seal the unit and close the plant permanently. Therefore, to state that the power under section 18 (1) (b) can be

invoked only to issue direction in rem and not in personam was an argument, which does not merit acceptance, the bench added.

The bench said the petitioner has been visited with earlier orders of closure and none of those orders were put to challenge by the petitioner on the ground now canvassed before it stating that the board does not have power to issue such a direction under section 17 (1) (i), though it may fully not be right to say that the petitioner was stopped from raising such contentions, nevertheless, the court can take note of the conduct of the petitioner that the petitioner was aware of the legal position and precisely for such reason, such contention was not raised at any earlier point of time, when closure orders were passed. Thus for the above reasons, it was held that the impugned government order does not suffer from the vice of lack of jurisdiction and the board as well as the government

pliance for the five years previous to its closure by the state government on May 28, 2018," said Pankaj. "We, however, respect the court verdict as it comes and accept it and will look at all legal options available to us, seeking for a remedy," he added.

Further, sounding more optimistic of winning the legal battle, Pankaj Kumar announced the uninterrupted continuation of welfare measures that the company has been implementing till the time the plant exhausts all its legal options.

However, the police personnel responsible for the death of those people are still free, he pointed out.

Working President of TNCC Mohan Kumaramangalam welcomed the verdict as 'the first step to providing justice to the victims of the brutal police shooting that claimed the lives of several innocent protestors, including Snowlin, a young courageous girl who valiantly fought for the future of our children. Kumaramangalam said that he continued to wait for the Justice Aruna Jagadeesan Commission report so that the guilty could be brought to book and the families of the victims can get justice and achieve some closure in their lives.

The high court had stressed through its verdict that superpowers had to bow to the strong voice of he people, Makkal Needhi Maiyam founder Kamal Haasan said in a statement. Though the verdict called for a celebration, the war was not over and must be fought continuously, Kamal Haasan said.

Thus, this report definitely a material, which should be reckoned to hold that the continued operation of the petitioner has affected not only the quality of the air in the area but as well as ground water. The above conclusion, which we had arrived at based on public opinion, should be given due credence because, the defaults committed by the petitioner have been continuously indicated in various reports more particularly, of Neeri".

**War not over, says Kamal**

From P1

However, the police personnel responsible for the death of those people are still free, he pointed out.

Working President of TNCC Mohan Kumaramangalam welcomed the verdict as 'the first step to providing justice to the victims of the brutal police shooting that claimed the lives of several innocent protestors, including Snowlin, a young courageous girl who valiantly fought for the future of our children.

Kumaramangalam said that he continued to wait for the Justice Aruna Jagadeesan Commission report so that the guilty could be brought to book and the families of the victims can get justice and achieve some closure in their lives.

The high court had stressed through its verdict that superpowers had to bow to the strong voice of he people, Makkal Needhi Maiyam founder Kamal Haasan said in a statement.

Though the verdict called for a celebration, the war was not over and must be fought continuously, Kamal Haasan said.

Activists laud HC verdict on SterliteDC CORRESPONDENT
THOOTHUKUDI, AUG 18

The dismissal of Sterlite's plea against its closure order of the state government by the Madras high court, sent waves of jubilation across the city, as activist groups and political parties distributed sweets and burst crackers on Tuesday, hailing the judgement.

Activists started congregating in front of the Rajaji Reservoir park on the Thoothukudi - Palayamkottai highway since 9 am, members of the Anti-Sterlite People's Federation, Thoothukudi district, led by coordinator, Krishnamoorthy, were hopeful of a

favourable judgement for them.

As the judgement came on expected lines, they shouted in joy, hailing the judges. The also thanked the state government for putting up a strong defense against Sterlite's petition.

The police order against public gathering was totally ignored by the activists, who also joined the celebrations on the busy road.

Cadres of the AIADMK, DMK, CPI(M), MDMK and Naam Thamizhar Katchi, too joined the celebration. The activists also wanted the government to fight out the case if Sterlite went on an appeal to the Supreme Court.



The bench dismissed the petition, challenging the order passed by the TNPCB rejecting the application for renewal of consent and upheld the order passed by the TNPCB.

The bench also dismissed the petition challenging the orders of the TNPCB issuing directions for closure and disconnection of power supply.

Court ruling on Sterlite welcomedDC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, AUG. 18

The coordinator of 'Thamizhaga Anaithu Vivasaya Sangangalin Orunginaippu Kuzhu', P. R. Pandian, has welcomed the Madras High Court order upholding the state government's order to close Sterlite copper plant, at Thoothukudi. "We welcome the order which has rendered justice to 13 persons who sacrificed their lives in the police firing in the agitation against Sterlite, and the people of Thoothukudi who have been fighting against the polluting industry for many years," said Pandian, in a press release issued here on Tuesday. Action should be taken against Anil Agarwal, proprietor of the plant, and Vedanta group should be banned from running and starting any industry in India, Pandian added.

Kosapet hopeful

Artisans in Kosapet near Purasawalkam, hoping people will buy small Vinayaka clay idols for worship at home on Vinayaka Chaturthi, get the images ready. —DC

Elephant calf carcass found in Kovai forestDC CORRESPONDENT
COIMBATORE, AUG. 18

A new born female calf elephant was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Coimbatore forest range in the early hours of Tuesday.

According to DFO Venkatesh, anti-poaching (AP) watchers during their routine patrolling in the early hours of Tuesday, had noticed a dead elephant calf in the forest, and they were unable to find any elephant herd nearby.

AIADMK functionaries defect to DMK

Chennai: A group of 12 AIADMK functionaries, led by former MP and Villupuram North district secretary Dr R Lakshmanan, joined the DMK at the Anna Arivalayam in the presence of party president M K Stalin on Tuesday. The defection, coming

On an alert, a team led by additional principal chief conservator of forest, Coimbatore, I Anwardeen, along with DFO, ACF and veterinarian Dr Sukumar, rushed to the spot close to Anaikatti Central beat which 15 kms from Mangarai, deep inside the reserve forest.

The carcass was in a decomposed condition. After an autopsy, Dr Sukumar declared that the new born calf could have been 'delivered dead' a couple of days back, and wild boars would have mauled the carcass.

close on the heels of a former AIADMK Minister Dr Ravi joining the DMK, is a pointer to a prevailing trend in which many politicians, feeling left out in their own parties, are being lured by DMK functionaries at the district level to their camp. —DC

Collector's fiat on Velankanni feteDC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, AUG. 18

The district administration here has banned the entry and participation of devotees to the annual festival of 'Punitha Arokia Annai' popularly known as 'Velankanni Matha' at Velankanni, in the annual festival to commence on August 29, said Collector Praveen P Nair. In a

release on Tuesday, Collector Nair said, entry of devotees into Velankanni Church has been banned since the pandemic and its impact increased day by day in the state. Since the Church authorities have made elaborate arrangements to conduct the festival, routine rituals and special masses, covered by online and television net-

work, devotees should avoid visiting Velankanni, but can watch the festival over electronic media, he added.

Man, son killed: A 59-year-old farmer and his 32-year-old son were brutally murdered by a gang over a land dispute at Mettu Irungalur village under Samayapuram police limits near here, on Tuesday.

SHORT TAKES

SWAPNA, UAE OFFICIALS GOT ₹3.60 CR: ED

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 18

Gold smuggling case accused Swapna Suresh and top officials of UAE consulate here received ₹3.60 crore as commission from a construction firm for a Life Mission project in Vadakkenchery in Palakkad district of Kerala.

This was disclosed by the Enforcement Directorate which had earlier questioned Swapna Suresh. The Life Mission project costing ₹18 crore was meant for providing flats to those families which lost their homes in floods.

The ED said of the ₹18 cr for the project, ₹3.60 cr was given as commission which was shared by Swapna, top brass of UAE consulate and an Egyptian national at the consulate. The deal was to pay 20 per cent of the project cost as commission for getting the funding sanctioned for the project.

The commission issue has come as a major embarrassment for the ruling Left Democratic Front government as the Life Mission is its flagship programme aimed at providing homes to landless and homeless families in the state.

According to ED, Swapna had also received ₹70 lakh in 2019 from a company which was awarded the contract for visa stamping at the consulate.

Besides she reportedly used to get 1000 dollars for every kg of gold smuggled through her.

Meanwhile, the Con-gress-led Opposition UDF has demanded a high-level probe into the commission issue. Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala said the Chief Minister cannot shy away from his responsibility as commission was sought for a government sponsored project.

NO CHANGE IN MUKHERJEE'S CONDITION

New Delhi, Aug. 18: There is no change in the condition of former President Pranab Mukherjee who continues to be on ventilator support, the Army's Research and Referral hospital said on Tuesday.

Doctors attending on him said his vital parameters are stable.

The 84-year-old former president was admitted to the hospital in Delhi Cantonment on August 10.

He was operated for removal of a clot in the brain and has been in a coma ever since. He also tested positive for Covid-19.

"There is no change in the medical condition of Shri Pranab Mukherjee. He continues to be on ventilator support and his vital parameters are stable," a statement from the hospital said. Mukherjee was the 13th President of India from 2012 to 2017.

NIA ARRESTS DOCTOR FOR 'LINKS WITH ISIS'

New Delhi, Aug. 18: The NIA has arrested an ophthalmologist from a medical college in Bengaluru for allegedly being in touch with ISIS operatives, working to develop a medical and a weaponry-related applications to help terrorist cadres and furthering its activities in the country, officials said on Tuesday.

Abdur Rahman, 28, working at M S Ramaiah Medical College, was taken into custody on Monday in connection with the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) case being probed by the agency, they said.

The ISKP case was initially registered by the Delhi Police Special Cell in March 2020, after the arrest of a Kashmiri couple - Jahanzaib Sami Wani and his wife Hina Bashir Beigh - from Okhla Vihar, Jamia Nagar in the national capital.

The couple having affiliations with the ISKP, an affiliate group of ISIS, were allegedly involved in subversive and anti-national activities and were in touch with a member of the Abu Dhabi module of the ISIS, Abdullah Basith, who was arrested in a separate NIA case and lodged in Tihar jail. "During interrogation, Rahman confessed that he was conspiring with accused Sami and other Syria-based ISIS operatives on secure messaging platforms to further ISIS activities. He was in the process of developing a medical application for helping the injured ISIS cadres in the conflict zones and a weaponry-related application for the benefit of ISIS."

J&K ENCOUNTER ENDS AFTER 30 HOURS

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, AUG. 18

The encounter in Kreeri area, 38-km north of Srinagar, ended on Tuesday afternoon after the security forces bombed the edifice where one of the three militants involved in a deadly sneak attack on police party a day ago had been holed up.

However, the search operation in the area was still underway as reports last came in. "The joint operation is still on. So far, two AK assault rifles and three pistols have been recovered," said defence spokesman Colonel Rajesh Kalia.

The officials confirmed that the remaining LeT militant, probably a Pakistani national, too was killed in the security forces final assault, ending the nearly 30-hour-long gunfight.

IGP (Kashmir) Vijay Kumar said that the third militant Usman killed on Tuesday was involved in the murder of local BJP leader Sheikh Waseem Bari along with his father and brother in northern Bandipora town on July 8. Two other militants were killed on Monday within hours of their together targeting a joint party of the J&K police and Central Reserve Police Force manning a makeshift checkpoint set up on a road running parallel to a shallow stream in Kreeri's Watragam hamlet with rifle and pistol fire.

A Special Police Officer of the J&K police and two CRPF jawans were killed in the attack.

During the operation which was resumed at first light on Tuesday after remaining suspended for the night to avoid collateral damage, two Army soldiers were also killed. The Defence spokesman confirmed it and said, "Two soldiers who were critically injured have succumbed."

NHRC orders ₹5 l relief to encounter killing victims

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, AUG. 18

The National Human Rights Commission has directed the state government to pay ₹5 lakh within four weeks as monetary compensation to the next of kin of each of the five persons allegedly shot dead by the police in the Alair encounter of April 7, 2015. The order dated July 29 was received last week, but was lying in the office of advocate Mohammed Osman Shaheed, who had presented the case before the commission. The advocate, who is also president of the All India Minorities Defence Council, is ailing, and he saw it only this week.

Izhar Khan, Syed Amjad Ali, Mohammed Haneef, Mohammed Zakeer and Vikar Ahmed were allegedly shot dead on the outskirts of Tanguturu village in Nalgonda district while they were being shifted to the Hyderabad Metropolitan Courts from the Warangal Central Prison.

Vikar and his associates were facing trial for murdering a home guard. Three other associates of Vikar Ahmed — Riyaz Khan, Mohammed Abdul Sayeed and Vinod Kumar Sahu — were acquitted by a Metropolitan Session Judge on September 14, 2016.

A d v o c a t e Mohammed Osman while presenting the case before the National Human Rights Commission had demanded monetary compensation and departmental disciplinary action against the police personnel involved in the alleged encounter.

The NHRC intimated Mohammed Osman that the Chief Secretary of Telangana state had been directed to ensure that monetary compensation of ₹5 lakh each is paid to next of kin of the deceased persons within four weeks.

The commission said it had sought a compliance report along with proof of payment. It directed that the video cassette/CD of the autopsy, if any, may be sent to the authority concerned.

The NHRC had awarded the compensation on September 12, 2018, but the government did not comply with the orders of the commission.

On several reminders of the commission, the Chief Secretary submitted that the recommendations of the NHRC have been submitted to the competent authority for orders and the same is awaited which may take some time.



CRPF personnel carry the coffins of their two colleagues who were martyred in an encounter with militants in Baramulla after their wreath laying ceremony at Humhama on the outskirts of Srinagar on Tuesday. — PTI

Shopian probe gains pace

Kin allege that 3 labourers from Rajouri were killed in fake encounter

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, AUG. 18

The Army on Tuesday said that the inquiry into the alleged killing of three labourers in purported fake encounter in Shopian district is underway and assured that due legal process would be followed in an impartial and transparent way.

"As intimated on August 11, a high-level Court of Inquiry into the July 18 Operation at Amshipora in Shopian is under progress. Statements of key witnesses are being recorded and progress is being monitored closely," a statement issued by the Army here said.

It said that additional

civil witnesses are being asked to depose before the Court of Inquiry.

"Concurrently, the DNA samples have been collected from Rajouri under the aegis of J&K Police and sent for matching with the terrorists killed on July 18," it added.

The Army said that it is "committed to ethical conduct of all counter-terrorist operations" and that cases where doubts are raised "are investigated under due process as per the law of the land".

It asserted that since this case is under investigation further details will be shared periodically "as appropriate without affecting due legal process".

IGP (Kashmir range) Vijay Kumar, had last week after the blood samples of the relatives of three labourers from frontier district of Rajouri who went missing in Shopian district last month were collected for DNA testing also assured that no stone will be left unturned in the police's pursuit of the truth.

According to the families of three labourers Muhammad Imtiaz, Abrar Ahmed Khan and Abrar Yusuf they might have been killed in a fake encounter by the troops at Amshipora area on July 18, a day after the trio had arrived there from Rajouri to work in an apple orchard to earn their

livelihood and then passed off as terrorists by the Army.

The IGP had said that the DNA samples were collected in a government-run hospital of Rajouri in presence of a police team sent from Srinagar.

The families of the missing persons had earlier requested the authorities that they be allowed to visit Shopian where a local resident had rented a room out to the trio soon after their arrival there.

As per them, their kin last called them on July 17 to inform they had reached Shopian where they have taken a room on rent. However, it was only earlier this month that the families filed a missing

report with the local police. Explaining the delay, Lal Hussian, a relative of one of the missing persons, said, "We thought there are connectivity problems in Kashmir for one or the other reasons and we were waiting for them to call soon".

The missing persons' kin have also reportedly desired that the bodies of the three alleged militants who, as per the Army's claim, were killed in the July 18 encounter be exhumed for identification. However, the police reiterated that they had provided sufficient time for identification of dead bodies at the Police Control Room Kashmir at Srinagar.

Covid cases cross 3-lakh mark in Andhra Pradesh

DC CORRESPONDENT
AUG. 18

Vijayawada: Andhra Pradesh has crossed three lakh mark of Covid-19 infections by registering 3,06,261 cases so far.

A Covid-19 bulletin here on Tuesday said 9,652 new Covid-19 cases have been reported out of 56,090 samples tested in the last 24 hours, and 88 deaths rising toll to 2,820.

Among new confirmed Coronavirus infections, East Godavari continues to lead with 1,396 followed by 990 in Chittoor; 928 in Visakhapatnam, 895 in Guntur, 830 in Kurnool, 805 in West Godavari, 755 in Kadapa and 725 in Prakasam.

No of cases on the rise in Telangana villages

Hyderabad: Testing has again resumed for Covid-19 with 19,579 samples tested on August 17 and 1,682 persons were positive on Monday, according to data released by the

● The Union Health ministry placed the total number of cases at 27,02,742 and the death toll at 51,797. The ministry said that 19,77,779 people have so far recovered from the infection.

state health department on Tuesday. There were eight deaths, taking the toll to 711.

The total number of cases in the GHMC area stood at 235. Medchal-Malkajgiri saw a surge with 106 cases, Ranga Reddy 166 and Warangal Urban 107.

The numbers in districts are rising and many small and private hospitals have to be set up as Covid 19 centres as beds in the local government hospitals are full.

Patients in a serious condition in the districts are being shifted to Gandhi Hospital as there is lack of specialists locally. Positive cases in men continue to be high at 65.10 per cent in the state.

1758 cases in Kerala, 1365 cured

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala on Tuesday reported 1,758 cases of Covid-19 even as 1,365 persons recovered from the infection. Six deaths were reported in the state on Tuesday.

Of the new cases 1641 got the infection through contact, 39 came from abroad, 42 from other states, source of infection is not known among 81 persons and 25 health workers also got infected.

139 deaths in Karnataka

Bengaluru: Karnataka on Tuesday reported 7,665 new cases of Covid-19 and 139 related fatalities, taking the total number of infections to 2,40,948 and death toll to 4,201, the health department said.

The day also saw recoveries overtaking the number of new positive cases, with 8,387 patients getting discharged.

RUSSIA THROWS ITS WEIGHT BEHIND INDIA AGAIN

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 18

Two months ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India for the annual bilateral summit between the two countries, Russia has strongly backed India by reiterating its opposition to any discussion on the Kashmir issue at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and has again supported the Shimla Agreement of 1972 that calls for the Kashmir issue to be discussed bilaterally between India and Pakistan.

India has enjoyed time-tested strategic ties with Russia and the erstwhile Soviet Union before that, spanning decades, especially in the defence sector.

Speaking at a seminar in virtual format organised recently by the Russian Centre of Science and Culture (RCSC) on the subject of "Russia and India: Major Milestones in the History of Relations", Russian Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) in New Delhi Roman Babushkin said, "The Shimla Agreement of 1972 (between India and Pakistan) is the basic legal guidance Russia is following almost for 50 years already, which clearly should prevent any discussion of the Kashmir issue in the UNSC and other platforms. That's why we are of the principled position that that no one should interfere in bilateral issues between the two countries (India and Pakistan) unless both of them jointly ask for it".

Mr. Babushkin, who is both DCM and Minister Counsellor at the Russian Embassy in New Delhi, added, "Today we also see that our positions (Indian and Russian) on major global and regional issues are similar and coinciding. It means that our strategic partnership which is crossing the 20th anniversary this year is natural and it is forward looking".

RCSC Director Fedor Rozovsky hailed the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation between India and the erstwhile Soviet Union and described it as a "historical document reflecting the true essence and soul of friendship and cooperation between the two traditional, time-tested friends India and Russia".

3-DAY NAVAL COMMANDERS' CONFERENCE BEGINS TODAY

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 18

Amid India-China border tensions, Indian Navy's top Commanders will be meeting here on Wednesday for three days naval commanders' conference.

Indian Navy is already at a high alert due to the India-China military stand off in the Ladakh sector and has deployed all its assets in the sea.

Last month Indian Navy had carried out an extensive exercise in Andaman and Nicobar islands which dominate major sea trade route for the Chinese ships.

Indian Navy's P-8I surveillance aircraft are deployed in Ladakh to carry out surveillance and reconnaissance on the Chinese army.

"The conference assumes greater significance against the backdrop of recent events on our northern borders, coupled with the unprecedented challenges posed by Covid-19 and would provide the higher naval leadership a forum to discuss conduct of operations, sustenance and maintenance of assets, and procurement issues," said a senior official. The conference is the apex level forum for interaction between commanders.

FIGHTING COVID

India has so far conducted 3,09,41,264 tests; record 8,99,864 tests done in a day

SII to start fresh trials of vaccine this week

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 18

With little over 55,000 fresh cases on Tuesday, the total number of coronavirus cases in India zoomed past 27 lakhs. In the last 24 hours, 886 new deaths were recorded taking the total fatalities to 51,797 as per union health ministry.

However, according to Covid19India.org, the death figures were over 52,000 by Tuesday evening and overall cases over 27.3 lakh.

Despite such high numbers being recorded daily, Niti Aayog member Dr V. K. Paul said there are reassuring signals too as the

number recoveries are up and the mortality rate is reducing.

"We are really happy with the daily testing numbers which is absolutely remarkable. We are in control of the pandemic," he said.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said a decline in daily new cases has been noticed from August 13 as new detections have come down from 64,000 plus to 55,000 now. He underlined that the number of deaths too are also declining but "there is no room for laxity on containment, testing and surveillance."

"There is a reducing trend. But five days is a

short span in a pandemic. Yet there are satisfying results that are seen of the work states doing under the guidance of the Centre," he said adding in spite of a sustained level of 7 lakh to 8 lakh test a day, the positivity figure has come down from 10.03% to 7.72%.

India has so far conducted 3,09,41,264 tests with a record 8,99,864 tests done in a single day.

The total number of recoveries crossed the 19 lakh with 57,937 patients being cured in the last 24 hours - the highest recorded in a day so far. Active cases now are 6.73 lakh. The recovery rate is 73.18 per cent and case fatality

rate (CFR) has come to 1.92 per cent.

Also, the Serum Institute of India is expected to start phase II trials of the Oxford vaccine candidate this week.

"The trials are in course - two in phases I and II and one in phase III will start very soon. This development is very reassuring," said Dr Paul while talking about all vaccine trials in India.

However, he cautioned that till the time trials are complete one should keep fingers crossed.

"Please do not assume that any vaccine that goes into trial will be successful," Dr Paul said adding there is no room for laxity

and all precautions must be taken by people all the time.

"This will increase our control over pandemic. We will not let the virus rule us," he added.

Meanwhile, Union civil aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri said that the government is negotiating with 13 more countries for air travel arrangements.

These include Australia, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Nigeria, Bahrain, Israel, Kenya, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan.

"We continue to further

strengthen the reach and scope of Vande Bharat Mission.

Air travel arrangements are already in place with the US, UK, France, Germany, UAE, Qatar and Maldives. We are now taking these efforts forward and are negotiating with 13 more countries to establish such arrangements. The ongoing negotiations will benefit stranded Indians and nationals of these countries," Mr Puri said.

"Air bubbles have also been proposed with our neighbors Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan. We will consider such arrangements with other countries also," he said.

IN BRIEF

457 cases linked to church: S. Korea

Seoul: South Korean health officials said Tuesday that they have found 457 Coronavirus cases linked to a huge Seoul church led by a bitter critic of the country's president, driving an alarming surge of infections in the greater capital area. Kwon Jun-wook, director of South Korea's National Health Institute, said outbreaks at the Sarang Jeil Church and elsewhere have pushed the country into the biggest crisis yet since the emergence of Covid-19. He said a failure to slow transmissions in the densely populated Seoul metropolitan area, home to nearly 26 million people, could create a situation comparable to the "miserable scenes of the United States or European countries."

2 existing drugs can prevent virus: Study

Boston: Two existing drugs inhibit SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, from infecting human cells in the lab, a study has found. According to the study, published in the journal PNAS, both drugs, vacuolin-1 and apilimod, originally developed years ago, target a large enzyme called PIKfyve kinase. Before this study, little was known about this enzyme's role in Covid-19 infection, the researchers said. The work, which will need to be replicated in human trials, suggests a potential new target for Covid-19 therapies, they said. "Our findings show that targeting this kinase through a small-molecule antiviral against SARS-CoV-2 may be an effective strategy to lessen the progression or seriousness of Covid-19," said study co-senior author Tomas Kirchhausen, a professor at the Harvard Medical School (HMS) in the US. Kirchhausen said he discovered vacuolin-1 16 years ago, while apilimod was developed by a company called LAM Therapeutics.

Chocolate firm glitch dusts Swiss town

Berlin: Residents of a Swiss town got a bit of a shock when it started snowing particles of a fine cocoa powder after the ventilation system at a chocolate factory malfunctioned. The Lindt & Sprüngli company confirmed local reports Tuesday that there was a minor defect in the cooling ventilation for a line for roasted "cocoa nibs" in its factory in Olten, between Zurich and Basel. The nibs, fragments of crushed cocoa beans, are the basis of chocolate. Combined with strong winds on Friday morning, the powder spread around the immediate vicinity of the factory, leaving a fine cocoa dusting. The company says one car was lightly coated, and that it has offered to pay for any cleaning needed — but hasn't yet been taken up on the offer. Factory production was able to continue as normal and the company says the particles were completely harmless to people or the environment.

CHINA CONSIDERS IMPOSING TARIFFS ON OZZIE WINE

Canberra, Aug. 18: China on Tuesday began investigating whether Australia is dumping wine in a trade dispute that further strains relations between the countries and could shut the biggest export market for Australian wine.

The Chinese Ministry of Commerce said the anti-dumping investigation involved wine in containers of 2 liters (68 fluid ounces) or smaller imported from Australia from Tuesday.

The Australian government denied subsidizing exporters. "We do find this deeply troubling, concerning and perplexing given Australia's wine industry is not subsidized to export and it's certainly not dumping product on the world market," Trade Minister Simon Birmingham said. "Now it's for China and Beijing to explain the rationale behind these actions and why they have moved to that stage of an investigation."

China's only other anti-dumping investigation of Australian products effectively closed the China market to Australian barley in May through crippling tariffs. Australia is appealing that decision.

The investigation of Australian wine exports, which made 1.1 billion Australian dollars (\$795 million) from the Chinese market last year, could take between a year and 18 months.

Trump govt imposes new Huawei limits

Washington, Aug. 18: The Trump administration is further tightening restrictions on China's Huawei, seeking to starve it of crucial components by cutting off all access to US technology.

"We don't want their equipment in the United States because they spy on us," Trump said. "And any country that uses it, we're not going to do anything in terms of sharing intelligence."

The Commerce Department's new rules, rolled out Monday, will further block Huawei from accessing chip technology. Washington cut off Huawei's access to US components and technology, including Google's music and other smartphone services, last year.

Those penalties were tightened in May when the White House barred vendors worldwide from using US technology to produce components for Huawei.

A Huawei executive said this month that the company has started running out of processor chips to make smartphones as a result of those sanctions, and may have to stop production of its own advanced chips. But the Commerce Department said Monday that more restrictions were needed because Huawei has "continuously tried to evade" the earlier sanctions by using technology supplied by third parties.

The new rule is designed to block Huawei's access to commercially available chips made with tools acquired from the US "The new

SENATE CONDEMNS CHINA'S HOSTILITY TOWARDS INDIA

Washington, Aug. 18: A bipartisan US Senate resolution has condemned China's use of military force to change the status quo at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India and called for a diplomatic solution to the issue.

Indian and Chinese troops have been locked in a bitter standoff in several areas along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh since May 5. The situation deteriorated after the June 15 Galwan Valley clashes in which 20 Indian Army personnel were killed.

The Chinese side also suffered casualties but it is yet to give out the details. The resolution, introduced by senators John Cornyn and Mark Warner, commended India for taking steps to secure its telecommunications infrastructure from Chinese security threats and also supported bilateral and multilateral partnerships, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), to promote a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

— PTI

rule makes it clear than any use of American software or American fabrication equipment to produce things through Huawei is banned, and requires a license," Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said.

— PTI

#MilkTeaAlliance to aid Thai protest

Bangkok/Hong Kong, Aug. 18: As Hong Kong pro-democracy advocates voiced support for Thai anti-government protests at the weekend, they used the hashtag #MilkTeaAlliance.

In Bangkok, flags representing Hong Kong and independence for Taiwan appeared on a sign bearing the tag at the biggest demonstrations in years.

And in Taipei, dozens of people gathered to back the Thai protests and give weight to a nascent community of cross-border youth movements pushing for democracy at home and uneasy with China's growing regional power.

"This is the first physical expression of the Milk

Tea Alliance," said Thai student Akrawat Siripatanachok, 27, who helped organise the show of solidarity in Taipei joined by Hong Kong activists, a Chinese dissident and Taiwan students.

"We don't want to just talk about it online. We want a pan-Asian alliance for democracy" A hashtag that began in April as a backlash to Chinese nationalist attacks on a Thai celebrity for a perceived slight to China shows signs of turning into a bigger movement uniting like-minded activists.

Why milk tea? The light-hearted name represents a shared passion for sweet tea drinks in Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

— Agencies

China's swollen river triggers flood alert

Shanghai, Aug. 18: China's biggest river, the Yangtze, and several of its tributaries have risen to dangerous levels after days of heavy rain, forcing tens of thousands of people from their homes and triggering an unprecedented emergency response alert.

China has seen unusually high levels of rain this flood season, with south-west and central regions in the Yangtze river basin bearing the brunt of flooding.

The Ministry of Water Resources said on Monday that 38 tributaries on the upper reaches of the Yangtze were now higher

than their warning levels, 19 dangerously so.

The southwestern province of Sichuan, which includes a major upstream section of the Yangtze, has raised its flood emergency response to its highest level, the first time it has ever done so, with its rivers overflowing and villages and farmland inundated.

The Qingyi river, an upper Yangtze tributary, had seen its worst flooding in a century. Sichuan's flood control authority said, with the city of Yaan forced to evacuate more than 36,000 people as the river burst its banks on Monday.

— PTI

ANIMAL | SHELTER

20-year-old apes Samson and Bobby in Java suffer from malnutrition

Jakarta, Aug. 18: Two critically endangered orangutans have been rescued from captivity on Indonesia's Java island and sent to a rehabilitation centre on Borneo to assess whether they can be released back into the wild, a conservation group said. "Samson" and "Bobby", both male and estimated to be around 20 years old, were suffering from malnutrition when they were removed from an amuse-

ment park and a private family home, according to a statement from International Animal Rescue (IAR).

The two Bornean orangutans had been identified as being illegally held in captivity in October last year before a rescue was arranged, said Darmanto, the head of Indonesia's nature conservation agency in Central Java.

The orangutans, who had been held in cages, have

Lukashenko must go



Belarusian opposition supporters gather for a protest rally in Minsk, Belarus. More workers in Belarus joined a widening strike on Tuesday as they press for the resignation of authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, who has extended his 26-year rule in an election the opposition says was rigged.

— AP

LITHUANIANS VOTE FOR SANCTIONS AGAINST BELARUS

Vilnius, Aug. 18: Lithuania's parliament voted for economic sanctions against neighboring Belarus on Tuesday, saying the presidential election there mustn't be internationally recognised. "We are sending a strong message to the world today," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius said after lawmakers approved the sanctions on a 120-0 vote with two abstentions. Nineteen of the 141 parliament members were absent.

The document adopted by lawmakers in the Seimas, Lithuania's national legislature, also calls for an international rejection of the legitimacy of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's reelection. Both the European Union and the US have called the presidential election in Belarus EU foreign ministers have rejected the election results and last week began drawing up a list of officials in Belarus who could face sanctions.

— AP

Democratic Convention kicks off with a call to defeat Trump

Michelle Obama scorches Don, says 'vote for Biden like our lives depend on it'

Don retweets Biden's disputed audio call

Washington, Aug. 18: President Donald Trump has retweeted an audio recording that US intelligence officials have described as being part of a Russian campaign to denigrate Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden.

The leaked conversation, purportedly between Biden and former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, dates from Feb. 18, 2016. The excerpt of it retweeted by Trump centers on the ouster of Ukraine's chief prosecutor, who had previously investigated the owner of a Ukraine energy company where Biden's son, Hunter,

once held a board seat.

By amplifying the recording to his more than 85 million Twitter followers, Trump underscored the ease with which pro-Russian narratives can seep into American public discourse ahead of the 2020 election even after being flagged by intelligence officials as the product of a concerted Russian effort.

US President Donald Trump's election campaign has described the Democratic National Convention as a Hollywood-produced infomercial which fails to hide the radical-leftist takeover of presumptive nominee Joe Biden.

— AP

US PRESIDENT TO PARDON WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE LEADER SUSAN ANTHONY

Washington, Aug. 18: President Donald Trump said Tuesday he will pardon Susan B. Anthony, a leader in the women's suffrage movement, who was arrested for voting in 1872 in violation of laws permitting only men to vote.

Anthony is best known for her role in the movement to secure voting rights for women, but she also was a strong anti-slavery and voting rights pioneer. Trump's pardon,

which he said he'll issue later on Tuesday, comes 100 years after the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which ensured women the right to vote. It's also known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. His move also comes amid an outcry over Postal Service disruptions that Democrats say endanger the voting rights of millions of Americans who would vote by mail in November amid the pandemic.

— AP

ACCURACY ISSUE WITH COVID-19 TESTS, SAYS FDA

Washington, Aug. 18: Potential accuracy issues with a widely used Coronavirus test could lead to false results for patients, US health officials warned. The Food and Drug Administration issued the alert Monday to doctors and laboratory technicians using Thermo Fisher's TaqPath genetic test. Regulators said issues related to laboratory equipment and software used to run the test could lead to inaccuracies. The agency advised technicians to follow updated instructions and software developed by the company to ensure accurate results.

The warning comes nearly a month after Connecticut public health officials first reported that at least 90 people had received false positive results for the Coronavirus. Most of those receiving the false results were residents of nursing homes or assisted living facilities.

A spokeswoman for Thermo Fisher said the company was working with FDA to make sure that laboratory personnel understand the need for strict adherence to the instructions for use.

— Agencies

● **IF TRUMP** is reelected, "all the progress we have made will be in jeopardy", former presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders said as he accused the president of being negligent to the pandemic which has resulted in job losses of 30 million people.

Harris was a presidential aspirant until last year before she dropped out of the race because of lack of popular support. "We all ran for president motivated by the same reasons," said Harris who is scheduled to address the convention on Wednesday. "Donald Trump does not understand who we are as Americans. He really doesn't," she said in another brief remarks as speakers after speakers at the convention slammed the president for his policies, which they alleged has divided the country.

If Trump is reelected,

Sikhs, Hindus endangered minorities in Afghanistan: US Cong resolution

Washington, Aug. 18: Describing Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan as "endangered minorities", a resolution introduced in the US Congress has sought to resettle these persecuted religious communities from the war-torn country to America. Introduced in the House of Representatives last week by Congresswoman Jackie Speier and co-sponsored by seven others, the resolution sup-

ports refugee protection for Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan, noting the "systematic religious persecution, discrimination and existential danger" faced by the members of these communities.

"Sikhs and Hindus are indigenous but endangered minorities in Afghanistan, numbering approximately 700 out of a community that recently included over 8,000 members," the resolution

stated.

The resolution supports resettling Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan in the US under the United States Refugee Admissions Programme pursuant to the Immigration and Nationality Act. Expressing concern for the safety of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan, the resolution condemns all terrorist attacks, religious persecution and dis-

crimination against members of these communities in the war-ravaged country. Noting that Islamic militants attacked a gurdwara in Kabul on March 25, killing 25 worshippers, including a four-year-old girl, the resolution said that the terrorists made further attempts on the lives of the survivors before and after the funeral ceremony held for the victims.

— PTI

● **THERE HERE** are only estimated to be around 1,00,000 Bornean orangutans left in the wild, according to the World Wildlife Fund, with the population crashing by more than 50% over the past 60 years.

● **THE ANIMALS** have suffered from illegal poaching, as well as destruction of habitat due to large-scale logging and replacement of forests with cash crops such as palm oil.

been sent to a rehabilitation centre in Ketapang, in West Kalimantan province on Borneo, IAR said.

At the centre, they will be given health checks and

and Boboy who should be living free in their natural habitat but instead have been confined to cages for years," said Karmelee L. Sanchez, programme director of IAR Indonesia.

"The rehabilitation process for rescued orangutans is long and complicated. It will be extremely difficult for an orangutan that has been locked in a cage all its life to learn how to survive in the wild," said Sanchez.

There are only estimated to be around 1,00,000 Bornean orangutans left in the wild, according to the World Wildlife Fund, with the population crashing by more than 50% over the past 60 years.

The animals have suffered from illegal poaching, as well as destruction of habitat due to large-scale logging and replacement of forests with cash crops such as palm oil.

— Agencies

DECCAN Chronicle

19 AUGUST 2020

Let them skip JEE, for their own good

With the Supreme Court's indiscriminate status quo on the JEE and NEET entrances taking effect, a logistical nightmare stares at the authorities. Parents are happy that their children will not "lose" a year and will be availing of the best opportunities. They forget that the rules of both the NEET and JEE allow students to take it multiple times and it is commonplace for many to give up a year anyway in order to take it twice. In these unprecedented circumstances of a Covid year, should not the health of their children have been the parents' priority? But then, the deadly virus has so far only been known to hit other people. Denial is comforting.

So the governments at the Centre and in the states must now be seen working to ensure that the examinations do not become another source of the spread. For this, they have to plumb the best practices from around the world and then adapt them here. Sadly, given our high population and low per capita income leading to anxiety for our children's future financial security, the emphasis on a job-oriented STEM education is paramount leading to a manic make-or-break college entrance system unparalleled in the world. Hence not many examples of these practices exist. While 17 lakh students have registered for NEET, 11 lakh youngsters will be writing the JEE. Only a limited number of exam centres are present in a state. Not every district has an exam centre. The students will be accompanied by their parents on these outstation trips where they will arrange for overnight stays in hotels and at relatives' residences, raising infection chances.

As far as holding of exams is concerned, so far it has been seen that the level of precautions taken and screening done at centres are dismal. The World Health Organisation now holds that the coronavirus is airborne. Patients, too, may be asymptomatic. Asymptomatic patients will inevitably be seated in the exam hall next to uninfected for three hours. More alarmingly, there will be cases of students coming to take the exam with a light fever, sparked by stress or common cold, and they will be made to take the exam in isolation alongside those who may be having the virus. An online exam would have solved this crisis, but neither the government nor the court displayed the requisite pro-activity. The only option that remains now is for parents, themselves, to let their child skip the exam. The government, which can still step in, is unlikely to, seeing as it has consistently opposed the entrance postponements.

So that relief is available to all, 11 students from various parts of the country had moved a petition in the Supreme Court. But god forbid, if the student "wastes" their year frivolously, studying science or engineering/medicine in less prestigious colleges and institutes or, in the worst case scenario, in pursuits other than the most heavy-duty academics. "These students are all 21-22-year-olds. Can you believe they will not be going out," solicitor general Tushar Mehta submitted before the court. The government had also cited, not so accurately, that the entire country is "working".

The court, therefore, in its uncontested wisdom, declined the students' prayer. After all, is there a precedent that the esteemed Indian judiciary took into account a child's argument? Even if, in the process, it has jeopardised the child's right to health and their right to life. For their own good.

Flashpoint in Belarus

Over three decades after the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union disintegrated shortly afterwards, Belarus' embattled President Alexander Lukashenko, who ruled his country – once part of the Soviet empire – with an iron hand for over a quarter century, is being taught a lesson on the meaning of "people power". After claiming victory in the August 9 election, he faced nine days of continuous protests demanding he leave for rigging the results, with even some police and intelligence personnel deserting him. Mr Lukashenko, described by many as "Europe's last dictator", stood firm at the outset, but after open heckling by factory workers in Minsk on Monday, who demanded he "step down", seemed to indicate he might be open to sharing power. He suggested a referendum be held to change constitutional provisions so that a fresh election could take place, but this concession seems to have come too late, with the demonstrators demanding that he just go. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the Opposition leader who fled into exile in neighbouring Lithuania two days after the election, claims that she won by a 60-70 per cent margin, and said she is ready to take over and lead the country, but Mr Lukashenko vowed he won't quit "under pressure". He even said: "Until you kill me, there will be no other elections." One hopes he hasn't forgotten the fate of Romania's Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena.

The embattled leader may have hoped Russia, Belarus' powerful eastern neighbour, might come to his rescue and he spoke to President Vladimir Putin several times, but Moscow's intervention seems unlikely. President Putin promised help in case Belarus faces an external threat, but the threats Mr Lukashenko faces are internal. There is little anti-Russian sentiment in Belarus, and most people speak Russian, so rather than prop up the unpopular President, Mr Putin might try to "manage" the transition. An invasion, like in Ukraine some years ago, would also trigger fresh Western sanctions, something Russia might wish to avoid. The European Union has called an emergency virtual summit on Wednesday, as it explores how to help Belarus in its hour of need.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

ADITYA SINHA
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748
Coimbatore: 77 Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore 641009. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256.
Bengaluru: 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: 08043460500; Fax: 080-22960551/52/55
Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kallasaigudi Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax: (0891) 2755285
Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/2555287, Fax: (0866) 2555234
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618
Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904
Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burrannur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2248581/82, Telefax: (0861) 2348580
Karimnagar: Survey No. 1341, Vavilala Colony, Jagitayala Road, Karimnagar 505 001. Phone: (0878) 2228908; Telefax: (0878) 2220433
Kochi: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Emakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408
Kozhikode: No 6/1002 E, First Floor City Mall, Opp. YMCA Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001
Thiruvananthapuram: St Joseph Press Thyeacud post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/6/7, Fax: 0471-04016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss

Dilip Cherian

Dilli Ka Babu



India builds UN team ahead of 2021-22 stint at Security Council

India will take over as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in January 2021. The government has begun preparations by deciding to upgrade India's diplomatic presence at the UN. The Indian delegation is being strengthened with the appointment of an additional deputy permanent representative and a counsellor to solely handle Security Council matters.

According to sources, 1999-batch Indian Foreign Service officer R. Ravindran, who is joint secretary (Central and West Africa) will join the Indian Permanent Mission in New York in the rank of additional deputy representative. He served in the office earlier under Hardeep Singh Puri, who is now minister for civil aviation, urban development and commerce, but who headed the mission when India was a non-permanent mem-

ber in 2011-2012.

Ravindran's colleague Pratik Mathur, who is from the 2007 batch, and is deputy secretary in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), will be a counsellor. Both IFS officers will join the mission before the 75th UN General Assembly opens next month. The India mission is currently headed by T.S. Tirumurthi, with Nagaraj Naidu as deputy permanent representative. It is also said that external affairs minister S. Jaishankar will be keenly following India's stint at the Security Council with regular monthly reviews.

DISCRIMINATORY RETIREMENT PRACTICES?

At a time when the Covid pandemic has forced states to tighten their finances, the Tamil Nadu government has decided to increase

retirement benefits for retired senior officials. Citing petitions from the IAS Officers' Association and senior bureaucrats, it has permitted an additional ₹10,000 monthly servant allowance to all retired chief secretaries and additional chief secretaries.

The move is bound to raise eyebrows since many other states with strained finances have been forced to hold back the dearness allowance of government officials and pushed back pension grants. Barely two months ago, the government had increased the retirement age of babus from 58 to 59 years, ostensibly to postpone the huge pension burden it would face. More recently, the government has given retiring chief secretary K. Shanmugam a three-month extension.

According to sources, the state government has based the order on

a similar order by neighbouring Karnataka, in 2015. Then Karnataka had allowed chief secretaries and additional chief secretaries a servant allowance of ₹6,000 plus telephone and medical allowances over and above the pension and other benefits of the retired babus.

BITTER MEDICINE

Manipur has a qualified doctor as the state's new chief secretary. Senior IAS officer of the Manipur cadre, Rajesh Kumar who was additional chief secretary, has succeeded J. Suresh Babu who superannuated from government service. Incidentally, Babu was also a doctor who became a civil servant.

Mr Kumar's appointment comes in the backdrop of a demand from several student organisations in

the state to appoint a "qualified state native" to the post of chief secretary. Kumar, who is an IAS officer of the 1988 batch, is not. Once Mr Kumar's appointment was announced, some organizations are now demanding that the decision be reviewed. The state government, however, has shown no sign of acknowledging this demand.

With the students upset over what they term as "denial of rights of the native communities" by the state government, Mr Kumar as the new chief secretary may have to apply a healing balm to the "hurt" sentiments of the student community first, besides getting down to discharging his own considerable administrative duties.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian@Twitter.com](#). Let's multiply the effect.

Subhani



Polls at 73: More women voters, 'criminal' leaders



Sanjay Kumar

The seven-decade-long journey of electoral politics in India has both sweet and sour memories. The sweet memories of India's electoral journey could be documented as the increasing participation of Indian voters in the numerous elections held so far to form governments at three levels — central, municipal/panchayat and state. The sweet memories could also be remembered as an upsurge in electoral participation of the marginalised. It can also manifest as a reasonably high degree of trust shown by Indians in institutions vital for the functioning of the government. But in this journey of sweet memories have also existed some bitter experiences — elections being violent at times, an expanding role of muscle (*dabang*) and the role of money power. Though trust in institutions remains high, the trust in elected representatives (MPs, MLAs and sarpanchs) has declined over the last few decades. This is largely due to frequent defections of leaders from one party to another, signalling the declining role of ideology in Indian politics.

Since Independence, Indians have exercised their franchise 17 times to elect the national government. These elections over the years have witnessed increasing participation of voters. The first Lok Sabha elections witnessed a high turnout of 61.1 per cent and the second in 1952 witnessed a higher turnout of 62.2 per cent. But after that, for a very long time, the turnout at Lok Sabha elections remained below 60 per cent, barring exceptions. It increased to 66 per cent during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and touched 67 per cent during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The state Assembly election witnessed a much higher

turnout compared to the Lok Sabha election and the last few decades witnessed a significant increase in this parameter. Due to constituencies being much smaller and campaigns being personalised, local body elections have witnessed a much higher turnout compared to the other two levels of elections.

Although women got their voting rights along with men, they lagged far behind men in exercising it. Earlier, many of them did not come out to vote resulting in a big gender gap in turnout. But turnout amongst women has increased significantly during the last few Lok Sabha elections. The gap between male and female turnout that used to be 9-10 per cent got narrowed down to 1.6 per cent during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and during the 2019 Lok Sabha election men and women voted in equal proportions — shoulder to shoulder — the biggest story of the Indian elections so far. Youth, too, have begun to participate much more actively in elections now. Dalit and adivasi voters, who were earlier missing from the long queues on the voting day up until the mid-1990s, have also started voting in much bigger numbers.

The beauty of Indian elections has been that all its verdicts have been acceptable to both the winner and the loser. Some elections resulted in the incumbent getting re-elected, while there have been other instances when the ruling party lost

Based on their own declaration of pending cases, 43 per cent of the current Parliament has criminal cases pending against them. In the previous Parliament, this number was 34 per cent.

The gap between male and female turnout that used to be 9-10 per cent got narrowed down to 1.6 per cent in the 2014 elections and in the 2019 elections men and women voted in equal proportions

badly. This trend has been visible in all the three types of elections. There have been contestations and counter-contestations about how free and fair the elections were, especially in the 1990s when elections, including many state Assembly elections, were marred by violence, but in spite of all that, results were accepted gracefully. There has been discomfort about the use of the electronic voting machine (EVM). Political parties suspected these machines could be tinkered with, but all these issues come to a rest once results are declared. Unlike in many countries where there are major disputes around election results, in India we never had any similar dispute and government formation has never been held up due to controversy over election results.

Political parties have shown a great deal of maturity in this respect, but the credit should also go to the Election Commission of India. Question have been asked about the EVMS, but results have gone in favour of and against all political parties at some point of time — no party can complain of being at the receiving end all the time. In election after election, both at the national and state levels, Indian voters have shown a great deal of maturity, voting back only the government that worked for the people. Were it not the case, the government would not have changed eight times at the national level. Between 1952 and 2019, of the 363 Assembly elections held, the ruling party got re-elected 188 times and was defeated 175 times.

But unfortunately, this is not the whole story of the Indian elections.

The aim of being in politics has almost entirely shifted from serving the people (*seva bhaav*) to be in power to make money by using political position and political pressure. Elections have become far more expensive now compared to the past. An ordinary man has no place in present-day politics. Not that one can win election only by using money power, but the importance of money for contesting an election has increased enormously. A very large number (almost 30 per cent) of all contestants during the 2019 Lok Sabha election owned property worth more than ₹1 crore. It is important to note that 86 per cent of elected MPs have assets worth more than ₹1 crore. The story remains the same for the state Assembly elections.

Even more disturbing to note is that a large number of elected representatives both in Parliament and the state Assemblies have criminal cases pending against them. Based on their own declaration of pending cases, 43 per cent of the current Parliament has criminal cases pending against them. This is not unique of the current Parliament, 34 per cent MPs of the earlier Parliament had criminal cases pending against them, too. This number stood at 24 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively, for the Lok Sabhas of 2004 and 2009. If women's turnout is the biggest success story of the Indian elections, criminalisation of politics is its darkest.

The writer is a professor at Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and a political analyst. Views expressed are personal.

Unlike in many countries where there are major disputes around election results, in India we never had any similar dispute and government formation has never been held up due to controversy

LETTERS

WELCOME MOVE

It is with reference to the news Supreme Court wont defer Neet and JEE (Aug. 18). Ever since the authorities announced Neet 2020 would be conducted on July 26, there was uncertainty about the Neet dates. To put an end to the anxiety of the 15.9 lakh students who have registered to write Neet, recently Supreme Court refused to defer Neet and JEE due to Covid-19. Also the SC observed that they could not put the careers of the students in jeopardy and thus confirmed the dates of the above two entrance examinations as September 13 and September 1 to 6 respectively. It is welcome.

P. Victor Selvaraj
Palayamkottai

WOMEN'S MARRIAGE AGE

PRIME MINISTER Modi's proposal to increase the women's marriage age perhaps to prevent the burgeoning population growth is laudable but practically it is inadvisable considering the way the young girls, even 15 or 16 years old, are falling in love and eloping with their boyfriends, influenced by movies and cell phones. In fact the girls, after attaining puberty, get libidinous thoughts courtesy the estrogen effect. That's why many parents prefer to marry off their daughters at the earliest. If the girls are studying in colleges they may wait up to 21 years of age by compulsion. But those without college education or drop-outs should not be forced to sit at home without getting married till they complete 21 years of age. Hence it is suggested to maintain the status quo. Instead the PM should move the Supreme Court to re-visit its verdict, which nullified CrPc 497 calling it anti-women and freely allowed adultery of married women sans punishment.

A. Seshagiri Rao
Chennai

EDU INSTITUTIONS

We read reports that the Centre and States across the country have opened up almost all sectors despite increasing Covid-19 deaths. It is germane to note that the Supreme Court of India has not agreed to defer the Neet and JEE exams due to the spreading pandemic. Let us reopen all educational institutions in the first week of September with proper guidelines in place.

S. Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

SHORT TAKES

Barcelona sack coach Setien

Madrid: Barcelona have sacked Quique Setien as coach, the club confirmed on Monday, with Ronald Koeman the frontrunner to be his replacement.

"The new coach will be announced in the coming days as part of a wide ranging restructuring of the first team," Barca said on Twitter.

Setien was only appointed in January but has paid the price for Barca surrendering the La Liga title to Real Madrid and then being humiliated by Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

His exit was finalised during an emergency board meeting at Camp Nou, which lasted almost six hours and saw Koeman emerge as the favoured choice to take charge.

The club also announced next year's presidential elections, scheduled for June, will be brought forward to March 15. Angry supporters had hoped they would be held immediately but that possibility was ruled out, meaning under-fire president Josep Maria Bartomeu will continue.

Koeman has been in charge of the Dutch national team since 2018 and is due to lead them at the postponed European Championship next year and the World Cup in 2022. — *AFP*

Historic first as 3 Indians at Major

Royal Troon: Indian women's trio of Aditi Ashok, Diksha Dagar and Tvesa Malik will look to write a new chapter in Indian golf when they tee off at the prestigious Women's British Open on Thursday. This will be the first time that three Indians, men or women, teed up at the same Major. The young threesome will have family and friends with them at the famed Royal Troon golf course, even though there will be no spectators.

The 22-year-old Aditi, who often has her father on the bag, has her mother, Maheshwari, this time — she was also there at Scottish Open — while 19-year-old Diksha's father, Col Narendra Dagar will as usual do the duty of a caddie.

Tvesa, 24, has a friend and experienced European Tour pro, Kiran Matharu, as her caddie. "I have some experience of playing with the European players, especially at home at the Hero Indian Open, where I had my first Top-10 last year, but a Major in Scotland is a different thing altogether," said Tvesa, who will be making her Major debut here. When she tees up on Thursday, Aditi will come one step closer to becoming the Indian with most Major starts. — *PTI*

Nuggets edge Jazz in overtime

Los Angeles: Jamal Murray scored 36 points, including 10 in overtime, as the Denver Nuggets overcame a 57-point performance from Donovan Mitchell to defeat the Utah Jazz 135-125 in a playoff game on Monday. Nikola Jokic finished with 29 points and 10 rebounds for Denver, who were taken to overtime by the Jazz for the second-straight contest. "I'm smiling because those are the games you want to be in," Murray said. "Those are the games that are the most fun and most competitive." Jokic had a chance to ice the victory in regulation, but his hook shot at the buzzer over Utah's Rudy Gobert failed to drop.

Live on TV

CARIBBEAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Jamaica Tallawahs vs St Lucia Zouks from 7.30 pm; Guyana Amazon Warriors vs St Kitts & Nevis Patriots at 3 am (Thursday). Both matches on Star Sports 1, 2, HD

NBA PLAYOFFS

Toronto Raptors vs Brooklyn Nets from 11 pm; Boston Celtics vs Philadelphia 76ers from 4 am (Thursday); Los Angeles Clippers vs Dallas Mavericks from 6.30 am (Thursday). All matches on Sony Six, HD

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEMIFINAL

Bayern Munich vs Lyon from 12.30 am (Thursday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Regd. No.
TNENG/2010/35692

Printed & Published by
K. Sudhakar on behalf of
Deccan Chronicle Holdings
Limited and Printed at
Deccan Chronicle Press situated at
No 2/22, Sengalipalayam Road,
N.G.O Colony Post,
Kurudampalayam Village,
Coimbatore - 641 022. RNI
Registration No: TNENG/2010/35692
Ph No : 2231252, 253, 255, 257 & 358
Editor: **ADITYA SINHA**

RoHIT for Khel Ratna

Vinesh, Rani among 5 recommended for top sports award

New Delhi, Aug. 18: Star cricketer Rohit Sharma, wrestler Vinesh Phogat, and women's hockey captain Rani Rampal were among an unprecedented five picked for the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, while another unparalleled 29 were recommended for the Arjuna award by the sports ministry's selection committee here on Tuesday.

Paddler Manika Batra and Rio Paralympic gold-winning high jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu were the other two recommended for the country's highest sporting honour by a 12-member selection committee. Rampal was a late addition to the initial list of four.

For the Arjuna, India pacer Ishant Sharma, recurve archer Atanu Das, women's hockey team player Deepika Thakur, kabaddi player Deepak Hooda, and tennis player Divij Sharan were among the 29 short-listed, an official source said after the selection committee's meeting here.

The 31-year-old Ishant has played 97 Tests and 80 ODIs for India, grabbing over 400 international wickets.

This is the first time in the history of awards that five athletes have been recommended for the top sporting accolade with the final decision resting on sports minister Kiren Rijju.

In 2016, four athletes — star shuttler P. V. Sindhu, gymnast Dipa Karmakar, shooter Jitai Rai, and wrestler Sakshi Malik — were collectively given this award.

The 33-year-old Rohit will only be the fourth cricketer after Sachin Tendulkar, just-retired Mahendra Singh Dhoni and current skipper Virat Kohli to be conferred with the Khel Ratna.

The committee, comprising the likes of Virender Sehwag and former hockey captain Sardar Singh, met at the Sports Authority of India headquarters here and finalised the names after deliberations that took up the first half of the day.

While Rohit has been recognised for his ever-rising accomplishments with the bat, Vinesh has been rewarded for her gold medals in the 2018 Commonwealth and Asian Games besides a bronze in the 2019 Asian



Rohit Sharma

LIST OF AWARDEES

● **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award:** Rohit Sharma (cricket), Vinesh Phogat (wrestling), Manika Batra (table tennis), Rani Rampal (hockey), Mariyappan Thangavelu (para high-jumper).

● **Arjuna Award:** Atanu Das (archery), Shiva Keshvan (luge), Dutee Chand (athletics), Satwik Sairaj Ranki Reddy and Chirag Shetty (badminton), Vishesh Bharguvanshi (basketball), Manish Kaushik and Lovlina Borgohain (boxing), Ishant Sharma and Deepti Sharma (cricket), Ajay Sawant (tent pegging), Sandesh Jhingran (football), Aditi Ashok (golf), Aakashdeep Singh and Deepika Kumari (hockey), Deepak Hooda (kabaddi), Kale Sarika (kho kho), Dattu Bhokanal (rowing), Manu Bhaker and Saurabh Chaudhary (shooting), Madhurika Patkar (table tennis), Divij Sharan (tennis), Divya Kakran, Rahul Aware and Sakshi Malik (wrestling), Mirabai Chanu (weightlifting), Suyesh Jadhav (para athletics), Sandeep (para athletics) and Manish Narwal (Para shooting).

Wrestling Championships

Terming it as one of the biggest moments of her career, Vinesh promised to live up to the expectations associated with the award.

"It's a proud moment for me. It was a long wait but it was worthwhile. If God permits I would live



Vinesh Phogat



Manika Batra



Rani Rampal

● **This is the first time in the history of awards that five athletes have been recommended for the top sporting accolade with the final decision resting on sports minister.**

up to the reputation associated with this award," Vinesh said.

Star paddler Manika was recommended for her remarkable performance in 2018, a year during which she won the Commonwealth Games gold medal and Asian Games bronze in women's singles. — *PTI*

SPORTS AWARDS LIKELY TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY

New Delhi, Aug. 18: In a first, this year's National Sports Awards ceremony is likely to be held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with all the winners logging in from their respective places to hear their names being announced on August 29.

The National Sports Day is celebrated on August 29, the birth anniversary of hockey wizard Dhyan Chand.

"The sports awards function this year is like-

ly to be an online function. As per the Government of India instructions, the awardees will also be announced on the morning of the day of the function," a sports ministry source said on Monday.

It also allowed athletes to self-nominate in view of the "difficulties" being faced by them in finding people who can recommend their names amid the lockdown.

— *PTI*

Mari inspired to win more medals

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, AUG. 18

Mariyappan Thangavelu's life has been a rollercoaster ride. After a road accident stunted growth in his right leg at a young age, sports came to the rescue and added a new dimension to his life. The gold medal (high jump, T42 category) he bagged at the Paralympics in 2016 turned his life upside down as awards and cash incentives (in crores) poured in.

The meteoric rise of an ordinary guy from rural Tamil Nadu makes for a perfect movie script. A biopic on Mariyappan's rags-to-riches story is now being made by filmmaker Aishwaryaa Dhanush, daughter of Rajinikanth.

However, the drama in his life refuses to end. In 2017, a family from Salem had alleged that Mariyappan was behind the demise of a 19-year-old who was found dead on a railway track. A petition to implead Mariappan was filed in the Madras High Court. The charges were subsequently withdrawn.

After a quiet couple of years, Mariyappan is now back in the spotlight. The 25-year-old will be only the second sports person from Tamil Nadu, after Viswanathan Anand, to get the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award, if the sports ministry approves the recommendation.

"I can't express my feelings in words. It's a huge honour," Mariyappan told this newspaper from his hometown in Salem.

Queried about the murder charges, Mariyappan said they had been withdrawn. "There is no case or charge pending against me. I have submitted all the documents to the awards committee. And the sports ministry also

It will surely inspire me to go for another medal at the Paralympics to be held in Tokyo next year.

— **MARIYAPPAN THANGAVELU**
PARALYMPIAN

conducted an enquiry," he added.

The award announcement, Mariyappan said, has come at a crucial time. "It will surely inspire me to go for another medal at the Paralympics to be held in Tokyo next year. I have been training hard for the Games. My target is to break the 2-metre barrier and I am confident of accomplishing it," he added.

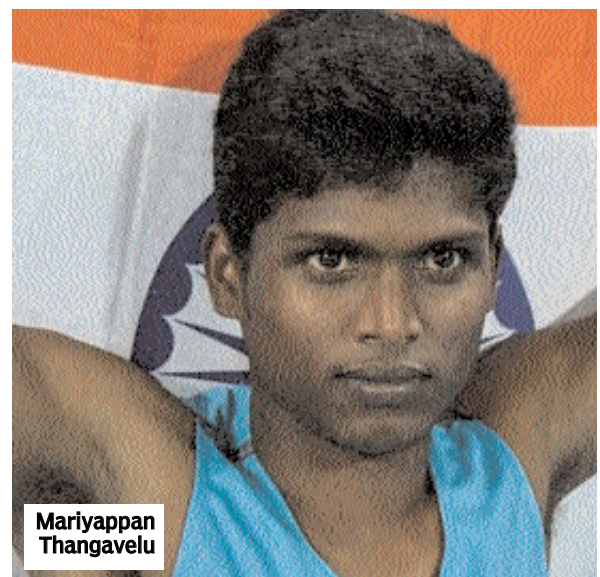
Mariyappan's coach Satyanarayana said his training schedule had been reworked and would resume in September. "Even during the lockdown he was training at SAI centre, Bengaluru. After spending a few weeks at home, Mariyappan will be back to training soon," he added.

At the 2018 Asian Paralympic Games, Mariyappan could only finish third behind compatriots Sharad Kumar and Varun Bhati.

Coach Satyanarayana said Mariyappan had participated at the Asiad despite undergoing an ankle surgery two months before the event.

"He couldn't push hard. In fact, doctors had told him not to compete for six months," he said.

Satyanarayana said Mariyappan getting the highest sporting honour would inspire a lot of youngsters, especially those from rural areas. "His grit and determination are inspiring. Hope he continues to achieve more representing the country," he added.



Mariyappan Thangavelu

Vinesh pulls out of national camp

COVID | SCARE

New Delhi, Aug. 18: Vinesh Phogat, the only Indian woman wrestler to have qualified for Tokyo Olympics, has pulled out of the national camp citing health safety concerns amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a decision which has irked the national federation.

The rescheduled national camp for Olympic weight category wrestlers is set to begin from September 1 in Lucknow (women) and Sonapat (men).

However, Vinesh is not comfortable travelling to Lucknow as she is fearful of her health amid the raging pandemic.

"I am not going to attend the camp. I am training everyday with coach Om Parkash, who follows the plan which my personal

coach Woller Akos sends me every week. The situation is not good to travel to Lucknow," Vinesh said.

The 2019 World Championship bronze-medallist said she "falls sick very easily" so she does not want to take a chance with her health.

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is not impressed with reasons given by the Asian Games gold-medallist.

"The selection committee will decide if Vinesh will get exemption or not. The camp is for players. We want preparation to kick off now for Olympics," said a WFI Assistant secretary Vinod Tomar.

— *PTI*



Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku celebrates with team-mate Lautaro Martinez after scoring against Shakhtar Donetsk in their Europa League semi-final in Duesseldorf, western Germany, on Monday.

— *AFP*

Lukaku, Martinez send five-star Inter into final

Düsseldorf (Germany), Aug. 18: Inter Milan are destined for "great things" under Antonio Conte, according to Lautaro Martinez after the Argentine and Romelu Lukaku both scored twice to thrash Shakhtar Donetsk 5-0 in Dusseldorf and reach the Europa League final.

Daniilo D'Ambrosio was also on target for the Italian giants, who will face Sevilla in Friday's final in Cologne.

Inter have endured a lean decade since winning the Champions

League in 2010, but closed the gap on Juventus at the top of Serie A to just one point in Conte's first season in charge and are now one win away from a first trophy in nine years.

LYON FACE BAYERN IN CL SEMIS

In Houssem Aouar, Lyon have a player who is both a symbol of their success at bringing through gifted young talent and a reason why the French side can hope to pull off another Champions League sensation when

they meet Bayern Munich in the semi-finals in Lisbon on Wednesday.

Moussa Dembele stole the headlines by scoring the late goals which gave Lyon a shock 3-1 win over Manchester City in the quarter-finals, but Aouar was at the origin of both. The 22-year-old playmaker supplied the pass for Dembele to put Lyon 2-1 up in the 79th minute. Then it was Aouar's shot which Ederson parried out for Dembele to wrap up the victory.

— *AFP*

ENGLAND, PAKISTAN DRAW RAIN-HIT SECOND TEST

Southampton, Aug. 18: Pakistan's Mohammad Abbas took two wickets on Monday as a weather-interrupted second Test against England at Southampton ended in a predictable draw.

England were 110-4 in reply to Pakistan's first innings 236 when home captain Joe Root (nine not out) declared to hasten the end of a match ahead of what would have been the statutory last hour.

Root's move ended the shortest Test in England, in terms of balls bowled, since a rain-affected draw between England and Pakistan at Lord's in 1987.

Abbas, who took 2-28 from 14 overs, removed Zak Crawley (53) and Dom Sibley (32). England, who enjoyed a three-wicket win in the first Test at Old Trafford earlier this month, remain 1-0 up in a three-match series ahead of Friday's finale.

— *AFP*