

DECCAN Chronicle

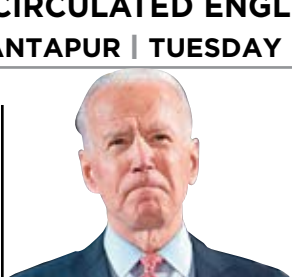
THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | TUESDAY | 18 AUGUST 2020



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Sharad Pawar is in home quarantine



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Spotlight on Biden in US convention

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Wimbledon champ Halep says no to US Open



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WEATHER

Max: 33.0°C
Min: 18°C
RH: 57%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 33/18 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+54,348)	(+897)
27,00,931	51,922
covid19india.org	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+894)	(+10)
TS: 92,255	703
(+6,780)	(+82)
AP: 2,96,609	2,732

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

2,19,25,867
DEATHS
7,74,963
COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
213

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Shravana Bahula Chaturdasi till 10.36 am
Star: Ashlesha till 4.06 am (Wednesday)
Variyam: 5.39 pm to 7.09 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.34 am to 9.24 am; 11.11 pm to 11.57 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
HILJRI CALENDAR
Zulhijja 27, 1441 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.31 am
Zohar: 12.26 pm
Asar: 4.28 pm
Maghrib: 6.05 pm
Isha: 7.21 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.52 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.00 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 06.06 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 06.06 AM

COUNTER POINT



No secrets... my life is an open Facebook!

IN BRIEF

Drushyam fame Nishikant dead

Hyderabad: Bollywood director Nishikant Kamat, who was hospitalised in a critical condition at Hyderabad a couple of weeks ago, passed away on Monday evening. The 50-year-old had been on ventilator support and was fighting for his life during the past few days. He was diagnosed with chronic liver disease and secondary infections. In a statement, AIG Hospitals, Hyderabad, said Kamat was admitted to AIG on July 31 with complaints of fever and excessive fatigue. Diagnosis revealed that he was suffering from liver cirrhosis for the past two years. Kamat made his directorial debut with Marathi film Dombivali Fast (2005). The movie won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Marathi. Kamat later directed blockbuster Marathi film Lai Bhaari, starring Riteish Deshmukh. Best-known for directing the Hindi remake of Malayalam hit Drishyam (starring Ajay Devgn and Tabu), Nishikant made his Bollywood debut with Mumbai Meri Jaan (2008), apart from directing Irrfan Khan in Madaari and John Abraham in Force and Rocky Handsome. Kamat also enacted cameos in films like Rocky Handsome and Bhavesh Joshi Superhero. No sooner the news about Nishikant Kamat's death broke out, condolences started pouring in from Bollywood personalities.

Contempt cases on naming judges: SC to set procedure

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

The Supreme Court on Monday said that it will examine the larger questions involved in contempt cases with respect to allegations of corruption against sitting or former judges and the procedure to be followed in dealing with them.

The court passed this order while hearing the 2009 contempt case against advocate Prashant Bhushan who allegedly spoke about judicial "corruption" in an interview to *Tehelka* magazine.

The court said that the issues involved in the 2009 contempt case against Mr Bhushan had "wider ramifications" and the bench, headed by Justice Mishra, spelt out three issues that need to be examined — Whether allegations of corruption against sitting or former judges can be made in public; the circumstances in which such allegations are made and the procedure to be followed in dealing with such

● **THE COURT** passed the prder while hearing the 2009 contempt case against advocate Prashant Bhushan who allegedly spoke about judicial "corruption" in an interview

matters. "In case you have any grievance against any judge, what should be the process? In what circumstances can such allegations be made? When some matter is subjudice, to what extent can matter be argued through media or another mode?" Justice Mishra said.

"We are not on conviction... We want to hear (the case) because if the question is left, then it will not be better for later on... The issues involved have several ramifications and we would like senior lawyers to address them," the bench, also comprising Justices B.R. Gavau and Krishna Murari, observed even as senior counsel Rajeev Dhavan wanted to address it on the conviction part of the 2009 contempt case against Mr

Bhushan.

After Justice Mishra framed the three questions to be addressed by senior lawyers appearing in the matter — Mr Dhavan for Prashant Bhushan, Kapil Sibal for former *Tehelka* editor Tarun Tejpal and Harish Salve as amicus curiae assisting the court — Mr Dhavan told the court that he along with Mr Bhushan had framed five questions which they think should be heard by a five-judge constitution bench.

Justice Mishra permitted Mr Dhavan to circulate the questions amongst all the lawyers appearing in the case. At the outset of the hearing, Mr Dhavan pointed to the opposite positions in the August 14 judgment holding Mr Bhushan guilty of criminal contempt for his two tweets. He said that while its first part holds that the tweets are not contemptuous, it later holds the same tweets to be contemptuous. He said that his client intends to file a plea seeking a review of the order.

SC REFUSES TO INTERVENE IN JEE, NEET SCHEDULE

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to interfere with the conduct of medical and engineering entrance exams — NEET and JEE — scheduled to take place in September saying that life must go on and students can't lose a precious year in the wake of Covid pandemic.

Dismissing a plea by one Sayantan Biswas seeking direction to National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts both the NEET and JEE exams, to postpone them, Justice Arun Mishra, heading a three-judge bench, said that there was "absolutely" no merit in the plea.

"Life cannot be stopped. We have to move ahead with all safeguards and all... Are students ready to waste one whole year? Education should be opened up. Covid may continue for a year more. Are you going to wait another year? Do you know what the loss to the country and peril to the students is?" Justice Arun Mishra said. The court took on record assurance by the NTA that all necessary precautions will be taken in view of Covid-19 pandemic. The ICAI had on July 13 informed the SC of its decision to scrap the examination for chartered accountants.

Naidu writes to PM on phone tap

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

Accusing the ruling YSR Congress-led state government and "private persons" of illegally tapping phones of people from different walks of life, Telugu Desam supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to order an inquiry by the Central agency concerned into the illegal activity.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Naidu said that the ruling party in its overenthusiasm to retain power at any cost was dangerously threatening and attacking persons or institutions raising their voice against the "mal-functioning of the government."

Lawyers, journalists and social activists have not been spared along with the leaders of the Opposition parties. "It appears that the YSRCP has now even targeted judiciary as it is facing

hurdles from them," he said. Naidu said some private persons had been resorting to phone tapping using cutting edge technologies. If the activity is allowed unchecked, it may even pose a threat to the security and integrity of the nation.

They will not only violate the right to privacy of individuals, but resort to blackmail of people in high places, he added.

The TD supremo said that telephone tapping as per the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 (Section 5(2)) and the Information Technology Act, 2000 (Section 69) can be done only in the case of threat to national security or in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, threat to friendly relations with foreign countries.

In the long run, such nefarious activities would result in breakdown of democratic values and freedom of speech leading to jungle raj, Naidu pointed out.

SECOND TMC MLA DIES OF COVID-19, INDIA CASELOAD CROSSES 27 LAKH

DC CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, AUG. 17

Trinamul Congress has lost its second MLA to Covid-19. The deceased, Samaresh Das, 76, was the three-time legislator of

Egra in East Midnapore. Meanwhile, the overall Covid tally in India rose to 27,00,931 with the addition of 48,031 cases. The toll rose to 51,922 with 782 more deaths.

MELODY | LINGERS

Music legend was associated with Nizam College for annual Sangeet Samaroh

Jasraj dead, Hyd recalls Panditji's musical legacy

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC HYDERABAD, AUG. 17

Legendary Hindustani classical vocalist Pandit Jasraj who enthralled crores of fans for more than eight decades, is no more.

He breathed his last in New Jersey at 5.15 pm on Monday. He was 90. He is survived by his wife Madura, son Shaarang Dev Pandit and daughter Durga Jasraj, both musicians.

Pandit Jasraj, who belonged to the Mewati gharana and was one of India's greatest music legends, was in the US when the Coronavirus-led lockdown happened and decid-

ed to stay back in that country. His last performance was in April this year.

Panditji has a great connection with Hyderabad, where he used to live with his parents at Phoolbagh near Moazzam Jahi market. His father was a court singer for the Nizam. A street in Hyderabad is named after his father, Pandit Motiram Marg.

Pandit Jasraj had a long association with students of Nizam College. The college offered the old principal lodge building for the purpose of promoting Hindustani music to children.

Pandit Jasraj would hold the annual music festival



Pandit Jasraj

as a tribute to his father Pandit Motiram and for Pandit Maniram. Pandit Jasraj's Sangeet Samaroh gave an opportunity to the city music lovers to get first hand exposure to

3 cops, 1 jawan killed in terrorist attack in J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, AUG. 17

Separatist militants in a sneak attack, the second in the past four days in the Valley, killed three policemen and a jawan in the Kreeri area of Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla district on Monday.

However, the J&K police's counterinsur-

gency Special Operations Group (SOG) together with the Army's 29 Rashtriya Rifles and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) after laying siege to a vast area around the scene of shooting killed all the three assailants "in a swift and meticulous" action, the police said adding that one of them was Sajad Ahmed

Mir alias Haider alias Raja, a senior Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) commander. The rifle snatched from the slain cop was recovered, the police said.

Late on Monday evening, militants attacked a CRPF camp in Nehama of Kulgam district, injuring a ASI S. Sukumar of the 'A' Company of its 18th Battalion, police said.

● **PANDIT JASRAJ** spent his childhood in Hyderabad, and was a student of Vivek Vardhini High School.

● **HE USED** to bunk school and spend time to hear songs of Begum Akthar at a small tea hotel where they used to play gramophone records, recalled Mohan Hemmadi, who was associated with Pandit Jasraj since 1960.

world renowned classical artists. On November 30 every year, Pandit Jasraj himself would perform as a tribute to his father and his guru at the Sangeet Samaroh.

Pandit Jasraj, who was decorated with Padma Vibhushan, spent his childhood in Hyderabad, and was a student of Vivek Vardhini High School.

He used to bunk school and spend time to hear songs of Begum Akthar at a small tea hotel where they used to play gramophone reco-rds, recalled Mohan Hem-madi, who was associated with Pandit Jasraj since 1960.

According to Prof. Uma Maheshwar Reddy, the then Principal of Nizam College, Pandit Jasraj was offered space in the year 2000 and the annual concerts were held in the premises from 2000 to 2004. Panditji and many artists

would not stay there during the event but he would also conduct free classes to beginners of Hindustani classical music.

The tombs of Pandit Motiram and Pandit Hariram are in Amberpet Smashana Vatika, and Pandit Jasraj used to offer his respects whenever he was in Hyderabad.

"Sisters" Pragya and Chhavi Sodhani were selected by him during the Sangeet Samaroh. After completing their tenth and eleventh standards, they shifted to Bombay to be under the tutelage of Pandit ji," said Alka Sodhani, their mother, in whose house Panditji would sometimes stay.

CM directs officials to ensure people's safety

5 bridges submerged in floods: E. Godavari collector

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed collectors of both East and West Godavari districts to take all necessary measures to evacuate rain and flood-affected people to safety and provide them proper accommodation, food and health care, especially in the wake of Coronavirus also prevailing in the two districts.

Addressing collectors through video conference from his Camp Office here on Monday, the CM asked them to extend all requisite help to flood victims without hesitating about the costs involved. He wanted personnel from both NDRF and SDRF to be deployed in vulnerable areas to ensure safety of the people.

East Godavari collector D. Muralidhar Reddy informed the Chief Minister that five bridges have got submerged in flood waters. 161 villages in 13 mandals of the district have been impacted by floods. Most of the inundation has been in island villages. So far, 63 relief camps have been set up in the district to provide succour to the flood-affected people.

The EG collector informed the CM that they have arranged satellite phones at all necessary places, so that communication is not disrupted during the crisis period. 14 launches and 86 boats have been kept ready to mobilise essential commodities to relief camps as well as villages that have got isolated due to floods. He said so far, no loss of life has been reported due to floods.

With regard to precautions against Covid-19, Muralidhar Reddy informed the CM that they are providing face masks and hand sanitisers to people at the relief camps. Medical camps are also



An Indian Air Force helicopter lifts man to safety at the Khutaghat dam in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district on Monday. The 43-year-old man was caught in water discharged from the dam and clung to a tree for over 12 hours before he was rescued.

— PTI

Bhadrachalam crosses 62ft, Godavari set to rise further

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

The water levels in Godavari are rising alarmingly and it crossed 18.20 feet at Sir Arthur Cotton Barrage in Dowleswaram with a discharge of 19.69 lakh cuses of water downstream into the sea Monday 6 pm.

Water resources authorities issued a third flood warning when water level touched 17.75 feet at 3 pm. As the levels at Bhadrachalam crossed 62 feet at 6 pm and continued to rise, the authorities warned of further rise in Godavari river and up to 21-22 feet

by Tuesday night. It could stabilise for some time and start receding from Wednesday morning onwards. However, as IMD predicts low-area formation in Bay of Bengal and the resultant rainfall from Wednesday, authorities are keeping their fingers crossed on handling the flood situation and to avoid any damage to properties and loss of life.

Godavari river witnessed its worst floods in 1986 where the discharge was estimated at about 35 lakh cuses. Though the water resources authorities do not expect a repeat of such heavy floods this

time, they are more concerned about IMD's prediction of further rainfall in the next few days.

With Wednesday being Amavasya, authorities are also worried with the discharge of water from Godavari into the sea at its mouth in places like Antarvedi, Yanam, Kotipalli and others as the water level in the sea rises due to high tides during that time. The river water may not go into the sea resulting in rise in backwaters causing inundation of low-lying areas.

■ **Page 2: Tributaries of Godavari swelling**

being organised to carry out Covid-19 tests. He asserted that good food is being provided to evacuees.

West Godavari collector R. Muthyalu Raju informed the Chief Minister that 30 villages in seven mandals of the district have been impacted by floods in Godavari. All

aged persons and pregnant women have been evacuated from vulnerable areas to the safety of relief camps.

NDRF and SDRF have been deployed at three places. Power generators have been kept ready at primary health centres, besides antidotes for snake bites.

The WG collector said they have identified four weak points along the Godavari flood bank at Polavaram and strengthened them by placing sand bags.

CM Jagan asked both the district collectors to avoid any trouble related to distribution of essential commodities to people.

LAND GRABBING CASES FEARED IN VISAKHAPATNAM

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 17

Making the port city of Visakhapatnam the executive capital may augur well for people of north coastal Andhra. But this should not be at the cost of people from middle class owning prime lands in the city and its outskirts. During the last five years, Visakhapatnam, being the biggest city in truncated AP, has been drawing the attention of big time realtors. The movement picked up pace when the CM announced three capitals for the state in the Assembly in December.

■ **Pg 3: Land-grabbings reported in last 5 months**

FARMER TRIES TO IMMOLATE SELF AT TAHSILDAR OFFICE

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 17

A farmer Polavarapu Nookaraju tried to immolate himself in front of the Tahsildar office in S. Rayavaram in the rural district of Visakhapatnam.

■ **Page 3: Farmer found inherited land deleted**

IN BRIEF

**'AP DEVELOPS
980 SQ KM NEW
GREEN COVER'**DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

The minister for energy, forest & environment, science & technology in the state of Andhra Pradesh, Balineni Srinivas Reddy said that AP developed 980 sq km new green cover for the second consecutive year as part of its efforts to enhance green cover in the state.

The minister, took part in an online meeting, along with forest ministers from other states, with the union minister for environment and forest, Prakash Javadekar, on Monday. Mr Reddy, quoting the Indian State of Forest Report, 2019, informed Mr Javedekar that AP stood second in developing green cover in the entire country and claimed credit for repeating the same.

The minister said that under Jagananna Patchathoranam programme, 20 crore saplings were distributed with the support from 26 departments for plantation and added that with the support from the Centre, they were planning to develop four more Nagara Vanams in addition to the existing 23 in the state. The minister also said that they were taking up plantation along the Godavari and Krishna rivers.

The minister further said that they were taking all measures to develop green cover to 33 per cent from the present 23 per cent, under directions from the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

**GODAVARI DIST
GEAR UP TO
HANDLE COVID**DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

Authorities in Godavari districts are facing a tough challenge to handle Godavari floods and also prevention of spread of Covid-19 especially among evacuees in relief camps.

In East Godavari, the authorities have identified Rampachodavaram, Chintur, Yetapaka in agency area and Amalapuram in Konaseema area as vulnerable for Godavari floods and evacuated the people to relief centres for safety.

The health authorities have swung into action and started conducting medical camps at relief centres. They supplied 10,000 face masks, 1,000 N95 masks and five litres of sanitiser to be distributed at relief camps through local PHCs under the supervision of deputy DMHOs. Several TrueNat machines and Rapid Test Kits have also been sent to the concerned PHCs.

The health authorities say that by conducting medical camps they were screening the patients mainly pregnant women, antenatal cases and symptomatic aged persons in order to conduct Covid-19 tests and provide them treatment based on the test results. People in relief camps are advised to maintain social distancing and wear face masks without fail. The authorities though had even planned to mobilise Sanjeevini bus to the affected areas to conduct Covid-19 tests in the vehicle itself, but due to lack of proper road connectivity in flood affected areas, they mobilised through small vehicles all requisite medical equipment to take care of health of the people. PPE kits have also been sent for benefit of health personnel to conduct Covid-19 tests on suspect cases. The authorities have also sent stocks of anti rabies vaccine, antidote for snake bite and other requisite medical equipment.

In West Godavari, the health authorities have identified vulnerable areas like Narasapuram, Achanta, Bhimavaram and agency areas like Koida and Velerupadu where relief camps have been set up due to Godavari floods and mobilised all requisite equipment to conduct Covid-19 tests and provide treatment to the infected patients. The health authorities said that four PHCs were identified falling in the vulnerable area and all requisite medical equipment were mobilised.

West Godavari DMHO Dr K.M. Sunanda said, "We have mobilised face masks, sanitisers, PPE kits, TrueNat machines and other equipment to conduct Covid-19 tests on suspect cases at relief camps. We are conducting medical camps and educating people on maintenance of social distancing and the need to seek health care in case of any symptoms.

● The authorities had even planned to mobilise Sanjeevini bus to the affected areas to conduct Covid-19 tests in the vehicle itself.

Teachers against schools reopening from September 5

30% of syllabus dropped but textbooks remain unchanged

V.K.L.GAYATRI | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 17

Though the government has decided to reduce school and Intermediate syllabus by 30 per cent for the 2020-21 academic year, there will be no new textbooks. The government has decided to inform the teaching community about the lessons that have been dropped and to continue with the same textbooks for the present academic year.

All educational institutions have been shut since March 23 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. After a series of review meetings, the state government has announced to re-open schools from September 5, which also marks Teacher's Day.

Normally, there will be 220 working days in an academic year. However, in the new academic year, as almost three months have already been wasted and with only 160 days ahead, the government has decided to reduce the syllabus. As there is no time to print new textbooks, it has been decided to continue with the present textbooks, albeit after removing some portions. 'Details of syllabus that

has been dropped will be informed to the teachers and there will not be any classes for those lessons. Managements are also being informed about reopening on September 5,' a senior official from Commissioner of School Education said.

However, the teachers' associations are suggesting the government not to re-open schools from September 5, as Covid-19 positive cases have been increasing in the state. Even the reduced syllabus and Covid-19 precautions would be eye-washes, the unions pointed out.

"There are about 70 lakh students in the state from Class I to X. How can the ratio be divided in the given critical situation. The government should take opinion from the public, teachers and their associations and other political parties. The government is not conducting any meetings to elicit opinions of the teaching community. The decision to reopen from September 5 is not good. We are seeking further postponement," said K. Bhanu Murthy, State President of Andhra Pradesh Teachers Federation.

ULB accounts to be audited online

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 17

In a first, the Union and state governments have jointly developed a web portal to facilitate the financial audit of accounts of village panchayats, mandals, and Urban Local Bodies online.

AuditOnline is a generic and open source application developed as part of Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES) under the e-panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP) initiated by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR). It facilitates recording of details for both internal and external audits as per the defined process.

The software not only

facilitates online and offline audit of accounts but also maintains the past audit records of the auditee with an associated list of the auditors and audit team and acts as a good financial audit tool. It also improves transparency and accountability.

The information will be uploaded in the public domain and for usage by other PES applications.

The government has started the new facility audit online web portal (<http://auditonline.gov.in>) Around 20 per cent of audit of village panchayat accounts will be conducted online in the present fiscal. District Audit Officer, Srikakulam, K. Raju said.

Property registrations to be recorded

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 17

The state government has issued orders for implementation of video recordings of property registration capturing by CCTV cameras, to buyers and sellers in the Sub Registrar Offices (SRO).

The Stamps and Registration department proposed to conduct the online registrations by using the CCTV cameras at all the SROs through video recording and surveillance with central monitoring.

The government accorded permission for implementing the new system as a pilot project as phase

1. The video recordings will serve as evidence and a second layer of protection for buyers and sellers as cases of impersonation by forging identities. A copy of the video and snapshot would be provided to the parties on request in CDs and other devices on a normal cost. The expenditure for the pilot project by collecting user charges from the parties.

The new facility will be implemented in 20 selected SROs in the state including Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Kakina, Eluru, Patamata, Vijayawada, Gunadala, Guntur, Mangalagiri and Narasaraopet.

WAR ON | COVID

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, AUG. 17

Dr Supriya Mannepal, a US-based doctor with roots in Nellore of AP, has underlined administration of IV Remdesivir injection early in hospitalised Covid-19 patients.

She recommends this especially for patients on supplemental oxygen, who have bilateral lung infiltrates.

Medical Director for Infectious Diseases at Northeast Georgia Health System, Gainesville, GA, USA; Dr Supriya is all praise for doctors in AP for their dedicated services. She says the treatment

Doctor with roots in Nellore is all praise for doctors in AP for their services

US-based doctor suggests early use of Remdesivir



● Dr Supriya underlines the importance of closely monitoring a patient's clinical status and vital signs and adjusting treatment for saving patients.

● Pats AP doctors for dedication and commitment; says treatment protocol in AP is similar to the one in the US.

the second week of symptoms (second week crash). She warns against missing happy hypoxia (oxygenation less than 94 per cent on room air but exhibiting mild or no symptoms). "We in US utilise vitamin C, zinc, melatonin, and vitamin D supplements as part of the treatment regi-

men, similar to what I noted in the protocols of AP. For patients with oxygenation less than 94 per cent on room air and bilateral lung infiltrates, we are starting Remdesivir and adding steroids if on supplemental oxygen," recounted Dr Supriya. One among 10 top doctors

in the Infectious Disease Department at Georgia State and director of the 500-bed hospital, she said that they have not seen much benefit in giving Remdesivir if it is initiated after the patient is already on mechanical ventilation. If giving convalescent plasma, she advises that giving it early is beneficial for patients. "We have learnt that Covid-19 patients are at high risk of developing clots. Treatment protocols both in USA and AP include prophylactic anticoagulation based on D-dimer levels, especially for those who are hospitalised," she stated. The US-based doctor said

proning and breathing exercises are very helpful in improving oxygenation. "I am very happy to see that these are being included in the treatment protocols in AP," she remarked.

She said that Tocilizumab, which is another drug that is part of the treatment protocols in AP and USA, is helpful in patients who develop cytokine storm. We are using it less and less, especially if treatment is started early with Remdesivir and steroids.

She also said they are noticing increased risk of bacterial sepsis and fungal infections in patients who are receiving this drug.



Flood water discharge from Dowleswaram barrage in Rajahmundry on Monday.

— A. MANIKANTA KUMAR

Godavari floods hit 29,280 in 13 mandals in E. Godavari

6,029 people were evacuated to safety by using 135 boats: Collector

Tributaries of Godavari swelling

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

The East Godavari administration has said that 29,280 people from 146 villages in 13 mandals have been affected due to the Godavari floods so far.

District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy in a statement said that 6,029 people were evacuated to safety by using 135 boats and nine launches from 80 villages and added that 65 medical camps were arranged to avoid the spread of diseases. He said that so far, 95 relief centres were set up, and 14,477 persons were being accommodated in them by providing food and drinking water.

Paddy in 35 hectares and horticulture crops in 872 hectares were inundated and damaged. The floodwater entered into 211 houses, and two houses suffered damages.

FROM PAGE 1

Central Water Commission authorities maintain that following heavy rainfall, areas like Peruru, Kothaguda, Palwancha received rainfall of 100 to 150 mm in a day while Pathagudem received 270 mm resulting in swelling of Godavari tributaries like Sileur, Sabari and Indravati causing heavy inflow of water into Godavari river.

Water resources superintending engineer K.S. Prakasa Rao said, "We are expecting the Godavari water level to rise further as water level at Bhadrachalam too is rising at present. However, we expect water at the barrage to stabilise at 21-22

WATER LEVEL AT BHADRACHALAM STARTS RECEDING

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

The water level in the Godavari river in Bhadrachalam has started receding and its level recorded at 60.90 feet at 10 pm against 61.5 feet at 5 pm

feet and start receding. We have identified 70-90 vulnerable points along the 534-km stretch of river from Akhanda Godavari to the place where the river merges into sea."

Water resources authorities maintain that 84 villages in East Godavari and 58 villages in West Godavari are to be affected due to the floods and

on Monday.

The water resources authorities say that as the water level has started receding in Bhadrachalam, it will be having its impact at the Sir Arthur Cotton Barrage after 10 hours. They main-

tain that the water level in the Godavari river will continue to rise and after the discharge touching about 22-23 lakh cusecs from the barrage at 6 am on Tuesday, the level will stabilise for some time before receding.

the local revenue authorities have evacuated people from all vulnerable places to safety.

Polavaram project chief engineer B. Sudhakar Babu said, "We have temporarily stopped works on some components of Polavaram project and the flood water in the river is flowing on spillway and also through gaps in cof-

fer dam both upstream and downstream avoiding any inundation of local villages as was the case in last year's floods. Once the flood water recedes, we will resume work at the project."

Moreover, water level in Godavari at the barrage is rising at the rate of 0.10-0.20 ft for every hour and recorded 18.10 ft at 5 pm.

TB reservoir receives 98 tmc ft

NAGABHUSHANAM
HOSKOTE | DC
ANANTAPUR, AUG. 17

The Tungabhadra reservoir had received 98.855 TMC ft against 100.8 TMC ft capacity on Monday following inflows from upstream parts of the reservoir. The reservoir was filled and overflowed in last year on the same day while the reservoir needs two more TMC ft to fill the dam.

The water level recorded 98.855 TMC ft with 1632.29 ft level, and 33,737 cusecs of inflows and 8,594 cusecs of outflows from the river. The dam authorities observed that the situation was different last year when inflow was 76,534 cusecs and the outflow of 63928 cusecs on the same day. The Tungabhadra dam superintendent engineer Venkataramana said that the dam authorities were not per-

● The dam authorities observed that the situation was different last year when inflow was 76,534 cusecs and the outflow of 63928 cusecs on the same day.

mitting visitors even during Independence Day due to the Covid-19 pandemic. "Last year the river area

was inundated in Tungabhadra river area at Hampi and there were heavy flows towards Mantralayam in Kurnool district, but the situation is different this year as the river areas towards AP are still dried up," Dhananjaya, resident of Hampi told DC. He further added that many historic temples and locations were submerged last year.

However, the Srisailem reservoir received heavy

inflows from the upstream parts in Krishna basin. The water level recorded 871.60 ft along with 148 TMC ft water along with 1.41 lakh cusecs inflows, and 61,000 cusecs outflows towards downstream.

Official sources said that the Almatiri reservoir had 114 TMC ft storage along with 1.27 lakh cusecs of inflows and 2.25 lakh cusecs of outflows towards the downstream areas.

DGP WRITES TO NAIDU ON PHONE TAPPING

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

AP Director General of Police (DGP), D. Goutam Sawang, stated that the police had not received any complaint from any quarter whatsoever about the alleged tapping of phones of leaders of the opposition party, lawyers, journalists and activists.

The DGP wrote a letter to the former CM N. Chandrababu Naidu referring to the latter's letter to the Prime Minister on the tapping of phones. He asked for the submission of details of such phone tapping as they violate the provisions of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and Information Technology Act, 2000, to his office to take necessary action. He requested for cooperation to protect the rights of people at large and to maintain and uphold the rule of law.

● The DGP wrote a letter to the former CM N. Chandrababu Naidu referring to the latter's letter to the Prime Minister on the tapping of phones.

IN BRIEF

Ganja smuggler escapes custody

Visakhapatnam: Causing embarrassment to the police department on the eve of the new commissioner taking charge, 32-year-old Mittipalli Nageswara Rao, who was nabbed on charges of ganja storage and peddling, managed to escape from the New Port police station in Vizag city on Sunday. However, the incident came to light only on Monday morning. The City Task Force (CTF) police, led by ACP A. Trinad Rao, along with New Port police, raided a house at Gandhinagar near Peda Gantyada area in Vizag city on Saturday night. The Task Force arrested Nageswara Rao and seized 486 kg of dry ganja worth ₹36 lakh from his house. Noticing the police team, Nageswara Rao's associates Pyla Prakash, Gantla Srinu, Veera and Raj Kumar escaped from the spot in a car. The gang procured the weed from Vizag Agency and had planned to transport it in a goods carrier to Chennai. The accused and the seized ganja have been handed over to the New Port police for further investigation. Sources said that Nageswara Rao escaped from the police station on Sunday morning while the police were busy with routine work. A few minutes later, the police realized that Nageswara Rao was missing and launched a search.

Expand VIMS services: Collector

Visakhapatnam: Collector V. Vinay Chand has directed the management of Visakh Institute of Medical Sciences (VIMS), which is the state Covid-19 hospital, to prepare an action plan to expand the services to facilitate medical aid to more patients. The Collector, along with Covid-19 special officer and principal, Andhra Medical College Dr P.V. Sudhakar visited VIMS and inspected the services in the hospital. Mr Vinay Chand said that given the rapid increase in the Covid-19 positive cases, VIMS has to play a vital role in the coming days. Given the future challenges, VIMS should be developed to tackle any emergencies like Covid-19. He directed the management to procure more ventilators and oxygen cylinders as required.

Mystery shrouds death of tribal

Nellore: Mystery shrouds the body of a 44-year-old tribal woman found at the cross road near Amudaladinne village in Kavali rural mandal on Monday. The woman identified as Namburu Seshamma was seen living with one Subba Rayudu, also a tribal, in a makeshift tent at the outskirts of the village. The woman also has a son. Both are rag pickers and in the habit of consuming liquor and toddy every day. The locals alerted the police when they found the body of Seshamma in a pool of blood on Sunday night. A police team led by Kavali DSP D. Prasad rushed to the spot on Monday and scanned the scene of the offence. The DSP said that they found stab wounds on the neck, abdomen and thigh of the deceased woman. The DSP added that they have booked a case and formed a team to track down Subba Rayudu.

RENOVATED BUTTERFLY PARK TO REOPEN

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 17

The Butterfly Park located in Indira Gandhi Zoological Park is all set to reopen for public if the lockdown is completely eased and government accorded permission for opening the premises.

The Park has also a breeding room, an environment in itself where butterflies are hand reared for release into the park. With adaptations and setups in accordance with the four stages of their life cycle, the room has a sole purpose of breeding and rearing butterflies. The rearing activity was inactive for a few years now and work is under progress to restart it again, said curator Nandini Salaria.

She said fully fledged Butterfly Park which is home to more than 50 species of butterflies. The park supports the life cycle of butterflies by providing both host plants and a variety of nectar plants. The multi coloured flowers ranging from creepers, shrubs to trees make sure the butterflies have plenty to feed on.

With a variety of host plants and nectar plants raised to cater to the life cycle of these winged jewels, Salaria said there are 30-40 plants raised here with ultimate care.



Medical staff collect swab samples from people for Covid-19 testing at Sanjeevini bus parked at the Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Monday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

AP shows decline with 6,780 cases, 82 deaths

Of 29,05,521 samples tested so far, 2,09,100 recovered

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

Andhra Pradesh has started witnessing a slight dip in the number of Covid-19 cases in the last few days with Monday recording 6,780 new Covid-19 cases, raising the overall tally to 2,96,609, apart from 82 deaths, taking the death toll to 2,732.

The state health department, in its Covid-19 bulletin, reported that out of 44,578 samples tested, 6,780 individuals have tested Covid-19 positive.

Of the 29,05,521 samples tested so far in the state, 2,09,100 patients have been discharged after recovery, while 84,777 patients are still undergoing treatment for the infection.

East Godavari tops among the newly confirmed Coronavirus infections with 911 cases, followed by 776 in Guntur, 724 in West Godavari, 535 in

■ With regard to cumulative cases, East Godavari has suffered the worst with 41,204 cases, followed by 33,952 in Kurnool, 30,062 in Anantapur, 26,915 in Guntur, 25,327 in Visakhapatnam, 24,306 in West Godavari, 23,917 in Chittoor, 17,645 in Nellore

Anantapur, 527 in Srikakulam, 523 in Kadapa, 519 in Visakhapatnam, 481 in Nellore, 462 in Vizianagaram, 458 in Chittoor, 372 in Kurnool, 357 in Prakasam and 135 in Krishna.

With regard to cumulative cases, East Godavari has suffered the worst with 41,204 cases, followed by 33,952 in Kurnool, 30,062 in Anantapur, 26,915 in Guntur, 25,327 in Visakhapatnam, 24,306 in West Godavari, 23,917 in Chittoor, 17,645 in Nellore, 17,331 in Kadapa, 15,258 in Srikakulam, 13,095 in Vizianagaram, 12,479 in Krishna, 12,223 in Prakasam, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

Rate of recovery appears to be good in Kurnool with 26,407 persons discharged, followed by 26,049 in East Godavari, 24,300 in Anantapur, 19,524 in Visakhapatnam, 18,938 in Guntur, 18,690 in West Godavari, 14,673 in Chittoor, 12,679 in Kadapa, 12,334 in Nellore, 9,830 in Srikakulam, 9,208 in Krishna, 7,351 in Prakasam, 6,222 in Vizianagaram, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

Prakasam has registered 13 deaths, followed by 10 in East Godavari, eight in Chittoor, seven each in Guntur and Kadapa, six each in Srikakulam and West Godavari, five each in Anantapur, Kurnool,



A mobile grab of fire department officials trying to douse the flames from a car at Bharathinagar in Vijayawada on Monday. — DC

Man tries to kill 3 by setting car afire in Vijayawada

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

Having had differences in real estate and car sale business with his three partners, a man attempted to murder them by setting their car on fire, on Monday.

According to the police, based on a preliminary inquiry, Venugopal Reddy, Krishna Reddy, Gangadhar and his wife

Nagavalli were involved in the business since 2014. However, they suffered a loss in the business.

Venugopal Reddy allegedly called the other three partners to meet him at a place near a private hotel in the city to discuss matters of business. When the trio arrived there, Venugopal Reddy doused the car with petrol and set it on fire

and fled from the scene.

The trio managed to escape from the burning car, and one of them reportedly suffered severe burns on his body. The injured was shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment.

Assistant commissioner of police, Nagarjuna Reddy, inspected the scene of the offence. He said that special teams were formed to capture the culprit.

Misuse of position by CM's principal secy Praveen Prakash

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 17

In gross misuse of official position, Praveen Prakash, principal secretary to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has obtained permission from the state government to visit New Delhi on weekends at the cost of state exchequer.

Mr Prakash's family stays in New Delhi. His wife, a senior IPS officer, Bhavan Saxena, is Resident Commissioner of AP Bhavan in the national capital.

Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney has recently issued a memo permitting his Delhi weekend visits as

■ The crucial factor both the Chief Secretary and Mr Prakash chose to ignore was that no central government office in New Delhi works on Saturday and Sunday even though has to travel in weekends

"on duty". Justifying the order, the Chief Secretary said Mr Prakash was assigned the crucial subjects of Centre-State relations, state reorganisation Act, projects, release of funds from the centre and hence he has to meet senior Central officials in New Delhi.

He has been permitted to visit New Delhi every week-

end, Saturday and Sunday, on "official purpose, the Chief Secretary said and also made it clear that her order does not require concurrence of the finance department which in other words means the watchdog of the state exchequer cannot raise any queries.

But, the crucial factor both the Chief Secretary and Mr Prakash chose to ignore was that no central government office in New Delhi works on Saturday and Sunday and both can only explain whom he would meet and what official work he could discharge in the Central offices that remain closed on Saturday and Sunday.

Covid-19 patient misses from RIMS

DC CORRESPONDENT SRIKAKULAM, AUG. 17

A 50-year-old woman of Rajam town has alleged that her husband Sira Srinivasa Naidu, who has been tested positive for Covid and admitted in RIMS in Srikakulam, has been missing since the last 32 days.

Sira Rajeswari told reporters on Sunday that her husband has been suffering from jaundice and when admitted into hospital in Rajam, he was tested positive.

He was immediately taken to RIMS hospital in an ambulance and she was asked to follow in an autorickshaw. When she went there the health officials told her that her husband has been admitted and she was asked to return home as entry has been banned.

Two days later she went

there and made an enquiry on his health status but none replied to her. She repeated her visits every three days but all the time none responded to her.

She said she later went to the superintendent of police and the officers there advised her to file a report in Two Town police station.

Since no response came from the police station so far, she is suspecting something might have gone wrong. A senior government official told this correspondent that in many cases proper entries were not being made at the time of admissions. There was also a possibility of the man dying and family members were not informed.

"As of now the patient is not traced in the hospital," the official said.

OP SERVICES RESUME IN BIRRD

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, AUG. 17

The outpatient (OP) services, which were stalled given Covid-19 pandemic, have been resumed from Monday in the TTD-run Balaji Institute of Research, Rehabilitation and Surgery for the Disabled (BIRRD) in Tirupati.

According to BIRRD Director, M. Madanmohan Reddy, the OP services were resumed with 50 patients given treatment daily by observing all precautionary measures as per the Covid norms. He said that OP services remain open from 8 am till 12 noon and all emergency cases will also be given admission.

The director said that all the patients with OP tickets would be provided medication on the same day, while there will be limited inpatients only for an emergency.

Both the doctors and the patients have to wear masks and strictly observe social distancing by maintaining three feet distance. This is to avoid the rampant spread of Coronavirus.

■ the OP services were resumed with 50 patients given treatment daily by observing all precautionary measures as per the Covid norms

FARMER FOUND PART OF INHERITED LAND DELETED FROM RECORDS

From Page 1

The farmer found that the village revenue officer allegedly deleted a part of his inherited land from the revenue records. The incident took place on Monday morning.

Reports said Polavarapu Kannayya of Peddapushpalam village of S. Rayavaram owned 1.55 acres of land in the village. After his death, the land was inherited by his son Polavarapu Ramana. The passbook was in the name of Kannayya. Ramana recently applied for changing the passbook in his name. To his shock, he found 36 cents of land had gone missing from the records and registered in the name of one P. Appalakonda of the same village.

Ramana's two sons Eswara Rao and Nookaraju approached VRO Esawara Rao for correction of records but they were abused by him. Nookaraju immediately doused himself in diesel which he carried with him but others rescued him.

Banana major crop in Kadapa

NAGESWARA RAO BALLEDA | DC KADAPA, AUG. 17

Kadapa district has been identified as a major producer of the high yielding quality banana crops. To increase its cultivation, Kasinayana and Rajampet mandals of the district have been selected as clusters. Two farmer produce organisations (FPOs) have also been set up in this regard.

The production of bananas is being increased through these clusters. Their management, implementation, monitoring, advice, guidance will come from the cluster-based business organisations (CBBOs). There are currently 46 FPOs running in the district. The central government's priority policy of one produce from one district is being followed with special focus on productive areas in the region. District collector Chevuri



Manish Kumar Sinha

SINHA ASSUMES CHARGE AS VIZAG POLICE CHIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 17

Manish Kumar Sinha took charge as the new Commissioner of Police for Visakhapatnam city on Monday. A 2000-batch officer of Telangana cadre, Sinha earlier served as the Intelligence Chief (Inspector General of Police) of Andhra Pradesh.

He took charge from the outgoing Commissioner Rajiv Kumar Meena, who has been transferred and directed to report to the police headquarters, Mangalagiri, until further orders.

Probably, Manish Kumar Sinha will be the first Commissioner of police for the Executive Capital of Andhra Pradesh as YSR Congress party government will lay the foundation stone for the administrative capital in the city in coming days.

DEVUNIKADAPA TEMPLE OPENS FOR DEVOTEES

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, AUG. 17

Officers of Devunikadapa Lakshmi Venkateswara Swamy temple allowed devotees for darshan from Monday afternoon.

TTD officials had suspended the darshan for devotees for the last 20 days. But the special rituals to the deities were performed uninterruptedly.

From Monday onwards devotees were allowed darshan, though those Under-10 and over 60 years of age were barred from entry in keeping with the Covid protocol, said temple inspector Eswara Reddy.

■ From Monday onwards devotees were allowed darshan, though those Under-10 and over 60 years of age were barred from entry

Land-grabbings reported in last 5 months

From Page 1

Several incidents of land grabbing have been reported during the last few months. Attempts in this regard have reached higher proportions after Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan gave his assent to the three capital bills.

On top of it, the infamous Sunday morning incident, when 30 people ransacked an office and godown over an extent of 3,500 square yards abutting the National Highway and put an ownership billboard, has sent shock waves across the city. Referring to Sunday's incident, senior lawyer T. V. V. S.

Kanakaraju said the land has been registered in the name of La-ksmi Kovvuri, wife of Gangi Reddy, former VUDA chairman and founding member of Telugu Desam. Their sons Srinivasa Reddy and Satyanarayana Reddy had inherited the land and gave it to one Santosh on lease 20 years ago for running a marble showroom. Proving the authenticity of the land, the government had compensated the Reddy family for loss of land during the highway expansion in 1981.

"Around 30 people clad in spotless whites got down from expensive cars and executed the grabbing," Kanakaraju said. He wondered how police cordoned off the entire site, not allowing even the marble shop owner and lease holder to enter the premises.

In another case of Gajuwaka, the High Court had confirmed ownership of 1.55 acres of prime land in Peda Gantyada in the name of Chenchu Venkayya, which was inherited later by his son Govindarajulu and his mother.

One Atchenna, who lost the case in High Court, created a document and executed a sale cum GPA in favour of another person. On a complaint, Gajuwaka police, instead of taking action against the accused, allegedly began harassing

the land owner at the behest of local YSRCP leader. Contempt, criminal and civil cases were filed against Atchenna and Govindarajulu also filed a writ petition against Gajuwaka police recently.

"Land grabbing is a refined crime and police are helpless in initiating any action. The police should hire a civil lawyer if they are serious about controlling grabbing," Kanakaraju said.

All political parties indulge in such activities when they come to power, said a retired revenue officer. Telugu Desam Party had also had its bouts of land grab before losing last year's polls. Acres of gov-

ernment land had been up for grab in the name of land pooling. Former BJP MLA P. Vishnu Kumar Raju successfully stalled it. None other than a senior minister in Naidu cabinet and his associates were accused of grabbing the government land. On the insistence of his own party leader, Chandrababu Naidu was forced to create an SIT for a probe but its report has never seen the light.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy also constituted SIT-2 soon after coming to power and promised a report by May 31 this year. People have forgotten both these reports.

SHORT TAKES

NEPAL, INDIA HOLD TALKS AMIDST BORDER ROW

Kathmandu, Aug. 17: Senior diplomats of India and Nepal on Monday held a virtual meeting to review the progress made on various India-aided developmental projects being implemented in the Himalayan nation.

The meeting came days after Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli telephoned his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi to greet him on India's 74th Independence Day, in the first high-level contact after bilateral ties came under severe strain following issuance of a new political map by Nepal in May.

Nepalese Foreign Secretary Shanker Das Bairagi and Indian Ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra are leading the delegations representing their respective countries during the oversight mechanism meeting, according to Nepal Foreign Ministry sources here.

The meeting, being held virtually due to the coronavirus outbreak, will assess the progress made on various India aided development projects being implemented in Nepal, the sources said.

No further details of the meeting were available.

The ties between India and Nepal came under strain after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated an 80-km-long strategically crucial road connecting the Lipulekh pass with Dharchula in Uttarakhand on May 8.

AL-HIND ACTIVIST HELD FOR B'LURU VIOLENCE

DC CORRESPONDENT BENGALURU, AUG. 17

The special team investigating last week's riots at KG Halli in the city have arrested one person, reportedly said to be a member of Al Hind, an organisation working against the Sangh Parivar.

Though the police sources said that the arrested person was also allegedly involved in murder of an RSS activist Rudresh in Shivajinagar some years ago, home minister Basavaraj Bommai said that the investigation was in preliminary stages and could give any details only after verification of facts.

The arrest comes following a raid by the CCB team of SDPI office in Frazer Town on Sunday.

In the raid the team seized a large haul of arms, including petrol bombs and daggers. The mobile phone call records revealed that he was in touch with most of the persons, who were coordinating with the people participating in riots, through WhatsApp messages.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa held a meeting with the home minister, DG&IGP, Bengaluru City Police Commissioner and chief secretary. It was decided that the government would approach the Karnataka High Court, seeking permission to appoint a Claim Commissioner to recover the loss of damaged property from the accused.

SHARAD PAWAR IS IN HOME QUARANTINE

DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, AUG. 17

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar will remain in home quarantine for next few days after five persons working at his Mumbai residence tested positive for Coronavirus. Mr Pawar's test results have come out negative.

Informing about Mr Pawar's isolation at home, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope said, "Mr Pawar is not showing any symptoms of the Coronavirus infection. He underwent Covid tests in Mumbai and his reports have come out negative. But we will ask him not to go on a state tour for the next few days."

As a precautionary measure, tests of nearly 100 people are being conducted, including personal assistants, secretaries and other officials working daily with Mr Pawar, who came in contact with these persons in the last couple of days.

"Five persons working at Silver Oak (Mr Pawar's residence) have tested positive for coronavirus. We have informed the state health department to communicate with health and civic officials in Pune as Mr Pawar was there on Sunday," corporation officials said.

Festivities go on



A man carries Lord Ganesha idol covered in a plastic sheet during rain ahead of the Ganesh Chaturthi festival in Kolkata on Monday. Meanwhile, with two months to go for Bengal's biggest festival, the first Durga idol for a Kolkata-based puja organiser was delivered from Kumartuli, the clay modellers hub, bringing hope in the minds of the artisans and organisers amidst the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

BJP SCRIPTED SHAHEEN BAGH PROTEST: AAP

New Delhi, Aug. 17: The AAP on Monday claimed the entire Shaheen Bagh protest was "scripted by the BJP" and that its leadership dictated each and every move of the agitators for electoral benefits in Delhi polls, drawing a rebuttal from the saffron party.

AAP spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj made the claim a day after several members of the Muslim community from Shaheen Bagh area, which was the centre of the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests here, joined the BJP.

He alleged the BJP's campaign for the Delhi election centered around the Shaheen Bagh protests and it was the only party that benefited from the controversy surrounding the stir.

"Delhi assembly election could have been fought on the issue of education, health, environment or other developmental narratives. But the Delhi BJP chose to fight the election on the issue of Shaheen Bagh, he said.

The whole Shaheen Bagh protest was scripted by the BJP. The top-most leadership of the BJP scripted each and every step of these protests," he alleged.

His allegations drew a rebuttal from Manoj Tiwari, the chief of Delhi BJP when these protests happened, who said his party does not discriminate on the basis of religion. -PTI

Couple attacked for posting order on equal rights

Bengaluru, Aug. 17: Enraged over sharing in Whatsapp the recent Supreme Court order about women's rights on ancestral property, four youth allegedly attacked their uncle and aunt here, police said on Monday.

M. Shashikala lodged a complaint that the sons of her brothers Dhanaraj and Mohan attacked her and her hotelier-husband Muttu on August 12, the police said.

She stated that Muttu had in the family WhatsApp group posted the court order saying women too have equal rights on the property of their parents, they said.

On night of August 12, Dhanraj's sons Vaishak, Vaibhav and Vaishnav and Mohan's son Varun went to Muttu's hotel and attacked him with sticks and stones.

When Shashikala went to the rescue, she was also attacked and threatened.

When contacted, the police said the four have

Can block access to AIMIM supporter if ordered: FB

The supporter is accused of posting inflammatory content on websites

DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, AUG. 17

Social media platforms Facebook and YouTube on Monday told the Bombay high court that they would block access of their websites to an All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) supporter, accused of posting inflammatory content aimed at creating communal unrest, if the Union government or the court orders.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Madhav Jamdar was hearing a petition filed by Mumbai resident Imran Khan, seeking a direction to police to take action against Abu Faizal for uploading incriminating hate speeches on social media.

The petitioner's lawyer earlier said Faizal was a supporter of the Asaduddin Owaisi-led All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM).

The plea sought deletion of videos uploaded by Faizal and also a permanent ban to be imposed on him from all social media websites.

In May this year, the high court had ordered YouTube and Facebook to delete the videos uploaded by Faizal.

On Monday, Facebook's counsel Darius Khambata and YouTube's advocate

Naresh Thacker informed the court that the videos uploaded by the user (Faizal) have been deleted.

The petitioners advocate, Vivek Shukla, told the court that Faizal has uploaded videos even after his earlier clips were deleted.

"We (Facebook) can block access of the site to this user (Faizal) if the central government passing an order as per the procedure laid down under the Information Technology Act or if the court orders us to do so," Khambata said.

Thacker, appearing for YouTube, conceded and said the URLs of the earlier videos uploaded by the user (Faizal) have been deleted.

The bench sought to know from Shukla if the petitioner approached the nodal officer appointed by the government under the IT Act Section 69(A) (power to delete/block objectionable content posted online).

"The Information Technology Act has laid down a procedure by which any person can approach the nodal officer if he or she has a complaint against any content posted on the internet. Why should the court interfere and pass orders," Chief Justice Datta said.

The bench reserved its order on the plea.

ANKHI DAS FILES PLAINT WITH DELHI POLICE

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Senior Facebook India executive Ankhi Das has filed a complaint with Delhi Police, alleging that she has been receiving "violent threats to her life", officials said on Monday.

The Cyber cell unit is looking into the complaint by Das, who is Facebook's Director, Public Policy, India, South and Central Asia, a police official said.

Das filed the complaint on Sunday and alleged that several people were issuing "threats, making sexually coloured remarks and defaming her" through online posts. As per the complaint, the threats are in relation to an article published in the *Wall Street Journal*.

"The content, which even includes my photograph is evidently threatening to my life and body and I fear for my safety as well as that of my family members. The content also maligns my reputation based on a news article and I am subjected to name-calling and cyber bullying. -PTI

Visva Bharati campus closed after violence

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, AUG. 17

Visva Bharati (VB), world famous central university founded by Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan in Birbhum of West Bengal, has been shut down for an indefinite period.

The move came hours after a 4,000-strong mob, allegedly led by a Trinamul Congress MLA, stormed and vandalised it on Monday to protest the varsity's decision to abolish the traditional festival, Poush Mela, held every winter on its campus, and construction of a boundary wall surrounding the fair venue.

Susovan Banerjee, a VB executive council member, said, "There is nothing wrong in trying to stop encroachment on the VB property by constructing a wall. We have written to ministry of human resources and development and union home ministry about the incident. We have also drawn

the attention of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on the incident. The university will remain closed till normalcy returns to the campus."

Calling Poush Mela a heritage and integral part of Bengal, the attackers vandalised two temporary offices, destroyed construction material and used a payload brought for work, in bulldozing one of the gates of the VB.

A varsity spokesperson alleged that neither the police came to rescue nor the district magistrate responded despite contact. While TMC MLA of Dubrajpur Naresh Bauri was seen during the rampage, the mob included local traders who did their business over the years at the handloom, handicraft and folk musical fair, a brainchild of Tagore's father late Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore to celebrate Poush.

Mr Bauri said, "I was present there as a local

resident, not as an MLA or a TMC leader. How can Tagore's university, supposed to be a part of nature, be caged behind walls? Local people will never tolerate this."

The rampage, first such in the history of VB of which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the Chancellor, unfolded at around 9 am when VB vice chancellor Prof Bidyut Chakrabarti and other senior officials visited the ground to supervise the construction work.

Trouble was brewing in VB since August 15 when the work began only to be disrupted by protests by the angry locals, mainly the traders within a day.

In July, the VB authorities decided to scrap the festival citing its poor experience of past two years in organising it in view of a 2017 National Green Tribunal order.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar called up chief minister Mamata Banerjee to express concern on the issue.

CONGRESS SAYS NO LETTER ON 'LEADERSHIP' WRITTEN

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI AUG. 17

The internal strife in the Congress once again came to the fore with suspended Congress leader Sanjay Jha tweeting about several leaders writing to the party chief Sonia Gandhi.

However, the party was quick to rubbish the claims of any letter and alleged that the "non-existent letter" was an attempt to divert attention from the Facebook controversy and was being circulated by "BJP stooges".

Insiders claim that several leaders have been in consultations about raising 'leadership issues' in the party. They further claimed that ad-hoc leadership in the Congress does not auger well for the party.

Speaking to this newspaper on the condition of anonymity a leader said, "we are in the process of writing a letter to the Congress President. The letter presently is in the possession of one of the top most leaders."

He also claimed that they require clarity on the leadership, either Mrs. Gandhi should continue as the party chief or there should be elections to the Working Committee.

Then the elected Working Committee should select the party chief.

He said that the interference from Mr. Rahul Gandhi and his office should cease 'either he becomes a full-fledged President or stop controlling from backseat'.

Last month in a virtual conference of Rajya Sabha MPs only five out of 45 MPs demanded that Mr. Gandhi be made the President again.

The meeting was attended by Mrs. Gandhi and former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

While several others MPs suggested that there should be introspection in the party.

● WHILE BJP accused the social media giant of censoring nationalist voices, Congress seized on a media report that alleged that Facebook's content policies favour the ruling party.

opposition Congress seized on a *Wall Street Journal* report that alleged that Facebook's content policies favour the ruling party.

Meanwhile, demanding a probe by JPC into the allegations emerging from the news report in the US daily, the CPI(M) said the issue raises questions about the ruling party's investment in the leading social media platform and claimed that there is a "nexus" between them.

"The Politburo of the CPI(M) strongly condemns the role of global social media behemoth, Facebook, as exposed by the *Wall Street Journal*, particularly the functioning of its India policy chapter. Facebook is not following its own laid down policy against communal hate content," a statement from the Left party alleged. -PTI

Chinese national booked for money laundering

New Delhi, Aug. 17: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has registered a money laundering case against a Chinese national for allegedly running a hawala racket worth an estimated ₹1,000 crore using shell or dubious firms, officials said on Monday.

They said the central probe agency has pressed sections of the Prevention

of Money Laundering Act against 42-year-old Charlie Peng, alias Luo Sang, who is alleged to be the kingpin of the racket. Peng and some of his alleged associates, including Indians, and bankers were raided by the Income Tax Department on August 12. The taxman had searched at least two dozen premises, including that of Peng in Gurgaon.

The ED has taken cognisance of the tax department evidence and action and a Delhi Police Special Cell FIR against Peng before filing the criminal case of money laundering against him, they said.

Peng is alleged to be holding a fake Indian passport and tax officials had said he created a "web of sham companies to launder hawala funds to

and from China" in the past two-three years. They said his front or showcase business was import and export of medical and electronic goods and some other items.

Peng was arrested by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police in September 2018 on charges of fraud and forgery and was allegedly running an illegal money changer. -PTI

GOLD SMUGGLING | CASE Accused says she travelled with Sivasankar abroad thrice

Swapna's claim puts CM's ex-aide in soup

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 17

Gold smuggling case accused Swapna Suresh has reportedly given a statement before the Enforcement Directorate which could put the former principal secretary to chief minister M. Sivasankar and the government in trouble.

The accused has told the ED that she had travelled to foreign countries with Sivasankar at least on three occasions. Swapna

visited Oman along with Sivasankar in 2017, and then in April 2018. The ED team probing the case believes that the bureaucrat was aware of Swapna's clandestine activities.

When questioned by the ED on the gold found in Swapna's locker, the accused said that it was kept in the bank under Sivasankar's instruction.

It may be recalled that the NIA last month found ₹1.05 cr and 1 kg gold in Swapna's locker. While ₹36.5 lakh was found in the

locker of one of the bank branches in Thiruvananthapuram and ₹64 lakh and 982.5 gm gold in another. The investigating agency suspected that the money found in the locker could be cash received for gold smuggling. But her lawyer had maintained that the gold was received by Swapna as a gift on her marriage.

There are also allegations that Swapna had sought Sivasankar's help to arrange tickets under the Vande Bharat mission for foreigners. ED sources

said that Sivasankar, when confronted, said he had helped people in UAE who were stranded during Covid-19 lockdown, return home.

However, reports say that the five persons for whom tickets were procured were not foreigners. They had allegedly smuggled baggage which were not screened properly at the airport.

The ED team wants to investigate these issues in detail and might seek further custody of the accused.

Meanwhile, with just a couple of months left for the local bodies poll which are also considered as the semi-final before the Assembly elections in Kerala in 2021, the ruling CPM has ventured into damage control mode in the wake of the gold smuggling case.

The party has prepared a detailed FAQ model pamphlet, related to the case. The pamphlet will be taken door-to-door by party members to explain their position on the gold smuggling case.

IN BRIEF

Putin, Erdogan discuss conflicts

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the conflicts in Libya and Syria with his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan in a telephone call on Monday, the Kremlin said in a statement. The Kremlin said the call's main focus was on the crisis in Libya, highlighting the need to make real steps towards a sustainable ceasefire.

US choppers attack Syrian army post

Amman: Two US helicopters on Monday attacked a Syrian Army checkpoint in northeastern Syria near the Kurdish-held city of Qamishli, killing one soldier and injuring two others, state media said. The incident happened shortly after a US patrol was prevented from passing by an Army checkpoint in the area, state media said.

China welcomes Putin's proposal

Beijing: China welcomed on Monday to Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposed summit of world leaders to avoid "confrontation" over a US threat to trigger a return of all UN sanctions on Iran. The United States lost a bid on Friday to extend a UN arms embargo on Iran. Russia and China opposed extending the weapons ban, which is due to expire in October under a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the world powers. Eleven members abstained, including France, Germany and Britain, while the United States and the Dominican Republic were the only two votes in favour.

Japan PM leaves hosp post check-up

Tokyo: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe underwent a medical check-up in hospital on Monday, a government source said, amid concern voiced by a top official that the premier was suffering from fatigue from handling the Coronavirus pandemic. Abe, Japan's longest-serving prime minister, left hospital after the examination, *Jiji news agency* said. He had the check-up at Tokyo's Keio University Hospital, the source familiar with the situation said.

16 killed in hotel attack in Somalia

Mogadishu: At least 16 people were killed in an attack on Sunday by al Shabaab on a seaside hotel in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, a government spokesman said, as the Islamist group launched a similar assault on a Somali military base. Sunday's toll includes 11 victims and five assailants, Ismail Mukhtar Omar said in a tweet late on Sunday, adding: "Security forces lost one, 18 people were injured." Militants stormed the high-end Elite Hotel in Lido beach, detonated a car bomb and then opened fire with assault rifles, the latest attack by al Shabaab, which has been battling the country's central government since 2008. Al Shabaab wants to topple the central government and establish its own rule based on its own strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law.

PROTESTOR CHALLENGES THAI MONARCHY

Bangkok, Aug. 17: The deafening cheer for Anon Nampa at Thailand's biggest demonstration in years underlined the bookish human rights lawyer's emergence at the forefront of a youth protest movement with his taboo-breaking call for reforms to the monarchy.

"He looks quite harmless," Rangsiman Rome, a former activist who is now an opposition member of parliament, said. "But once he gets the microphone and gets on stage or starts working, he becomes a different, serious person."

Although the protest movement has no single leader, Anon's August 3 call for curbs on the power of the monarchy shook Thai politics in a way not known in living memory and made him a hero for some and a hate figure for others.

His open challenge put Anon at risk of arrest under "lese majeste" charges, which can mean 15 years in jail. "I think there is a need for everyone to be able to talk about the monarchy openly and constructively," Anon said. "I think society is becoming more open about this."

Freedom in the air

Women in masks to help curb the spread of the Coronavirus participate in a tug-of-war game during the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the country's independence in Medan, Indonesia, on Monday.

—AP

Biden in spotlight as polls near**Four-day convention will be held online due to Covid-19 pandemic**

Milwaukee, Aug. 17: As Democrats on Monday open an unprecedented virtual convention, the party's disparate factions are projecting a united front behind Joe Biden, brought together by their common determination to oust Donald Trump in November's election.

"It is absolutely imperative that Donald Trump be defeated," Bernie Sanders, a former Biden rival and a keynote speaker on the event's opening night, said on Sunday. Adding to the drama, the four-day convention — originally planned for the Midwestern city of Milwaukee but forced online by the Covid-19 pandemic — takes place amid a furor over Trump's efforts to limit mail-in voting.

The president, insisting without proof that mail-in voting fosters fraud, has threatened to block extra funding that Democrats say is urgently needed to allow the US Postal Service to process millions of ballots.

In normal election years, nominating conventions are a raucous scene, attended by tens of thousands of party faithful and designed to inspire the party's base and lure independents and the undecided.

Democrats had picked Milwaukee for its location in the important swing state of Wisconsin. The city had spent millions in preparation.

But planners have been struggling to find virtual replacements for the usual roaring applause, circus-like atmosphere and balloon drops.

Viewers are expected to be treated to live feeds from several Democratic "watch parties," some even live-streamed from drive-in theaters or featuring erstwhile Biden rivals

Don will get dirty: Kamala

Washington, Aug. 17: Indian-American Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee Kamala Harris has said that President Donald Trump and his campaign will "engage in lies" and "dirty tactics" to distract from the real issues that are impacting the American people.

She was responding to President Trump's promotion of the conspiracy theories about her eligibility to serve as the vice president and Biden.

On Saturday, Trump said that he would not be "pursuing" questions about Harris' eligibility, but did not dismiss the conspiracy theories as false. Trump on Thursday said he heard on "social media" that Harris could be ineligible. "I heard today that she doesn't meet the requirements,"

Trump said, referring to John Eastman, the lawyer and Chapman University professor who raised the

like Senator Amy Klobuchar.

The experimental format will allow speakers to address American voters unfiltered — largely shorn of the usual overwrought stagecraft and screaming delegates. Or, some fear, it could make for a more boring show.

Biden enters the convention with significant but tightening poll leads over Trump and amid signs that his history-making pick of Senator Kamala Harris as his running mate — the first woman of colour on a major party's presidential ticket — is widely popular among Democrats. —*AFP*

● **RESPONDING TO Trump's remarks, Harris, 55, said on Sunday that the President and his campaign will engage in deception.**

issue in a Newsweek op-ed, as "very highly qualified."

Responding to Trump's remarks, Harris, 55, said on Sunday that the president and his campaign will engage in deception. "They're going to engage in lies. They're going to engage in deception. They're going to engage in an attempt to distract from the real issues that are impacting the American people. And I expect that they will engage in dirty tactics. And this is going to be a knockdown, drag-out. And we're ready," she said.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden scripted history on Wedn-

nesday by selecting Harris, an Indian-American and an African-American, as his running mate in the election on November 3. Born to a Jamaican father and an Indian mother, California Senator Harris, if elected, would be the first woman Vice-President ever for the country. "What's at stake right now is that we've had over 160,000 people die in the last few months and many of them needlessly ... tens of millions of people who have lost their jobs ... we're in the midst of a hunger crisis in our country. The media isn't covering it so much," she said. "I'm prepared to fight because this is a fight that is for something, not against something. This is a fight for where we need to be ... We need to focus on what can be unburdened by what has been," Harris said. Harris is no stranger to accusations about her race. —*PTI*

EU calls for emergency summit over Belarus polls

Minsk, Aug. 17: European Council President Charles Michel on Monday convened an emergency summit of EU leaders to discuss the presidential election in Belarus and the crackdown in the wake of the polls.

Noting that the video conference would take place on Wednesday at 1000 GMT, Michel tweeted that "the people of Belarus have the right to decide on their future and freely elect their leader." "Violence against protesters is unacceptable and cannot be allowed," he said.

The 27 EU foreign ministers said on Friday that the elections were neither free nor fair and that they refuse to accept the results of the polls, as announced by the Belarus electoral commission.

Several thousand factory workers took to the streets of Minsk on Monday, demanding the resignation

● **THE OFFICIAL RESULTS of the August 9 vote gave Lukashenko 80 per cent of the votes and Tsikhanouskaya only 10%, but the opposition claimed the vote was rigged.**

of authoritarian Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. It was the ninth straight day of protesting against the results of an election that extended his 26-year rule. Nearly 5,000 workers from the Minsk Tractor Works plant, which has been on strike since Monday morning, marched down the streets of Minsk, demanding that Lukashenko step down and cede his post to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the leading opposition candidate.

The official results of the August 9 vote gave Lukashenko 80 per cent of the votes and Tsikhan-

ouskaya only 10%, but the opposition claimed the vote was rigged.

"Lukashenko is a former president, he needs to go," Sergei Dylevsky, the leader of the protest at the Minsk Tractor Works plant, said on Monday.

"Sveta (Tsikhanouskaya) is our president, legitimate and elected by the people." Tsikhanouskaya, a 37-year-old former English teacher, entered the race after her husband's jailing in Belarus. She managed to galvanize nationwide support, drawing tens of thousands to her campaign rallies. Large-scale protests against the vote results continued even after she left the country for Lithuania last week, a move her campaign said was made under duress.

The protests have posed the biggest challenge yet to Lukashenko's iron-fisted rule of the ex-Soviet nation of 9.5 million. —*AP*

FEARS RISE OVER UNFAIR U.S. PREZ ELECTION

Washington, Aug. 17: With less than 80 days to go before the US presidential election, it looks like Democratic nominee Joe Biden's race to lose.

Yet, as Democrats nationwide gather online this week to nominate him as their party's choice to challenge President Donald Trump on November 3, many fear Biden may just do that — for factors almost entirely out of his control.

The former Vice-President and his allies have every reason to feel bullish. Polls show Biden has built an expansive lead in nearly every battleground state that Trump won narrowly in 2016, as the Republican's approval numbers tumble amid the Coronavirus pandemic. For the first time in a decade, retaking the Senate — and full control of Congress — is within sight. —*Agencies*

Wellington, Aug. 17: New Zealand's Prime Minister postponed the country's general election on Monday by a month to October 17 as the city of Auckland remains in lockdown due to a growing Coronavirus outbreak.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern bowed to pressure to delay the polls after parties complained they could not campaign with nearly a third of New Zealand's 5 million people under lockdown in Auckland. "Ultimately, the 17th of October... provides sufficient time for parties to plan around the range of circumstances we will be campaigning under," Ardern said at a news conference.

The election was scheduled for September 19 and New Zealand law requires it to be held by November 21. Advance voting will now start on October 3.

The Prime Minister ruled out delaying the polls any further, as her Labour Party maintains a strong lead over the conservative National Party in opinion polls. "We are all in the same boat. We are all campaigning in the same environment," Ardern said.

New Zealand on Monday recorded nine new cases of Covid-19, taking the number of active cases to 78. There have now been a total of 1,280 cases in the country, and 22 deaths.

An earlier election would have worked in Ardern's favour, as her success in stifling Covid-19 and keeping the country virus-free for 102 days until the latest outbreak had boosted her popularity.

Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, who had called for a delay, said "common sense has prevailed". —*Agencies*

CHINA GRANTS 1st VIRUS CURE PATENT TO CANSINO

Beijing, Aug. 17: China's vaccine specialist CanSino Biologics Inc has won a patent approval from Beijing for its Covid-19 vaccine candidate Ad5-nCoV, state media reported, citing documents from the country's intellectual property regulator.

It is the first Covid-19 vaccine patent granted by China, state reports. The paper cited documents published by China's National Intellectual Property Administration saying that the patent was issued on August 11. Saudi Arabia said this month it plans to begin Phase III clinical trials for the CanSino vaccine. —*Agencies*

S. KOREA PASTOR TESTS POSITIVE AMID VIRUS SPIKE

Seoul, Aug. 17: A conservative South Korean pastor who has been a bitter critic of the country's president has tested positive for the Coronavirus, health authorities said on Monday, two days after he participated in an anti-government rally in Seoul that drew thousands.

More than 300 virus cases have been linked to the Rev. Jun Kwang-hun's huge church in northern Seoul, which has emerged as a major cluster of infections amid growing fears of a massive outbreak in the greater capital region. —*AP*

Harris picks Indo-American as her press secy for V-P rally

Washington, Aug. 17: Senator Kamala Harris has roped in Indian-American Sabrina Singh, who previously was the spokeswoman of two Democratic presidential candidates, as press secretary for her Democratic Vice-Presidential campaign.

Singh, 32, headed the press shop of New Jersey Senator Cory Booker and former New York mayor Mike Bloomberg. Last

week, Democratic presumptive presidential nominee Joe Biden, 77, picked 55-year-old Indian-origin Harris as his running mate.

Singh was earlier spokesperson of the Democratic National Committee. She is the granddaughter of Sardar J.J. Singh of the India League of America, a non-profit organisation which champions the interests of Indian-American commu-

nity in the US.

In the 1940s, J.J. Singh along with a small group of fellow Indians mounted a nationwide campaign against racial discriminatory policies of the US. This culminated in the then president Harry Truman signing the Luce-Celler Act on July 2, 1946. It allowed a quota of 100 Indians to immigrate to the United States per annum. —*PTI*

China ready to work with India

Beijing, Aug. 17: China on Monday said it is ready to work with India to enhance political mutual trust, properly manage their differences and safeguard the long-term development of bilateral ties.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said this at a regular briefing when a Western media journalist sought China's reaction to Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's remarks that the Indian armed forces have given a befitting reply to those challenging the country's sovereignty.

Modi, in his 74th Independence Day address to the nation from the ramparts of Red Fort, said the armed forces have given a befitting reply to those challenging the country's sovereignty "from LoC to LAC", in a veiled reference

to Pakistan and China.

"From LoC (Line of Control) to LAC (Line of Actual Control), anyone who casts an eye on the sovereignty of the country, the armed forces have responded in the language they understand," Modi said. Modi's comments came amid India's bitter border row with China along the LAC in eastern Ladakh. —*PTI*

Pak Army chief visits Saudi to revive ties

Riyadh, Aug. 17: Pakistan's Army chief arrived in Saudi Arabia on Monday amid a row between the two countries that has threatened Riyadh's financial lifeline to Islamabad. General Qamar Javed Bajwa's visit was "primarily military-affairs oriented," a Pakistani Army spokesman said. But Pakistani military

and government officials have said that Gen. Bajwa would use his good offices to try to calm the situation that if not reversed could badly hurt Pakistan's central bank foreign reserves.

A traditional ally, Saudi Arabia gave Pakistan a \$3 billion loan and \$3.2 billion oil credit facility to help its balance of payments crisis in

late 2018.

Irked by Islamabad demands for Riyadh to convene a high-level meeting to highlight archival India's alleged human rights violations in the disputed Kashmir region, Saudi Arabia has forced Pakistan to pay back \$1 billion prematurely and is demanding another \$1 billion of the loan.

Riyadh has also not responded to Pakistani requests to extend the oil facility, military and finance ministry officials said.

The head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), General Faiz Hameed, was accompanying Bajwa, a Pakistani military source said. —*Agencies*

WEB ALERT Tech giant's warning in 'Open letter to Australians' after draft law to make it pay for news**Aussies could lose free search services, warns Google**

Canberra, Aug. 17: Google warned on Monday that the Australian government's plans to make digital giants pay for news content threatens users' free services in Australia and could hand users' data to media organisations.

The US-based company's warning, contained in what it called an "Open letter to Australians," comes a week before public consultations close on Australian draft laws that

would make both Google and Facebook pay for news siphoned from commercial media companies.

"A proposed law... would force us to provide you with a dramatically worse Google Search and YouTube, could lead to your data being handed over to big news businesses, and would put the free services you use at risk in Australia," Google Australia and New Zealand managing director Mel Silva wrote.

Australian competition watchdog Rod Sims, chair

Google owns YouTube, a video-sharing platform.

Both Google and Facebook have condemned the proposed legislation, which was released last month and aims to succeed where other countries have failed in making them compensate media businesses for news content.

Australian competition watchdog Rod Sims, chair

of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, which drafted the laws, said Google's letter "contains misinformation." "Google will not be required to charge Australians for the use of its free services such as Google Search and YouTube, unless it chooses to do so," Sims said in

a statement.

"Google will not be required to share any additional user data with Australian news businesses unless it chooses to do so," he added.

Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, the minister responsible for the consumer watchdog, said in a statement that the draft law "remains open for consultation, providing an opportunity for media companies and digital platforms to provide

feedback" until August 28. Swinburne University senior lecturer on media Belinda Barnet described the Google letter as a "cynical exercise" designed to "scare Google users." "I see no merit in any of the arguments," she said.

"One of the most ironic arguments is that they're going to have to hand over some data to news organisations — for example which article people have read and how long they

may have read it for — and this coming from the world's major privacy violator and certainly the world's largest data aggregator is a bit rich," Barnet added.

Google has been battling the Australian consumer watchdog on two fronts. Last month, the watchdog launched court action against Google for allegedly misleading account holders about its use of their personal data. —*AP*

DECCAN Chronicle

18 AUGUST 2020

Misuse of social media a threat to democracy

Democracy and the life it seeks to assure its stakeholders are under increasing threat of being undermined by the reckless use of social media by vested interests. The threat includes the issue of external forces making a charade of the electoral process. Allegations ran thick and fast about how such media undermined the 2016 United States presidential elections. There are also instances of violence breaking out based on misinformation or deliberate and provocative messages, claiming lives and disrupting normal life of unsuspecting innocent people. The recent riots in Bengaluru is the latest example.

It is against this background that the demand of the Congress party for a joint parliamentary committee to investigate the allegations that social media platform Facebook has been violating its own policy to favour the rabble-rousers and hate-mongers of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gains relevance. The allegation is based on a report that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* which alleged a "broader pattern of favouritism" towards the BJP by Facebook. The report named BJP leaders who posted hate-filled messages against Muslims on several occasions, including before the Delhi riots. The company's top public-policy executive opposed the application of the hate speech rules of the company against at least four BJP leaders and groups who were "flagged internationally for participating in violence", saying it "would damage the company's business prospects in the country". The report said the company "acknowledged that the official had raised concerns about the political fallout that would result from designating the BJP leader a dangerous individual".

The business model of social media is directly and instantly proportional to the reach of their contents. This will be best served by pandering to and often engaging extremist elements in society and polity who will ensure such stuff gets widest publicity. With little checks and balance in place, the social media has the power to break into smithereens the social fabric that has been woven for decades or even centuries.

The allegation, though denied by Facebook, is not about partisan politics; it's about the sanctity of the country's democracy and democratic processes, which should be a matter of concern for the government as well as the Opposition. The response of the government, however, has been less than forthright. Instead of addressing the issue, Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has sought to level personal allegations against former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and advance a whataboutery that the Opposition was in the dock during the Cambridge Analytica scandal. This denial is not enough. Mr Prasad and the government must understand that no mature democracy would allow outsiders to violate the law and manipulate systems. The heads of social media organisations, including Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, had been hauled up before the US congressional committee for alleged unethical business practices. India, priding itself to be a global leader, must do whatever it takes to protect the sanctity of the democratic process. Giving in to the Opposition demand would reinforce our democratic processes and enhance the national prestige.

Covid strikes cricket

Cricketer, cricket administrator and politician Chetan Chauhan has created a distressing record as the first Test player to die of Covid-19. The death of a son of an Indian Army doctor is illustrative of the insidious power of the coronavirus to inveigle itself into the human body despite all the precautions a person of knowledge might take against it. His case is a tragic reminder that the battle against Covid-19 is far from over in India and that complications the virus creates in multiple organs in some people, especially in the most vulnerable 70-plus section of the population, are not easily fought off even with specialised medical care.

Born just a few weeks before independence was attained, Chauhan became famous as the diligent yet stodgy other half of an opening partnership with the world record breaking Sunil Gavaskar that helped erase the memories of eras symbolised by the retreating back foot in the face of hostile fast bowling, without the benefit of protective gear of course. Chauhan was the unglamorous but sincere second fiddle who was reluctant to stage the walkout in Melbourne in 1981 just because Gavaskar was given out Leg Before Wicket (LBW), perhaps wrongly. India went on to stage a remarkable comeback victory in the Melbourne Test to square the series.

Having experienced life in Australia for a few years, Chauhan felt the tug of his homeland and returned to daringly step into the politics of Delhi cricket, which is a kind of crash course before real politics of the electoral kind. With his engaging quality of having time to listen to everyone, Chauhan fared well as an MP and became a UP minister too. He may have helped overturn the belief that there is no place for a decent man in the quagmire of UP politics. To serve in public life was Chauhan's credo. As a batsman he was a cricket tragic in the sense that he never managed a Test century, 97 being his best. But he tried for India in every sense under all the hats he wore.

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Subhani



Mohan Guruswamy

The so-called Naga peace talks are now floundering. National Socialist Council of Nagaland leader Thuingaleng Muivah reiterated on August 14 from New Delhi that going by the 2015 Framework Agreement signed between his outfit, the NSCN(I-M), and the Government of India: "Nagas can co-exist with India, but will not merge with it. We are not asking (for a) Naga national flag and constitution from the Government of India. Recognise them or not, we have our own flag and constitution. Flag and constitution are ingredients of our recognised sovereign entity and the symbols of Naga nationhood."

Not long ago I had a conversation with an RSS figure conversant with the Naga issue. He was confident Narendra Modi would soon find a "creative solution" to this vexed problem. I asked him if it meant the dismemberment of Arunachal Pradesh as the Konyak Nagas, who mostly owe allegiance to the NSCN's Khaplang faction, are mostly in Tirap and Changlang divisions of that state? He didn't answer, except saying wait and see - Modiji has a "creative solution".

Whatever it was, the "creative solution" is now clearly unravelling. The NSCN(I-M) has now demanded that Prime Minister Modi's longtime Naga interlocutor R.N. Ravi, now Nagaland's governor, must be removed from the talks. The severely ailing 86-year-old Isak Muivah is now in New Delhi for health reasons and is also in talks with the powers that be. What can they

now offer him after scrapping Article 370 and dismembering J&K and putting Jammu and Kashmir under Central rule as a Union territory? How far removed is Article 371 from Article 370? The Naga quest for a separate identity independent of India burst into an armed conflict in January 1956 when A.Z. Phizo assumed full control of the Naga National Council, which was championing the Naga cause. Immediately after Phizo took over, the Naga Hills was declared a disturbed area and put under the Indian Army's control.

At that time eminent Indians like Jayaprakash Narayan chastised Jawaharlal Nehru for sending the Army to "pacify" the Naga Hills. Nehru assured critics that the Army would be in the area for just a few months. The Indian Army is still deployed in the region and 3 Corps is permanently headquartered in Dimapur. From time to time news would filter out that the contours of a settlement were visible, but nothing of consequence came out. On August 3, 2015 the Narendra Modi government announced that an agreement was concluded and that its details would be kept secret. Why the details of the accord must be secret is best known to it, and what exactly it is has been the subject of much speculation.

While the details of the "historic agreement" are still shrouded in secrecy, it is believed the immediate deal only covered the territory of Nagaland. It seemed agreed that the question of the other areas of "Greater Nagalim" would be resolved consensually via dialogue with Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. It was thought the deal will pave the

The Naga quest for a separate identity independent of India burst into an armed conflict in January 1956.

way to an election where the NSCN (I-M) or a successor political party would be facilitated to secure power through polls, as done in Mizoram.

In a paper published on March 30, 2017 in a widely read blog "Indian Security Affairs" maintained by Maj. Gen. P.K. Mullick (Retd), Lt. Gen. J.R. Mukherjee (Retd), a former corps commander with extensive experience and connections in Assam and the Northeast, wrote: "Unauthenticated leaks from reliable sources indicate that points agreed are: A separate constitution? Flag for Nagaland, separate currency and passports for Nagas. Nagaland would have a UN representative, foreign affairs and defence will be a joint subject; a pan-Naga government to cover all Naga-inhabited areas." This is why Manipur is agitated, as it will leave it with just the Imphal Valley. The unabashed misuse of the office of governor following the recent elections to install a BJP-led government lends credence to a certain urgency to implement the deal, as the talks have been going on for almost two decades.

We constantly worry about the Chinese hand at play since the days when Mowu Angami went to Yunnan. But what we need to worry more about is the American hand at work. The first missionaries went there in 1836, when Rev. Miles Bronson set up a mission in Namsang, now in Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap subdivision. But the real impetus to Christianity came after the advent of an American Baptist missionary, Rev. E.W. Clarke.

The Baptists never looked back since then and now maintain over 800 churches and have a

majority of Nagas under their fold. While it must be acknowledged the missionaries played a pioneering role in establishing modern healthcare and educational facilities, we must not remain unaware of the Baptist Church's role in creating a new awareness and sense of oneness among the Naga tribes.

While the armed forces may have learnt from their experience, our political and bureaucratic leadership never seemed to have learnt anything, or worse, forgotten anything. We have since Nagaland's formation in December 1963 lurched from one compromise after another. Consequently, the Naga Hills region - Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal - have had the most uncaring and corrupt state governments with little to show on the ground despite India's highest per capita development expenditures.

India's long-term security interests, and the steady expansion of Chinese influence in Myanmar in the areas abutting our borders, equally require our military and administrative presence in the Naga Hills as it does a general stability.

The answers to these can only be found in new and innovative political and administrative arrangements that factor not just the culture of Naga tribes but the geography of the Naga Hills. Article 371A of the Constitution does offer some safeguards, but clearly these do not satisfy the Nagas.

But a separate constitution, flag, currency and UN membership might be going a bit too far. Will this not have consequences in other parts of the country like Jammu and Kashmir, where a secessionist war is raging, and even in states like Tamil Nadu where regional nationalism is extremely strong?

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

MOTHER TONGUE

Mr Tulasi Reddy's opinion (citing good instances) that education up to primary level should be in mother tongue (*CM demeans mother tongue, DC, Aug. 17*) is appreciable. He should know that the people studying in private (English medium) schools are not from England, America or Australia, but India. So, if he had insisted that both in government and private schools, the primary education should be in mother tongue, his statement would have been 100 per cent unbiased.

Jagannadham Chowdari
Srikakulam

HEALTH MISSION

The launch of National Digital Health Mission to provide citizenry card with all health related details and forming a repository of medical information is good but is also a tall order. It carries the risk of breaching the Right to Privacy of the patient. To respect the privacy of patient and maintain secrecy of their condition is an important part of medical ethics. That will be hard to follow with the proposed digitisation. Another problem is that with limited resources it is difficult to create repository at national level. It requires manpower with knowledge of medical jargon and infrastructure.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

Russia launches Venus-7

MOSCOW, AUG. 17 The Soviet Union today launched what it called an "Automatic inter-planetary station Venus-7." Tass said the aim of the launching "is to continue the exploration of the planet Venus, which was carried out earlier by the Soviet automatic stations." Tass said the space ship was launched at 8.38 a.m. Moscow time (1108hrs IST) and together with the final stage of the rocket carrier was

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle put into an interim orbit of the earth.

At 1229 hrs. IST, the engine of the final stage was switched on for just over four minutes out of orbit and on its way.

Tass said at 1430 hours IST Venus-7 was more than 40,000 km. from earth.

"Venus-7 was put into a trajectory close to the present one," the Soviet news agency said, "All the systems and scientific equipment on board the station are functioning normally."



Kishwar Desai
London Diary

Of 'staycations' & cheap meals: Will Christmas be merry again?

Only those who were sensible enough to opt for a staycation did not get their holidays wrecked. Oh, to think that just a year ago we could fly endlessly around the globe. And now taking even a short holiday is like a complicated military manoeuvre, where every possibility has to be measured and prepared for. Just a fortnight ago, people were told to travel abroad to European countries with which the UK had "air bridges". As holidays typically end by the beginning of September, Brits rushed off to Italy, Greece, Spain and France. Now comes the ruling that France is a no-go, as is Spain, which has seen a second wave of infections. If you have been or are in France and get delayed in returning, then you face a fortnight of quarantine at home upon return.

This means kids will miss opening days of school. That is, in case the schools open at all. The Teachers Union is not sure if their members or their pupils will be safe. But not to worry. Pubs are open and restaurants have been cheered up by Rishi Sunak's scheme of meals at half-price if you eat out. As the old rock

The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh headed off to Balmoral, their castle in Scotland.

song said: "We need no education". Cheap meals is all we need! But whether this will be enough to ensure that restaurants will survive is difficult to say - as the subsidies cannot last for too long.

Each society has its own way of dealing with Covid-19. In India we have families bonding even more and the sale of noodles and pasta is shooting up as people home-cook. And many feel it is time to bring back the joint family. But in London it is difficult to keep anyone at home while the pubs continue to overflow.

Like others, the royal family too have opted for a staycation. The Queen, 94, and the Duke of Edinburgh, 99, headed off to Balmoral, their Scottish castle where the weather is, if anything, more severe than in Windsor, where they were isolating themselves. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has also chosen Scotland for his holidays

but that is more because he knows that there is yet again a rising demand in Scotland for independence. Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish First Minister (like chief minister) managed the Covid episode much better than Boris did for England and is likely to win the elections in Scotland. So we are bracing for yet another referendum on Scottish independence.

Even so the government in Scotland did not do better than England when it came to exam results of school leavers waiting to go to universities. Teaching was disrupted due to lockdowns. Schools tried teaching online but as usual the private schools did better than state funded schools. Proper examinations could not be held. So they had mock exams in many parts of the country. The students also have teachers' assessments to send forward with their university applications. With no proper exams, what would the final grades be?

If anything worse than the pandemic policy can be imagined, we have had it. The Scottish Education Authority used an "algorithm" which resulted

in massive downgrading of students. There was such a furore that the minister had to apologise and rescind the results. Better decisions are awaited and students feel cheated and angry. So they will appeal. With only four weeks left before the university admissions are decided, an unhappy holiday is what students can look forward to. For young people all over the world, 2020 has brought huge uncertainty.

There are many reasons to celebrate or commemorate August 15 - which is also Victory over Japan (VJ) Day, but it gets celebrated much less than the Victory in Europe (VE) Day. In India it is rarely mentioned, though one of the most crucial land battles, that in Kohima, took place in India, which Japan lost and then retreated from Southeast Asia. It means a lot in Australia and New Zealand but not in other places which should commemorate it.

The one good news among many sad ones is that theatres are about to reopen. In a dramatic gesture, Andrew Lloyd Webber volunteered to be a test case for the

Covid-19 vaccine because like many, he thinks that until there is a vaccine the problem of social distancing will trouble theatres. He had to close the long-running Phantom of the Opera (which I saw it for the first time 20 years ago), but no doubt he will rebound with something else. But even with their capacity reduced to one-third of normal, venues like Bridge Theatre and the National will open in the autumn. Bridge would show a new play by David Hare and later it will revive Talking Heads by Alan Bennett. The National will open only the Olivier Theatre with a new one-person play Death of England: Delroy. It is an unusual play about racism written by two black playwrights. Art galleries are also reopening. Tate Modern has opened as has the National Gallery. The British Museum and the British Library are back but with limited capacity. Perhaps by Christmas, life may, finally, be merry again.

Kishwar Desai is an award winning author.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,050.78	0.46
Nifty 50	11,247.10	0.61
S&P 500*	3,382.57	0.29
Dollar (₹)	74.88	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.97	-0.09
Euro (₹)	88.62	0.21
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	53,611.340	0.63
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	45.03	0.23
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.975	0.010
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.688	-0.021

* As of 9:30 PM IST

GDP contracted 16.5% in June quarter: Ecowrap

SBI's research report Ecwrap expects India's GDP to have contracted by 16.5 per cent during April-June (Q1). In May, it had estimated Q1 GDP contraction of over 20 per cent. It said degrowth in corporate GVA (better results of firms) has been significantly better than revenue degrowth. So far, around 1,000 firms have reported their Q1 results, which indicate over 25 per cent fall in top line and over 55 per cent fall in bottom line.

Seafood exports in FY20 pegged at 12,89,651 mt



India shipped 12,89,651 mt of seafood worth Rs 46,662.85 crore (\$6.68 billion) during 2019-20, largely cushioning the adverse impact of the pandemic, the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPE-DA) said in Kochi. Frozen shrimp remained the major export item in both quantity and value followed by frozen fish while the USA and China were the major importers. Exports improved in rupee term by 0.16 per cent.

Aarti Drugs board to consider bonus issue

Aarti Drugs said its board will meet later this week to consider a proposal to issue bonus shares. The firm, which manufactures bulk drugs and chemicals, did not divulge more details. The next meeting of "the board of directors of the company is scheduled to be held on Thursday, August 20, to consider a proposal for issue of bonus shares," Aarti Drugs said. Shares of Aarti Drugs rose 10.03 per cent on the BSE.

Muthoot, Kotak arm tie up to offer Covid cover

Muthoot Finance said it has tied up with Kotak Mahindra General Insurance to offer Covid-19 insurance cover of up to Rs 1 lakh against gold loan. Muthoot Finance Ayush Gold Loan scheme will provide complimentary cover to customers taking gold loan under the Super Loan scheme. Muthoot Finance MD George Alexander Muthoot the initiative is part of the firm's ongoing customer loyalty programme and social commitment.



Disbursements dip 90% in April-June MFIs take a hard knock in first qtr

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, AUG. 17

Micro-finance disbursements dropped by 90 per cent in the June quarter to all-time low levels and the gross loan portfolios of all micro-lenders shrank by 2.42 per cent compared to the March quarter. However, collection rates, which had fallen to all-time low of 35 to 40 per cent in March, have started picking up.

All the microlenders together disbursed Rs 6,235 crore in the lockdown-hit June quarter, which was down 91 per cent from Rs 72,528 crore in the March quarter and 88 per cent below the disbursement of Rs 54,127 crore in June 2019 quarter, according to the data from Sa-Dhan.

The share of NBFC-MFIs, in quarterly disbursement, fell to a dismal 97.5 per cent to Rs 529 crore from Rs 21,927 crore in the March quarter. Though banks accounted for a major share of the disbursements at Rs 4,233 crore, it was still 88 per cent down from the March quarter disbursement of Rs 35,194 crore. Small Finance Banks too saw 88 per cent decline from Rs 10,746 crore in the March quarter to Rs 1,281 crore in the June quarter.

"During the lock-down we were not contemplating disbursements. We started disbursements only after the June first week. Our strategy has been to disburse to exist-



ing clients and not to new clients," said S. V. Raja Vaidyanathan, MD of Asirvad Microfinance.

Lower disbursements dragged down the combined gross loan portfolio of micro-lenders in end-June to Rs 2,24,595 crore from Rs 2,30,165 crore in the March quarter.

The overall collection rate in April had fallen to an all-time low of 35-40 per cent, which was lower than the repayment rate during demonetisation. By May it improved to 45-50 per cent and in July to 65-70 per cent. Sa-Dhan expects that collection rates will move up to 80-85 per cent by August-September.

"By September, when the moratorium ends, there will be a jump in collections as the 20 per cent customers who have availed of moratorium, will start repaying. By the end of the year, collection rates should return to pre-Covid levels," said

Vaidyanathan. Collections rates were 99.08 per cent in the March quarter and 98.11 per cent in June 2019.

The overall write off ratio, which stood at 0.52 per cent in the March quarter and 0.90 per cent in June 2019, shot up to 2.57 per cent in the last quarter. Uttarakhand recorded a write-off ratio of 10.31 per cent, Delhi 8.35 per cent, Maharashtra 5.88 per cent, Gujarat 5.53 per cent and Uttar Pradesh 4.72 per cent. Industry-wide portfolio at risk-30 days deteriorated to 1.89 per cent from 1.78 per cent in March.

"Nationwide lockdown and extension of moratorium led to lower repayments in April, however after relaxations and opening up of the economy, now the repayment rate is at 65-70 per cent and is expected to increase to 80-85 per cent in August and September," said P Satish, Executive Director, Sa-Dhan.

Taxpayers don't have to report big transactions

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Taxpayers will not be required to mention their high-value transactions in their income tax returns, officials in the know of the development said.

"There is no such proposal to modify income tax return forms," an official said, responding to reports of a proposal to expand reportable financial transactions to include hotel payments over Rs 20,000, life insurance premium payment over Rs 50,000 and health insurance premium payment over Rs 20,000, donations and payment of school/college fees over Rs 1 lakh a year.

Any expansion in reporting under the statement of financial transactions (SFT) will mean that such reporting of high-value transactions to the I-T department will be done by financial institutions, they said.

Only third parties would report high-value transactions to the I-T department as per the Income Tax Act. Such information would be used to identify people who are not paying up due taxes.

"There is no such proposal to modify income tax return forms," an official said. "The taxpayer would not need to mention his/her high-value transactions in his/her return."

—PTI

Retail investors play the market in June quarter

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, AUG. 17

BUYING UP

- Retail holding rises in 1,018 companies in Q1
- HNI holdings in NSE firms rise to 1.84%
- Insurers holdings up 25.28% to ₹7.02 L cr
- FPI holdings fall to 21.05% from 21.17%
- In top 10 firms, FPIs have 52.29% stake, DIIs 38.64% and MFs 36.05%

Retail investors have entered the stock market in a big way during the lockdown period, as evidenced by a rise in their stake in more than 1,000 companies during the April-June 2020 quarter.

"Retail holding went up in 1,018 companies listed on the NSE in the last quarter. The average stock price of these companies in the same period increased by 60.28 per cent. On the other hand, retail holding went down in 545 companies. The average stock price of these companies too increased by a slightly higher 61.08 per cent," according to Prime Database.

"Unlike seen in previous quarters and years wherein retail would typically buy at the peak and sell at lows, the last quarter saw heavy buying by retail making use of the steep fall in share prices due to the coronavirus pandemic," said Pranav Haldea, managing director, Prime Database Group.

Holdings of high net worth individuals (HNIs)—individuals with more than Rs 2 lakh shareholding—in companies listed on the NSE also increased to 1.84 per cent by value as on June 30, 2020 from 1.78 per cent as on March 31, 2020.

Among the domestic institutions, holdings of insurance companies, in absolute value terms, went up by 25.28 per cent from the March quarter to Rs 7.02 lakh crore as on

June 30, 2020. Life Insurance Corporation of India's holding—across 292 companies where its holding is more than 1 per cent—stood at Rs 5.40 lakh crore in the June quarter, an increase of 26.93 per cent over the previous quarter.

The holding of private promoters in companies listed on the NSE reached an all-time high of 44.43 per cent by value, increasing from 44.25 per cent in March. Private promoter ownership has been steadily increasing for the last 11 years, having increased from 33.61 per cent in June 2009.

While Indian private promoters' holding has gone up from 26.45 per cent to 34.86 per cent over the last 11 years, foreign promoters' holding has gone up from 7.16 per cent to 9.57 per cent.

On the other hand, the holding of the government in companies listed on the NSE hit an all-time low of 6.36 per cent as on June 30, 2020, down from 6.56 per cent as on March 31, 2020.

"Since June 2009, hold-

ing of government has been steadily declining, from 22.71 per cent as on June 30, 2009, due to the government's divestment programme, not enough new listings as also lacklustre performance of many CPSEs relative to their private peers," according to Haldea.

Holdings of domestic mutual funds in companies listed on the NSE reduced to 7.81 per cent by value in June from 7.96 per cent in March.

Holdings of foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) also fell from 21.17 per cent in March to 21.05 per cent in June 2020, despite net inflows of Rs 29,516 crore during the quarter. FPI ownership stood at Rs 28.60 lakh crore as on June 30, 2020.

FPIs are the largest non-promoter shareholders in the Indian market and their investment decisions have a huge bearing on the stock prices and overall direction of markets. It is thus time that complete details of all their holdings are made mandatory to be disclosed in India, Haldea said.

"Institutional money continues to incrementally get more concentrated to the top 10 per cent companies by market cap, reflecting a heightened risk-off environment," Haldea said, adding, "The top 10 per cent companies by market capitalisation accounted for 52.29 per cent of overall FPI holding, 38.64 per cent of overall DII holding and 36.05 per cent of overall mutual fund holding."

US law firm Rosen plans to sue HDFC Bank over misleading info

New Delhi, Aug. 17: US-based Rosen Law Firm on Monday said it is planning to investigate potential securities claims against HDFC Bank following allegations of sharing "materially misleading business information" with investors.

HDFC Bank said it was not aware of any lawsuit and prima facie it looked "frivolous as we believe we have been transparent in our disclosures".

"Rosen law firm is preparing a securities lawsuit on behalf of HDFC Bank shareholders," the global investor right law firm said in a statement on its website.

Citing some news reports about alleged unfair business practices and the lender missing analysts' estimates on profits for the June quarter, Rosen Law Firm said it is preparing a securities lawsuit.

The HDFC Bank American Depository Receipt share price fell by 2.83 per cent following the report, it added.

The bank's ADRs are listed on the NYSE.

The law firm said it will



investigate "potential securities claims on behalf of shareholders of HDFC Bank Ltd resulting from allegations that the bank may have issued materially misleading business information to the investing public".

Last year, Rosen Law had prepared a similar class-action suit against IT giant Infosys after a whistleblower had alleged malpractices by a few key management personnel. The suit was dismissed in May this year.

The law firm quoted media reports about allegations of improper practices and conflict of interest in HDFC Bank Ltd's

vehicle financing operations, which involved its former unit head.

"If you purchased securities of HDFC Bank please visit the firm's website...to join the securities action," Rosen Law Firm said.

The largest Indian private sector lender had posted a 22 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit at Rs 6,927 crore in April-June quarter of the current fiscal year 2020-21.

Commenting on the development, HDFC Bank said: "We were unaware of any such development (class action lawsuit) till we heard about it from the media a little earlier today. We are getting details of it. We'll examine it and respond to it as appropriate. Prima facie it does look frivolous as we believe we have been transparent in our disclosures".

The bank said it is an interim response.

The lender in July launched a probe on vehicle finance lending practices following allegations against the conduct of a key executive in the auto lending business.

—PTI

Insurers set to offer transit cover for Covid-19 vaccine

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, AUG. 17

With more than 170 Covid-19 vaccine candidates in the works globally, insurers and reinsurers are looking to offer transit cover for the vaccines to be transported from one country to other parts of the world. Insurance companies, which aim to provide comprehensive risk mitigation services to support the development, manufacturing and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines, are likely to start writing business from October 1.

Lloyd's, the world's specialist insurance and reinsurance leader, recently announced the creation and in-principle approval of its programme, Syndicate 1796, set up to insure the storage and transportation of Covid vaccines to the emerging economies.

Indian insurers are also keen to tap the evolving market for transportation of vaccines. Sanjay Datta, chief underwriting and claims, ICICI Lombard, said, "We are already providing marine cover for transportation of pharmaceutical products. How-

BIOLOGICAL E BUYS AKORN INDIA

Hyderabad, Aug. 17: Biological E. Limited (BE), a city-based pharmaceuticals and biologics company, on Monday announced the acquisition of Akorn India Limited, a subsidiary of Akorn Inc, USA, for an undisclosed sum. By this strategic acquisition, BE will be able to enhance its manufacturing capabilities of its vaccines and injectable medicines, a BE release said. BE is in the process of developing a Covid-19 vaccine and may be able to use Akorn's facilities at Paonta Sahib plant in Himachal Pradesh for manufacture of the vaccine.

—PTI

ever, when it comes to providing the end-to-end cover for transportation of Covid-19 vaccines, we are watching the ongoing developments in this regard. Accordingly, we will decide about the

launch of such a product, as the government is making special arrangements for its transportation right from the laboratories to the end-consumers."

Syndicate 1796 is developed by insurance technology firm Parsyl in tie-up with various partners, including vaccine alliance Gavi. The Syndicate forms the foundation of the new global health risk facility (GHRF) at Lloyd's. The GHRF will offer All Risk cargo coverage for transit and storage risks on all global health products related to Covid-19 and any other infectious disease control programmes. The creation of a public-private syndicate to address a global health emergency is the first in Lloyd's history.

It is expected that those eligible for coverage will include manufacturers, procurement agents, logistics companies, ministries of health and other public agencies. "This unique partnership is a real demonstration of the value and ingenuity the Lloyd's market can bring to help address a global health emergency," said John Neal, CEO, Lloyd's.

NFRA FINDS LAPSES IN KPMG ARM'S FY18 AUDIT OF IFIN

New Delhi, Aug. 17: The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) has found various lapses in the statutory audit of IL&FS Financial Services Limited for 2017-18 done by BSR & Associates LLP.

NFRA has issued the Audit Quality Review Report (AQR) of the statutory audit for the year 2017-18 of IL&FS Financial Services Ltd (IFIN).

However, BSR said the audit quality review did not give "due consideration to all the facts and circumstances", adding that it was reviewing the report and would respond later.

"The instances of failure to comply with the requirements of the Standards of Auditing (SAs) by BSR are significant," a release issued by the corporate affairs ministry said on Monday. NFRA comes under the ministry. BSR & Associates is an affiliate of KPMG.

As per the ministry's release, BSR did not have adequate justification for issuing the audit report.

NFRA found that the IT processes/ platform used by BSR have deficiencies that are systemic and structural in nature.—PTI

RENAULT BRINGS NEW DUSTER 1.3 TURBO PETROL

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, AUG 17

The French car maker Renault on Monday launched the all-new Duster turbo petrol variant starting at Rs 10.49 lakh. The top-end is priced Rs 13.59 lakh at pan-India showroom. The company will continue to sell the existing BS6 Duster 1.5 petrol variant.

Renault claims the new 1.3-litre turbo petrol engine to be the most powerful SUV in its segment.



SHORT TAKES

Ronnie wraps up sixth World title

Washington: Ronnie O'Sullivan became world snooker champion for the sixth time and at the age of 44 by beating fellow Englishman Kyren Wilson 18-8 in the final.

O'Sullivan moved to within one of the all-time record of world titles, held by Stephen Hendry, and tied the number won by Steve Davis and Ray Reardon.

Regarded as the most talented player ever, O'Sullivan had a tough run to the final, beating Chinese star Ding Junhui in the second round, former world champion Mark Williams in the quarterfinals, and then three-time winner Mark Selby in a spectacular semifinal that went to a decider.

The best-of-35-frame match against Wilson, a first-time finalist, ended up being a procession after O'Sullivan won seven straight frames in Sunday's afternoon session from 10-8 up. Returning for the evening session at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, O'Sullivan needed just one more frame for the win and sealed it with a break of 96. — AP

Nagal in Prague pre-quarterfinal

Prague: India's Sumit Nagal advanced to the pre-quarterfinals of the Prague Challenger tennis tournament after his opponent Jay Clarke of Britain retired hurt here on Monday.

Nagal, ranked 127 in the world, was leading 6-3, 5-7, 4-1, when Clarke decided to call it quits in the second round match after playing for over two hours.

The 22-year-old Indian, playing his first competitive match since his Davis Cup encounter against Croatia's Marin Cilic in March, had received a bye in the opening round.

Nagal, seeded sixth in the tournament that also features three-time Grand Slam winner Stanislas Wawrinka, will face local favourite Jiri Lehecka in the Round of 16.

Other Indians in the fray include Divij Sharan and N. Sriram Balaji, who will be competing in the doubles events with separate partners.

Sharan will partner Dutchman Robin Haase and they were seeded number one. Balaji will join hands with Belgium's Kimmer Coppejans. — PTI

Alex grabs points at Austrian GP

Spielberg, Austria: A trying day at the Red Bull Ring with a red-flag interrupted race, but Alex Marquez salvaged points to continue his top 15 run in the MotoGP. Stefan Bradl's participation in next week's Styria GP is now confirmed as Marc Marquez continues his recovery.

Weather forecasts were once again proven wrong as glorious sunshine beat down on the Red Bull Ring for the fourth MotoGP race of the year. Both Repsol Honda Team RC213Vs shot off the line, Alex Marquez and Stefan Bradl immediately gaining positions and joining the group battling for the top ten. But a red flag for a dramatic crash at Turn 3 saw the race stopped, restarted and run over 20 laps.

Alex made another strong start from 13th on the grid with the restart, immediately moving into the top 10 as the field roared through the opening corners. The fighting was fierce in the first laps and the MotoGP rookie found himself shuffled down the order after his lightning start. But Alex's consistency saw him stay free of trouble afterwards and benefit from the mistakes of others, moving back into the points.

Live on TV

CARIBBEAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Trinbago Knight Riders vs Guyana Amazon Warriors from 7.30 pm; Barbados Tridents vs St Kitts & Nevis Patriots from 3 am (Wednesday). Both matches on Star Sports 1, 2, HD

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEMIFINAL

Paris-Saint Germain vs RB Leipzig from 12.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

NBA PLAYOFFS

Milwaukee Bucks vs Orlando Magic from 11 pm; Oklahoma City Thunder vs Houston Rockets from 4 am (Wednesday); Los Angeles Lakers vs Portland Trailblazers from 6.30 am (Wednesday). All matches on Sony Six, HD.

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United they fall again

Manchester lose another semifinal, this time in Europe

Cologne (Germany), Aug. 17: Manchester United made it an unwanted hat-trick of semifinal defeats this season after losing 2-1 in the Europa League to Sevilla. After losing in the last four of the FA Cup and EFL Cup, United failed to convert a string of chances before Luuk de Jong scored the winning goal for Europa League experts Sevilla.

The Spanish club has won all five of the finals it's reached in Europe's second-level cup competition. Sevilla has the chance to win a record-extending sixth title on Friday in Cologne when its opposition will be either Inter Milan or Shakhtar Donetsk, who play Monday.

Sevilla goalkeeper Yassine Bounou kept his team in the semifinal at 1-1 with crucial saves either side of halftime, before de Jong won it.

With the game at 1-1 and heading for extra time, Sevilla substitute de Jong made the breakthrough in the 78th minute. A cross by Jesus Navas fell kindly for the tall Dutch forward to score his first European goal of the season from close range.

United had taken the lead in the ninth minute with yet another penalty in a season packed with them. Diego Carlos tangled with Marcus Rashford as the United forward had his shot saved, and then Bruno Fernandes stepped up to send the penalty into the top-left corner.

— AP



Sevilla players celebrate after Suso (second from left) scored their first goal during the Europa League semifinal against Manchester United in Cologne, Germany, on Sunday. Sevilla won 2-1. — AP

Paris giants train guns on Leipzig

Lisbon, Aug. 17: The similarities between Paris Saint-Germain and Leipzig end with both clubs trying to reach the Champions League final for the first time.

The French powerhouse will head into Tuesday's semifinal match with its high-profile squad, while the German club comes with a team of mostly untested players.

At the Stadium of Light in Lisbon, it will be

Neymar, Kylian Mbapp and his teammates taking on a Leipzig squad with little Champions League experience.

Leipzig have almost nothing to lose. For PSG, anything short of the title will feel like a disappointment for a club where a priority aim has been to break through with the European title after years of dominance in France.

Leipzig reached the Bundesliga in 2016 and

the Champions League a few years later. In their second Champions League appearance, the German club eliminated Tottenham in the Round of 16 and Atletico Madrid in the quarterfinals.

PSG, managed by German coach Thomas Tuchel, got past Borussia Dortmund in the Last 16 and Atalanta in quarterfinals.

PSG enter the semifinals with the feeling that this finally could be the time

they triumph in Europe.

PSG was eliminated in the Round of 16 in the last three seasons, and in the quarterfinals four straight times before that.

Its last semifinal appearance was 25 years ago, when they lost to AC Milan.

"We don't talk about history, we live at the moment. We are here because we played a great Champions League season," Tuchel said. — AP

CHAUHAN LAST RITES WITH FULL HONOURS

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Former India cricketer and Uttar Pradesh cabinet minister Chetan Chauhan, who died of Covid-19 related complications, was on Monday cremated with state honours in Garhmukteshwar, Hapur.

Chauhan was 73 and breathed his last at a Gurugram hospital after battling the dreaded infection for over a month. His body was first taken to his residence in Mayur Vihar before the last rites were performed in Garhmukteshwar.

Chauhan was serving as the Minister of Sainik Welfare, Home Guards, and Civil Security in the Uttar Pradesh cabinet. He is survived by his wife and son Vinayak, who lit the pyre after arriving from Melbourne on Sunday.

"He was cremated with full state honours. The funeral was attended by several bureaucrats and a sizeable crowd gathered to pay their last respects," a Delhi and Districts Cricket Association official, who attended the funeral, said.

Chauhan was the legendary Sunil Gavaskar's longest serving opening partner and together the duo scored more than 3,000 runs, including 12 century stands.

He played 40 Tests for India and was the first Test cricketer to finish his career with over 2,000 runs but without a century.

He became the second UP minister to succumb to Coronavirus. — PTI

RAINA TOLD BCCI HE QUIT, A DAY LATE

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Suresh Raina communicated his retirement decision to the BCCI a day after he made it public, the Board said on Monday, lauding the former India all-rounder for being a key player in the limited-overs format.

Minutes after the iconic Mahendra Singh Dhoni announced his international retirement on August 15, 33-year-old Raina followed his mentor in doing the same, surprising many.

"Attacking left-hand batsman Suresh Raina officially communicated to BCCI on Sunday about his decision to retire from international cricket," said the BCCI in a statement.

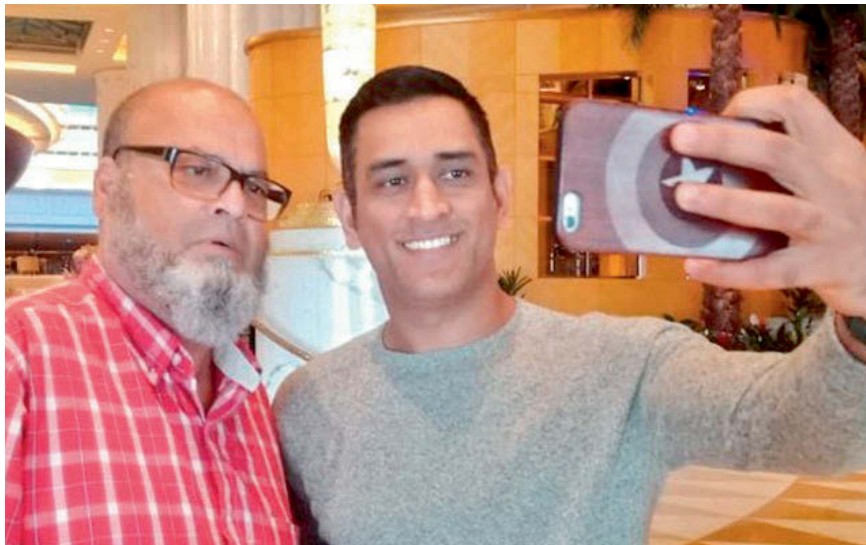
The usual norm is players informing the BCCI before announcing retirement.

Raina represented India in 18 Tests, 226 ODIs and 78 T20Is in an international career spanning 13 years. He also had the honour of captaining the team briefly.

"Under his captaincy, India registered a 3-2 series victory in West Indies and a 2-0 win over Bangladesh in ODIs and a 2-0 T20 International series win in Zimbabwe," the statement added.

Raina, who scored a century on debut in Tests, is also the first Indian to slam hundreds in all three formats of the game and his centuries were scored outside India.

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah paid a glowing tribute to the southpaw. — PTI



Former Indian cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni clicks a selfie with Mohammad Bashir Bozai, his Chicago-based Pakistan-born fan, in this file photo.

Dhoni's fan from Pakistan will quit watching cricket

New Delhi, Aug. 17: In Karachi-born Mohammad Bashir Bozai's vow to give up watching India-Pakistan play at ICC events, obsessive fandom follows Mahendra Singh Dhoni into retirement, adding to things like jersey number and disciples such as Suresh Raina.

Travelling the world to watch the arch-rivals in action doesn't make sense anymore to Bashir, aka 'Chacha Chicago', who endured abuses from Pakistani fans while cheering for Dhoni.

The well-known *chacha*, instead, plans to visit Ranchi to meet the man whose sphere of influence spreads far and wide.

"Dhoni has retired and so have I. I don't see myself travelling for cricket again with him not being around. I loved him and he loved me

Dhoni has retired and so have I. I don't see myself travelling for cricket again with him not being around.

— MOHAMMAD BASHIR BOZAI
M. S. Dhoni fan

Dhoni arranged it for the 65-year-old, enough for him to "unconditionally love" the World Cup-winning captain for life.

For someone who survived three heart attacks and cris-crossed the globe to see Dhoni in flesh and blood, cricket will never be the same. Now that he is done attending live games, his next stop is Ranchi. "I will go to his house in Ranchi when things get normal (post Covid-19 pandemic). That is the least I can do to wish him all the best for the future. I will also ask Ram Babu (another super fan, from Mohali, to come with me). I would have travelled to see him in the IPL but there are travel conditions and with my heart condition, it is not safe to do so," said Bashir, whose wife hails from Hyderabad (India). — PTI

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Marksman MS may just shoot a surprise

New Delhi, Aug. 17: Enquiring about importing a rifle, he once sent a mail at 2 am, got it delivered at his Ranchi home, went to the range and did what he does in anything he tries his hand at.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni hit the bull's eye, fuelling an interest that would see him visit innumerable shooting ranges in the country over the next few years and display his skills in the sport.

The Walther rifle imported by Dhoni, who retired from international cricket on Saturday, is the

same model (LG300XT Walther Carabonte) which Abhinav Bindra had used to win a historic gold medal at the Olympics.

This was 10 years ago, when Indian shooters were starting to dominate on the world stage and Dhoni, who is now also a life member of National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), was bracing up for what would culminate into his second World Cup title triumph.

Recently, during an interaction with cricketer Suresh Raina, shooter Manavadiya Singh

● **A life member of National Rifle Association of India, M. S. Dhoni owns a LG300XT Walther Carabonte, the model Abhinav Bindra had used to win gold at the 2008 Olympics.**

Rathore, who is the son of Olympic silver-medallist Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, revealed that Dhoni is a pro when it comes to shooting as well. Manavadiya recalled

how impressive Dhoni was when the cricketer visited his house. "He has a lot of interest in shooting also. I think he hit the target all the time," Manavadiya had said.

Dhoni has exhibited his shooting skills in the past. In 2017, when a team training session was cancelled due to rain in Kolkata, Dhoni headed to the Kolkata Police Training School and tried his hand at pistol shooting. "His accuracy is breathtaking," Kolkata Police was quoted as saying at the time.

He had also shared a clip of him trying his hand at pistol shooting in 2018.

"He has had love for guns and shooting since a very long time. Now that he is done with cricket, shooting could be his next sport. I have seen many professional athletes shifting to shooting after retiring from their sport and go on to become Olympic champions. Unlike other sports shooting and golf can be played till a very long time," Shimon Sharif, a top importer of equipment for leading shooters, said. — PTI

COVID | SCARE

Simona says no to Grand Slam

New York, Aug. 17: Wimbledon champion Simona Halep will skip the US Open, saying she is putting her health first and prefers to stay in Europe amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

Halep, a former top-ranked player who is currently No.2, won the title in Prague on Sunday.

"After weighing up all the factors involved and with the exceptional circumstances in which we are living, I have decided that I will not travel to New York to play the (at)usopen," Halep wrote on Twitter.

"I always said I would put my health at the heart of my decision and I therefore prefer to stay and train in Europe," she wrote.

Six of the top eight women in the WTA rankings won't play in New York. No.1 Ash Barty and defending champion Bianca Andreescu have also withdrawn from the tournament. Other women who won't be playing include No.5 Elina Svitolina, No.7 Kiki Bertens and No.8 Belinda Bencic.

Rafael Nadal, the men's defending champion, has also withdrawn from the tournament, but Novak Djokovic has said he will play. The US Open is scheduled to start at Flushing Meadows on Aug. 31.

Irina Khromacheva of Russia will replace Halep in the main draw, according to the United States Tennis Association. — AP

NISHIKORI TESTS POSITIVE FOR VIRUS

New York, Aug. 17: Japan's Kei Nishikori, the 2014 US Open runner-up, said he has contracted Covid-19 and has withdrawn from an ATP event in New York with this year's US Open only two weeks away.

World number 31 Nishikori said he took the test and received the positive result on Sunday in Florida and will isolate himself despite few symptoms. He and his team plan more tests.

"I have some unfortunate news. This morning, while still in Florida, I got tested for Covid-19 and tested positive," Nishikori said in a statement posted on social media.

Boxer Sarita Devi is Covid positive

Back in India, former world champion boxer L. Sarita Devi on Monday tested positive for Covid-19 along with her husband Thoiba Singh but both of them are asymptomatic. The couple are based in Imphal. "Me and Sarita have tested positive. We are right now moving to a Covid-19 care facility in Imphal. Both of us have no symptoms at all," Thoiba said. — PTI

FAN FRAME



Ravindra Sharma (centre) took this photo with former Indian cricket captain Gundappa Viswanath (left). Viswanath scored 6,080 runs in the 91 Tests he played between 1969 and 1983, scoring 14 centuries and 35 half-centuries in 155 innings.

BRADY BAGS BRAGGING RIGHTS AT LEXINGTON

Lexington (Kentucky, USA), Aug. 17: Wearing a pandemic-appropriate mask, Jennifer Brady walked over to accept the first WTA trophy of her career, making sure to apply hand sanitiser before raising the new hardware overhead.

Brady claimed her initial tour-level title at the Top Seed Open on Sunday, overcoming some shaky serving and using a five-game run to seize control for a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Jil Teichmann in the final.

It was the first professional tennis event in the United States since the start of the Coronavirus outbreak, and no spectators were allowed. The unusual circumstances did not bother Brady at all.

She did not drop a set throughout the hard-court tournament and ceded only 24 games in all. It was a perfect way to prepare for the US Open, which begins August 31 in New York. — AP

Bucks, Lakers in focus at playoffs

Miami, Aug. 17: An NBA season unlike any other shifts into high gear with the start of the playoffs in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

In a season reshaped by the Coronavirus pandemic, home court advantage is just a memory.

Fans are banned from the campus where the league has so far successfully operated without a positive Covid-19 test. But the price is that players know that the deeper their teams' playoff run the longer they remain isolated from their families and friends.

"This is going to be the toughest championship you could ever win," Milwaukee Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo, the reigning Most Valuable Player, had said.

Antetokounmpo's Bucks arrived at the bubble virtually assured of the top seed in the Eastern Conference and own the best record in the league as they head into a first-round meeting with the Orlando Magic.

The Bucks beat the Magic in all four of their regular season games, but they've produced a lacklustre 3-5 record in the restart.

The Los Angeles Lakers have also gone an unimpressive 3-5 in seeding games. LeBron James, Anthony Davis and company will be up against battle-hardened Portland Trail Blazers, who won four straight down-to-the-wire games—including an extra play-in game against Memphis Grizzlies — to seize the final playoff berth in the West. — AFP