

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
NELLORE | MONDAY | 10 AUGUST 2020

**WEATHER**  
Max: 35.6°C  
Min: 28.5°C  
RH: 66%  
Rainfall: Nil  
Forecast: clear.  
Max/Min temp. 35/28°C

**COVID-19 CUNT**  

CASES	DEATHS
(+61,572)	(+1011)
22,12,484	44,457

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(+61,572)	(+1011)
22,12,484	44,457

**ASTROGUIDE**  
**Sarvari**; Dakshinayana  
**Tithi**: Shrivana Bahula Shashti till 6.42 am  
**Star**: Ashwini till 10.04 pm  
**Varjyam**: 5.34 pm to 7.22 pm  
**Durmuhurtam**: 12.47 pm to 1.38 pm; 3.19 pm to 4.10 pm  
**Rahukalam**: 7.30 pm to 9 pm  
**HJRI CALENDAR**  
Zulhijja 19,1441 AH  
**PRAYERS(SHAHI MASJID)**  
**Fajar**: 4.39 am  
**Zohar**: 12.16 pm  
**Asar**: 4.42 pm  
**Maghrib**: 6.38 pm  
**Isha**: 7.53 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.35 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.55 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 10.32 PM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 11.06 AM**

**COUNTER POINT**  

SALES...

UNION MINISTER WHO ENDORSED 'PAPAD' POSITIVE

**IN BRIEF**  
**State records 10,820 cases**  
**Vijayawada**: Andhra Pradesh has registered 10,820 new Covid-19 cases, raising the overall tally to 2,27,860 in the last 24 hours, apart from 97 deaths during this period, taking the death toll so far to 2,036. Health bulletin issued by the government on Sunday stated that out of 62,912 samples tested, 10,820 individuals have tested Covid-19 positive.  
**Full report on Page 3**

## India plans to bar import of 101 weapon platforms in five years

PAWAN BALI | DC  
NEW DELHI, AUG. 9

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday announced a “negative list” of 101 defence platforms and weapons whose import will be banned progressively, starting December 2020, to boost the indigenisation of defence production under the “Atma Nir-bhar Bharat” initiative.

The negative list includes artillery guns, assault rifles, corvettes, sonar systems, transport aircraft, light combat helicopters (LCHs)



and radars.

By December 2025, the import of all defence items on the list will be totally barred, while 69 will not be imported from December 2020 itself.

The defence ministry claimed with this embargo, contracts worth ₹4 lakh crore will be placed with domestic industry in the next five to seven years.

Of these, equipment and weapons of ₹1,30,000 crore each are likely for the Army and Air Force, while almost ₹1,40,000 crore worth of items are anticipated by the Navy.

“This decision will offer a great opportunity to India’s defence industry to manufacture items in the negative list,” the defence minister said.

## Cong: Sonia will stay interim prez

New Delhi, Aug. 9: The Congress on Sunday said Sonia Gandhi will continue as interim president till such time a “proper procedure” is implemented in the “not too distant future” to elect a party chief.

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi, during an online media briefing, said it was true that Sonia Gandhi’s tenure as interim chief comes to an end on August 10, one year after she assumed the post, but it did not mean that the seat automatically falls vacant that day.

“Sonia Gandhi is the president, she will continue till such time as a proper procedure is implemented and it will be implemented in the not too distant future,” he told reporters.

“Yes, her tenure comes to an end on August 10. But be rest assured that there is a process which goes through the CWC (Congress Working Committee). This will be followed in the near future and a result will

● **PARTY SPOKESMAN** Abhishek Singhvi said it is true that Sonia Gandhi’s term as interim president comes to an end today, but the seat won’t automatically fall vacant

emerge,” he said.

The procedure is written in the Congress’ constitution and the party is committed to follow it, Mr Singhvi said, adding that it was being done and information will be shared on it soon.

Asked about the confusion over whether Mrs Gandhi’s term ends tomorrow or there is no deadline for when the term of an interim president ends, he said it is very clear that neither nature nor politics, nor political parties, permit or tolerate a vacuum.

“Just like nature abhors a vacuum, political parties cannot function in a vacuum. It is true that the tenure is expiring tomorrow. There is a laid down procedure for elections,” Singhvi said. — *PTI*

## Plane crash black box probe begins

New Delhi, Aug. 9: Investigators on Sunday began examining the black box of a Boeing-737 that overshot a runway on its second attempt, killing 18 people in the worst aviation accident in a decade.

In an interview on Sunday, Arun Kumar, head of DGCA, said India would open the recovered transcripts to international investigators, as well as manufacturer Boeing.

“Only after conducting a thorough and unbiased probe, can we tell what happened,” Kumar said.

The 2,700 metre runway at the airport is known as a “table-top”, an aviation term for runways with steep drops at one or both ends.

They leave little room for error should a pilot

overshoot the runway, either through human error or mechanical failure.

Late on Saturday, Kumar said in another interview that the pilot made an aborted landing attempt into a headwind and then made a second approach with a tail wind, landing 1,000 metres down the runway.

An air traffic control official familiar with the crash confirmed this version of events, adding it is unusual to attempt a landing with a tailwind, typically used for takeoffs.

“The length of the runway is around 2,700 metres and the plane touched the ground after crossing 1,000 metres, leaving less room for a halt,” the official said. — *Reuters*

## 4G in J&K to get delayed further

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, AUG. 9

Restoration of 4G Internet services in Jammu and Kashmir could get delayed further with appointment of new Lt Governor Manoj Sinha.

Sources claim he is expected to review the entire issue in detail again. High speed internet services in Valley were suspended for over a year now after Article 370 was abrogated.

Suspension of high speed 4G internet services

in the Valley has remained a highly contentious issue as there were increasing demands from various quarters that these services be restored.

However, the move was strongly opposed by multiple security and intelligence agencies on the grounds that this will trigger a fresh round of terror and false propaganda. The matter has also been pending in the Supreme Court in view of some petitions being filed for restoring the services.

### NATION | 4

**IAF officer completes space mission training**



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**Violence, chaos must not prevail in Lebanon**

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**IPL sponsor pullout no big deal: Ganguly**



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# 10 Covid patients housed in Vijayawada hotel die in fire

## Short circuit in reception spread to first, second floors at 5 am

MD. ILYAS | DC  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

Ten persons undergoing treatment for Coronavirus at a hotel-turned-hospital in Vijayawada were killed in a fire mishap early on Sunday.

The fire broke out at 5 am at the reception in the centrally located Swarna Palace Hotel due to a short circuit. The flames spread rapidly to first and second floors, where the patients were housed. Ramesh Hospitals, a well-known institution, had taken the hotel on lease for treating Covid-19 patients and 30 patients were undergoing treatment at the time of the mishap. The thick smoke that filled the hotel following the fire is said to have asphyxiated 10 of them.

Besides, 10 hospital staff were also present to take care of the patients. Short circuit in an air conditioner near the reception on the ground floor caused the fire around 4.30 am. The fire started spreading to first and second floors, where the patients were undergoing treatment. The fire was noticed about half an hour later.

Many patients rushed out of their rooms and tried to climb down the stairs. They were unable to see anything due to thick smoke. Patients and hospital staff then rushed to windows and started screaming for help.

The fire department, NDRF and police personnel reached the spot around 5.15 am. There was no way they could enter the hotel using the stairs. They used the fire brigade ladders and climbed to the first and second floors, broke the window panes of the rooms and evacuated the patients.

District fire officer M.



The Swarna Palace hotel in Vijayawada which was gutted resulting in the death of at least 10 Covid-19 patients on Sunday due to a short-circuit in the hotel's reception area.

● **THERE WAS** no way the fire department and NDRF could enter the hotel using the stairs. They used the fire brigade ladders and climbed to the first and second floors, broke the window panes of the rooms and evacuated the patients.

Srinivas Reddy said that the fire station was located within a kilometre from the hotel and they could respond within 10 minutes.

“There was no way to enter the hotel to rescue the people who were screaming from the windows, due to the flames and smoke,” he said.

■ **Page 2: Patients initially brought down on ladders**

## Eight of 10 patients died in fire tested negative for virus

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

In an ironic twist, out of 10 persons, who died in the fire mishap at Covid Care Centre attached to a private hospital in Vijayawada, only two tested Coronavirus positive while the remaining eight turned out negative.

As per government’s norms, it is mandatory that a Covid-19 test is carried out on all those who die an unnatural death before their post-mortem is conducted.

● **THIS CONDITION** has been stipulated so that forensic experts, who carry out the post-mortem, can take adequate precautions while performing the post-mortem.

Doctors at the government hospital, where the Covid-19 tests were carried out on the dead bod-

## Alert Covid patient called fire force, police for help

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

The presence of mind of a Covid-19 patient undergoing treatment in the private Covid centre at Swarna Palace Hotel at Vijayawada helped the fire department, National Disaster Response Force and other officials to swiftly plunge into action and rescue patients.

The patient, Chowdavarapu Pawan Sai Kishan, on observing the flames tried to escape from the

room. Seeing fire, heat and smoke, he returned to his room and broke open glass window pane. He then called the fire department and police from his mobile phone. The fire department rushed fire tenders to the hotel and rescued Pawan Sai by bringing him down on a ladder. They also rescued 18 patients who were also trapped and shifted them to hospitals.

Kishan narrated his horrifying saga through a selfie video and said this was almost a second life for him. He said he was stay-

ing in Room 307. In the wee hours, he saw thick smoke coming inside the hotel. He said “I started feeling breathless. The thick smoke made it impossible for me to use the stairs.”

“As I was facing a problem, I used my mobile. Fortunately the fire department, police and other officials responded swiftly. They immediately fixed a tall ladder which helped me to get down. I was shifted to another hospital. I salute them for saving my life and that of other patients,” he said.

## HOTEL DID NOT HAVE NoC FROM FIRE DEPARTMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

The six-storied Swarna Palace hotel lacks “No Objection Certificate” from the Fire Department, something mandatory for every building above the height of 16 metres. Though it was equipped with fire-fighting equipment, the smoke detectors and water sprinklers installed were not in working condition.

Fire authorities believe that if the smoke detectors were active, the fast-asleep staff would have woken up with the alarm going around 5 am.

■ **Page 2: Fire spread fast in sanitised rooms**

**Personnel say fire broken 30 minutes before**

## Delayed call to fire staff costs 10 lives

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

Long delay in alerting the fire personnel about the fire at Swarna Palace, a temporary private Covid-19 facility, has cost 10 Coronavirus patients their lives.

Fire Department authorities say they received information about the fire mishap at 5.09 am on Sunday. By the time they reached the venue, thick fumes of smoke and a raging fire had already engulfed the building. This indicated

that the fire had broken about 30-35 minutes before they got intimation about the fire.

According to fire personnel, fire erupted on the ground floor near the reception. It soon spread and turned into a wildfire because of inflammable material like wood, curtains and other materials.

As thick smoke and fire had reached the first floor from ground floor, even engulfing the staircase, there was no way out for patients to escape. A patient was found charred to

death on the first floor while seven more bodies were found on the second floor.

There was a huge oxygen tank kept at the reception for giving oxygen to Covid-19 patients upon their arrival for treatment at the facility. It is suspect oxygen leaked from this tank, causing the fire to rage further. Fortunately, the oxygen tank did not explode. There were also cooking gas cylinders in the kitchen on the ground floor. Luckily, the fire was brought under control before it could reach the kitchen.

Otherwise, it could have been a major disaster.

Regional fire officer G. Srinivasulu said, “We received information about the fire mishap at 5.09 am and reached the hotel by 5.13 am. As everyone had been fast asleep when the short circuit occurred, nearly 30-35 minutes were lost by the time they alerted us about the fire. When we reached, the fire had engulfed the ground, first, second and third floors. We could rescue Covid-19 patients only using ladders and ropes.”

## CM ANNOUNCES ₹50L EX GRATIA FOR VICTIMS’ KIN

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Sunday announced ₹50 lakh ex gratia to the families of those killed in the fire accident.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan ordered officials to take measures to save the lives of injured people.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief at the loss of lives.

■ **Full report on page 2**



## IN BRIEF

**Governor  
condoles deaths**

**Vijayawada:** Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan expressed deep anguish and grief over the death of 11 Covid-19 patients in the Swarna Palace Hotel fire mishap on Sunday. In his condolence message, the Governor expressed sympathy for the families of those who died in the hotel fire. He directed the state government to provide the best possible treatment to the injured persons and stressed the need for compliance with fire safety norms by hospitals and commercial buildings to avert recurrence of such tragedies.

**FIRE SPREAD FAST  
IN SANITISED  
ROOMS**

FROM PAGE 1

They could then have made efforts to counter the fire till fire brigade came on to the scene. During the crucial period, they could have also evacuated Covid-19 patients staying at the hotel.

As per preliminary reports, fire brigade received a call about the fire mishap at 5.09 am and by 5.13 am five fire tenders had reached the spot. The fire was doused within half an hour. It is suspected the fire erupted due to electric short circuit at the reception on the ground floor, releasing thick smoke. Hotel workers did not notice the fire as they were fast asleep at the time. By the time they realised the hotel was on fire, the fire had spread to the first and second floors.

Majority of the patients were of advanced age with mild symptoms or were asymptomatic. When they realised the hotel was on fire, some of the patients rushed to the third floor and started screaming for help from the open corridors. Fire personnel rescued as many as 18 Coronavirus patients by bringing them down using their ladders and with the help of ropes.

Fire authorities are now a worried lot as nearly 30 personnel and officers had taken part in the rescue operation. They had also physically handled Covid-19 patients. There is a possibility that some of them may have contracted the virus.

Regional fire officer G. Srinivasulu said as sanitiser sprays were being widely used to sanitise rooms, beds and other facilities, their inflammable vapours hanging in the air could have catalysed the fire. That could be the reason for the fire spreading rapidly.

Krishna district medical and health officer Dr I. Ramesh said, "We gave permission to Ramesh Hospital to use Swarna Palace to accommodate Covid-19 patients after putting in place all safety precautions". The hotel had the capacity to accommodate 30 patients.

**OFFICIALS WAKE  
UP, ORDER FIRE  
SAFETY AUDIT**PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC  
NELLORE, AUG. 8

As usual, officials woke up from slumber and directed the fire officers to inspect all the Covid hospitals and care centres following the Swarna Palace Hotel mishap in Vijayawada on Sunday.

District fire officials said that they have no idea whether the designated Covid hospitals have obtained NOC or not. In fact, they have no information as to how many hotels have been converted into Covid care centres and how many hospitals have been designated to treat the patients in their jurisdiction.

Fire officials in Prakasam and Nellore said all corporate hospitals in their jurisdiction have obtained NOC and they have to do fire safety audit in other Covid hospitals and care centres.

Prakasam district fire officer S. Srinivasa Rao said Sanghamithra and KIMS Hospital, which are treating Coronavirus patients in Ongole, obtained NOC, but they have to check whether other hospitals such as HCG MNR Curie Cancer Centre complied with norms.

He said they are waiting for the list of Covid care centres and hospitals to conduct an audit.

Nellore DFO K. Srikanth said they launched an inspection of designated Covid hospitals and care centres and expressed the hope that they would submit a report to the district authorities by Monday afternoon.

When contacted, DMHO Dr Rajyalakshmi said she constituted a team to inspect.

# Over 250 hosps have no NOC from fire dept

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC  
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 9

The Vijayawada fire mishap that claimed the lives of 10 Covid patients brings into sharp focus the state of safety standards in hospitals in Visakhapatnam city. Sources in the fire service department said over 250 hospitals in the GVMC jurisdiction have not obtained no objection certificates (NOCs). The officials recently conducted a survey in view of the Covid and served notices on the erring hospitals. Fortunately, major Covid designated hospitals are found to be adhering to the fire safety norms. There are several hospitals in the city which are treating Covid patients even though they have no official permission.

"During last couple of days 50 hospitals including 10 dental hospitals have obtained NOCs and 200 are yet to respond. We have written to the government to initiate action against these hospitals," said regional fire officer Niranjan Reddy.

Speaking to DC on Sunday, Niranjan Reddy said the vulnerable institutions like hospitals, schools and function halls are taking advantage of the inadequate staff of the fire service department and continuing to violate the fire safety

rules.

It may be recalled that a fire broke out in the Cath lab of My Cure, located at Maharanipecta here, in October 2018 due to a short-circuit. The alert staff shifted about 70 patients to various other hospitals and prevented casualties.

Similarly, a major fire accident was averted at an operation theatre in King George Hospital with the timely intervention of the staff. In another incident, the entire paediatric ward of Victoria General Hospital, well-known as Gosha Hospital, was gutted. Luckily, there were no casualties due to the immediate rescue operations by the staff.

In the Vizag region, there are about 340 hospitals, both in private and government sector. Only 80 have fire NOC and over 250, including 20 government hospitals, have not obtained mandatory certificate, said Niranjan Reddy.

District fire officer B. Ram Prakash said all the Covid designated hospitals including GITAM, VIMS, Apollo, Seven Hills and all the hospitals in Health City have installed fire safety systems at the time of construction.

"But they need to conduct mock drills and overhaul the system periodically," the DFO said.

## No fire safety in 15 hospitals

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, AUG. 9

Inspections conducted hastily by officials on Sunday soon after the Vijayawada tragedy revealed that 10 of the 25 Covid hospitals in East Godavari and five in West Godavari did not have NOC.

As the inspection of all hospitals was not completed, it will continue on Monday. West Godavari DFO Sankara Rao admitted

that many of the Covid centres and hospitals did not have NOCs.

According to him, due to the urgency, some of the buildings were hurriedly converted into Covid-19 centres without checking whether they met safety norms or not.

Joint collector (W) G.Rajakumari said that the fire department officials were directed to inspect Covid centres and take necessary steps for further course of action.

## Jagan announces ₹50 lakh ex gratia

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy announced ₹50 lakh ex gratia to the family members of those killed in the fire accident at the hotel-turned-corona facility here on Sunday.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan ordered the government to take immediate rescue measures to save the lives of injured people. The Chief Minister directed officials to take necessary steps to provide better medical services to the victims and also ordered a probe into the incident.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief at the death of ten Covid patients in the fire accident.

Mr Modi spoke to Jagan Mohan Reddy over phone and enquired about the present situation and complete details of the fire accident. The Chief Minister pointed out that a private hospital had leased the hotel which was converted into a Covid-19 care centre for treating coronavirus patients. He explained that the fire broke out at around 5 am and authorities immediately took remedial action and saved the lives of most of the patients, and the injured were being provided emergency medical care. He also mentioned

## Kin of fire victims blame state govt

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

Family members of the victims of Sunday's fire mishap at a hotel-turned-hospital were inconsolable and faulted the government for failing to ensure the safety to their loved ones.

K. Suvarnalatha, 42, a home-maker from Nidubrolu mandal in

verted into a Covid-19 care centre for treating coronavirus patients. He

explained that the fire broke out at around 5 am and authorities immediately took remedial action and saved the lives of most of the patients, and the injured were being provided emergency medical care. He also mentioned

## Rescue effort



Firemen carry a body from the Swarna Palace hotel in Vijayawada where a fire broke out on Sunday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

# Firefighters risked fire, Covid to save patients

Fire was extinguished in around 30 min by fire tenders

MD ILYAS | DC  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

Personnel from the fire department put their lives to enormous risk during their rescue operation that saved many Coronavirus patients who were undergoing treatment at Swarna Palace Hotel after it was converted into an isolation centre by Ramesh Hospitals.

When the fire broke out early on Sunday morning, nurses and patients screamed for help from the windows. Although many people gathered at the spot on hearing the cries, none dared to enter the premises because of the fear of catching Covid-19.

Showing remarkable courage, fire personnel immediately plunged into action and rescued several patients.



A man climbs down the fire service ladder from the fire hit Swarna palace Covid-19 treatment facility in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

District fire officer M. Srinivas Reddy, assistant district fire officer, A. Sekhar, SFO Autonagar K. Ramesh and fire officer Srinath Reddy said that after first dousing the

flames, they entered the building and started rescuing people inside. They stated that it was only while shifting people struck inside that they realised they were Covid-19

patients as they had tags and bands to their hands. This did not deter the officials from rescuing all 21 survivors.

The fire staff lamented that during the pandemic situation, the kith and kin of patients were treating their loved ones as untouchables. In contrast, the firefighters were without PPE kits and protective measures while going about the rescue operation.

The availability of two fire tenders located at the fire station barely one km from the hotel helped them reach within minutes. In the meantime, four more fire tenders from Ajit Singh Nagar, Kotha Peta and Autonagar were rushed to the spot. The fire was extinguished in around 30 minutes and they were able to contain the intensity of the mishap and property loss.

## Patients brought down on ladders

From page 1

He and three other fire officers decided to climb to the first and second floors on ladders and started bringing down the people. He said ropes were used to harness the patients so that they could climb down safely.

After the blaze was brought under control, fire personnel entered the hotel and found 10 dead bodies lying on floors of the hotel-turned-hospital.

Ministers Velampalli Srinivas Rao and Mekathoti Sucharita said as per preliminary investigations, negligence of hospital management had caused the fire mishap. A case has been registered and two committees have been constituted to probe the incident.

Vijayawada police has registered cases against managements of Ramesh Hospitals and Swarna Palace Hotel for the mishap.

Sucharita said negligence of the two managements had surfaced in the preliminary inquiry into the blaze. Cases had been registered on Sunday against the two managements.

Vijayawada Central mandal revenue officer P. Jaya Sri lodged a complaint at Governorpet police station alleging that managements of the hospital and the hotel had knowledge about electrical defects in the hotel. They avoided repairs as that would cost money.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy announced ₹50 lakh ex gratia to the family members of those killed.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan ordered the government to take immediate rescue measures to save the lives of injured people. The Chief Minister directed officials to take steps to provide better medical services to the survivors.

## PROBE REPORT IN 48 HOURS: HOME MINISTER

FROM PAGE 1

The home minister said 48 hours have been given for completing the investigation and submitting a report to the government. Stern action will be initiated against those found guilty.

Earlier, Vijayawada city central MRO, P. Jaya Sri lodged a complaint at Governorpet police station under whose jurisdiction Swarna Palace comes. In her complaint, the official stated that Ramesh Hospital, Vijayawada, had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Swarna Palace hotel for running a private Covid-19 centre to treat Corona patients on payment basis. The MRO alleged that managements of the hospital and hotel had knowledge about electrical defects in the hotel. They deliberately avoided repairs as that would cost a huge amount of money. Further, despite knowing the fact that there were electrical defects in the hotel that could cause short circuits, the two managements had opened the private Covid-19 treatment centre.

The complainant stated that an electrical short circuit had caused the fire mishap in the hotel killing 10 Corona patients and causing injuries to 20 patients and staff at the hotel. The official sought stern action against the two managements for negligence.

Meanwhile, Krishna district collector A. Md Imtiaz has appointed a committee to probe the fire mishap and directed it to submit its report within two days. Joint collector (Development) L. Sivasankar will lead the inquiry committee. Sub-collector Dhyan Chandra, VMC chief medical officer Dr. G. Geeta Bai, RFO Uday Kumar, and officials of the Electricity Department will be members of the probe committee.

## MOST HOSPITALS FIRE TRAPS IN TIRUPATI

AVINASH P.  
SUBRAMANYAM | DC  
TIRUPATI, AUG. 9

Most of the hotels-turned-Covid-19 care centres and private hospitals are located in congested and narrow lanes in the city, making it difficult for even a passenger vehicle to pass through them, let alone a fire tender. What is more disturbing is the fact that some private hospitals are far behind when it comes to implementing fire safety norms.

In most of the buildings, emergency exits remain permanently blocked, entry and exit points are not clearly marked. Though some have firefighting equipment, they are mostly defunct and sprinklers are hard to find, it is observed.

Highly-placed sources in the corporation told *Deccan Chronicle* that about five major hospitals in the city were found to be lacking the mandatory no-objection certificate (NOC) from the fire services department. It is learnt that frequent notices served on them by the fire services department authorities have failed to stir them into action.

## CRIMINAL | NEGLIGENCE Collector Veerapandian directs the district fire officials to check fire safety compliances

# Kurnool GGH with 900 Covid patients sits on powder keg

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC  
KURNOOL, AUG. 9

Kurnool Government General Hospital, which is the state Covid care centre in the district, does not have an NOC, according to officials.

Currently, as many as 900 patients are undergoing treatment at the 1,200-bed hospital. Allaying fears of any danger, hospital superintendent G. Narendranath Reddy said that all the electrical fittings and generators were

checked and found to be in good condition.

"There is no problem with regard to fire safety in the hospital," he said.

When contacted, district fire officer (DFO) confirmed that the Kurnool GGH did not obtain a no objection certificate. In spite of repeated warnings, the hospital failed to comply with fire safety norms. He said that though the KGGH acquired fire safety system last year, we did not assess its efficacy and issue an

● DFO confirmed that the Kurnool GGH did not obtain a no objection certificate. In spite of repeated warnings, the hospital failed to comply with fire safety norms. He said that though the KGGH acquired fire safety system last year, we did not assess its efficacy and issue an

NOC because the hospital did not apply for it. When asked about the reason for the hospital not being keen

about NOC, the DFO said that a fee ₹11 should be paid per square foot for NOC. The KGGH may have to pay a few lakhs for the purpose and the Hospital Development Society looks at it as a major expenditure.

Immediately after the news of Vijayawada hotel fire broke out, district collector G. Veerapandian had directed the district fire officials to check fire safety compliances in all the government and private hospitals in the district, and submit a report.

The DFO said many old hospitals in the state do not have fire safety equipments like sprinklers. "Even the roads in big hospitals are mostly blocked by parked vehicles. If a fire breaks out, fire tenders cannot find an easy access to the mishap site. Therefore norms & codes for building design & fire safety should be followed not only for high rise hospital buildings but also for small structures or nursing homes," he said.



Health workers call out for help from within the Swarna Palace in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— DC



## IN BRIEF K'taka liquor seized from RTC driver

**Kadapa:** Kadapa Chinnachowk police seized non-duty paid Karnataka liquor worth ₹27,580 from an RTC bus on Sunday morning and the police took the driver, Jayachandra, into their custody. According to information from police Inspector Kambam Ashok Reddy, the police received message from RTC officials on Sunday morning and they found illegal liquor in bus (number AP04Z 0382) coming from Bangalore. They have seized 17 full bottles, 55 half bottles and 190 quarter bottles of Karnataka liquor and arrested the driver.

## Cong 3-day stir completes

**Kadapa:** Kadapa DCC leaders three-day protest demanding that EWS reservations be implemented ended on Sunday. District Congress youth leader Vishnu Pritam Reddy, addressing the partymen at the DCC office here on Sunday, demanded that the state government should issue orders immediately for the implementation of EWS reservations in the state government recruitments. Thousands of the youth from poor families will benefit if the quota is implemented. Congress leaders Sujatha Reddy, Laxmaiah, Narsimhulu, Khan and others participated in the protest.

## PD Act: Gutka smuggler booked

**Kurnool:** A 39-year-old gutka smuggler was booked under Preventive Detention Act and remanded to Kadapa Central Prison, said the district SP Dr Kagibrlili Fakeerappa.

A native of Kalugotla village in Koilkuntla mandal, the accused has been allegedly procuring the banned product and distributing it in Allagadda, Nandyal, Sirivella and other areas. Gutka worth ₹60 lakh was seized from his possession last month, the SP said. He said that 14 cases were pending against him out of which eight were registered at Koilkuntla police station. Three cases were registered at Allagadda and one case each at Allagadda Rural, Sirivella and Nandyal police stations. The accused has been procuring the banned Gutka from Hyderabad to Raichur and other places and was making huge profit by distributing it in the rural areas of the district.

## SEB cracks whip on illegal liquor

**Tirupati:** The Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB), in coordination with police and excise and prohibition department, cracked the whip on illegal manufacturing, bottling, sale and transportation of liquor as well as illegal sand mining and smuggling in Chittoor district.

The SEB had so far seized 35,426 bottles of liquor, 1,602 tetra packets of liquor, 7,291 litres of ID liquor and destroyed 89,563 litres of ID arrack making units worth around ₹1 crore in the last three months. As many as 268 persons were arrested and 216 vehicles were seized in connection with 170 cases booked against the illegal transportation of sand in the district. The department also seized 8,98,187 packets of banned tobacco products during special raids.

## 5-yr-old boy's body found in canal

**Kakinada:** A five-year-old boy's body was found in a canal near Palivela village of Kothapet mandal on Sunday. According to sources, two boys of Ravulapadu in Ravulapalem mandal were found missing and the parents lodged a complaint with the police station four days back. On Sunday, one of the boys, Nani, was found dead. According to Ravulapalem SI H. Sastry, Motham Nani, 5, and Dupam Karthik, 6, went out from their house for playing on August 5 but did not return home.



Women of various organisations stage protest against the state government for failing to handle the Covid crisis effectively and demanded that adequate steps be taken to check the spread of virus, near GVMC Gandhi Statue Junction in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

# AP records 10,820 new cases, 97 deaths

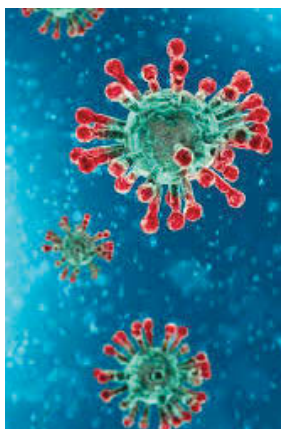
## Sate among the worst-affected areas in the world

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 9

Andhra Pradesh has registered 10,820 new Covid-19 cases, raising the overall tally to 2,27,860 in the last 24 hours, apart from 97 deaths during this period, taking the death toll so far to 2,036.

The state health authorities have released their Coronavirus bulletin here on Sunday stating that out of 62,912 samples tested, 10,820 individuals have tested Covid-19 positive. Out of the total 24,87,305 samples tested so far in the state, 1,38,712 infected patients have been discharged from various hospitals after recovery, while 87,112 patients are undergoing treatment.

Among new infections, East Godavari has recorded the highest number of 1,543 positive cases, followed by 1,399 in Kurnool, 1,132 in West Godavari, 961 in Visakhapatnam, 881 in Guntur, 858 in Anantapur, 848 in Chittoor, 823 in Kadapa, 696 in Nellore, 452 in Srikakulam, 439 in Krishna, 430 in Prakasam and 358 in Vizianagaram.



With regard to cumulative infections, East Godavari continues to top the list by registering 31,703 cases, followed by 27,431 in Kurnool, 24,107 in Anantapur, 21,718 in Guntur, 19,493 in Visakhapatnam, 18,147 in West Godavari, 17,097 in Chittoor, 13,437 in Kadapa, 13,220 in Nellore, 10,979 in Srikakulam, 10,292 in Krishna, 8,806 in Vizianagaram, 8,535 in Prakasam, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

The rate of recovery among infected patients has been good in Kurnool

■ Out of 62,912 samples tested, 10,820 individuals tested Covid-19 positive.

■ Out of the total 24,87,305 samples tested so far in the state, 1,38,712 infected patients have been discharged from various hospitals after recovery, while 87,112 patients are undergoing treatment

■ East Godavari has recorded the highest number of 1,543 +ve cases

As 17,814 patients have been discharged, followed by 17,447 in East Godavari, 16,927 in Anantapur, 14,160 in West Godavari, 13,711 in Guntur, 10,892 in Visakhapatnam, 9,842 in Chittoor, 6,830 in Kadapa, 6,524 in Nellore, 6,462 in Krishna, 6,361 in Srikakulam, 5,270 in Prakasam, 3,577 in Vizianagaram, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

Of the total 97 deaths, 12 have been reported from Guntur district, followed by 11 in Prakasam, 10 each in Chittoor and West

Godavari, eight each in Anantapur, Kadapa, and Srikakulam, seven in Kurnool, six each in East Godavari and Visakhapatnam, four each in Krishna and Nellore, and three in Vizianagaram. With regard to cumulative deaths, Kurnool has been the worst hit with 245 deaths, followed by 224 in East Godavari, 223 in Guntur, 212 in Krishna, 171 in Chittoor, 170 in Anantapur, 163 in Visakhapatnam, 146 in West Godavari, 122 in Srikakulam, 111 in Prakasam, 95 in Nellore, 83 in Vizianagaram and 71 in Kadapa.

AP has carried out Covid-19 tests on 46,579 samples per million population, registering Covid-19 positive rate of 9.16. Maharashtra tested 21,254 samples per million population with a positive rate of 18.95, while Telangana tested 15,021 samples with a positive rate of 13.13.

The state health authorities have discharged 9,097 infected patients after recovery from various hospitals in the state.

# Tirumala registered 2.38L footfalls in July

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, AUG. 9

As many as 2.38 lakh pilgrims from different places across the country had darshan of Lord Balaji at Tirumala in July, said TTD EO Anil Kumar Singhal.

Disclosing the details to mediapersons here on Sunday, Singhal said that though there was a dip in the number of pilgrims due to increased Coronavirus cases across the country, during the last three days, the number of pilgrims picked up again.

"On August 8, about 8,500 odd pilgrims had darshan against the quota of 9,000 tickets," he observed.

Hundi collections stood at ₹16.69 crore, while the e-hundi collection stood at ₹3.97 crore in the last month. "In Padmavathi temple also, we commenced e-hundi recently and so far, ₹8.15 lakh has been received," Singhal added.

The TTD is contemplating making advertisements free on the Sri Venkateswara Bhakthi channel (SVBC) upon requests from devotees across the world and started an SVBC Trust as it requires ₹3-4 crore annually to maintain the channel. So far, the trust had received ₹2.61 crore in the

# 743 TTD staff tested +ve: EO

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, AUG. 9

As many as 743 employees of the TTD tested positive for Covid-19 since the hill shrine of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala was reopened on June 8 after nearly 80 days of lockdown.

Revealing this to media persons during the monthly "Dial Your EO" programme here on Sunday, TTD executive officer Anil Kumar Singhal said not a single devotee, who visited Tirumala for darshan, had got infected with the virus because of stringent anti-Covid measures taken by the temple management. While 91 employees tested positive for Covid-19 till July 9, about 652 employees fell victim to the virus by August 9. Three have succumbed to the deadly virus so far.

According to the TTD EO, 402 employees have recovered completely and re-joined their duties,

last three weeks.

"After reviewing the financial prospects, we are planning to start an

while 338 are undergoing treatment in TTD Covid centres at Srinivasam, Vishnu Nivasam and Madhavam in Tirupati.

"We are giving the best possible treatment to our employees in the Covid centres. I thank all our employees for rendering services to the visiting pilgrims," he said.

Refuting the allegations that TTD reopened the temple only to fill its coffers, Mr Singhal said that they had taken the decision in June after several requests from devotees with a noble intention to fulfill their longing for darshan of Lord after 80 days of lockdown.

"Initially, everyone appreciated the TTD's move. But soon as cases started increasing in Tirupati, the blame was put on us by some vested interests. We are spending more on checking the spread of Covid-19 than what we are earning now," he clarified.

HD version of SVBC for better telecast of programmes,"Singhal maintained.

# Man beheads son-in-law

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, AUG. 9

In a gruesome incident at DJ Puram village in Rowthulapudi mandal of East Godavari district a man beheaded his son-in-law and handed the severed head to officials at Annavaram police station on Sunday.

The son-in-law reportedly threatened his father-in-law that he would kill his two children if the elder man did not allow him to marry again.

According to Annavaram Circle Inspector Y. Rambabu, Palla Satyanarayana married off his daughter to Pampanaboyina Lakshman (30) of Achampet village in Sankhavaram mandal in 2015. The couple had two daughters. But,

Lakshman's wife reportedly committed suicide 10 months back.

On Saturday, Satyanarayana invited his son-in-law and the grandchildren to present new clothes as a ritual after the death of his daughter.

Lakshman fought with his father-in-law for another marriage, failing which he threatened to kill his two young daughters. An enraged Satyanarayana hacked him with a sword and separated his head and brought it to the police station. Rambabu said that the head and the remaining body were sent to post-mortem.

Annavaram police registered a case.

Meanwhile, it is suspected that in a drunken state, Lakshman had killed his wife but made it appear like a suicide.

# MINOR FIRE MISHAP IN A SHIP BERTHED AT VIZAG

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 9

A minor fire in a ship berthed at West Q 5 in Visakhapatnam port caused panic among the crew and port workers on Sunday.

The vessel BD51 used for changing crew for the major merchant ships was berthed at WQ5 on Saturday.

On Sunday, about 2 pm, smoke was found emanating from the crew change room of the ship.

Immediately, VPT fire brigade rushed to the spot and put out the flames.

Port officials said the smoke originated from oil soaked waste jute and cotton and boiler suits of crews. There's no damage to the vessel, the officials said.

# NO FANFARE OR HUGE IDOLS FOR VINAYAKA CHAVITI

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, AUG. 9

In the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, higher officials of the civic body and police have instructed the Tirupati Varasiddi Vinayaka Utsav Committee to use only clay idols of Vinayaka and limit the size to only 2 feet.

They were also told to limit the number of centres and ensure low key celebrations.

The elected representatives and officials held a meeting with the members of Utsav Committee in Tirupati.

# Tribals told to know of rights

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, AUG. 9

District collector Chevuri Hariikiran called on the tribal communities to know about their rights and laws framed for their welfare in the Constitution.

He was speaking at a programme held by the District Tribal Welfare Department on the occasion of World Tribal Day

on Sunday.

The collector, who was the chief guest at the programme, said that the authorities should work hard to ensure that the welfare schemes provided by the state government for the development of the tribals reached the beneficiaries.

He said that the role of tribals in the preservation of our ancient culture and

traditions was worth appreciating.

The state government has introduced several welfare schemes through the Tribal Welfare Department. There are 4 per cent of tribals in the district population. The tribal welfare schemes have been benefiting the Erukula, Lambadi and other communities in the district.

# Super speciality hospital in Agency

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, AUG. 9

West Godavari district collector Revu Muthyala Raju said that the government had sanctioned a super speciality hospital in the Agency area which would be built at a cost of ₹75 crore and the officials are searching for 10 acres of land for it.

He participated in the International Adivasi Day at Kota Ramachandrapuram in ITDA office on Sunday. He said that steps were being taken for improving infrastructure in the Agency area by developing roads and other facilities.

He said that the tribal people were facing several hardships to get treatment for their ailments. He said that two Covid Care Centres have been set up in Tadepalligudem and Eluru and another Covid Centre

would be set up at Buttayigudem with a ventilator facility. He suggested the tribal people wear masks, maintain social distance and wash their hands with soaps, when they go outside.

Polavaram MLA T. Balaraju said that employment opportunities would be provided to the tribal youth soon.

At Rampachodavaram, East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy called upon the tribal people to make efforts to develop themselves by making use of the laws and the resources.

He said that third phase of Forest Rights Pattas would be distributed to the beneficiaries on October 2 on Gandhi Jayanti. He praised the tribal women who were working in Sri City in Chittoor in firms manufacturing cell phones.

# Anantapur continues to see a spike in Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, AUG. 9

Anantapur continued to witness a surge in the number of Corona cases. Further, the death toll rose during the last one week.

On Sunday, at least 8 Covid patients died at RDT Bathalapalli and Covid KIMS Saveria Hospitals. The total deaths reported stood at 170 so far.

About 858 new cases were recorded and the tally reached 24,107 in the district. Official sources said 7,010

■ Majority of the cases are from Anantapur Municipal Corporation area and the situation was creating panic among the people in Kadiri, Guntakal and Puttaparthi

cases were active and being provided treatment at Covid hospitals and quarantine centres.

A majority of the cases are recorded from Anantapur Municipal Corporation area and the situation was creating panic among the people in Kadiri, Guntakal and

Puttaparthi areas.

Anantapur headquarters and Puttaparthi observed curfew on Sunday.

As part of the curfew, no shops, except medical shops, were permitted to open throughout the day.

Collector Gandham Chandrudu said at least 3,500 tests were being done through rapid antigen kits every day at all parts of the district. About 670 patients were discharged from covid hospitals and quarantine centres in the district on Sunday.

# JAC: PROTECT ADIVASIS FROM VIRUS THREAT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 9

Adivasi organisations observed World Indigenous People's Day at several places in north coastal Andhra on Sunday.

Members of Joint Action Committee of Adivasi organisations hoisted the flag at Girijana Students Union Library in Paderu where several speakers expressed their concern over the fast spreading Coronavirus in the Agency.

"Covid is threatening the very existence of Adivasis and hence the government should pay special attention as the existing medical institutions and health officials are not adequate to face the challenges," said JAC convener Rama Rao Dora. He also appealed to the government to follow the Unesco guidelines in protection of Adivasis.

Paderu MLA, in a meeting held in ITDA in the presence of collector V. Vinay Chand and Araku MLA Chetti Palguna, asked the government to check illegal mining that has been going on since years. She also told the collector to improve road network, drinking water supply and internet services in the Agency areas. Araku Valley MLA Chetti Palguna told the collector that the recent rains caused land slip in many areas disrupting the traffic. He said the roads should be restored to ensure supply of essentials.



## SHORT TAKES

MAN KILLED IN  
TIGER ATTACK IN  
CHANDRAPUR

**Chandrapur, Aug. 9:** A shepherd has been killed by a tiger in the Bramhapuri forest range in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, an official said on Sunday.

The incident occurred on Saturday evening when the victim, Annaji Kuthe, was grazing cattle, he said, adding that the body was spotted by villagers in night. A total of 18 people have been killed in Chandrapur district so far this year by tigers, the official said. In 2019, 23 people had fallen prey to big cats.

BJP RIDDEN WITH  
FACTIONALISM,  
SAYS GEHLOT

**Jaipur, Aug. 9:** Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Sunday questioned the shifting of BJP MLAs to Gujarat, saying the opposition party was ridden with factionalism.

His comments came in the wake of the BJP herding its 18 MLAs in the past two days to party-ruled Gujarat ahead of the Rajasthan assembly session beginning August 14. The BJP had claimed that their MLAs were being harassed by police and the administration at the behest of the Congress government in the state.

Gehlot, on the other hand, defended the stay of Congress legislators at a Jaisalmer hotel, saying the party required to keep them together to thwart horse-trading. "But, what is worrying the BJP? They are herding their legislators to three-four places. I see a big split in them," Gehlot told reporters in Jaisalmer.

Lashing out at the opposition party, Gehlot said the "tradition they are setting up is dangerous to democracy." He said while BJP is trying to topple his government, the government is making efforts to save lives amid the Coronavirus crisis. Unfortunately, such people sitting in power are weakening democracy, which we saved for the past 70 years, Gehlot said.

11 PAK MIGRANTS  
FOUND DEAD IN  
RAJASTHAN

**Jodhpur, Aug. 9:** Eleven members of a family of Pakistan Hindu migrants were found dead at a farm in Rajasthan's Jodhpur district on Sunday morning, police said. A member of the family, however, was found alive outside the hut they lived at Lodta village of the Dechu area, over 100 km away from Jodhpur city, an officer said.

"But he claimed to have no idea about the incident, which believed to have happened in the night," said Superintendent of Police (Rural) Rahul Barhat. "We are yet to ascertain the cause and means of death. They appeared to have committed suicide by consuming some chemical in the night," Barhat said.

He said there was a smell of some chemical in the hut, suggesting they consumed something. The family belonging to the Bhil community had come to India from Pakistan's Sindh province in 2015 on a long-term visa. They had been living at the Lodta village farm, which they had hired for farming, for the past six months.

ED GRILLS RHEA'S  
BROTHER FOR  
18 HOURS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI, AUG. 9

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) questioned Showik Chakraborty, brother of actor Rhea Chakraborty, for about 18 hours and has summoned the actress again for questioning on Monday in connection with the money laundering case linked to the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput.

Following questioning of Rhea on Friday, the agency is probing the trail of ₹2.5 crore worth fixed deposit of the late actor, to ascertain if it was diverted to Chakraborty. The interrogation has hinted towards the possibility of the money having been allegedly siphoned off with the help of her chartered accountant (CA).

The ED officials said the responses given by the brother sister duo was largely incomplete that gave rise to many questions. The team questioning them has hence sought for another round of questioning and Chakraborty has again been summoned on Monday.

## PMO sets deadline for Naga talks

Sources stated that an accord will be signed in September after surrendering weapons

MANOJ ANAND | DC  
GUWAHATI, AUG. 9

The Centre has decided to conclude the decades-old peace talks with the NSCN (I-M) and NNPGs (Naga National Political Groups) in Nagaland by September this year, for which a process of thrashing out differences over some of the minor rhetorical issues will start next week in meetings in New Delhi between the collective leadership of the NSCN (I-M) and the Prime Minister's special envoy for Naga talks R.N. Ravi, who is also the governor of Nagaland.

Saying that the Prime Minister's Office had set a September deadline for the final settlement of all Naga political issues, authoritative security sources told this newspaper that the date and place of signing of the historic peace accord, bringing an end to one of India's oldest armed insurgencies, is

yet to be decided.

Saying that Mr Ravi was leaving for New Delhi from Kohima on Tuesday, the sources said the NSCN (I-M) delegation has already reached New Delhi for the talks. Saying that a consensus had already been created on a majority of the issues, apart from the demand of for a separate flag and constitution, the sources said the NSCN (I-M) was also insisting on some changes in the "language" of the final draft agreement that will be come up for discussion at the meeting.

Indicating that the focus of the talks in New Delhi would also be to work out the date and place for signing of the peace accord, the sources said the interlocutor would also be asking the Naga rebel groups to submit the list of cadres and inventory of arms and ammunition. Stating that an accord will be signed after the surrender of the

● **THE SECURITY** sources said the interlocutor and NSCN (I-M) negotiators may have more than one or two rounds of meetings before finalisation of the modalities of the Naga pact for which the NSCN (I-M), the working committee of Naga National Political Groups and other stakeholders will be the signatories.

● **SAYING THAT** the Prime Minister's Office had set a September deadline for the final settlement of all Naga political issues

inventory of weapons by the cadres, the sources said the Union home ministry, in consultation with the interlocutor, was also preparing a rehabilitation package for the Naga rebels.

Clarifying that the Covid-19 situation had delayed the peace process, the sources said the government had already rejected the demand for a separate flag and constitution for Nagaland, but the NSCN (I-M) was still insisting on discussing these issues. Saying these two contentious issues may be left for negotiations between the state and Central governments after the signing of the accord, the sources said a vested interest group was working overtime to derail the peace process. "As Naga peace talks started in 1997, a vested interest group is already developed and active. They know they can't derail the peace process so they have been working hard to ensure that the status quo is maintained," the sources said, while rejecting media reports making claims such as a change of interlocutor to the NSCN (I-M) refusing to join the talks, etc.

About the talks being held in New Delhi instead of Kohima, the sources said the decision to hold the talks in New Delhi was taken by Mr Ravi given the health issues of 86-year-old NSCN (I-M) general secretary Th Muivah, who is now under treatment in New Delhi.

The security sources said the interlocutor and NSCN (I-M) negotiators may have more than one or two rounds of meetings before finalisation of the modalities of the Naga pact for which the NSCN (I-M), the working committee of Naga National Political Groups and other stakeholders will be the signatories.

It is significant that the Naga insurgency has been one of India's oldest conflicts. Right from Independence, the Naga groups have asserted their distinct identity and sought to break away from the Indian Union. Led by Angami Zipo

Phizo, the movement for secession took a violent turn in the 1950s. When some elements signed a peace accord with the government, a more radical outfit — the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) — was set up under the leadership of T. Muivah, Isak Swu and S.S. Khaplang. The group later split.

In 1997, New Delhi began engaging closely with the NSCN, led by Isak and Muivah (I-M). A ceasefire was declared. Multiple rounds of talks were held. Violence dipped — even though the insurgents maintained a parallel government in the state. And in August 2015, a framework agreement was signed that has not only managed to neutralise the Naga extremists but also shattered the backbone of the insurgency across the entire Northeast. A distinct evolution in the Naga position is visible, the security sources added.

CONG LEADER  
BOOKED FOR  
TAMPERING  
PM'S PICTURE

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, AUG. 9

Police in Indore on Sunday lodged an FIR against former minister and Madhya Pradesh Congress unit working president, Jitu Patwari, for portraying Prime Minister Narendra Modi in poor light by posting a morphed photograph of him in social media and making 'objectionable' remarks against him.

Police booked the Congress leader, said to be close to ex-AICC president, Rahul Gandhi, under sections 188 (Disobedience to official order) and 464 (making a false document) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) following a complaint lodged by Indore Lok Sabha member, Shankar Lalwani, and several other BJP leaders.

## Token of appreciation



Internationally acclaimed sand artist Narayan Sahu pays tribute to Doctors, nurses and police for their dedicated and valuable service round the clock during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic through his sand artwork at phoenix mills palladam lower parel in Mumbai on Sunday.

— RAJESH JADHAV

Virus cases in India  
cross 22-lakh mark

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, AUG. 9

India crossed the 22 lakh cases mark on Sunday. On Saturday, India had recorded 65,788 cases, the highest so far on a given day.

The biggest contributors to the spike were Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh both of which reported over 10,000 cases in a single day while numbers are rising in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar and West Bengal. Delhi, where the number of cases has fallen impressively, is again reporting a high number of cases. However, Delhi health minister said the rise in Delhi numbers is due to persons from outside the city coming to the capital for testing and treatment which is leading to the increase in numbers.

Union health ministry officials said such high numbers of positive cases are due to higher testing. In a new high, India has scaled the peak of testing more than 7 lakh people in a single day as 7,19,364 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours. India

has so far conducted 2, 41, 06, 535 tests.

"Such high levels of testing will also lead to a high number of daily positive cases. However, states have been advised to firmly focus on comprehensive tracking, prompt isolation and effective treatment. Several meetings in the past week have engaged with states showing higher fatality rates," said union health ministry officials.

They added that such an approach of high testing has started showing results and recoveries are also increasing exponentially. India recorded the highest number of recoveries in a single day with 53,879 patients recovered and discharged on Saturday. With this, the total number of recovered cases has touched another high of 14,80,884 on Sunday.

"This is more than twice the number of active cases (6,28,747). The number of recovered cases is 2.36 times the active cases, which are all under medical attention either in home isolation or in hospitals," officials said.

Cong targets PM, launches  
employment programme

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, AUG. 9

Targeting Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, the Congress on Sunday launched a Rozgar Do (provide employment) programme.

Congress leader, Rahul Gandhi, accused the Modi government of failing to meet its promise of jobs for two crore people every year and then enacting policies that 'destroyed India's economic structure' and left crores without jobs.

In a 90-second video posted on his Twitter account, Gandhi launched the Rozgar Do campaign and urged young people without jobs, as well as others, to raise their voices, speak out and 'awaken the gov-

ernment from its slumber.'

"When Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, he promised the youth of this country that he would give employment to two crore people every year. He sold them a very big dream. The truth is 14 crore people have been made jobless by Narendra Modi's policies," said Gandhi.

He further added, "Why did this happen? Because of wrong policies - demonetisation, GST and then the lockdown. Because of these three, the government has destroyed India's economic structure. The truth now is India cannot give its youth jobs."

Several leaders of the Congress also shared videos on social media

demanding that Modi should give employment to the youth. In the last couple of weeks, the Congress claimed that around 12 crore people lost jobs in April alone, a month into the first lockdown, according to estimates by the private think tank, the centre for monitoring Indian economy (CMIE).

Unemployment in India stood at 11 per cent in June down from 23.5 per cent the previous month - according to data released by CMIE that said over 46 crore people were looking for jobs that month.

The CMIE also said that unemployment levels 'pre-lockdown' were 8.5 per cent. The Congress has added unemployment as one of the major failures of the Modi government.

## ₹1 lakh-cr PM fund for agri-infra

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WITH AGENCY INPUTS  
NEW DELHI, AUG. 9

The Centre on Sunday announced a financing facility of ₹1 lakh crore under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund for agri-entrepreneurs, start-ups, agri-tech players and farmer groups for nurturing farm assets and post-harvest management.

The fund, which was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is part of the government's 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' initiative to make farmers self-reliant.

These assets will enable farmers to get greater value for their produce, as they will be able to store and sell at higher prices, reduce wastage, and increase processing and value addition, the government said.

"Today, our farmers have a choice. If he wants to

● **THE FUND**, which was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is part of the government's 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' initiative to make farmers self-reliant.

deal with his produce in his field, he can. Or he can directly connect with the warehouse or whoever pays the higher price," Modi said, saying the agriculture sector will benefit a great deal.

A loan amount of ₹1 lakh crore will be made available to farmers over a period of four years.

While ₹10,000 crores will be made available between 2020 and 2021, ₹30,000 crore will be provided in each of the remaining three years. Farmers will also get a subsidy of three per cent on interest.

The PM also released the

sixth instalment of ₹17,100 crores to the bank accounts of over 8.55 crore farmer beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) scheme.

Under the scheme, launched in 2018 and funded by the Centre, each farmer gets direct support of up to ₹6,000 a year as minimum income support.

The Prime Minister reiterated that India has a huge opportunity to invest in post-harvest management solutions like warehousing, cold chain and food processing, and build a global presence in areas such as organic and fortified foods.

He also mentioned that this scheme provides a good opportunity for start-ups in agriculture to avail the benefits and scale their operations, thereby creating an ecosystem that reaches farmers in every

corner of the country. Modi also interacted with farmers from Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh who are among the initial beneficiaries of the credit facility under this new fund through Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) for creating post-harvest facilities.

Citing reasons for poor investment in agri-infrastructure, the prime minister said there was "negligible" investment due to legal hurdles in the wake of a provision of stock limit under the Essential Commodities (EC) Act. "Now, we have surplus production. The stock limit not only affects the farmers but also the country's economy and consumers. But surprisingly the law (EC Act) was still continuing when we have become a surplus producing nation. This law is not required now," he said.

## ISRO'S GOAL Four astronauts will go into space for seven-day mission

## Cosmonauts finish phase-1 Gaganyaan training

AKSHAYA KUMAR  
SAHOO | DC  
BHUBANESWAR AUG. 9

Odisha-born Indian Air Force (IAF) wing commander, Nikhil Rath, along with his other co-pilots has completed the first phase of training for the country's first manned mission to space called Gaganyaan.

Rath, who hails from Bolangir, is among the four selected pilots for the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Gaganyaan, billed for 2022. He has completed

his training at Gagarin cosmonaut training centre in Russia on crew actions in the event of an abnormal descent module landing.

According to a statement by the Russian space corporation, Roscosmos, Rath, along with his co-pilots, have completed training on crew actions in all-weather and all terrain modules. "They were trained on landing on wooded and marshy areas in winter (February), on the water surfaces (June) and in the steppe in summer (July)



Nikhil Rath

in complete adherence of Covid-19 safety protocols," Roscosmos said.

"The programme for Indian cosmonauts also

● **THE PROGRAMME** for Indian cosmonauts also includes training in a centrifuge and in a hyperbaric chamber to prepare their organisms for sustainingspaceflight factors, such as G-force, hypoxia and pressure drops.

includes training in a centrifuge and in a hyperbaric chamber to prepare their organisms for sustainingspaceflight fac-

tors, such as G-force, hypoxia and pressure drops. These training sessions are to be held in the near future. All of the Indian cosmonauts are in good health and are determined to continue their training," the statement added.

If everything follows schedule, the astronauts will go to space for a seven-day mission.

If the space project succeeds India will be the fourth nation to send astronauts to space after the United States, Russia and China.

Rape accused  
held after 34 yrs

DC CORRESPONDENT  
BHOPAL, AUG. 9

Police in Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh on Sunday arrested a rape accused who had absconded after committing the crime 34 years ago.

The accused, Suresh Pathak (62), was arrested in Gwalior bus stand early on Sunday morning following a tip off by a local police informer, police said.

According to the police, the accused, a resident of Dehri under Barason

police station in Bhind district, had been living in Mathura, Vrindavan and Hardwar in guise of a 'sadhu' for the last 33 years after fleeing Madhya Pradesh soon after he committed the crime in 1986.

He returned to Gwalior in 2019 thinking that his case may have been buried in police files and forgotten.

Police has circulated his photographs in all police stations in the state recently as a part of drive to solve old cases.



## IN BRIEF

**Hungary bus crash: 1 dead**

**Budapest:** One man died and three people, including a young child, were seriously injured when a tourist bus crashed into a ditch on the side of a highway in Hungary, police and rescue officials said Sunday. The incident happened on the M5 highway in the city of Kiskunfelegyhaza, about 115 kilometres (71 miles) east of Budapest, the capital. Police said the vehicle was a Polish tourist bus. A spokesman for the National Rescue Service said a 35-year-old man died at the scene and 34 people were injured. Three people who suffered serious injuries, including a child about five years old. Two helicopters and 14 ambulances were taking the injured to hospitals. The bus was travelling toward Budapest and the crash happened around 6:30 a.m.

**Czech apartment blaze kills 11**

**Prague:** At least 11 people have been killed and 10 others injured in an apartment building fire in the northeastern Czech Republic, officials said Saturday, with some suggesting that the fire could be arson. Police said the fire hit the 11th floor of the 13-story building in the afternoon in the town of Bohumin. Firefighters spokesman Lukas Popp told local media that six people, three adults and three children, were killed in an 11th-floor apartment. The other five died after trying to escape from the building "in a panic" by jumping from the windows on the 12th floor, Interior Minister Jan Hamacek told Czech public radio. Hamacek and the head of the regional government, Ivo Vondrak, suggested the fire was likely intentionally set. Regional firefighter chief Vladimir Vleck said it was unusual how quickly the fire spread through the apartment.

**30 perish in S. Korea floods**

**Seoul:** Landslides and flooding triggered by days of heavy rain in South Korea have left at least 30 people dead and 12 missing, officials said Sunday, warning of more downpours. Torrential rain has wreaked havoc across the country since the beginning of the month, but nearly half of the deaths occurred in the past three days, according to the Ministry of the Interior and Safety. Since Friday more than 3,700 people have been displaced from their homes after flooding in the country's hardest-hit southern region. In all, nearly 6,000 people have been evacuated from their homes across the country this month, with about 4,600 of them staying at temporary shelters. Among the victims was a man in his 80s who was found dead after he was buried in a landslide with his tractor. A 61-year-old man and a 59-year-old woman were killed after their home was swallowed by a landslide. Authorities have issued landslide warnings for 24 regions.

**3 DAYS OF RAIN KILLS 50 IN PAKISTAN**

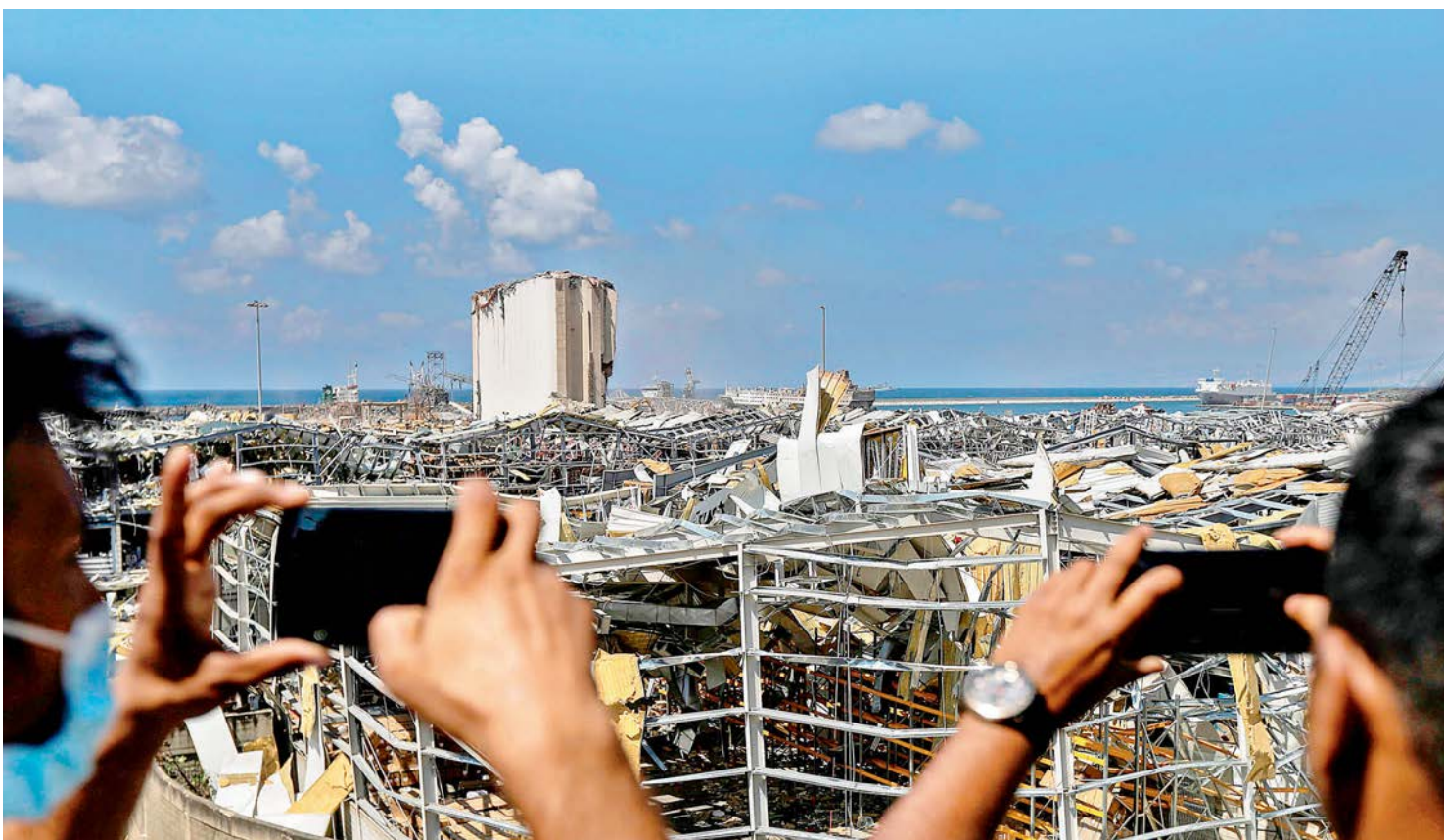
**Karachi, Aug. 9:** Three days of heavy monsoon rains triggering flash floods killed at least 50 people in various parts of Pakistan, as troops with boats rushed to a flood-affected district in the country's southern Sindh province Sunday to evacuate people to safer places.

Every year, many cities in Pakistan struggle to cope with the annual monsoon deluge, drawing criticism about poor planning. The monsoon season runs from July through September, during which swelling rivers cause damage to crops and infrastructure.

According to Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority, 19 people were killed in rain-related incidents in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 12 in southern Sindh province, 8 in Punjab province and 10 in the country's scenic northern Gilgit Baltistan region in the past three days.

Rains also partially damaged about 100 homes and caused a breach in a main flooded canal, inundating villages in Sindh province. Troops used boats to rescue stranded people and move them to safer places.

It said a medical camp was also established and food was being provided to the rescued people. Heavy rains also lashed many districts in Baluchistan province, damaging homes. According to local media reports, at least eight people were killed in Baluchistan because of rains and flash flooding.



People take photos from atop a bridge overlooking the damaged port of Lebanon's capital Beirut and its grain silos on Sunday, in the aftermath of a colossal explosion that occurred Tuesday due to a huge pile of ammonium nitrate that had languished for years at a port warehouse. — AFP

# Violence, chaos must not prevail in Lebanon: Macron

**French Prez urges speedy global response after deadly Beirut port blast**

**Paris, Aug. 9:** French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday said violence and chaos must not prevail in Lebanon as he opened a UN-backed aid conference for the country rocked by angry protests over negligence blamed for the deadly Beirut port blast.

"It is up to the authorities of the country to act so that the country does not sink, and to respond to the aspirations that the Lebanese people are expressing right now, legitimately, in the streets of Beirut," Macron said.

"We must all work together to ensure that neither violence nor chaos prevails," he added. "It is the future of Lebanon that is at stake." Macron on Sunday called for speedy international backing for disaster-struck Lebanon and urged its leaders to prevent "chaos" as he opened an emergency aid conference following Beirut's deadly port blast.

Macron hosted US President Donald Trump and other world leaders for the virtual conference to drum up aid for Lebanon, as the UN said some \$117 million will be needed over the next three months for the emergency response. "The objective today is to act quickly and effectively to coordinate our aid on the ground so that it goes as efficiently as possible to the Lebanese people," Macron told the conference also attended by

## Lebanon information minister quits in first govt resignation

**Beirut, Aug. 9:** Lebanon's information minister Manal Abdel Samad on Sunday quit in the first government resignation since a deadly port blast killed more than 150 people and destroyed swathes of the capital. "After the enormous Beirut catastrophe, I announce my resignation from government," she said in a statement carried by local media, apologising to the Lebanese public for failing them.

The head of Lebanon's Maronite church meanwhile called on the entire government to step down over the August 4 explosion, a blast widely seen as shocking proof of the rot at the core of the state apparatus. Lebanese protest-

ers enraged by the blast vowed to rally again after a night of street clashes in which they stormed several ministries.

Maronite patriarch Beshara Rai joined the chorus of people pressing Prime

Minister Hassan Diab's cabinet to step down over a blast he said could be "described as a crime against humanity". "It is not enough for a lawmaker to resign here or a minister to resign there," Rai said in a Sunday sermon.

"It is necessary, out of sensitivity to the feelings of the Lebanese and the immense responsibility required, for the entire government to resign, because it is incapable of moving the country forward."

Rai echoed calls by Diab for early parliamentary polls — a long-standing demand of a protest movement that began in October, demanding the removal of a political class deemed inept and corrupt. — AFP

## BLAST CRATER 43 METRES DEEP, SAYS OFFICIAL

**Beirut, Aug. 9:** The huge chemical explosion that hit Beirut's port, devastating large parts of the Lebanese capital and claiming over 150 lives, left a 43-metre (141 foot) deep crater, a security official said Sunday.

The blast Tuesday, which was felt across the country and as far as the island of Cyprus, was recorded by the sensors of the American Institute of Geophysics (USGS) as having the power of a magnitude 3.3 earthquake.

It was triggered by a fire in a port warehouse, where a huge shipment of hazardous ammonium nitrate, a chemical that can be used as a fertiliser or as an explosive, had languished for years, according to authorities.

The huge blast also wounded at least 6,000 people and displaced more than 300,000 from their destroyed or damaged homes.

The revelation that the chemicals had languished for years like a ticking time-bomb in the heart of the capital has served as shocking proof to many Lebanese of the rot at the core of the state apparatus. — AFP

# Mauritius containing oil spill in sea

**Port Louis, Aug. 9:** Police in Mauritius on Sunday prepared to board a grounded ship leaking tonnes of oil into its crystal-clear waters, as clean-up crews confronted a growing ecological disaster on the archipelago's pristine shores. The bulk carrier MV Wakashio has been seeping fuel into a protected marine park boasting unspoiled coral reefs, mangrove forests and endangered species, prompting Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth to declare an environmental emergency

and appeal for international help.

Attempts to stabilise the stricken vessel, which ran aground on July 25 but only started leaking oil this week, and pump 4,000 tonnes of fuel from its hold have failed, and local authorities fear rough seas could further rupture the tanker.

Hundreds of volunteers, many smeared head-to-toe in black sludge, are marshalling along the coastline, stringing together miles of makeshift cordons in a desperate attempt to

hold back the oily tide. But already, thick muck has inundated the island nation's unspoiled lagoons, marine habitats and white-sand beaches, causing unprecedented damage to the fragile coastal ecosystem upon which Mauritius and its economy relies.

"People have realised that they need to take things into their hands. We are here to protect our fauna and flora," said Ashok Subron, an environmental activist at Mahebourg, one of the worst-hit areas. Police said Sunday they would execute a search warrant granted by

a Mauritius court to board the Wakashio and seize items of interest, including the ship's log book and communication exchanges, as part of its investigation into the accident.

The ship's captain, a 58-year-old Indian national, will accompany officers on the search, police officials said.

Twenty crew members evacuated safely from the Japanese-owned but Panamanian-flagged ship when it ran aground are under surveillance. — AFP

## HONOURING | DEAD

**City mayor raises concern that nuclear countries had retreated from disarmament efforts**

# Nagasaki urges nuke ban on 75th anniv of A-bombing

**Nagasaki, Aug. 9:** The Japanese city of Nagasaki on Sunday marked its 75th anniversary of the US atomic bombing, with the mayor and dwindling survivors urging world leaders including their own to do more for a nuclear weapons ban.

At 11:02 a.m., the moment the B-29 bomber Bockscar dropped a 4.5-ton (10,000-pound) plutonium bomb dubbed "Fat Man", Nagasaki survivors and other participants stood in a minute of silence to honour more than 70,000 dead.

The Aug. 9, 1945, bombing came three days after

the United States dropped its first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the world's first ever nuclear attack that killed 140,000. On Aug. 15, Japan surrendered, ending World War II.

At the event at Nagasaki Peace Park, scaled down because of the coronavirus pandemic, Mayor Tomihisa Taue read a peace declaration in which he raised concern that nuclear states had in recent years retreated from disarmament efforts.

Instead, they are upgrading and miniaturising nuclear weapons for easier use, he said. Taue singled

out the US and Russia for increasing risks by scrapping the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

"As a result, the threat of nuclear weapons being used is increasingly becoming real," Taue said. Noting that the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty entered into force 50 years ago, Taue urged the US and Russia to show a (asterisk)workable way (asterisk) towards their nuclear disarmament at the NPT review process next year.

He said that "the true horror of nuclear weapons has not yet been adequately conveyed to the world at

large" despite struggle and efforts by hibakusha, or atomic bombing survivors, to make Nagasaki the last place of the tragedy.

He also urged Japan's government and lawmakers to quickly sign the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

After taking part in the ceremony, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe criticised the treaty for not being realistic. None of the nuclear states has joined, and it is not widely supported even by non-nuclear states, he said. "The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted

without taking into consideration the reality of the harsh national security environment," Abe said at a news conference.

"I must say the treaty is different from Japan's position and approach" even though they share the same goal of abolishing nuclear weapons, he said.

Abe has repeatedly refused to sign the treaty. He reiterated that Japan's approach is not to take sides but to serve as a bridge between nuclear and non-nuclear states to encourage dialogue to achieve a total nuclear ban. — AP

# Germany troop pullout: Pompeo eyes east Europe

**Washington, Aug. 9:** As President Donald Trump orders US troops out of Germany and faces a tough re-election battle, his top diplomat, Mike Pompeo, is heading to friendly climes in Central and Eastern Europe.

Pompeo on Tuesday opens a five-day trip that will terminate in close ally Poland, which is eager to welcome some of the US troops leaving Germany to guard against historic adversary Russia. He will also travel to the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Austria where he is expected to press his campaign for nations to shun Huawei, the Chinese telecom giant considered a threat by Washington as it takes a lead in fifth-generation internet.

In Slovenia, where he will be the first US secretary of state to visit since 2001, Pompeo will on Thursday sign an agreement on 5G, officials said without previewing details. Pompeo's trip comes weeks after the Pentagon said the United States would bring home some 6,400 military personnel from Germany and shift nearly 5,600 more to other NATO allies, including Italy and Belgium.

Trump has a tense relationship with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who declined his invitation for a Group of Seven summit in Washington in the middle of the Coronavirus pandemic, and accuses Europe's largest economy of unfair trading practices.

"What is most significant about this trip is the places the secretary is not going to," said Ian Lesser, the Brussels-based vice president of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

"If the secretary was going to address the core issues in transatlantic rela-

## HIGHEST LEVEL U.S. VISIT TO TAIWAN BEGINS

**Taipei, Aug. 9:** A senior member of US President Donald Trump's administration landed in Taiwan Sunday for Washington's highest level visit since switching diplomatic recognition to China in 1979, a trip Beijing has condemned. During the three-day visit Health Secretary Alex Azar will meet President Tsai Ing-wen, who advocates Taiwan being recognised as a sovereign nation and is loathed by China's leaders.

Tsai's office said the meeting would take place Monday morning. Azar is the most senior US cabinet member to visit Taiwan in decades and his visit comes as relations between the world's two biggest economic powers plunge to historic lows.

In recent days, Trump has ordered sweeping restrictions on popular Chinese apps TikTok and WeChat and the US Treasury Department slapped sanctions on Hong Kong's leader over a tough law that curbs dissent.

Washington has billed the Taiwan trip as an opportunity to learn from the island's fight against the Coronavirus. — AFP

tions at the moment, he would be making stops in Brussels, Paris and Berlin." Lesser said that the troop repositioning out of Germany was unlikely to be a major issue for US voters. "What does have some political resonance is how a senior American official is received when he or she goes to Europe," he said. — AFP

# Mahinda Rajapaksa sworn in Lanka PM

**Colombo, Aug. 9:** Sri Lanka's former President Mahinda Rajapaksa was sworn in as the prime minister for the fourth time Sunday after his party secured a landslide victory in parliamentary elections that cemented his family's hold on power. Rajapaksa took oath before his younger brother, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, at a prominent Buddhist temple on the outskirts of the capital Colombo. Mahinda Rajapaksa served as the island nation's president from 2005 to 2015 and is highly popular among the ethnic majority Sinhalese for ending the country's 25-year civil war against Tamil rebels in 2009.

He was first elected prime minister in 2004 and again appointed for brief periods in 2018 and 2019. Sri Lanka People's Front — the party led by the Rajapaksa brothers — won 145 seats in the 225-member Parliament in the election last Wednesday. Its main opponent obtained only 54 seats.

A party representing ethnic minority Tamils won 10 seats, and 16 others were split among 12 small parties. The victory gave the Rajapaksa brothers nearly the two-third majority of seats requir-



Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (R) swears in elder brother Mahinda Rajapaksa (L) as Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister in Colombo on Sunday. — AFP

ed to make constitutional changes that could strengthen dynastic rule in the country. This time, five members of the Rajapaksa family have been elected as lawmakers — Rajapaksa, his son Namal, the eldest brother Chamal and his son Sashindra, and a nephew, Nipuna Ranawaka. The brothers need 150 seats to be able to change the constitution.

At least four small parties collaborate with the Rajapaksas' party, so they appear to have mustered that support. However, analysts say any attempt by Gotabaya Rajapaksa to push for changes that will strengthen presidential powers at the expense of the prime minister may trigger sibling rivalry. — AP



Japanese PM Shinzo Abe lays a wreath to mark the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, at the Nagasaki Peace Park on Sunday. — AFP



## DECCAN Chronicle

10 AUGUST 2020

### Kozhikode highlights air safety imperative

It would be some time before we get to know what led to crashlanding of the Air India Express flight at Kozhikode airport on Friday, which claimed the life of 18 passengers including the pilot and the co-pilot. The Director-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has already initiated an investigation into the accident in which the aircraft, part of the Vande Bharat Mission, carrying 191 passengers including the crew skidded off the runway and ran into a ditch. Inclement weather and poor visibility coupled with human error have been cited as early reasons but the whole truth will come out only when the investigation is completed. It should also reveal if the systems were made to make amends for the errors that caused a similar accident in Mangaluru airport 10 years ago.

An aircraft is a magnificent engineering product which has evolved over a century and air travel is the safest mode of transport if we consider the number of people using it. This is basically because it is system-dependent, and recalibrates itself if something goes wrong anywhere in the system. It is imperative on the part of the regulators and the authorities to pick lessons from the Kozhikode incident and improve it further.

While awaiting the investigation report, we must comment on the grace, presence of mind, valour and selflessness, which were on display at Kozhikode immediately after the mishap. The local residents of the nearby Kondotty town in Malappuram district rushed to the accident site, launched the rescue operations in no time and, with the help of the rescue team from the airport, completed the job in about less than two hours. They evacuated all the passengers and rushed them to the nearby hospitals despite knowing the fact that they are operating in a Covid containment zone and that many of the passengers could have been infected with the Coronavirus. The timely intervention has considerably reduced the casualty, according to doctors. The social media was awash with photographs of youngsters rushing to hospitals and queuing up to donate blood for people of whom they have not heard before.

That, however, should bring certain other disturbing facts to the attention of the government. The DGCA had banned the operation of wide-bodied aircraft under Code E from May 2015 after an inspection by the regulator flagged safety concerns and later in 2018 allowed the same. The aircraft that met with the accident does not belong to that class but experts have already called for a reassessment of the safety standards. The tabletop airport, which is traditionally considered accident prone, needs expansion of its runway and the proposal to acquire about 100 acres for the project has been hanging fire for long. The Airports Authority of India, which runs the airport, and the government of Kerala must act in tandem, discuss it with the people and their representatives and complete the project after meeting their demands at the earliest so that all types of aircraft can have safe landing there.

### Setback for Tamils, Muslims

The overwhelming victory of Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) in the August 5 elections to the island nation's Parliament is a triumph of Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism and a consolidation of power by the Rajapaksa family. It just follows a popular political trend across the globe, wherein people with power and privilege hunger for more power and more privilege and hand over governments on a platter to politicians whom they believe would do that for them.

In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese perhaps chose the Rajapaksa family because they were enamored by the way prominent brothers, Mahinda and Gotabaya, ruthlessly quelled the LTTE in 2009. Or do the people believe that as a large family of rulers — another brother Basil and Nirmal, son of Mahinda, included — the Rajapaksas would do a better job in showing minorities their place?

Whatever it is, political trends that lead to the concentration of power in the hands of a family yanks democracy off the feet of nations. With such a brute majority in Parliament, the brothers are only likely to make sweeping constitutional changes to enhance the authority of the President and to continue ruling the country for a longer time. There are also indications that they would fashion the government on the lines of a military regime. Already Gotabaya, who came in as President in November, has appointed many serving and former military officers to key bureaucratic posts.

Since Gotabaya stormed into government by stoking ethnic Sinhala nationalism and SLPP has now romped home exemplifying such a majoritarian agenda, the ruling family would have no qualms about subjugating the minorities, Muslims and Tamils in particular. And when the minorities look up to the government for an assurance to realise their legitimate aspirations, the pardoning of military officers charged with war crimes during the end of the civil war in 2009 by the Rajapaksas can be least assuring.

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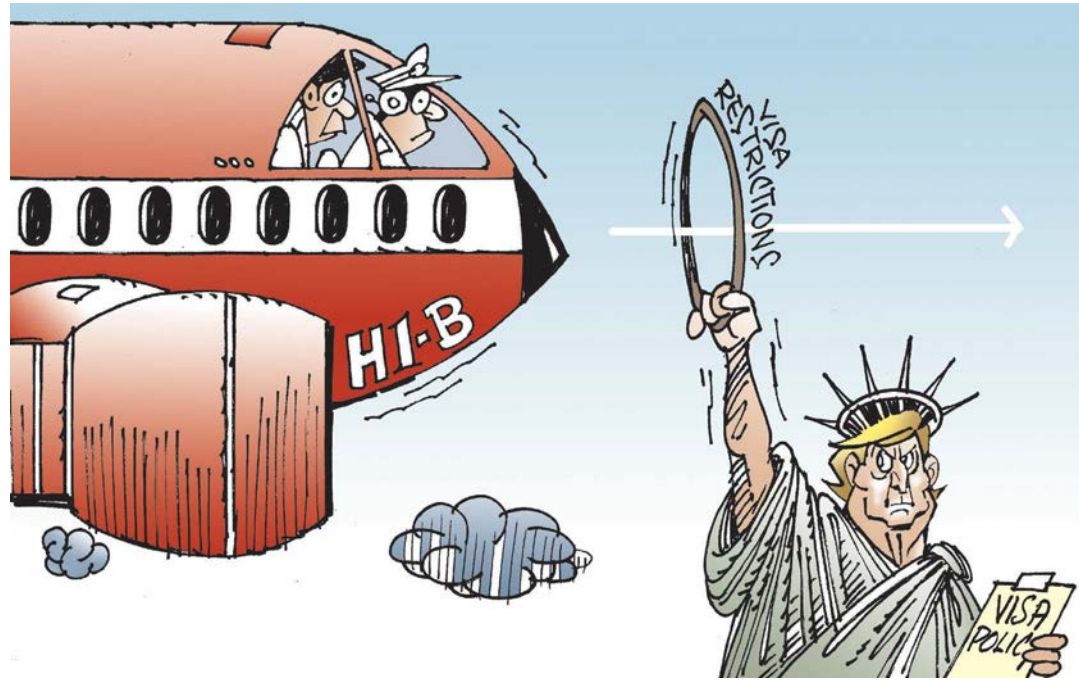
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Subhani



## Will 'Ram Rajya' lead to a more tolerant India?



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

Religious disputes, involving historical memory, and deeply divisive recent communal clashes, are not easy to resolve. But the manner in which India got over the Ram Mandir versus the Babri Masjid dispute must be a unique template for the rest of the world. When the talks failed, the matter was left to the Supreme Court. The judgment, which finally came in November 2019, was a remarkable compromise. It condemned the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 and asked for all those responsible for this act to be prosecuted. The Ram Mandir Trust was awarded the disputed land for the building of the new temple. Simultaneously, the country's highest court also ordered that five acres of land should be allocated elsewhere for the construction of a mosque. In a country where some 80 per cent of the population is Hindu, Shri Ram will finally get a temple in his name in his hometown and at his birthplace after a struggle for over a century through a hard fought legal title suit!

There were some commentators in the media who proclaimed that August 5, 2020, the date of the *shilanyas* of the temple, marked the death of secularism in India. Frankly, I consider all such remarks ludicrous. Does secularism banish religious faith and worship in India? On the contrary, the Constitution guarantees both as part of our fundamental rights. If so, why should the building of a temple, pursuant to the decision of the highest court of the land, be the

harbinger of such unredeemed doom? The Muslim litigants, who were party to the judicial dispute, may not have been entirely happy about the final verdict, but they accepted it. The same "secular" commentariat has no objection if a mosque or a church is built. In the past, they had always maintained that a solution to the prolonged dispute should be found either through mutual accommodation or through a judicial verdict. Why then this pained hand wringing? In fact, it is my firm conviction that it is precisely this kind of reflex reaction that does the greatest disservice to the cause of secularism in this country.

Perhaps the problem with the critics is the pageantry that marked the ceremony. But this was hardly a chance that the BJP-RSS was going to miss. A temple was becoming a reality after 136 years of struggle. Its consecration had to be done in accordance with Hindu rituals, and the entire ceremony was bound to be telecast live. There was criticism too about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation in the function. But the precedent of our first President, Rajendra Prasad, inaugurating the

Perhaps the problem with the critics is the pageantry that marked the ceremony. But this was hardly a chance that the BJP-RSS was going to miss. A temple was becoming a reality after 136 years of struggle.

restored Somnath temple in Gujarat, in spite of the advice of then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru against it, is telling. Secularism in our country is not about the absolute separation of the State and faith. It is about the fundamental freedom of following one's faith, while respecting all other faiths. Babu Rajendra Prasad was one of the most prominent followers of Mahatma Gandhi. He was uncompromisingly secular. But his evocative defence of his devotion was simply this: "I believe in my religion and cannot cut myself away from it." In other words, just like Gandhiji, he did not see a contradiction between being a practising Hindu and the imperative to respect all religions. Indeed, if one reads the debates of the Constituent Assembly on the question of secularism, this — and not the European construct of a complete separation between the State and religion — was the interpretation accepted by the vast majority of its members.

This being said, what is important for the future is a closure to the kind of communal politics that we have recently seen. Devotees of Shri Ram would do well to remember that he was "*maryada purushottam*", the very epitome of right conduct, the role model of correct behaviour. Shri Ram would never sanction irrational anger, unwarranted violence, or unnecessary vengeance, particularly

against the weak or the innocent. In fact, in Tulsidas's *Ramcharit-manas*, there is a very significant line in the description of Ram Rajya: "*sab nar karahin paraspar priti*" (all human beings would harbour mutual affection for each other). It is Shri Ram again who — in Tulsidas' words — tells Bharat: "*Par hiith saras dharam nahin bhai, par peeda sam nahin athamai* (there is no greater virtue than the welfare of others, and no greater sin than injury to others)." This did not make him a passive god. He fought hard against injustice and defeated Ravan. But even in this form, he harboured no personal enmity, and remained the embodiment of the *saumya rasa*, eternally in equipoise and equilibrium, rational and restrained, and certainly not the kind of person who would approve taking the law into one's own hands.

Thus, when Prime Minister Modi in his speech at the ceremony said that Ram stands for the unity of India, it must be assumed that what he meant was that Ram, as the embodiment of mercy, compassion, justice and right conduct, must guide our actions in the future. BJP ideologue Ram Madhav quotes Swami Chinmayananda to say that Ayodhya itself stands for "*ayuddha*" (non-war or peace), which should augur peace forever among all communities. If the otherwise noble greeting of Jai Shri Ram has been weaponised by illiterate bigots, Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on Jai Siya Ram in Ayodhya on August 5 is a good sign. We must remain vigilant to ensure that such sentiments are, indeed, implemented in the future. Hinduism, and its intrinsic tolerance for all faiths, would want that to happen.

The writer, an author, is a former diplomat and in politics

### LETTERS

#### HELP IN NEED

Tributes to the proud son of Mother India, Deepak Sathe, pilot of the ill-fated Air India Express who saved many passengers using his skill and experience. He is an inspiration for many youth who complain against the system than take the opportunity to improve themselves. I could not remain silent after reading that people from nearby towns and villages thronged blood banks and waited in queues to donate blood in the rain and pandemic.

Srinivasa Murty Kota, M.E.  
Visakhapatnam

It was touching to read about the selfless people who donated blood. The Centre must stand by the state in this crisis.

Dr C. Ghanshyam  
Visakhapatnam

It is very sad to see the number of mishaps in Kerala. The experience of heavy rains in Kerala every year should have been taken seriously to avoid such mishaps.

P. Koormarao  
Visakhapatnam

#### DOWRY NEVER DIES

I could not stop my tears reading about the three innocent deaths, one father and his two daughters (*Dad's death prompts two girls to end life, DC, Aug. 9*). The government should take stringent action and hang the guilty in public.

G Maqbool Ahmed  
Kurnool

#### PM's unity call to youth

NEW DELHI, August 9 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi today asked youth to take a pledge to work for strengthening national unity to enable the country to face all possible internal and external dangers.

The Prime Minister was addressing a function organised by the Delhi Pradesh Youth Congress to celebrate the "youth day".

Vigyan Bhavan Hall was packed to capacity. Tourism and Civil aviation Minister Dr. Karan Singh was in the chair.

Mrs. Gandhi said the younger generation had to charter its own course. It should not expect others for leadership. They should ensure that the country progressed on socialist and democratic lines.

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup

### Singhal nephew at puja venue; Covid reprieve for Gehlot govt?

While most invitees seated in close proximity to Prime Minister Narendra Modi around the havan kund at the ground breaking ceremony for the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya last week could be recognised, people were left guessing the identity of a couple who participated in the religious ceremony. It turned out the "unknown person" was Salil Singhal, a Udiapur-based businessman and the nephew of late Ashok Singhal, who was the international working president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad for nearly two decades and a leading figure in the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. Salil Singhal's presence, along with his wife Madhu, led many to ask about denying the same courtesy to children of senior Bharatiya Janata Party leaders L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi who were also the architects of the movement which catapulted the saffron party to power. Party insiders pointed out it should be remembered that Ashok Singhal was the first leader from the Sangh to declare his support for Mr Modi's candidature as the BJP's prime

ministerial face. Speaking to the press at the 2013 Mahakumbh congregation in Allahabad, Mr Singhal had said that Mr Modi enjoyed the same popularity as Jawaharlal Nehru. In contrast to Mr Singhal, Mr Advani had resisted Mr Modi's move to the national political stage while Mr Joshi was also not known to be favourably disposed towards Mr Modi.

After Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra came out in support of the construction of a Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, party leaders went overboard in endorsing her stand. While most leaders put out similar tweets and statements, many party offices in the states and districts organised special prayer meetings while others even burst crackers to mark the occasion. However, this open display of religiosity at the party offices has not gone down well with a section of the Congress cadre. Questions are being raised in private conversations about organising pujas at party offices and whether similar celebrations will be held in the future to mark the festivals of other faiths. Most parti-

nently, it is being asked if any programme will be held when the construction of the mosque begins on the plot, which has been allotted to the Muslim community to compensate for giving up their claim on the disputed site of the Babri Masjid.

First home minister Amit Shah tested positive for Corona virus. Petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan was next. Both are undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Gurugram. With the two leaders in quarantine, BJP insiders are wondering how their incarceration will affect the party's plans to topple the Ashok Gehlot government in Rajasthan. It is an acknowledged fact that it is Mr Shah who is planning and supervising the operation in the desert state while Mr Pradhan, who has now emerged as his chief lieutenant, executes the former party president's orders. So does this mean a reprieve for the Gehlot government? The more optimistic in the BJP express full faith in Mr Shah's capabilities while underlining that it is perhaps no coincidence that the two chief players are in a hospital which is in close proximity to

the resort where rebel Rajasthan Congress leaders are lodged.

Bihar's director general of police Gupteshwar Pandey, who has been extremely vocal about the ongoing investigation into actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death, sounds more like a politician than a high-ranking police officer. Like a politician he has been making all kinds of charges in public, acting as judge, jury and executioner. It must be recalled here that Mr Pandey nurses political ambitions and had even sought a ticket from the Bharatiya Janata Party but it never materialised. As inspector general of police, Muzaffarpur, Mr Pandey courted controversy when he was investigating an abduction case and was even examined by the Central Bureau of Investigation in connection with it. Mr Pandey took voluntary retirement from the service a few years ago but was subsequently reinstated by Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar, a decision which raised a lot of eyebrows. This bit of background is important to understand why Mr Pandey is over-eager to please his

political bosses.

The recent decision of the textile ministry, headed by Smriti Irani, to disband the 70-year-old All-India Handloom Board, set up by Pupul Jayakar, and the All-India Handicrafts Board, has virtually gone unnoticed. The two panels, comprising craftspeople and other experts, served as a valuable forum for the government to get inputs from people working in the field. The official explanation for scrapping these boards is that it is prompted by the government's vision of "minimum government, maximum governance". However, representatives of the sector and craftspeople, are convinced the decision flows from a belief that Irani's ministry does not need to listen to voices from the ground. They feel it is a deliberate attempt to deny an opportunity to those outside the system to interact with the government. Ms Irani is particularly prickly about working with anyone who has been even remotely associated with the Congress regime.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,040.57	0.04
Nifty 50	1,1214	0.12
S&P 500*	3,351.28	0.09
Dollar (₹)	74.93	0.00
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.12	0.53
Euro (₹)	88.64	0.20
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	55,120	725 1.30
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	44.40	0.00
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.886	0.025
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.566	0.00

\* As of Friday/Saturday

FPIs invest over ₹7,800 crore in equities in Aug.

Overseas investors remained net buyers in Indian markets by investing a net Rs 8,327 crore in the first week of August. Foreign portfolio investors invested a net Rs 7,842 crore in equities and Rs 485 crore in the debt segment during Aug. 3-6, according to depositories data. FPIs have been net buyers in the past two months. They invested Rs 3,301 crore in July and Rs 24,053 crore in June on net basis.

Emission rules for construction, agri machinery likely



The Centre said it has issued draft notification for separate emission norms for agriculture machinery and construction equipment vehicles. MoRTH has invited suggestions on a draft notification seeking to amend Central Motor Vehicles Rules 1989 to separate the emission norms for agricultural machinery (agricultural tractors, power tillers and combined harvesters) and construction equipment vehicles, a release said.

Amazon Easy stores get an upgrade

Online retailer Amazon launched an upgraded 'Amazon Easy' store format that integrates its multiple services through a single touchpoint. The format would offer a touch-and-feel product experience through a physical product display, the firm said. Customers can also place an order on Amazon.in with assistance from the store staff and either pick up the order from the store or get it delivered at the doorstep.

₹68,000 cr loans released under discoms' package

As much as Rs 68,000 crore worth of loans under the Rs 90,000-crore liquidity package announced for the stressed power distribution utilities have been sanctioned so far. "State-run non-banking finance firms REC and Power Finance Corporation have sanctioned loans worth about Rs 68,000 crore so far under the Rs 90,000 crore liquidity infusion package for discoms announced in May," a source said.



Current price is lower than 1980 high Gold has room to go beyond \$2,800

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 9

At \$2,070 an ounce, gold touched a new high last week and has moved up more than 30 per cent since the break of Covid-19 pandemic. However, when adjusted to inflation, the record price is lower than 1980 January as well as September 2011 record-high levels. This provides room for gold to move beyond \$2,800 per ounce.

"Adjusted for inflation, the gold price today is \$200 shy of the 2011 level and well below its January, 21, 1980 record high equivalent to approximately \$2,800 per ounce in today's money," says a World Gold Council report.

Gold had hit a record high of \$850 an ounce in January 1980 as investors piled up bullion to beat high inflation due to strong oil prices, the Soviet Union intervention in Afghanistan and the impact of the Iranian revolution. If adjusted to inflation, this would have translated to \$2,800 per ounce in today's scenario. Similarly, in September 2011, gold had made a high of \$1,920 per ounce and if adjusted to inflation, it would have been close to \$2,200 per ounce.

Further, the report finds that the gold price had more than doubled from about \$900 per ounce in early 2008 to its high more than three years later in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. In con-



trast, it has increased by 30-34 per cent since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The current price movement of gold has been driven by high levels of global uncertainty and very low interest rates. The Covid-19 pandemic is far from over and more importantly, its impact on the global economy is yet to be determined.

Central banks have aggressively cut interest rates, often in combination with quantitative easing and other non-traditional policy measures. Governments have also approved massive rescue packages to support their local economies. These initiatives have increased concerns that easy money, rather than fundamentals, is fuelling the stock market rally and all the extra money being pumped into the system may result in very high inflation or at the very least, currency debasements.

"The re-emergence of infections seen in Japan, Australia, South Korea and Vietnam and upturn

in infections seen in the US, Russia and India could trigger the reimplementa-tion of lockdowns and containment measures. The more delayed the complete reversal of the great lockdown, the slower the economic recovery. With this back-ground, it is hard to imagine a scenario where central banks around the world will change their accommodative stance any time soon," said Chirag Mehta, senior fund manager-alternative investments, Quantum Mutual Fund.

Further, despite record inflows into gold ETFs in 2020, gold remains an under-owned asset. The market share of Gold ETFs, compared to all ETF assets, jumped from 3 per cent to 8 per cent in the aftermath of the global financial crisis before dwindling to one per cent levels in the following years. The current figure stands at 3 per cent, indicating significant potential for Gold ETF asset expansion going forward, says Mehta.

TikTok plans to sue Trump administration

BELINDA CAO & YUEQI YANG AUG. 9

TikTok plans to file a federal lawsuit as soon as Tuesday to challenge President Donald Trump's executive order banning the video-sharing service from the US as unconstitutional, National Public Radio reported.

The lawsuit will be filed in the US District Court for the Southern District of California, where TikTok's American operations are based, NPR said, citing a person familiar with the matter whom it didn't identify. It will argue that the president's action is unconstitutional because it failed to give the company a chance to respond and that the US government's national-security justification for the order is baseless, according to the report.

Chinese-owned TikTok responded in a blog post on Friday it is "shocked" and will pursue all remedies available, including in US courts. A company spokesman reached by phone on Saturday declined to comment on the NPR report and referred to the earlier blog post.

Trump signed executive orders on Thursday prohibiting US residents and companies from doing business with TikTok and Tencent Holdings' WeChat apps, effective in 45 days, citing the national-security risk of leaving Americans' personal data exposed. A 1977 law lets the US president declare a national emergency in response to an "unusual and extraordinary threat."

— Bloomberg

Defence stocks may gain from latest import ban

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, AUG. 9

Defence production related stocks like Larsen & Toubro, Bharat Forge and defence PSUs such as Bharat Electronics and HAL would be in focus on Monday as the government has fast-tracked indigenous production of many items and plans to phase out high levels of import dependence over a period of time.

The Department of Military Affairs (DMA), Ministry of Defence (MoD) has prepared a list of 101 items for which there would be an embargo on the import beyond the timeline indicated against them, said a release on Sunday.

"It is estimated that contracts worth almost Rs 4 lakh crore will be placed upon the domestic industry within the next five to seven years. Of these, items worth almost Rs 1,30,000 crore each are anticipated for the Army and the Air Force while items worth almost Rs 1,40,000 crore are anticipated by the Navy over the same period," the defence ministry said.

Bharat Forge, Bharat Electronics, Larsen & Toubro, HAL, Cochin Shipyard, Garden Reach, BEML, Bharat Dynamics, Mishra Dhatu Nigam and BHEL may bag large contracts with their past records in defence-related production, brokers said.

Defence production related stocks have rallied post-Galwan Valley clash on June 15.

The list of 101 embargoed items comprises not

On the rise		
Defence production related stocks have rallied post-Galwan Valley clash		
Company	Current stock price	Stock price on June 15-Galwan Valley clash
HAL	947.90	657.5
Bharat Electronics	99.20	70.9
BHEL	35.25	29.1
BEML	656.35	595.7
Mishra Dhatu Nigam	204.70	195
Bharat Dynamics	419.05	235.55
Cochin Shipyard	331.65	264
Garden Reach Ship-builders & Engineers	202.40	188.55
Larsen & Toubro	915.70	899.65
Bharat Forge	408.00	340.45

Figures in ₹

Source: BSE, FC Research

just simple parts but also some high technology weapon systems like artillery guns, assault rifles, corvettes, sonar systems, transport aircraft, light combat helicopters (LCHs), radars and many other items.

The list also includes, wheeled armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs) with indicative import embargo date of December 2021, of which the Army is expected to contract almost 200 at an approximate cost of Rs 5,000 crore.

Similarly, the Navy is likely to place demands for submarines with indicative import embargo date of December 2021, of which it expects to contract about six at an approximate cost of Rs 42,000 crore. For the Air Force, it has been decided to enlist the light combat aircraft with an indicative embargo date of December 2020. Of these, 123 are anticipated at an approximate cost of over Rs 85,000

crore, the release said.

The embargo on imports is planned to be progressively implemented between 2020 and 2024. The aim behind promulgation of the list is to apprise the Indian defence industry about the anticipated requirements of the Armed Forces. More such equipment for import embargo would be identified in consultation with all stakeholders, the defence ministry said.

The recently published draft Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy, 2020 suggests a more bottom-up framework to empower system integrators to achieve greater scale by expanding the role of the private sector, especially MSMEs. Key objectives include achieving Rs 1.75 lakh crore turnover, including Rs 35,000-crore exports; cutting defence imports; entry in the global defence exports value chain, among others.

Oil giants cut value of assets by \$50 bn

DAVID GAFFEN AUG. 9

The world's five largest oil companies collectively cut the value of their assets by nearly \$50 billion in the second quarter, and slashed production rates as the coronavirus pandemic caused a drastic fall in fuel prices and demand.

The dramatic reductions in asset valuations and decline in output show the depth of the pain in the second quarter. Fuel demand at one point was down by more than 30 per cent worldwide, and still remains below pre-pandemic levels.

Several executives said they took massive write-downs because they expect demand to remain impaired for several more quarters as people travel less and use less fuel due to the ongoing global pandemic that has killed more than 700,000 people.

Of those five companies, only Exxon Mobil did not book sizeable impairments. But an ongoing re-evaluation of its plans could lead to a "significant portion" of its assets being impaired, it reported, and signal the elimination of 20 per cent or 4.4 billion barrels of its oil and gas reserves.

By contrast, BP took a \$17 billion hit. It said it plans to re-centre its spending in coming years around renewables and less on oil and natural gas.

Weak demand means oil producers must revisit business plans, said Lee Maginniss, managing director at consultants Alarez & Marsal. He said the goal should be to pump only what generates cash in excess of overhead costs. "It's low-cost production mode through the end of 2021 for sure, and to 2022 to the extent there are new development plans being contemplated," Maginniss said.

London-based BP has previously said it plans to cut its overall output by roughly 1 million barrels of oil equivalent (boepd) by the end of 2030 from its current 3.6 million boepd.

Of the five, Exxon is the largest producer, with daily output of 3.64 million boepd, but its production dropped 408,000 boepd between the first and second quarters. The five majors, which include Chevron Corp, Royal Dutch Shell and Total SA, also cut capital expenditures by a combined \$25 billion between the quarters.

— Reuters

ONGC pares debt by 35%, but low oil & gas prices a concern

New Delhi, Aug 9: State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has cut its debt by more than one-third but faces an uphill challenge to meeting planned expenditure during the current fiscal due to oil and gas prices falling below sub-optimal levels, according to company officials and regulatory filings.

ONGC's outstanding debt of Rs 21,593 crore as on March 31, 2019 has come down to Rs 13,949 crore as on March 31, 2020, as it used revenue from better operations to retire some of the borrowings, according to the company's regulatory filings.

Out of this debt, long-term borrowings account for Rs 2,245 crore which are due for maturity in December 2029.

The company had cash and cash equivalent (including other bank balances) of Rs 968 crore as on March 31, 2020, up from a record low of Rs 504 crore a year back.

Standalone debt-equity ratio at the end of March 31, 2020 is only 0.07, which is considered comfortable.

Company officials explained that ONGC has been working on bringing



operational efficiencies and financial discipline and used surplus revenues to repay debt.

"While we ended the 2019-20 fiscal year with a comfortable financial position, we face an uphill challenge during the current 2020-21 financial year. The pandemic has played havoc on oil prices and government mandated gas price is way below cost of production," a senior official said.

ONGC has planned a capital expenditure of over Rs 26,000 crore and meeting that target with the current oil and gas prices will be a challenge, he said.

Another official said the company had taken an impairment loss of Rs 4,899 crore in Q4 FY'20 to

factor in estimated future crude oil and natural gas prices. However, the company believes that oil and gas prices will recover in future and then this impairment loss shall be reversed as and when prices rise, he said.

ONGC once was India's most profitable company with a cash balance of over Rs 10,000 crore. But the fortunes reversed after the company bought the government's 51.11 per cent stake in oil marketing company Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and the Gujarat government's GSPC in a KG-basin gas block.

It funded the Rs 36,915 crore acquisition of 51.11 per cent equity shares in HPCL through internal

funds of Rs 12,034 crore and balance Rs 24,881 crore from borrowed money from commercial banks.

The funding requirement of Rs 7,560 crore for Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation's KG block acquisition was met by borrowing against term deposits.

Its cash and balances dipped to touch a record low of Rs 504 crore in March 2019, down from Rs 1,013 crore in March 2018 and Rs 9,511 crore in March 2017 and Rs 9,957 in March 2016.

"We live in an era of sub-optimal oil prices and government mandated natural gas prices that are way below the cost. The answer to such a scenario is to optimise cost and bring in operational efficiencies," an official said.

He said the company has sufficient lines of credit/ short term fund facilities with banks amounting to Rs 7,800 crore for meeting the working capital or deficit requirements. Further, the company has an overall limit of Rs 10,000 crore for raising funds through commercial paper.

— PTI

Shelf-life of skills now only 2-3 years, says Nasscom chief



U. B. Pravin Rao

Bengaluru, Aug. 9: Nasscom chairman U. B. Pravin Rao on Sunday said the shelf-life of skills is now only two to three years, as he called for continuous, lifelong learning.

As corporates are reinventing themselves, individuals also need to reinvent themselves to stay relevant, said the COO of Infosys.

"Shelf-life of skills is becoming short, two-three years," said Rao, who was addressing the online graduation ceremony hosted by upGrad and IIT-B.

"People need to unlearn, learn new stuff and therefore commit to lifelong learning. This is critical to stay relevant and employable", Rao said. — PTI

BARCLAYS PROBED BY WATCHDOG FOR MONITORING STAFF

EDUARD GISMATULLIN AUG. 9

Barclays Plc is being investigated by the Information Commissioner's Office, a privacy watchdog, on allegations it spied on its workers through a computer monitoring software, the Telegraph reported. It said Barclays faces a maximum fine of 865 million pounds (\$1.1 billion) if it's found to have broken data privacy laws.

The software allowed managers to measure the length of time employees were away from their desks or how long they took to finish tasks, the paper said. —Bloomberg





## SHORT TAKES

## Domestic cricket likely from Nov.

**New Delhi:** The BCCI is mulling November 19 as tentative date for start of domestic season with Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament but Indian players in various IPL teams won't be able to play first few rounds due to quarantine protocols in place.

The delay in the beginning of the domestic season due to Covid-19 pandemic means that only Mushtaq Ali trophy and Ranji Trophy (December 13-March 10) comprising of 245 games (across the formats with 38 teams) will be played.

There will be no Vijay Hazare Trophy, Duleep Trophy or Challenger Series this year and as of now there is no provision for Irani Cup also.

"This is a tentative list that has been prepared and it has gone for approval of president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah," a BCCI official said.

While this is a draft schedule, it is being asked how the Indian players, who will return from IPL, will play since they will have to be in a 14-day quarantine as per government rules.

— PTI

## Ex-Bagan captain Manitombi dead

**Kolkata:** Former India defender and Mohun Bagan captain Manitombi Singh died at the age of 39 at his native village near Imphal in Manipur on Sunday, club sources said.

Manitombi was suffering from prolonged illness and breathed his last in the early hours of Sunday.

He is survived by his wife and an eight-year-old son. "Mohun Bagan family is deeply saddened by the untimely demise of former club captain Manitombi Singh. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time. Rest in peace, Manitombi Singh," the club posted on its Twitter handle.

Manitombi was a key member of the Stephen Constantine-coached India Under-23 side that lifted the LG Cup in 2003 by defeating Vietnam 3-2 in Ho Chi Minh City.

It was India's first international triumph since their victory at an eight-nation tournament in Singapore in 1971.

Manitombi also represented India in the 2002 Busan Asian Games. — PTI

## Johnson leads at PGA tourney

**San Francisco:** Dustin Johnson supplied the birdies, eight of them at the PGA Championship, the most he has ever made in his 157 rounds of major championship golf for a 5-under 65 and a one-shot lead.

Brooks Koepka supplied the needle on Saturday.

Koepka recovered from three straight bogeys to salvage a 69 and stay within two shots of a leaderboard more crowded than any of San Francisco's congested highways.

At stake is a chance to become only the seventh player to win the same major three straight times. He surveyed the cast of contenders, and focused on the guy at the top.

The final round at Harding Park figures to be wide open, just like it was on a Saturday so wild that eight players had at least a share of the lead during the third round.

Johnson lost his yardage book and still found his way through an enormous crowd of contenders.

— AFP

## DONCIC HELPS MAVERICKS BEAT BUCKS

**Lake Buena Vista, Florida:** Luka Doncic scored 36 points in his NBA-leading 17th triple-double and the Dallas Mavericks scored the last seven points of regulation to force overtime, going on to a 136-132 win over the Milwaukee Bucks on Saturday.

Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo had 34 points, 13 rebounds and five blocks before fouling out in the final seconds on the day the reigning MVP was named a finalist for the award. Meanwhile, Jamal Murray scored 23 points as Denver Nuggets beat beat Utah Jazz 134-132. — AP

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## EYES ON ICC CHAIR

## Nomination process for top post on agenda

**Dubai, Aug. 9:** Finalising the nomination process to elect Shashank Manohar's successor as the next independent chairman of the world cricket body is the sole agenda for the ICC Board, which will meet virtually on Monday.

It is expected that the entire process irrespective of whether it's an election or unanimous selection will be over by four weeks.

"The meeting on Monday only has nomination process in the agenda. Normally, it is a two week window that is provided for filing nominations," a senior board member said on the condition of anonymity.

Usually in ICC, a two-third majority is required but there could be a few board members who would want it to be a case of simple majority among 17 members.

The 17 board members of ICC comprise of 12 Test playing nations, three associate nations (Malaysia, Scotland, Singapore), chairman (in this case interim) and independent director (Indra Nooyi of Pepsico).

ICC CEO Manu Sawhney is also a part of ICC Board but without voting right. A candidate can be nominated by a past or present director of ICC but it has to be seconded mandatorily by two current directors. Only then one can enter the election fray.

There have been discussions on whether the a former director nominating an incumbent should remain valid or not.

As far as the candidates are concerned, there are few names, including that of current interim chairman from Singapore Imran Khawaja, are doing rounds.

— PTI



BCCI president Sourav Ganguly (left) with a Vivo representative in this file photo.

## Vivo pullout no big deal: Dada

**Delhi, Aug. 9:** India's cricket chief Sourav Ganguly says the Indian Premier League's decision to suspend a lucrative contract with its main sponsor, the Chinese phone maker Vivo, following a deadly border clash between the two nations is "just a blip".

The IPL last week suspended the agreement with Vivo, which signed a five-year contract in 2017 worth more than \$330 million to sponsor the world's richest cricket tourney.

"I wouldn't call it a financial crisis. It is just a little bit of a blip," said Ganguly, the head of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

"BCCI, it's a very strong foundation — the game, the players, the administrators in the past have made this game so strong that BCCI is able to handle all these blips," he said at an online conference on Saturday.

"You keep your other options open. It is like Plan A and Plan B," the

BCCI president added.

The 2020 IPL tournament is due to start in the United Arab Emirates next month.

Vivo said the decision was mutually agreed.

The IPL and BCCI have tie-ups with companies including Paytm, Swiggy, Dream11 and Byju, which all have Chinese investment.

According to reports, the BCCI was in talks with Indian companies over sponsorship deals but was expected to make less

than the \$60 million it would have received from Vivo.

Each of the eight IPL teams stands to lose nearly \$4 million from the lost sponsorship, a team said.

The star-studded IPL Twenty20 league is a huge revenue earner for BCCI and is estimated to generate more than \$11 billion for the Indian economy.

The tournament normally starts in March, but was repeatedly postponed this year because of the pandemic. — AFP

## UNITED, INTER BRACE FOR EUROPA TIES

**Paris, Aug. 9:** Manchester United, Inter Milan and Sevilla headline a quintet of former champions travelling to Germany for a remodelled eight-team straight knockout tournament that will crown the winner of a Europa League campaign heavily disrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic.

All games from the quarterfinals onwards in this season's competition will be played behind closed doors as one-off ties across four venues.

"There are rules and regulations on the bubble that's going to travel. We've got to stick together, stay together in and around the hotel and the training ground," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said. — AFP

**LIVE ON TV**  
**Europa League quarterfinals: Manchester United vs Copenhagen on Sony Ten 2; Inter Milan vs Leverkusen on Sony Ten 1. Both matches from 12.30 am (Tuesday)**



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (centre) vies for the ball with Napoli's Mario Rui (second from left) during their UEFA Champions League Round of 16 second leg match at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Sunday. Barcelona won 3-0. — AFP

## Messi rises and shines

**Barcelona, Aug. 9:** Just when it looked like Lionel Messi had nowhere to go, the Argentine great bamboozled half of Napoli's team before scoring from an exquisite solo effort that helped Barcelona reach the Champions League quarterfinals in Portugal.

Messi netted Barcelona's second goal in the 3-1 victory that sent the Spanish side past

Napoli on a 4-2 aggregate score on Saturday.

Messi's goal in the 23rd minute was arguably the pick of the 31 he has scored this season in all competitions.

Napoli appeared to have him in check when Messi received the ball all alone outside the right corner of the area. Messi, however, dipped his head and took on the well-placed defense. He kept control of the ball despite being

knocked over while going past three Napoli players.

Meanwhile, Robert Lewandowski scored twice and set up two more goals as Bayern beat Chelsea 4-1 on Saturday for a 7-1 win on aggregate in Munich to book a ticket to Lisbon.

Bayern has won 18 straight competitive games going back to February and hasn't lost since December. — Agencies

## PIRLO NAMED MANAGER OF JUVENTUS

**Milan, Aug. 9:** Former Italy and Juventus star Andrea Pirlo was appointed the Italian champions' new coach, just hours after Maurizio Sarri's sacking with the club promising a "new chapter in world football".

Sarri, 61, leaves Juventus after just one season, a day after the Italian giants crashed out of the Champions League in the last 16 to French club Lyon.

The 41-year-old Pirlo, with no previous top-level coaching experience, recently took over the Juventus U23 side and arrives on a two-year contract.

"The choice is based on the belief that Pirlo has what it takes to lead from his debut on the bench, an expert and talented squad to pursue new successes," Juventus said.

"Today, begins a new chapter of his career in the world of football: from Maestro to Mister," the club added. — AFP

## SILVERSTONE | GRAND PRIX

## Verstappen steals victory in Brit F1

**Silverstone, Aug. 9:** Max Verstappen delivered Red Bull's first victory at Silverstone since 2012 on Sunday when he made the most of a superior strategy in sizzling conditions to beat both Mercedes and claim victory in the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix.

It was the Dutchman's first victory of the season and the ninth of his career and the first time a race had been won by a driver who did not start on pole position in seven races since last year's Mexican Grand Prix.

Verstappen owed his victory to a team decision to start the race on hard compound tyres while his main rivals all launched from the grid on mediums, the two Mercedes men struggling to manage tyre-wear throughout the race.

During the race, Red Bull asked him to ease off, but he replied saying "I don't want to drive like a grandma" before the team relented.

Verstappen won by 11.326 seconds ahead of championship leader and six-time champion Lewis Hamilton

● **Max Verstappen went past the Mercedes duo of Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas to win the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix at Silverstone race track on Sunday.**

who passed Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas in the closing stages. The Finn finished third.

"I didn't see that coming, but after the first stint it seemed we were really good on tyres. I didn't have any tyre issues at all — a great day for us," said Verstappen.

Hamilton said: "That was a massive challenge, but congratulations to Red Bull. It was definitely unexpected to have the blistering (on tyres) as hard core as that."

Bottas, who started from pole, said: "Very frustrating for me, to start from pole and finish third. It's not ideal and I think that as a team we were sleeping." — AFP

## BUTTLER &amp; WOAKES SEE ENGLAND HOME IN TEST

**Manchester, Aug. 9:** Jos Buttler and Chris Woakes led a remarkable comeback for England in a three-wicket victory over Pakistan in the first test on Saturday.

The pair went on the counter-attack at the fall of the fifth wicket in England's second innings and shared a sixth-wicket stand of 139 on day 4 at Old Trafford. No fans were present for the exciting finale due to the coronavirus pandemic restrictions.

Buttler was out for 75 while Woakes hit the winning runs and was undefeated on 84 as England finished on 277-7 for its 10th highest successful test run chase.

Leg-spinner Yasir Shah (4-99) had put Pakistan in pole position with two wickets as the hosts got off to a shaky start in their second innings. — AFP

**Brief scores:** Pakistan 326 & 169 (Y. Shah 33, A. Shafiq 29, S. Broad 3/37, lost to England 219 & 277/7 in 82.1 ov (J. Buttler 75, C. Woakes 84\*, J. Root 42, Y. Shah 2/74).

## Root praises Jos, Chris for show

**Manchester, Aug. 9:** England captain Joe Root doffed his hat to Jos Buttler after his beleaguered teammate battled concerns over his father's health and fear of losing his place in the side to engineer a dramatic triumph in the first Test against Pakistan here.

After his vital 75-run knock in a partnership of 139 with Chris Woakes that rescued England from 117 for five to register a three-wicket victory, Buttler avoided any discussion on his father Johnny, who had spent the previous evening in hospital.

"It says a huge amount about him as a person to carry that and be able to either use it, or park it only he will know which way he did that and to play in that manner was exceptional. To have that external pressure as well, I'm chuffed to bits with him," Root said.

It was a welcome knock for Buttler who had been struggling with the bat.

Root was also full of praise for Woakes.

"You watch him play and know he's more than capable of three or four more Test hundreds. His game is there. He's got all the attributes, he was clear how he wanted to play Yasir Shah and managed the seamers.

**STOKES SET TO MISS REST OF THE SERIES**

England star Ben Stokes will miss the concluding two Tests against Pakistan for family reasons, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced Sunday.

Stokes's father Ged was admitted to hospital in Johannesburg two days before Christmas last year with a serious illness while following his son's progress with the England cricket team during their tour of South Africa.

Ged, a former Kiwi rugby league international, underwent three operations and spent 37 days in hospital. — Agencies

## Dire need to keep age fraud under check



Hemant Kenkre  
Silly Point

The lovely game of cricket has had its issues over a period of time. Fudging age, particularly in the Asian sub-continent, has been a primary one which has not got the necessary treatment it deserves from Boards that govern the game in countries therein.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced an amnesty scheme for young cricketers to own up any 'fudging' they may have committed if they want to play age-group cricket at a higher level.

The malaise of tamper-

ing with age has been going on for years in India and many 'illegals' have gone scot free, playing with cricketers much younger to them.

They have taken advantage of having strength over talent to bulldoze their way in school and age-group games creating a playing field that was completely top sided, favouring teams that fielded older boys.

BCCI's edict of offering amnesty is welcome in the sense it will now ensure parity in age-group tournaments where offenders who continue to play ille-

gally will face a two-year ban. The ban will ensure that they will not be allowed to play in any age-group tournaments, local and national, effectively taking away the best of the formative years of their careers.

Being ineligible to play for two seasons is a harsh punishment for youngsters and the BCCI has (over the past few years) been docking the guilty for meddling with age. Last year saw them, and domestic associations, punish more than 200 cricketers including one who had represented India Under-19 in the victorious 2018 World Cup.

Tinkering with age is an old issue that has plagued Indian cricket over the years. As a 16-year old boy, playing the Cooch Behar Trophy, which was an inter-state schools tourna-

ment in those days, I was shocked to see sweets being distributed by the captain of another state school team to celebrate the birth of his son. The incident that happened 47 years ago still rankles in my mind.

Most school cricketers in Mumbai (then Bombay) were aware that they had to compete with 'almost adults' who were masquerading as kids.

While cases, in those days, happened they were not as rampant as what we have been seeing recently. Elder, ineligible, players get more opportunities to represent state age-group teams irrespective of real skills, leaving genuine cricketers in the lurch. Not being in the state squads eventually forces talented youngsters give up the game with parents insisting on spending time on

the children education.

The biggest problem faced by genuine coaches is to persuade parents to let their talented children continue to play the game. Reputed coach, Dinesh Lad, who nurtured young talent like Rohit Sharma, Shardul Thakur and his son Siddesh said that the biggest challenge in his 25-years of coaching at the school level comes from convincing parents.

"Always tell parents that talented youngsters should continue to play at the Under-14 and Under-16 levels to develop their skills for the future and not worry about state team selections. Real talent like Sachin Tendulkar and Rohit Sharma will always find their way irrespective of the inequality," he confided.

Why then has this malaise been allow to take

rampant proportions over the years? The answer lies in career prospects that cricket offers. Earlier it was jobs that talented cricketers got which ensured stability, now parents look at the prospect of a much bigger and better opportunity of their wards likely to be picked for the Indian Premier League (IPL) and get them set for life. Today, playing in the IPL is a more immediate goal set for youngsters than playing for the state or the country, unlike in the past.

BCCI's amnesty scheme is a fabulous move, one that will give errant youngsters an opportunity to get back into the scheme of things and not put obstacles for their immediate future. If one takes a holistic view of the age tampering issue the primary blame lies with

indecorous coaches who get the youngsters (and their glib parents) to agree to fake certificates that fuddle the age of the cricketer.

The unequal contests eventually lead to ruin with this form of short-term cheating tearing into the fabric of the game. Along with the Board of Control for Cricket in India, many state associations have started to focus on this corruption which is as bad, if not worse, than match fixing and throwing the game.

Hopefully, the amnesty scheme will deter youngsters from taking such illegal shortcuts. To ensure a level playing field, the state associations must also censure errant coaches (the main culprits) with life time bans if any of their wards are found guilty in the future.