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■ **Page 2: Affidavit says 100% central funding**

— *PTI*

■ **Page 2: CM wants to boost enrollment ratio**

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SHORT TAKES

PRABHAKAR REDDY, SON RELEASED ON BAIL

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, AUG. 6

Telugu Desam (TD) leader and former MLA from Tadiparti, Anantapur district, J.C. Prabhakar Reddy and his son, Aswath Reddy, were released on bail from Kadapa central prison on Thursday evening. Reddy and his son were arrested by the Anantapur district police on June 13 on charges of illegal registration of vehicles and forgery of insurance papers.

With the release of J.C. Prabhakar Reddy and his son on bail, TD leaders are jubilant. Hundreds of party leaders and activists arrived at the Kadapa central prison on Thursday afternoon to give a hearty welcome to their leader, who was jailed for 54 days and released on Thursday. Hundreds of followers gathered at one place, the Kadapa sub divisional police officer, Uppara Suryanarayana, and inspectors Satyababu, Kambam Ashok Reddy and Satyanarayana dispersed them from the central prison area.

J.C. Diwakar Reddy's son, TD youth leader, Pawan Kumar Reddy, came to the Kadapa central prison on Thursday afternoon. He spoke to mediapersons and said that, "We are not afraid of any illegal cases. We did not lose our confidence with these cases. There was a possibility to file cases against me as well as my father. During these four years, many TD leaders from Srikakulam to Anantapur will be prosecuted."

TD: GOVT TO BE BLAMED FOR RISE IN COVID CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, AUG. 6

State occupied third position in Coronavirus cases in the country because of indifferent attitude of the government and its inefficient handling the situation, alleged former deputy CM N. Chinarajappa.

He told the media here on Thursday that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and his ministers were more concerned with shifting of the capital to Visakhapatnam than addressing the health emergency.

The government did not have any clear plan or course of action to contain the virus, while ruling party leaders like Vijaysai Reddy were getting treatment in corporate hospitals in other states, according to the former deputy CM.

The CM should keep the three capitals issue aside and address the Covid-19 threat, otherwise things would go out of control in the state, he said.

HUMAN ERRORS BEHIND RECENT MISHAPS

From Page 1

Joint inspector of factories, Visakhapatnam, J. Siva Sankar Reddy said, "The recent mishaps in some industrial units are due to human error. The off-site emergency plan in Visakhapatnam district was last updated in 2007. We are trying to collect information pertaining to all industrial units with regard to hazardous substances they handle and other safety aspects."

The state government has recently issued G.O. No. 156 for taking up a special drive to inspect industrial units with regard to their compliance with safety and environmental norms. The drive would cover all hazardous chemical industries under MSIH Rules, 1989; those which store, manufacture or handle hazardous materials/chemicals; and those that handle explosive substances, apart from all red category industries. Accordingly, officials from all departments concerned have been directed to start inspecting targeted industrial units all over the state.

Sources from industry say over enthusiasm within governments of the day to attract new investors towards set up industrial units and encourage existing units by liberalising all existing norms is one of the major causes for occurrence of industrial mishaps in the state. This is because there is no concurrent inspection of compliance with safety norms, conduct of mock drills and other practices.

● **THE STATE** government has recently issued G.O. No. 156 for taking up a special drive to inspect industrial units with regard to their compliance with safety and environmental norms.

Naidu used Amaravati: YSRC

Party alleges Naidu did not develop plott promised to Amaravati farmers

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 6

Former minister and YSR Congress MLA, Kolusu Parthasarathy, welcomed the clarification of the BJP-led union government about no role of the centre in the selection of capital in Andhra Pradesh.

Alleging that opposition leader, N Chandrababu Naidu, deceived the public on the Amaravati issue, Parthasarathy claimed that Naidu is interested in protecting the Amaravati lands for real estate purposes.

Addressing a press meet here on Thursday, Parthasarathy refuted TD claims about spending ₹52,000 crore on Amaravati and clarified that the then government called tenders for ₹52,000 crore to get commissions before the 2019 elections. He alleged that TDP leaders collected ₹5,000 crore commissions in those tenders and Naidu changed Amaravati into a real estate business.

Claiming that Naidu allotted lands to Singapore firms and private companies free of cost and at nominal prices but fixed ₹2 crore to ₹4 crore per acre for government institutions, Parthasarathy said this shows his vision of development of private companies. He alleged that Naidu did not develop a single plot which was promised to Amaravati farmers in lieu of offering farmlands under the land pooling scheme.

Stating that the YSRC government did not shift the capital from Amaravati as it would continue as legislative capital and that the government will develop Amaravati accordingly, Parthasarathy said that the TD government ruined Krishna and Guntur districts, by bringing up the 'green zone' and stalling development in the region to benefit the real estate agents of Amaravati.

Let Naidu quit first, says Rama Subba Reddy

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, AUG. 6

YSRC leader and former minister Ponnareddy Rama Subba Reddy has demanded that TD president Chandrababu Naidu, who is demanding a referendum on Amaravati, must resign first, along with his party MLAs and MPs, and get re-elected if they want to prove that people of the state want Amaravati as the capital.

CM wants to boost enrolment ratio

From Page 1

The Chief Minister said, "It has been decided to reopen colleges on October 15 and son thereafter, Vidya Devena Vasathi Devena funds will be given. All Common Entrance Tests (CETs) should be completed by September."

He said that the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education should go up significantly given the fees reimbursement and Vasati Devena incentives. He wanted the GER to go up from the present 32.4 percent to at least 90 percent considering the financial relief that is being provided.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said, "Three-year degree courses will have ten-month apprenticeships.



Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister Botsa Satyanarayana addresses a meeting at YSRC office in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

— K. MURALI KRISHNA

Naidu is selfish leader: Botsa

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 6

Minister for municipal administration and urban development Botsa Satyanarayana on Thursday alleged that TD chief Chandrababu Naidu was a selfish leader and never cared for the people's interests.

Ridiculing his challenge to the YSRC to hold elections afresh to seek mandate on the three capital issue, the minister said Naidu violated all the laws to gratify his ambitions and those of his coterie.

"Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy wants to develop every region in the State, but Naidu is focusing only on Amaravati for his personal gains and that of one particular community," Botsa said and reiterated the Jagan government's commitment to develop Amaravati.

"We have declared in the Assembly that Amaravati would be developed. There is no going back on that word."

The Sivaramakrishnan Committee was constituted by the Centre but its recommendations were

not emulated by the Naidu government. "People of Vizag want development of their region, so do the people of Vijayawada. The development of the entire state is the goal of the government, not just the 29 villages of Amaravati," Botsa maintained.

He wondered why there was nothing on the ground if Naidu's claim of spending ₹5,000 crore for the capital was true.

The minister said those who wanted to join the YSRCP were welcome as far as they obeyed the party rules.

TD objects to Centre's affidavit supporting YSRC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 6

Opposition Telugu Desam has objected to centre's affidavit filed in Andhra Pradesh High Court stating that the Union government has no role in deciding on the capital of AP, as such a decision lies within the exclusive domain of the state government.

Addressing a press conference on Thursday, former TD MLA Bonda Umamaheswara Rao asserted that the centre does have a role since Amaravati was selected as capital based only on the Sivaramakrishnan Committee recommendations made under provisions of

the AP Reorganisation Act 2014. He pointed out that Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself had laid the foundation stone for Amaravati and at the time promised all support to develop Amaravati as a vibrant capital that would surpass even Delhi in grandeur and scale. He said the AP High Court too was established in Amaravati as per the Presidential Order issued in consultation with the Supreme Court. The then Chief Justice of India arrived and inaugurated the High Court in Amaravati.

Umamaheswara Rao said the centre had resolved the long-pending

Kashmir and Ladakh issues by intervening into the affairs of that state. The national leaders should not forget the fact that Amaravati was selected because it is a centrally located place located between Srikakulam and Anantapur at the two ends of the state. He demanded that the centre intervene into the Amaravati issue as the state government is playing a vicious "three cards" game in the matter.

He alleged that having three capitals is a deep-rooted conspiracy of YSRC to grab lands and properties in Visakhapatnam and surrounding areas.

AFFIDAVIT SAYS 100% CENTRAL FUNDING

From Page 1

The affidavit also mentioned several other issues including 100% funding from the Centre for execution of Polavaram irrigation project.

However, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council Yanamala Ramakrishnudu in a statement released here on Thursday called for Centre's intervention under Article 355 of Indian Constitution by saying that the Centre could intervene in state affairs in case of an external aggression and internal disturbance and also in case the state failed to be administered in compliance with provisions of the Constitution.

He stated the controversy dealing with setting up three capitals, needs to be resolved by the President, the Centre or the judiciary.

Referring to BJP's promise to come to the rescue of affected farmers due to relocation of executive capital from Amaravati to Visakhapatnam, the senior TD legislator said that the Centre was having exceptional powers to address the issue. However, he opined that ultimately the people would decide on the state's move to set up three capitals in the state.

PRO-AMARAVATI WOMEN STAND UP AGAINST BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 6

The pro-Amaravati women, upinarms over BJP support to the YSRC government on the three capitals, staged an innovative protest with nooses in Amaravati on Thursday.

Their protest at Thullur alleged the collusion of YSRC and BJP in killing of Amaravati. The women wore the nooses around their necks and warned that if the government fails to continue with Amaravati as the only capital of the state then they would commit suicide. They recalled that when the BJP leaders toured Amaravati they reassured the people that they would protect Amaravati as the only capital but now they had deceived them, changing their colours.

YSRC activists: DON'T LET GANTA INTO PARTY

V.K.L. GAYATRI | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 6

Atmosphere in the Bheemili assembly constituency has got charged up suddenly after reports that TD leader and former minister Ganta Srinivasa Rao is preparing the ground for joining the ruling YSR Congress.

Ganta and the present Bheemili MLA and minister M. Srinivasa Rao are known to be at loggerheads. Under the circumstances, many YSRC activists and followers of Srinivasa Rao put up banners, formed human chains and staged dharnas across the Bheemili constituency opposing the entry of the former TD minister into the party.

Doc quizzed on child-trafficking

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 6

The illegal sale of new born babies in and around Visakhapatnam has taken wider dimension with the police finding one more such sale in the city. Presently the police are interrogating Universal Shruti hospital managing director Dr P Namrata, who was taken into two-day police custody on Thursday.

Commissioner of police R.K. Meena said that they found one more baby and arrested Dr Chekuri Padmaja of Padmaja Hospital, Seethammadhara and N Nooka Ratnam, a resident of Cheedikada in Vizag district.

It may be recalled that a few days ago, Maharani Peta police arrested six people, including two doctors- Dr P Namrata, MD of Universal Shruti Hospital, Dr Tirmala, an employee at the same hospital- and six others for selling a baby-boy to a Kolkata-based couple. As a part of the investigation, police personnel and medical officers carried out searches at Universal Shruti Hospital and Padmaja Hospital.

In the latest case, the gang sold the newborn baby-girl to a couple hailing from Vizianagaram by informing the mother that she had delivered a still-born child.

The police chief said that they received a complaint from Chandaka Venkata Lakshmi of Chodavaram on July 30. In her complaint, the woman stated that while she was pregnant, she visited Dr Jagga Rao Hospital at Chodavaram last November for a check-up. There, one Nooka Ratnam had informed her that she knew one doctor at Sruti Hospital in Vizag and assured caesarean operation free of cost.

Trusting her, Venkata Lakshmi visited Sruti Hospital and delivered on January 31. But, Ratnam along with Ramakrishna, Dr Tirmala, Dr Namrata and Dr Sarojini conspired together and informed her that she gave birth to a girl, who was still-born. They covered the child in a white cloth to make her believe the baby was dead.

Venkata Lakshmi was discharged from the hospital on February 3. Recently, she came to know that an infant was

● **COMMISSIONER OF police R.K. Meena** said that they found one more baby and arrested Dr Chekuri Padmaja of Padmaja Hospital, Seethammadhara and N Nooka Ratnam, a resident of Vizag.

sold by Sruti Hospital authorities and immediately approached the MVP Police station in Vizag suspecting that the hospital team might have sold her child.

Investigation has revealed that Dr Chekuri Padmaja, DGO of Padmaja Hospital had received the blood reports and other medical reports of Venkata Lakshmi from Universal Shruti Hospital through Dr Saroja on January 30, who informed her to shift the pregnant woman to Padmaja Hospital. Venkata Lakshmi underwent caesarean on January 31 and the girl's weight was critically less. The infant girl was referred to neonatal care at Medi Cover hospital for incubation and other medical treatment, Meena told reporters.

However, the staff informed Venkata Lakshmi that she had given birth to a dead girl. Dr Padmaja prepared the case-sheet with a wrong name. Dr Padmaja also prepared the birth certificate with wrong names of father and mother and sent it to GVMC for registration of birth.

Meanwhile, just prior to the incident, the couple who received the child consulted Dr Namrata and Dr Tirmala and told them they were not having children since long and sought assisted pregnancy. Dr Namrata told them that they have started surrogacy and collected ₹13 lakh from the couple and sold them the baby.

So far, six cases have been registered against Sruti Hospital. Investigation is on to unearth more such illegal activities, the commissioner said.

"We have taken Dr Namrata into our custody for two days and some more clues will emerge in the child-trafficking case," Meena said and added that the police will recover the baby girl and produce before her child welfare committee and help reunite with her biological parents.

No coercive steps against pvt schools

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 6

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has asked the State government not to use coercive methods against private schools in connection with the collection of fees.

A writ was filed by K .Tulasi Vishnu Prasad on behalf of Andhra Pradesh Private Un-Aided Schools' Managements' Association seeking permission to collect fee arrears of 2019-2020 academic year and fee for new admissions.

Vishnu Prasad said the Association had submitted several representations to the government for collecting arrears and fees but there has been no response.

Unfortunately, the Government is ignoring the fact that schools are functioning fully in online mode and most of the private school teachers were

working full-time from June and were engaged in taking online classes. He said that online education was expensive and involved additional expenditure, which was observed by many high courts in various writ petitions.

He said the writ was filed as Fee Regulatory Commission and the Departmental Officers of Education Department have been regularly issuing press statements and circulars restraining educational institutions from collecting fees from the parents and also threatening with penal action.

Pending disposal of the writ petition, the High Court passed interim orders restraining the state government and other respondents from taking any coercive steps against educational institutions.

The case has been posted for final disposal on Monday.

DEMAND FOR FOOD

Health minister ordered district admin to give quality food

No non-veg for Covid patients in hosps

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, AUG. 6

All hospitals are serving non-vegetarian food to Covid patients except those run by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams in Tirupati. However, nutritious food is being served in the 'TD-run Covid hospitals.

Health minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas disclosed this while inspecting Covid wards at Padmavathi Medical College in Tirupati on Thursday.

He directed the district administration to provide quality food to the patients.

He urged the doctors to create awareness among patients on plasma therapy and encourage those who recently recovered from the disease to donate plasma to help save the patients in serious condition.

"Doctors have to focus on plasma collection as it will help in speedy recovery of the patients in critical condition," the minister

● **HOSPITALS AND care centres should display on their notice boards the number of beds available and number of patients discharged on a daily basis.**

suggested. Hospitals and care centres should display on their notice boards the number of beds available

and number of patients discharged on a daily basis.

"We have issued orders to the district authorities to recruit doctors, technicians and other staff in Covid hospitals," said Mr Srinivas.

He warned of stringent action against private hospital fleeing Covid patients.

He along with deputy CM K.Narayana Swamy and minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy visited the state Covid hospital

attached to SVIMS.

Later, reviewing the situation with officials at SV Senate Hall, he told collector Narayana Bharathi Gupta to arrange additional beds for Covid care.

He directed the medical and health department to ensure that non-Covid patients were not denied treatment.

Srinivas appealed to private hospitals to come forward to support the government's efforts to provide best treatment to Coronavirus patients.

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Shravana Bahula Chaturthi till 2.07 am (Saturday)
Star: Purvabhadra till 1.34 pm
Variyam: 12.14 am to 2 am (Saturday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.33 am to 9.23 am; 12.47 pm to 1.38 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
HILJRI CALENDAR
Zulhijja 16,1441 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.15 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.00 pm
Maghrib: 6.38 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.32 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.44 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 9.27 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 9.14 PM

COUNTER POINT



Not medical reports, we have to check their bank statements before starting treatment!

BRIEF

Woman ends life after testing +ve

Nellore: A 65-year-old woman died by suicide by hanging after she tested positive for Covid-19 at Adusumalli village in Parchur mandal of Prakasam district during the early hours of Thursday. The woman had been experiencing high fever for the last three days, and her husband took her for a Covid-19 test as a precautionary measure on Wednesday. The medical officers carried out the test with an Antigen Rapid Test kit and declared her positive to Covid-19 within 20 minutes. The woman was depressed upon learning the news and hanged herself during the early hours of Thursday. She is survived by her husband and two daughters who settled abroad, the locals said. Parchur SI Ranganadh visited the house and conducted an inquiry.

TD alleges YSRC looted Covid funds

Kadapa: TD Kadapa district general secretary, Baliseti Hariprasad, and former director of the state fisheries corporation, Yatagiri Ramprasad, have alleged that YSR Congress leaders plundered the funds given by the central government for the pandemic. "We are raising both hands to the Chief Minister and asking him to protect the people of Kadapa district from the Coronavirus," Mr Hariprasad told media on Thursday.

TTD priest succumbs to virus

Nellore: A 45-year-old TTD priest succumbed to Covid-19 on Thursday while undergoing treatment at the Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences in Tirupati. The priest, who also suffered from diabetes and obesity, was admitted to the ICU following shortness of breath on August 2. His condition deteriorated on Thursday evening after his shortness of breath got aggravated. He was put on CPR but died around 4 p.m. The priest was earlier working with Govindaraja Swamy Temple in Tirupati. He was posted to the holy shrine in Tirumala sometime back because of shortage of archakas after 21 priests of the Tirumala temple tested Covid-19 positive.

Anaparthi MLA tests Covid +ve

Kakinada: Anaparthi MLA, Sathi Suryanarayana Reddy, was pronounced Covid-19 positive and send into home isolation for 15 days. He released a video on Thursday in which he asks people not to worry about his health as he would take all precautions and get treatment. He said that many people are Covid-19 positive and he went to them to give courage and contracted it himself. He requested his followers to test themselves to confirm their health and take necessary steps. He told people to contact his office when he is in isolation, people can contact his office for sorting out their problems with YSRC leaders Sabbella Krishna Reddy and Nallamilli Muralimohan.

Rough sea



High tides move towards an Indian Naval warship off the sea due to the depression over the Bay of Bengal near Ramakrishna Beach in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

AP records single-day high of 10,328 cases

Over 72 deaths recorded in the State in last 24 hrs

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 6

After a brief lull in surge of Coronavirus infections, Andhra Pradesh registered single day spike of 10,328 new Covid-19 cases, raising the overall tally to 10,328, apart from 72 deaths due to the virus, taking the death toll to 1,753 in the last 24 hours.

The state health department, in its Covid-19 bulletin issued here on Thursday, stated that out of 63,686 samples tested during the last 24 hours, 10,328 patients have been found to be infected with Coronavirus. The state government has so far tested 22,99,332 samples in all. Of them, 1,96,789 patients have been infected with the virus, while 1,12,870 have been discharged after recovery. 82,166 persons are under-

going treatment for the infection in various hospitals across the state.

With regard to new instances of the virus, East Godavari continues to lead with 1,351 cases, followed by 1,285 in Kurnool, 1,112 in Anantapur, 868 in Guntur, 788 in Nellore, 781 in Visakhapatnam, 798 in West Godavari, 755 in Chittoor, 682 in Srikakulam, 604 in Kadapa, 575 in Vizianagaram, 366 in Prakasam and 363 in Krishna.

In terms of total positive cases, East Godavari has been the worst affected, registering the highest number of 27,580 cases, followed by 23,348 in Kurnool, 21,173 in Anantapur, 19,419 in Guntur, 16,682 in Visakhapatnam, 15,786 in West Godavari, 14,306 in Chittoor, 11,493 in

Kadapa, 10,705 in Nellore, 9,636 in Srikakulam, 9,042 in Krishna, 7,468 in Vizianagaram and 7,256 in Prakasam.

As far as recovery rate from infection is concerned, East Godavari stands first by accounting for 14,792 of recovered cases, followed by 14,263 in Anantapur, 13,314 in Kurnool, 12,007 in Guntur, 11,716 in West Godavari, 7,948 in Chittoor, 6,940 in Visakhapatnam, 5,832 in Krishna, 5,584 in Kadapa, 5,263 in Nellore, 5,235 in Srikakulam, 4,324 in Prakasam and 2,757 in Vizianagaram.

Among the 72 deaths, Anantapur and East Godavari accounted for 10 each, followed by nine in Guntur, eight in Chittoor, six each in Krishna, Nellore and Prakasam, four in Visakhapatnam, three

each in Kadapa, Vizianagaram and West Godavari, and two each in Kurnool and Srikakulam.

With regard to the cumulative death toll Kurnool has registered the highest number of 223 deaths, followed by 205 in East Godavari, 198 in Krishna, 188 in Guntur, 147 in Visakhapatnam, 143 in Chittoor, 142 in Anantapur, 117 in West Godavari, 104 in Srikakulam, 86 in Prakasam, 74 in Nellore and 72 in Vizianagaram.

As on Thursday, Andhra Pradesh has carried out Covid-19 tests on 43,059 patients per million population, registering a Coronavirus positive rate of 8.56. Maharashtra continues to top the nation with a positive rate of 19.36 followed by Telangana standing at 13.59.

₹40.92 CR WB FUNDS FOR 7 NEW BUILDINGS

NAGESWARA RAO BALLEDA | DC
KADAPA, AUG. 6

The roads and buildings department is all set to renovate 65 Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and build new buildings for seven in the district with World Bank funds.

Of the ₹40.92 crore sanctioned by the bank, ₹27.75 crore has been allocated for repairs and renovation of 65 PHCs and ₹13.70 crore for construction of buildings for seven PHCs. As part of renovation, drinking water, toilets, electric fittings and other amenities will be provided in 65 PHCs.

The R&B department has finalized the tenders and is set to sign agreement with contractors.

The following are the places where PHC buildings will be constructed and the funds allotted to them: Kamanur (₹1.86 cr), Payasam (₹1.91 cr), Brahmamgari Matham (₹1.92 cr), Vemula (₹1.87 cr), Bidinancherla (₹1.88 cr), KVG Palke (₹1.86 cr), Santakovvuru (₹1.87cr). Each new PHC building will have eight to 10 rooms for patients. The R&B department had to invite tenders for the second time following poor response in its first attempt.

The contractors are required to complete the construction of new buildings within nine months from the date of signing the agreement.

■ Of the ₹40.92 crore sanctioned, ₹27.75 crore was allocated for repairs of 65 PHCs and ₹13.70 cr for seven new PHCs

■ Each new PHC building will have 8-10 rooms for patients. The R&B department had to invite tenders for the second time following poor response

105-year-old granny conquers Coronavirus

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC
KURNOOL, AUG. 6

At a time when youngsters are dreading the very word Coronavirus, here is a 105-year-old woman who set a classic example of a true-blue warrior while conquering Covid-19 at the Covid Hospital here.

She had comorbidities like blood pressure and blood glucose impairment, said G Narendranath Reddy, KGGH Superintendent. She fought valiantly and showed exemplary determination to beat the odds and survive, he said.

Mahanama, 105, a great grandmother with 44 grandchildren, said that meditation, yoga, frugal living with moderate food habits were the secrets behind her good health and high immunity levels.

A resident of Pedda Padakana Street in old Kurnool, she lost her



Mahanama

husband Madhava Swami, who was a goldsmith, in 1991. They had three sons and five daughters. One son died recently and another son had retired from RTC as a driver, she said.

Her eldest daughter is now aged 82 years. The second is in her 80s and the third is 70 years old. Two of her daughters have died, said her son Jaya Das Naidu.

It is interesting to note that even at the age of 105, Mahanama still does

■ When the district administration took a drive to test all the people above 60 years of age for corona, she tested positive and was admitted to State Covid Hospital on July 19

her own daily chores, said her son.

When the district administration took a drive to test all the people above 60 years of age for corona, she tested positive and was admitted at the State Covid Hospital on July 19.

During her 12-day stay, she had no other symptoms except mild fever, the hospital Superintendent said.

On one occasion when she had some breathing problem, she was provided with oxygen. Apart from that, she was not given any special treatment and she was fully cured of Covid. She was discharged on July 31, he said.

RISKY | TRADE

It is not known who authorised LG to enhance its styrene storage capacity

Vizag emergency plan updated 13 yrs ago

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 6

Failure to update the mandatory "off-site emergency plan" is said to be one of the prime reasons for a series of industrial mishaps in the state, especially in Visakhapatnam.

As per the norms of Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals (MSIHC) Rules of 1989, every district in the state must have an off-site emergency plan with details of the hazardous industries present in the district, storage capacity of

hazardous chemicals like styrene or ammonia, names of personnel handling storage of such substances, their contact numbers, possible chances of major accidents and their on-site and off-site impacts, and details of rescue and relief measures to be taken up.

Every district is to have a 'District Crisis Group' with collector as its chairperson while deputy chief inspector of factories will be the member convener; the other members being district-level officials from stakeholder departments like APPCB, fire, boilers, industries, revenue and

others. Though it is mandatory for the DCG to meet once in three months or at least once in a calendar year to take stock of developments in dealing with hazardous industries, such meetings hardly take place, with concerned officials preoccupied with their day-to-day activities.

In case of Visakhapatnam, its "off-site emergency plan" was updated in 2007. In the last 13 years, several new hazardous industrial units have come up, while some of the existing ones have enhanced their storage capacity of hazardous

chemicals as well as production capacities. But no data pertaining to these developments has been incorporated in the district off-site emergency plan.

Moreover, it is not yet known who authorised LG Polymers to enhance its storage capacity of styrene to 3,000 tonnes. As the district administration remained in the dark about this development and the firm itself was unprepared in handling the chemical, the mishap was only waiting to happen.

Joint inspector of factories, Visakhapatnam, J. Siva Sankar Reddy said,

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC
HYDERABAD, AUG. 6

Telangana state's Chagari Koushal Kumar Reddy from Sri Chaitanya Junior Kalasala topped the B.Tech admissions list announced by the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) on Wednesday. Out of a total of 1,83,059 students from around the country and 12 countries (West Asia, Indonesia, Nepal, Nigeria, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, the UK and Singapore) that had applied for admission.

Two more students from the state, Thrineth Reddy D. from Narayana Junior

College and Neeraj Gunda of Sri Chaitanya Junior College, bagged the sixth and seventh positions, respectively.

VIT Chancellor Dr. G. Viswanathan, said that admissions would be on merit, based on the normalised PCM/ PCB marks, JEE/ SAT scores obtained by the candidates. The ranks were declared for admission to 36 B.Tech, and BDes. programmes offered by VIT at its Vellore, Chennai, AP and Bhopal campuses. Under the GV School Development Programme (GVSDP), Central and state board exam toppers would be given 100 per

cent fee waiver. Candidates with ranks up to 50 would be given 75 per cent tuition fee waiver; those with ranks 51 to 100 50 per cent and candidates in ranks 101 to 1,000 would be given 25 per cent tuition fee waiver.

The district toppers (one boy and one girl) in all the districts of Tamil Nadu, MP and AP who are studying in government schools in rural areas will be given 100 per cent fee waiver and exemption from hostel and mess fees under the STARS (Support The Advancement of Rural Students) scheme.

Candidates can view their results at the institute's official website www.vit.ac.in.

Innovation hub at IIT-Tirupati

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, AUG. 6

The National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS) has chosen IIT Tirupati as the host institute for establishing a Technology Innovation Hub (TIH), which will focus on Positioning and Precision Technologies (PPT).

The Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, will invest ₹100 crore in the TIH over 5 years.

The hub will act as a national resource centre to create an ecosystem for start-ups and entrepreneurs in the field of technology and skill development. It will also nurture international collaborations in positioning and precision technologies that form the core of areas

like precision agriculture, navigation, precision timing and sensing, precision manufacturing, and disaster management. The technologies also find application in water resources management, transportation, surveillance and survey, satellite communication, guided defense technologies, and logistics.

TIH will be a Section-8 company and non-profit organisation. Director, IIT Tirupati, will be the chairman of its governing body that will include members from industry and academia. IIT Tirupati director Prof. K. N. Satyanarayana said TIH will promote translational research and development in cutting edge next-generation technologies with emphasis on "Make in India" in the field of positioning and precision technologies.

TTD MANTA PATHANAM ENTERS 119TH DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, AUG. 6

Tirumala temple and its surroundings were reverberated with rhythmic chanting of Sundarakanda Akhanda Pathanam organised with grandeur at Nada Neerajana Mandapam on Thursday.

The Mantra Parayanam being organized by TTD entered 119th day and Sundarakanda 57th day.

Akhanda Sundarakanda Pathanam consists of 227 shlokas from Dwitiya Sarga (Second Chapter) to Sapthama Sarga (Seventh Chapter) and the Shlokas

from Sasta Sargas (Six Chapters) were recited by nearly 200 Vedic scholars.

Additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy said that the TTD was organising the Shloka Parayanam to protect humanity from the Covid-19 pandemic.

K.S. Avadhani, principal of Dharmagiri Veda Vignana Peetham, Tirumala, who is leading the recitation of Shlokas, said, "In the entire epic Ramayana, Sundarakanda holds a special place. We are confident that the recitation of Shlokas in Sundarakanda will end the pandemic soon."

Mystery shrouds murder of doctor

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, AUG. 6

Mystery shrouds the murder of a doctor working in Karunamayee Sri Vijayeswari Devi Hospital at Puligilapadu near Rapur in Nellore district.

While police claim that a watchman in the hospital confessed to killing the doctor, the parents of the victim suspected the role of the hospital management.

According to police, Dr Ravindra Nayak, 28, disappeared from the hospital on May 14 night after celebrating his birthday with the staff at the hospital.

Police registered a case on July 19 based on a complaint lodged by his parents hailing from Udiripu Konda Thanda

in Koderu mandal of Anantapur district.

The watchman of the hospital, Ankaiah, surrendered to the police and reportedly confessed during interrogation that he had killed the doctor. He said he had hit Dr Nayak on the head with a beer bottle following a heated argument over a woman's issue on May 14 night.

The watchman reportedly told the police that he had dumped the body near Telugu Ganga Canal, which is 3 km away from the hospital, and set fire to it after three days to obliterate evidence. But Nayak's father Subhramanyam dismissed the confession of Ankaiah that he alone was involved in the murder. He demanded a deeper probe.

SANITATION WORKER DONATES PLASMA

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, AUG. 6

For the first time in East Godavari district, a sanitation worker, K. Appala Raju, in the Government General Hospital in Kakinada volunteered to donate his plasma on Thursday. Appalaraju tested Covid-19 positive in June, and he recovered completely.

District collector D. Muralidhar Reddy praised him and called upon the youth in the age group of 20-40 years to come forward to donate their plasma.

SHORT TAKES

SUSHANT CASE: CBI BOOKS FIR AGAINST RHEA, OTHERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

The CBI on Thursday registered an FIR against Bollywood actress Rhea Chakraborty, Indrajit Chakraborty, Sandhya Chakraborty, Showik Chakraborty, Samuel Miranda, Shruti Modi, and others in connection with the death case of Sushant Singh Rajput.

A senior official in the agency said the CBI has booked six accused and others under sections including criminal conspiracy, abetment of suicide, wrongful restraint, wrongful confinement, theft, criminal breach of trust, cheating and criminal intimidation.

The agency sleuths are also in touch with Bihar Police, which was earlier investigating the case, said the official.

The case will be probed by the Special Investigation Team under Superintendent of Police Nupur Prasad and will be supervised by DIG Gagandeep Gambhir and Joint Director Manoj Shashidhar, both are senior IPS officers.

Rajput, 34, was found hanging from the ceiling of his apartment in suburban Bandra in Mumbai on June 14 and since then Mumbai police has been probing the case.

Bihar Police also swung into action following a complaint by Krishna Kishore Singh, 77-year-old father of Rajput, and a resident of Patna.

Patna Police had registered an FIR under IPC sections related to alleged criminal conspiracy, cheating and abetment to suicide among others on the complaint.

KERALA TO SEE FALL IN CASES BY MID-SEPT: EXPERTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 6

Kerala's high level expert committee on Covid-19 Control believes that Coronavirus cases are expected to decline in the state by mid September if the state government continues with tough disease control and prevention measures.

Committee chairman Dr B. Ekbal said the state needs to strictly comply with the break-the-chain activities, strict quarantine and reverse quarantine measures to ensure the slide of Covid-19 by next month. The expert panel's statement comes close on the heels of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan directing the state police to contain the increasing cases of Covid-19 within two weeks.

However, experts say that before the slide Kerala Covid-19 cases are expected to peak by the end of this month or early September.

Meanwhile, on Thursday the state recorded highest single day tally of Covid-19 cases with 1,298 and the total cases so far crossed the 30,000 mark.

Of the new cases 1,017 contracted the disease through contact, 170 came from other states, 78 came from abroad and the source of infection of 76 is yet to be ascertained. The highest number of cases were reported in Thiruvananthapuram district with 219 of which 210 through contact, Kozhikode 174, Kasargod - 153, Palakkad - 136, Malappuram - 129.

At present 1.48 lakh people are under surveillance of which 1.36 lakh are under home/institutional quarantine, 11,437 are in hospitals.

Rain havoc in Mumbai



A landslide took place at Pedder Road area of Mumbai after consistent rainfall on Thursday. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray took stock of the state's preparedness in the wake of the heavy rains and asked authorities to remain alert. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Thackeray and assured all possible support. — *Rajesh Jadhav*

India snubs China for remarks on J&K

Urges Beijing not to interfere in India's internal affairs

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

Hours after China raised the Kashmir issue at the 15-member UN Security Council at the behest of its all-weather friend Pakistan, India on Thursday said it rejected China's interference in India's internal affairs, adding that China's attempt once again "met with little support from the international community". New Delhi also "urged" Beijing "to draw the proper conclusions from such infructuous attempts".

This is the second time in two days India criticised China for its comments and actions on the Kashmir issue.

Making no secret of the close collaboration between China and Pakistan, Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi tweeted Wednesday night that this was the third time in the past year that it was raised at the UN, thanking China "especially", saying Pakistan "welcomed" the meet.

The Chinese move in

‘India committed to its objective’

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

India on Thursday said it 'expects' China to work 'sincerely' with it for 'complete disengagement and de-escalation' at the line of actual control (LAC) in the Ladakh sector to ensure 'full restoration of peace and tranquillity' in the border areas.

This comes amid reports of a stalemate in the Sino-Indian military de-escalation in the Pangong Tso lake region due to the reported reluctance of Chinese PLA troops to pull back.

Ministry of external affairs (MEA) spokesperson, Anurag Srivastava, said, "As I have conveyed earlier, the special representatives of India and

collaboration with Pakistan was obviously planned at the UN on the first anniversary of India's revoking

China had a telephone conversation on July 5 where they discussed the situation in the border areas. They had agreed that early and complete disengagement of the troops along the line of actual control and de-escalation from India-China border areas in accordance with the bilateral agreement and protocols and full restoration of peace and tranquillity was essential for the smooth overall development of bilateral relations."

Making India's position clear, Srivastava added "India remains committed to this objective. We also expect that the Chinese side will work with us sincerely for complete disengagement and de-escalation."

Article 370, that granted special status to the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state.

China first began

raising the Kashmir issue last year at the UNSC for informal deliberations soon after India revoked Article 370.

On Thursday, the external affairs ministry said: "We have noted China initiated a discussion in the UN Security Council on issues pertaining to the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. This was not the first time China has sought to raise a subject that is solely an internal matter of India. As on such occasions, this attempt too met with little support from the international community. We firmly reject China's interference in our internal affairs and urge it to draw proper conclusions from such infructuous attempts."

India had on Wednesday too snubbed China, asking it to refrain from interference in India's internal affairs, hours after Beijing termed the revoking of Article 370 a year ago by New Delhi as "illegal and invalid".

India added that China had no locus standi on the issue.

PUTIN LIKELY TO VISIT INDIA IN OCT.

New Delhi, Aug. 6: Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to visit India in October this year for the Annual Bilateral Summit between the two countries, New Delhi said on Thursday. India said "regional and international issues of interest" are being discussed in exchanges between the two countries.

TV ACTOR SAMEER SHARMA ENDS LIFE BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 6

Television actor Sameer Sharma allegedly committed suicide at his home in suburban Malad.

The 44-year-old was found hanging from a ceiling fan in the kitchen of his flat at Neha building in Chincholi Bunder locality in Malad (West) on Wednesday night. Sharma has worked in popular serials like 'Yeh Rishta Hai Pyar Ke', 'Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi', 'Kahani Ghar-Ghar Ki'.

"We have not found any suicide note at the spot. It seems to be a suicide case. It is suspected that he hanged himself two days back. We have sent the body for an autopsy," said a senior inspector of Malad police station.

The incident came to light when the building's watchman peeped through the kitchen window and saw Sharma hanging.

PM remembers Sushma on her first death anniversary

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

Tributes poured in on the first death anniversary of BJP leader and former External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj on Thursday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi remembered her as "an articulate voice for India at the world stage" while Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu said she was a "blend of modern thinking and traditional values."

Swaraj passed away last year after a cardiac arrest hours after Parliament gave its nod to the bill nullifying the contentious Article 370 about which she tweeted that she was "waiting to see this day in my lifetime."

It was her last tweet and hours later she was rushed to the AIIMS where she breathed her last.

"Remembering Sushma Ji on her first Punya Tithi. Her untimely and unfortunate demise left many saddened.

She served India selflessly and was an articulate voice for India at the world stage," the Prime Minister tweeted.

Recalling how Swaraj used to visit him on every Raksha Bandhan to tie Rakhi, the Vice President said she was seen as "an epitome of Indian culture. She was a blend of modern thinking and traditional values. She was always respectful towards seniors and elders. She was one of the most affable Indian politicians and treated everybody with warmth and affection." Naidu addressed the first memorial lecture organised by the Panjab University in the memory of the late leader.

External Affairs minister and her successor S. Jaishankar said Swaraj was "always an inspiration." Paying tributes to her, Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said "will always remember her as a great orator, visionary leaders and above all a compassionate human being."

Union home minister Amit Shah said Sushma Swaraj was a "towering figure of Indian polity, an outstanding parliamentarian and a brilliant orator who dedicated her entire life in the service of the nation. Her ideals will continue to inspire the generations to come."

Information and Broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said Swaraj was a great orator, lively person and a good human being. Javadekar also addressed an event 'Sushmanjali' organised in the memory of the late leader. Shiv Sena's Priyanka Chaturvedi said Swaraj was an "empowered, talented, dedicated and inspirational daughter of India while Union minister of food processing Harsimrat Kaur Badal said she was a "motherly figure and a role model to many" and will be remembered as an "excellent minister and an astute politician."

Lalu shifted to RIMS director's bungalow

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, AUG. 6

Jailed RJD chief Lalu Yadav has been shifted from the paying ward of the Rajendra Institute Medical Sciences (RIMS) in Ranchi to the official residence of the hospital director located on the premises.

Sources aware of the development told this newspaper that the decision to move Lalu was taken after three of his caretakers tested positive for Covid-19 on July 25. This prompted his doctors to suggest the hospital authorities to shift 72-year-old RJD supremo to an isolated area.

Lalu Yadav is being treated for multiple serious ailments at RIMS Ranchi. Doctors said that he is suffering from heart, renal and other serious diseases and needed to be kept away from Covid-19 patients.

The BJP, however, feels that Lalu Yadav is getting "special treatment" from JMM-Congress-RJD led Mahagathbandhan government in Jharkhand. Talking to this newspaper on the issue, BJP spokesperson Nikhil Anand said, "If Lalu Yadav is being given any kind of special favour

beyond the existing law overlooking the jail manual then the matter is very serious. We would like to warn the Jharkhand government against giving any privileges to any person serving jail sentence."

Lalu Yadav was earlier criticised for using mobile phones and holding political meetings inside the RIMS premises. After he was shifted to the RIMS director's official bungalow, BJP leaders in Ranchi alleged that "the premises would be used as RJD headquarters where meetings will be held to discuss the upcoming assembly elections in Bihar".

After being convicted in the second fodder scam case involving the illegal withdrawal of ₹89.27 Lakh from Deoghar treasury, Lalu Yadav was sent to Birsamunda jail in Ranchi. He was later shifted to the RIMS in March 2018 after his health condition deteriorated.

Fraudulent withdrawal from government treasuries and use of fake bills and vouchers had surfaced in 1996. Officials conducting raids in 1996 had found that money was paid to non-existent companies for supplying fodder to the animal husbandry department.

Panel has discretion to decide on prisoners' bail, parole: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 6

The Bombay high court on Wednesday said the high-powered committee set up by the Maharashtra government had the discretion to decide which prisoners were entitled to be released on temporary bail or parole amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The HC also made it clear that no prisoner can claim right or entitlement to seek temporary release during the pandemic.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Madhav Jamdar was hearing a petition filed by social worker Medha Patkar through her NGO 'National Alliance for People's Movements' challenging an order passed by the high pow-

ered committee.

As per the order dated March 25, 2020, the committee had said those prisoners who have been convicted or are facing charges under special Acts or in serious offences, wherein the punishment is above seven years, are not entitled to be released on temporary bail or parole amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The petitioner's advocate S.B. Talekar had argued that the committee had exceeded its jurisdiction by classifying prisoners and it was infringing upon a person's fundamental right to equality.

The bench, in its order, however, noted that the principle of equality does not take away from the state the power of classifying persons for legitimate purposes.

"Equality before law does

not mean that things which are different shall be treated as though they were the same," the court said.

The bench further noted that the committee had a discretion to determine the category of prisoners who would be entitled to be released on temporary bail or parole.

"It is clear that the HPC (high-powered committee) balanced the rights of the prisoners to maintain maximum possible distancing to contain the spread of Covid-19 as well as the rights of the society," the court said.

"It is fallacious to contend that inmates can claim an absolute right for release in a situation like the prevailing pandemic as if it were flowing either from the Constitution or any other statute," the court said.

WAR OF WORDS Shivraj: MP deserves GI tag for aromatic rice

MP, Punjab fight over Basmati

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, AUG. 6:

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday slammed his Punjab counterpart Capt. Amrinder Singh for mounting pressure on the Centre to deny geographical indication (GI) tagging of basmati of MP, describing it unfair.

Chouhan said there was no basis for opposition to GI tagging of basmati of MP by Punjab Chief Minister since the state has 'written recorded history since 1908' for production of the variant of aromatic rice in 13 districts.

"Government of Madhya Pradesh strongly condemns the letter written by the Punjab Chief Minister to PMO (Prime Minister's Office) regarding allotment of GI tagging of basmati rice of 13 districts of the state", a tweet by chief minister's office (CMO) read.

Chouhan's office here ran a series of tweets justifying the state's demand for GI tagging of basmati rice grown in 13 districts of MP in the wake of Singh shooting a letter to the PMO on Wednesday demanding not to allow MP's basmati to get GI tag. In his letter, Singh argued that GI tagging to MP's basmati would not only be detrimental to

the interest of Punjab and other states who have already been awarded GI tag for their variant of the aromatic rice, but may also have an adverse impact on the export of basmati by India.

The Punjab Chief Minister said India exports basmati to the tune of ₹33,000 crore every year and any dilution in registration of Indian basmati may give advantage to Pakistan (which also produces basmati) in the international market in terms of characteristic and quality parameters.

The MP government, however, dismissed the concern expressed by Singh, saying that GI tagging to the state's bas-

mati would "provide stability to basmati prices in the international markets and boost our export".

"Madhya Pradesh has recorded history since 1908 of basmati production in 13 districts. Records of supplying seeds to farmers in MP in 1944 is recorded in the records of the Scindia state", a tweet by CMO here said.

The state government further said that the Indian Institute of Rice Research, Hyderabad, has recorded production of basmati since the last 25 years and added that exporters from both Punjab and Haryana have been procuring the rice variant from MP.

IN BRIEF

Court indicts Shehbaz, son

SHAFQAT ALI | DC
ISLAMABAD, AUG. 6

A Pakistani accountability court on Thursday indicted Pakistan Muslim League-(Nawaz) President Shehbaz Sharif and his son Hamza Shahbaz in Ramzan Sugar Mills reference. During the hearing headed by judge Amjad Nazir Chaudhry, both the accused pleaded not guilty in the reference and their lawyer requested time for case preparation which was rejected by the court. Shehbaz told the judge that he was being dragged into fake case as he has always worked with honesty and served the people of Punjab for 10 years. "I didn't take salary and even money for petrol for 12 years. I brought investment to Pakistan for economic stability," he added. The PML-N leader said he was a public representative with emotions for general masses.

5 dead in Denver home arson fire

Denver: Five people were found dead Wednesday after an early morning fire destroyed a suburban Denver home — a blaze that authorities said they suspect was intentionally set. Three people escaped the fire by jumping from the home's second floor. Investigators believe the victims were a toddler, an older child and three adults, Denver Fire Department Capt. Greg Pixley said. Their bodies were discovered after firefighters extinguished the fire, which was first reported by a Denver police officer at 2:40 a.m., Pixley said. The three survivors were hospitalised with non-life-threatening injuries, Denver police spokesman Jay Casillas said. Pixley spoke outside the charred house in the Green Valley Ranch neighbourhood. A police officer attempting to rescue people on the first floor was pushed back by the fire's heat, and it appears that those who died were all on the first floor.

Bombs damage ATM in NZ mall

Wellington: Would-be thieves apparently detonated two homemade bombs at a New Zealand mall ATM early Thursday and left other unexploded bombs behind, according to police. Authorities closed the Chartwell Shopping Centre in Hamilton and some nearby streets while they searched the area to make sure it was safe.

A military bomb disposal team was called to the site. Police said they found several homemade explosive devices, including two, that appeared to have exploded. They said the bombs had damaged the ATM and the immediate area around it but hadn't injured anybody. The ATM stood at an exterior wall of the shopping centre at an ANZ bank branch. Police initially declined say what the devices were made from or to confirm that no money had been stolen, saying they would release more details later in the day.

NIRAV MODI IN CUSTODY TILL AUGUST 27

London, Aug. 6: Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, fighting extradition to India, was on Thursday further remanded in custody until August 27 after he appeared via video link at a regular remand hearing before a UK court on charges over the nearly \$2 billion Punjab National Bank fraud and money laundering case.

The 49-year-old jeweller, who has been lodged at Wandsworth Prison in south-west London since his arrest in March last year, appeared via video link before District Judge Vanessa Baraitser at Westminster Magistrates' Court in London for a regular 28-day "call-over" hearing. He was told the next hearing in the case will be a case management hearing ahead of a trial set from September 7.

"You will appear via video link again. Your lawyers may be present in court," said Judge Baraitser, in reference to the part remote setting in operation across UK courts since the Coronavirus lockdown. In May, District Judge Samuel Goozee presided over the first part of Modi's extradition trial, held in a partial remote settings, with the second part scheduled between September 7 and 11. Besides, completing the arguments on establishing a prima facie case against Modi, the trial next month will deal with a second extradition request, made by the Indian authorities and certified by UK Home Secretary Priti Patel.

Don's FB post of kids immune to Covid-19 deleted

Houston, Aug. 6: Social media giant Facebook, for the first time, has removed a post from US President Donald Trump in which he claimed that children were "almost immune" to Covid-19, saying it violated its policy against spreading "misinformation" about the Coronavirus. The post in question was a video clip of a Trump interview on Fox News Channel uploaded by the Trump campaign on Wednesday.

The US President claims in the clip that children are "almost immune" to Covid-19. While much remains unknown about the Coronavirus, children are believed to be able to spread it to others, even without symptoms.

"This video includes false claims that a group of people is immune from Covid-19 which is a violation of our policies around harmful Covid misinformation," Andy Stone, a Facebook policy spokesperson said in a statement.

A link to the post now diverts to a page that says, "This Content Isn't Available Right Now." It is the first time that Facebook has removed a post from Trump entirely, rather than labelling it, as it has done in the past, making it a rare instance in which it has been willing to censor the president.

In June, Facebook removed ads that the Trump campaign posted that featured a symbol Nazis used to classify political prisoners during World War II. Twitter also removed a link to the same video

Test travellers from 'risk areas': Germany

Berlin, Aug. 6: Germany will require people arriving from countries deemed high risk, such as the United States, to take Coronavirus tests starting this weekend, the health minister said Thursday, as the country recorded its highest daily tally of new infections in three months. German officials have voiced alarm over a steady upward creep in the number of new infections over recent weeks.

The national disease control centre, the Robert Koch Institute, said 1,045 cases were recorded on Wednesday — the first time since May 7 that it has counted more than 1,000 new cases in a day. Daily figures can be volatile or distorted by delays in reporting, and

the number is still far short of the peak of more than 6,000 reached in early April.

"What we are seeing is a lot of small outbreaks," Health Minister Jens Spahn told reporters. "People are getting infected at family parties, at their place of work or at community facilities." On top of that, school holidays — the dates of which are staggered across Germany's 16 states — are ending in some regions, increasing concerns that vacationers could bring home the virus. Last Saturday, the government started offering free tests for people returning to the country, a move that Spahn said likely contributed to the increase in recorded cases. — AP

clip, which the official Trump Twitter account @TeamTrump shared earlier on Wednesday.

Links to the tweet now point Twitter users to a message that the tweet violated Twitter's rules and is no longer available. The Trump campaign accused Facebook of "flagrant bias".

"The President was stating a fact that children are less susceptible to the Coronavirus," Courtney Parella, the campaign's deputy national press secretary, said in an emailed

statement.

"Another day, another display of Silicon Valley's flagrant bias against this President, where the rules are only enforced in one direction. Social media companies are not the arbiters of truth," Parella said. A US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study involving 2,500 children published in April found that about one in five infected children were hospitalised versus one in three adults; three children died. — PTI

China sentences 3rd Canadian to death for storing drug at home

Beijing, Aug. 6: China has sentenced a third Canadian citizen to death on drug charges amid a steep decline in relations between the two countries. The Guangzhou Municipal Intermediate Court announced Xu Weihong's penalty on Thursday and said an alleged accomplice, Wen Guanxiong, had been given a life sentence.

Death sentences are automatically referred to China's highest court for review. The brief court statement gave no details but local media in the southern Chinese city at the heart of the country's manufacturing industry said Xu and Wen had gathered ingredients and tools and began making the drug ketamine in October 2016, then stored the final product in Xu's home in Guangzhou's Haizhu district.

Police later confiscated more than 120 kilograms (266 pounds) of the drug from Xu's home and another address, the reports said. Ketamine is a powerful pain killer that has become popular among club goers in China and elsewhere. Relations between China and Canada soured over the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, an executive of the founder of Chinese tech giant Huawei, at Vancouver's airport in late 2018. The US wants her ex-

US TALKS TOUGHER ON CHINESE TECH, BUT OFFERS FEW SPECIFICS

New York, Aug. 6: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday called for a big expansion of US government curbs on Chinese technology, saying that it wants to see "untrusted Chinese apps" pulled from the Google and Apple app stores.

Outside experts called Pompeo's proposal vague and possibly illegal. Pompeo called out popular video app TikTok and the messaging app WeChat, which people in the US use to communicate with others in the US and China, as "significant threats to the personal data of American citizens, not to mention tools for CCP content censorship."

CCP refers to the Chinese Communist Party. The US government has

tradited to face fraud charges over the company's dealings with Iran.

Her arrest infuriated Beijing, which sees her case as a political move designed to prevent China's rise as a global technology power.

In apparent retaliation, China detained former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig and Canadian

Lebanon officials shift blast blame as Macron calls for serious reforms

Beirut, Aug. 6: Lebanese officials targeted in the investigation of the massive blast that tore through Beirut sought to shift blame for the presence of explosives at the city's port, and the visiting French president warned Thursday that without serious reforms the country would "continue to sink".

The blast Tuesday, which appeared to have been caused by an accidental fire that ignited a warehouse full of ammonium nitrate at the city's port, ripped across the Lebanese capital, killing at least 135 people, injuring more than 5,000 and causing widespread destruction.

It also may have accelerated the country's Coronavirus outbreak, as thousands flooded into hospitals in the wake of the blast. Tens of thousands have been forced to move in with relatives and friends after their homes were damaged, further raising the risks of exposure.

French President Emmanuel Macron visited Thursday amid widespread pledges of international aid. But Lebanon, which was already mired in a severe economic crisis, faces a daunting challenge in rebuilding. It's unclear how much support the international community will offer the notoriously corrupt and dysfunctional government. Macron, who viewed the devastated port and was to meet with senior Lebanese officials, said the visit is "an opportunity to have a frank and challenging dialogue with the Lebanese political powers and institutions".

He said France will work to coordinate aid. Losses from the blast are estimated to be between \$10 billion and \$15 billion, Beirut Governor Marwan Abboud told Saudi-owned TV station *Al-Hadath*. — AP



Volunteers clean the rubble and broken glass from the streets in Beirut on Thursday in the aftermath of a massive explosion in the Lebanese capital. — AFP

Explosion likely an attack: Trump

Washington, Aug. 6: President Donald Trump on Wednesday continued to suggest that the massive explosion that killed at least 135 people in Lebanon might have been a deliberate attack, even as officials in Lebanon and his own defence chief said it's believed to have been an accident. "Whatever happened, it's terrible, but they don't really know what it is," Trump insisted. "Nobody knows yet."

Investigators probing the deadly blast that ripped across Beirut on Tuesday are focused on possible negligence in the storage of tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive fertilizer, in a waterfront warehouse. The Lebanese government ordered the house arrest of several

port officials. On Tuesday, Trump called the explosion a "terrible attack" and said American generals told him it was likely caused by a bomb.

"They seem to think it was an attack," Trump said. "It was a bomb of some kind, yes." Defence Secretary Mark Esper contradicted the president Wednesday, saying most people believe the explosion "was an accident, as reported". But later in the day, Trump insisted, nobody knows for sure. "How can you say accident if somebody left some terrible explosive-type devices and things around perhaps — perhaps it was that. Perhaps it was an attack," Trump told reporters during a White House briefing. — AP

OZ PLEDGES \$1.4MN FOR BEIRUT RELIEF

Beirut, Aug. 6: The Australian government has pledged an initial 2 million Australian dollars (\$1.4 million) to the relief effort in Lebanon following the deadly blast that ripped across the capital Beirut on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison told reporters Thursday that the aid will be provided to the World Food Programme and to the Red Cross for food, medical care and essential items. He says his country is considering another round of support.

Morrison says some Australian Embassy personnel were injured but "they are safe and accounted for and we wish them a speedy recovery".

He also thanked the US Embassy officials in Beirut for their support. — AP

Rajapaksas set for landslide win

Colombo, Aug. 6: Sri Lanka's strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa was poised to stage a political comeback on Thursday as his party took an early lead and was set for a landslide victory in the twice-postponed general elections, according to results announced so far. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the first world leaders to congratulate Rajapaksa on the outcome of the elections and said the two sides will work together to further advance all areas of bilateral cooperation and to take their special ties to ever newer heights.

"Thank you PM @narendramodi for your congratulatory phone call. With the strong support of the people of #SriLanka, I look forward to working with you closely to further enhance the long-standing cooperation between our two countries. Sri Lanka & India are friends & relations," Rajapaksa tweeted.

The SLPP has polled more votes than its rivals, scoring over 60 per cent of the total votes in the 16 seats officially declared so far from the South, dominated by the Sinhala majority community.

The party won 13 out of 16 seats. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in a tweet described the results as a

"great victory" for the ruling party.

Rajapaksa's party is expected to win control of the 225-member assembly by a comfortable margin, according to analysts. In Galle district, the SLPP won seven out of nine seats on offer while in the neighbouring Matara district they won six out of seven seats on offer.

The nearest rival is the new party formed by former presidential candidate Sajith Premadasa who has relegated his mother party, the United National Party (UNP), of former premier Ranil Wickremesinghe to the fourth place even below the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

The SJB has won only three seats from both districts. In the polling division results from other districts where counting is in progress, the SLPP has taken unassailable leads, sources said. In the Tamil minority dominated north, the main Tamil party — Tamil National Alliance (TNA) — despite bagging a few polling divisions had also suffered unexpected reversals at the hands of SLPP's Tamil allies — the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP). The counting began in the morning after the polls were closed on Wednesday. — PTI

PEACE CEREMONY

Attack witnesses urge world leaders to commit to nuclear disarmament

Survivors mark 75th anniv of 1st atomic attack

Hiroshima, Aug. 6: The dwindling witnesses to the world's first atomic bombing marked its 75th anniversary Thursday, with Hiroshima's mayor and others noting as hypocritical the Japanese government's refusal to sign a nuclear weapons ban treaty. Mayor Kazumi Matsui urged world leaders to more seriously commit to nuclear disarmament, pointing out Japan's failures.

"I ask the Japanese government to heed the appeal of the (bombing survivors) to sign, ratify and become a party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear

Weapons," Matsui said in his peace declaration.

"As the only nation to suffer a nuclear attack, Japan must persuade the global public to unite with the spirit of Hiroshima." His speech highlights what survivors feel is the hypocrisy of Japan's government, which hosts 50,000 American troops and is protected by the US nuclear umbrella. Tokyo has not signed the nuclear weapons ban treaty adopted in 2017, despite its non-nuclear pledge, a failure to act that atomic bombing survivors and pacifist groups call insincere.

The US dropped its first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, destroying the city and killing 140,000 people. The US dropped a second bomb three days later on Nagasaki, killing another 70,000. Japan surrendered August 15, ending World War II and its nearly half-century of aggression in Asia. Survivors, their relatives and other participants marked the 8:15 am blast anniversary with a minute of silence. Thursday's peace ceremony at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park was scaled down because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

● **SURVIVORS, THEIR relatives and other participants marked the 8:15 am blast anniversary with a minute of silence. Thursday's peace ceremony at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park was scaled down because of the Coronavirus pandemic.**

The fewer than 1,000 attendees was one-tenth of those attending in past years. Some survivors and their relatives prayed at the park's cenotaph before the

ceremony. The registry of the atomic bombing victims is stored at the cenotaph, whose inscription reads "Let all the souls here rest in peace for we shall not repeat the mistake."

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in his speech at the ceremony, said Japan is committed to nuclear weapons ban but a nuclear free world cannot be achieved overnight and that it has to start from dialogue between opposite sides.

"Japan's position is to serve as a bridge between different sides and patiently promote their dialogue and actions to achieve a

world without nuclear weapons," Abe said. Nuclear policies are divided amid a harsh security environment, so it is necessary to create common ground first, he said.

An aging group of survivors, known as hibakusha, feel a growing urgency to tell their stories to the youth. Elderly survivors, mostly over 83, lamented the slow progress of nuclear disarmament. They expressed anger over what they said was the Japanese government's reluctance to help and listen to those who suffered from the atomic bombing. — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

7 AUGUST 2020

Did PM just discredit India's freedom fight?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has exhorted his fellow citizens to treat August 5 on a par with August 15, India's Independence Day. The call, made after conducting the *bhoomi puja* of the Ram temple at Ayodhya on Wednesday, August 5, defies logic and negates history. Ram's devotees, Mr Modi included, have every right to be joyous when their lord, venerated as *Maryada Purushottam*, or the epitome of honour, gets a proper abode; none has a reason to quarrel with them either. But drawing an impossible parallel with Indian Independence movement and the one for the temple has its risks. For one, the freedom movement was a unifier in itself — Indians of all hues, irrespective of their religion, caste, language, sex, race and region were part of it. Countless people willingly sacrificed their lives for the cause, or suffered in silence, or became martyrs or spent their lives in villages changing their faces. It was a movement to not only liberate this nation from the yoke of foreign rule but also an attempt to unshackle itself from the very many forms of bondages that stopped its citizens from living their lives to the full. And the best product of the movement was the Constitution of India — which promised every Indian citizen justice.

Equally incomprehensible is the silence or subservience of the opposition, save of the Left, to the politicisation of an essentially religious ceremony. None seems to have an issue with the Prime Minister, accompanied by the chief minister of a state, laying the foundation stone of a place of worship of one religion.

struction of the temple. Mr Modi's call for seeing the temple as a symbol of India's unity would have better acceptance had he mentioned those innocent victims and begged their pardon. Perhaps, it would have been a true tribute to Lord Ram.

Equally incomprehensible is the silence or subservience of the opposition, save of the Left, to the politicisation of an essentially religious ceremony. None seems to have an issue with the Prime Minister, accompanied by the chief minister of a state, laying the foundation stone of a place of worship of one religion. The Congress, as it has always been on the issue, is a confused lot, speaking in many voices. The Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party expressed no opinion, nor the DMK of Tamil Nadu. Kerala's CPI(M) chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, however, made two points. One, India's secularist ideals would not have suffered this jolt had the Congress chosen to hold on to them. Two, our agenda must be to contain Covid-19 which has already affected 19 lakh people, and then bring succour to the people the pandemic has reduced to penury. That's some semblance of political sanity and sagacity, if you will.

In Beirut, avoidable tragedy

A devastating instance of sheer human incompetence led to the ripping apart of a swath of the Lebanese capital Beirut, destroying its port and two giant grain silos, killing at least 135 people, besides injuring 5,000 and leaving three lakh people homeless while affecting the lives of 7.5 lakh citizens and causing an estimated \$3 billion in damage. Had the leaders of the judicial or executive branches of the tiny West Asian nation been able to sort out the storage of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, confiscated from a financially distressed Russian cargo ship, rather than leave it lying in a port hangar for close to seven years, an explosion powerful enough to record 3.3 on the Richter scale and reverberate miles away in Cyprus would not have taken place.

It might have suited the leaders of Lebanon to have been in a position to blame it on saboteurs, terrorists, aggressors or conquerors, of whom the country, once proud of its label of 'Switzerland of the East', has seen aplenty in its history. It appears, prima facie, that an innocent enough spark from a welding torch set off stored fireworks, which in turn ignited the chemical that would have been far more useful as a base for fertiliser for a country that virtually imports all its food needs. A government, already in debt to the tune of 165 per cent of GDP, has so far offered a piffling \$66 million as relief even as it keeps its port officials under home arrest.

The scale of indecisiveness and lack of clarity on what to do with a chemical that has at least half the explosive power of TNT is risible. The human tragedy caused by such apathy, particularly when it comes to handling the complexity of man's ingenuity in making substances that can blow mankind to pieces, is shockingly revealing of the fecklessness of politicians who aspire for power but have little understanding of their responsibilities in safeguarding people. To them, investment in human safety seems the least priority.

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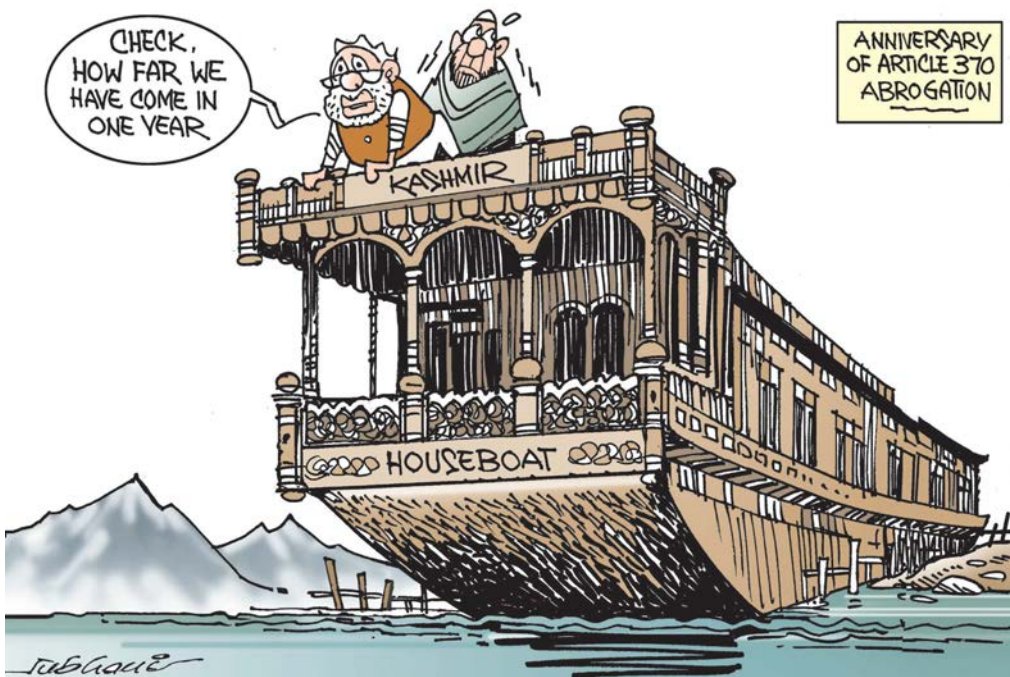
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Subhani



Pandemic on rise: More questions than answers



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

Is the coronavirus seeping into every faultline in this country? The honest answer is: We don't know.

Six months into the pandemic, there are more questions than answers about the virus. No one really knows how many Indians have been infected by the new coronavirus, nor how many have died. Perhaps we will never know because so many are asymptomatic and there are cracks in our death registration systems.

This week, a young copywriter told me that his father had died of Covid-19 but the family had managed to persuade the hospital authorities into changing the cause of death into something else because they wished the body to be cremated traditionally.

Meanwhile, India's official Covid-19 tally has crossed the 19-lakh mark; and the death toll is close to 40,000. Currently, India has the largest number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Asia and the third highest number of confirmed cases in the world, after the United States and Brazil.

There are masses of data swirling around.

According to government data, a cumulative total of 2,14,84,402 samples had been tested till August 4. At 2.10 per cent, India's Covid-19 case fatality rate since the first lockdown is low compared to the global average; 50 per cent of deaths have happened in the age group of 60 and above; 37 per cent deaths belong to the 45-60 age group; 11 per cent deaths belong to the 26-44 years age group; while 68 per cent of people who died were men and 32 per cent were women.

The government says 28 states/Union territories show a Covid positivity rate below 10 per cent, and this indicates that the testing strategy

is on the right track.

But the numbers we have don't tell the whole story.

Dr Hemant Shewade, a Bengaluru-based community medicine expert tracking the discourse around Covid-19 data in India points out that nationally, only 86 per cent deaths are captured by the civil registration system and only 22 per cent are medically certified for cause of death.

The Medical Certification of Cause of Death is not enforced in every state with equal efficiency. So far, it has been implemented only in certain hospitals and mostly in urban areas. This can give a very skewed picture even now, when there is a parallel system of Covid-19 death reporting (which are compiled by the district administration and shared with the state government and then with the Centre).

"There is a high possibility of the official Covid death figures coming from Covid-designated hospitals where only confirmed Covid cases, those suspected of having Covid and who reach the Covid hospital in an extreme condition are factored in," says Dr Shewade.

Not all states are equally equipped in terms of health and diagnostic infrastructure and human resources. Where testing is very low, and where medical certification of cause of death is low, it is likely that there will be a gross under-estimation of Covid-19 deaths. For example, Bihar, which has a population of over 120 million, has the lowest testing rate in the country, a mere four tests per 1,000 persons. This means a large number of cases may be going undetected.

There are other gaps in the data which impede our ability to understand the pandemic's trajectory. The data on Covid-19 tests in India doesn't make clear the distinc-

tion between the number of samples being tested and the number of people tested. There is also no official disaggregated data for every state on the RT-PCR tests (gold standard of coronavirus testing) and rapid antigen tests, says Dr Mohak Gupta, now part of the iCART Covid-19 research team and creator of www.coviddtoday.in, an open source project tracking India's state-wise progress against the Covid-19 epidemic.

Only a few states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Delhi share this information publicly but there are no updated national figures. We don't know how many among those who have antigen tests go for a follow-up RT-PCR test and what the results are. We also don't have statewide gender-disaggregated data on Covid deaths in any official portal nor the breakup between deaths in rural areas and those in urban areas. Dr Gupta points out that there is scant contact tracing data so we don't have a granular picture of how and where the virus is spreading, and stresses the need for real-time hospitalisation data and influenza-like illness (ILI) surveillance data in the public domain.

Then there is fear, which prevents insiders from coming forward to tell the truth.

"Unfortunately, there is no law in force that encourages potential whistleblowers in the public sector to bring complaints of corruption and wrongdoing to the attention of the competent authorities. Nor is there any mechanism to protect a whistleblower from reprisals for pointing the finger at wrongdoing. An available recourse is to make complaints to the lokayuktas. Hardly any parent law of such bodies empowers them to protect whistle-

blowers. The only remaining option is to move the courts directly, which few would want to do given the length of time it takes to get a conviction," says Venkatesh Nayak, programme head of the Access to Information Programme of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. As for whistleblowing in the private sector, the extremely limited provisions in the 2013 Companies Act or the Limited Liability Partnerships Act don't inspire much confidence in potential whistleblowers, says Mr Nayak.

There is also no mention of whistleblower provisions in the laws governing societies and trusts, which are of colonial vintage. "It comes as no surprise that doctors and nurses working in entities regulated by any of these laws continue to suffer in silence or at the most make complaints through official channels at considerable risk to themselves and their careers. The only remaining option is to go on mass strike, as is now happening in Zimbabwe. However, the government will clamp down on such legitimate protests by invoking the Essential Services Maintenance Act or draconian provisions of the Disaster Management Act," he adds.

Successive governments have pushed the six-year-old Whistleblowers Protection Act under the carpet without bringing it into force despite repeated reminders from civil society and the media.

Telling the truth has never been easy. However, there are those who persist. As Mr Nayak points out, despite the restrictions imposed by the Covid-related lockdowns, citizens are using the Right to Information Act to demand details of action by governments to tackle the epidemic. But delays and refusals are common as are attacks on RTI activists.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

WHITHER CONGRESS?

It seems that the grand old party has lost its voice amidst the chants of Jai Shri Ram. The BJP has every right to celebrate the ground-breaking ceremony of Ram temple construction in Ayodhya, as it's there in their election manifesto. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expectedly lost no time in owning the success. He even stretched imagination to that far that he compared the struggle for Independence. The fumbling of the Congress is quite evident here. Instead of keeping mum, it has joined forces with the BJP helplessly.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

PM Narendra Modi launched the works for the construction of Ram temple by launching the ground-breaking ceremony in Ayodhya, an historic occasion for which every Indian must be proud to be part of. But to make India Ram Rajya every one must live the social and ethical ideals of Lord Rama i.e., equal justice, brotherhood and unity.

Kottala Venkataramudu
Anantapur

SCHOOL REOPENING

AP is enthusiastic in reopening schools, but schools future depends on the Covid-19 pandemic which is ravaging the state as also the country. The government's utmost duty must be to contain its spread than reopening schools or any other centres or institutes.

D. Ravikumar
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Govt. rapped for not getting Soviet maps corrected

NEW DELHI, August 6

The Rajya Sabha today witnessed noisy scenes followed by a walk-out by members belonging to Opposition Congress, Swatantra the Jana Sangh and the Praja Socialist Parties.

It was in protest against the Government's failure to check what they described as "Soviet Union's continued cartographic aggression on India."

Drawing attention to the recent edition of the great Soviet Encyclopedia containing a political map of Asia showing large chunks of Indian territory as Chinese, the members charged that the Soviet Union has been printing such maps.

Dilip Cherian



Dilli Ka Babu

Officer sent to PMO won laurels in TN

Any appointment in the all-powerful Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is viewed with great interest. So, when P. Amudha, who is a 1994 batch IAS officer of Tamil Nadu cadre, was appointed to the PMO as joint secretary, on a lateral shift basis, for the remainder of her five-year central deputation period, observers are speculating about her talent that can meet the high standards of the PMO. Before this appointment, Amudha was serving as a professor at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie.

Interestingly, minutes after the news of her appointment emerged Tamil Nadu chief minister E. Palaniswami congratulated the IAS officer in a tweet and said that she had earned the goodwill of the state government as well as the

affection of the people through her honesty and efficiency. Amudha has earned her reputation as an effective field officer and ability to take swift decisions. Her peers recall her work during the Chennai floods in 2015 when she was special officer for monsoon relief in the state. It's these qualities that may have impressed the PMO to reel her in for what could be the most rewarding and challenging assignments for an IAS officer.

WHO WILL BE NEW RBI DEPUTY GOVERNOR?

A search committee headed by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba will interview candidates for the post of deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of India on August 7, according to sources. This was meant to be held on July 23 but was put off without any explanation. The post

had fallen vacant after senior-most deputy governor N.S. Vishwanathan demitted office three months before the end of his tenure in March due to health reasons.

Besides Gauba, the committee includes RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, financial services secretary Debasish Panda and two independent members.

The selected name from the interview will be sent to the appointments committee of the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister for final approval. Sources say that the panel has shortlisted eight candidates for the posts.

The RBI Act mandates that the central bank should have four deputy governors — two from within the ranks, one commercial banker and another an economist to head the monetary policy depart-

ment. At present, the RBI has three deputy governors — B.P. Kanungo, M.K. Jain and Michael Debabrata Patra.

HALT OR GO TO J&K CADRE CHANGE?

The Centre stopped inducting new officers in the J&K cadre of the All India Services after the reorganisation of Jammu & Kashmir into two Union territories, J&K and Ladakh, in August last year. The process was recently reinitiated, but sources say, it has been put on hold again after receiving feedback from officers that it would lead to confusion.

The J&K cadre of IAS, IPS and IOFS officers was to be merged into the AGMUT cadre. However, according to the regulations, officers already serving in the J&K cadre at the time would continue in

the existing cadre. The cadre controlling authority for AGMUT is the ministry of home affairs while the other cadres are controlled by the department of personnel and training (DoPT).

Apparently, some officers approached the Centre saying that two officers of the same batch would end up under different controlling authorities which would lead to "confusion" and "create differences" between the officers. Seeing the resistance from the babus, the Centre has decided, for now, not to proceed with the proposed cadre merger. Some officers believe that any key decision on the merger will likely happen only after August 15.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,025.45	0.96
Nifty 50	11,200.15	0.89
S&P 500*	3,326.43	-0.04
Dollar (₹)	74.92	0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.64	-0.81
Euro (₹)	88.78	-0.35
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	55,850.752	1.36
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	45.60	0.43
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.862	0.035
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.515	-0.028

* As of 10:30 PM IST

IDBI Bank in deal to sell 27% stake in insurance JV

IDBI Bank on Thursday said it has entered into a share purchase agreement (SPA) with the other two joint venture partners in IDBI Federal Life Insurance Company (IFLIC), to divest 27 per cent of its stake for ₹595.30 crore. In June, the private sector lender had informed about the stake sale-purchase proposal among the three JV partners. Currently, LIC-promoted IDBI Bank holds 48 per cent in IFLIC.

Gold and silver prices touch new record high



Gold and silver prices touched record levels in the national capital on Thursday and the yellow metal rose by ₹225 to ₹56,590 per 10 grams amid strong rally in the international market, according to HDFC Securities. Silver price surged by ₹1,932 to ₹75,755 per kilogram. On Wednesday, it had closed at ₹73,823 per kg. In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at ₹56,365 per 10 grams.

LIC acquires 5% stake in Yes Bank from mart

Yes Bank on Thursday said LIC has acquired close to 5 per cent shareholding in the bank by purchasing shares from the open market. With the fresh acquisition, the hold of LIC has increased from 0.75 per cent to 4.98 per cent, Yes Bank said in a regulatory filing to stock exchanges. LIC purchased 105.98 crore shares, reflecting 4.23 per cent stake, of the bank from the open market, the filing said.

Adani reports consolidated loss of ₹65.67cr

Adani Enterprises on Thursday reported a consolidated loss of ₹65.67 crore for the first quarter ended June 30, impacted by Covid-19 pandemic-induced lockdowns. The company had clocked a consolidated profit of ₹570 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago, the company said in a BSE filing. Its consolidated income for the quarter declined to ₹5,502 crore, as against ₹10,685 crore during the year-ago period.



RBI expects higher inflation, negative economic growth

■ Pauses rate cuts for now; maintains accommodative monetary stance

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, AUG. 6

Belying expectations, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday kept rates unchanged on Thursday owing to uncertainty around inflation despite signs of growth faltering further. The MPC voted to maintain an accommodative stance, thus opening up possibilities for more future rate cuts.

“While economic activity had started to recover from the lows of April-May, a surge in fresh infections have forced re-clamping of lockdowns in several cities and states to “level-off” various high-frequency indicators,” RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said in his monetary policy address.

The MPC expects headline inflation to remain elevated in Q2FY21 and sees it easing in the second half of the financial year. For 2021, the real GDP growth is expected to be negative.

It refrained from providing growth-inflation forecasts while sticking to the direction based guidance.


“Real GDP growth in the first half of the year is estimated to remain in the contraction zone. For the year 2020-21 as a whole, real GDP growth is also estimated to be negative,” Das said.

He said that the RBI will do whatever is required to revive the economy in the wake of the pandemic.

“With Covid-19 infections rising under fragile micro-economic and financial conditions, we propose to take regulatory and developmental measures, enhance liquidity support for financial markets, ease financial stress while strengthening credit discipline, improve the flow of credit, deepen digital payment systems and facilitate innovations by leveraging technology.”

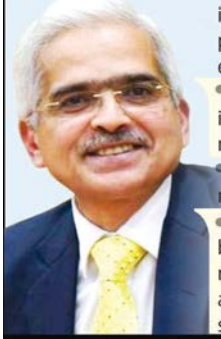
He said there is enough liquidity at present and that the RBI is using several other monetary operations to boost liquidity in the banking system.

All the six members of the MPC voted for a status quo in rates.



RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

Bi-monthly Monetary Policy Review



Highlights

- Policy rate unchanged at 4%, reverse repo at 3.35%
- Loans against gold enhanced to 90% of the value from current 75% to mitigate COVID-19 impact on households
- To continue with the accommodative stance to revive growth
- Supporting economic recovery assumes primacy in conduct of monetary policy in uncertain global environment
- Sees upside risk to inflation, projects moderation in Oct-Mar
- GDP growth to be negative in current fiscal
- Stressed MSME borrowers eligible for loan restructuring if their accounts were classified standard
- Allows lenders to provide window to restructure loans of corporate, individual borrowers to ease COVID-19 impact
- A new resolution window for corporate and personal loans to be framed
- To put in place safeguards for opening of current accounts and overdraft accounts for customers availing credit facilities from multiple banks
- Priority Sector Lending (PSL) to include startups
- Increased limits for renewable energy, including solar power, and small and marginal farmers and 'Weaker Sections' under PSL
- To allow a pilot scheme for small value payments in offline mode while safeguarding interest of users, liability protection
- Proposes Online Dispute Resolution for digital payments
- Rs 5,000 crore additional liquidity facility to be provided by the National Housing Bank to boost liquidity in housing sector
- Rs 5,000 crore liquidity support to NABARD to aid agri sector
- Economic activity had started to recover, but surge in infection has forced imposition of lockdowns
- Monetary Policy Committee conscious of primary mandate to achieve inflation target of 4% within a band of +/- 2%

Start-ups get RBI's priority tag

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 6

In a major boost to start-ups, now their loans will come under priority sector lending. RBI will also look into regional disparities in priority sector lending (PSL).

The PSL guidelines were last reviewed in April 2015. In these five years, the country has seen a lot of activity in the start-up space. Acknowledging the potential of start-ups

in boosting the economy, RBI has broadened the scope of PSL to include start-ups.

As per PSL norms, RBI mandates banks to lend a certain portion of their funds to specified sectors like agriculture, micro, small and medium enterprises, export credit, education, housing, social infrastructure, renewable energy, etc.

Further, RBI has also increased the PSL limits for renewable energy.

As part of reviewing the PSL guidelines, an incentive framework is also being put in place for banks to address the regional disparities in the flow of priority sector credit. While higher weightage will be assigned for incremental priority sector credit in the identified districts having lower credit flow, a lower weightage would be assigned in identified districts where the credit flow is higher.

Don't focus overly on ratings: Rajan

Mumbai, Aug. 6: India's policymakers should focus on protecting the economy as businesses struggle amid the coronavirus pandemic instead of being overly focused on what ratings agencies think, former Reserve Bank of India governor Raghuram Rajan said on Thursday.

"It is also important to convince both domestic and international investors that after the crisis associated with the pandemic is over, we will return to fiscal responsibility over the medium term, and the government should do more to convince them of that," Rajan told the Global Markets Forum.

The government has announced several initiatives to help the poor and small- and medium-size businesses, but actual

cash outgo from the government's measures has been estimated at just about one per cent of GDP.

Several attribute the fiscal prudence to fear of a downgrade after Moody's cut India's rating and outlook in early June followed closely by a change in outlook from Fitch.

"The RBI and government have certainly been cooperating, but it seems like it is elsewhere, the

ball is in the government's court to do more," Rajan said.

He said the RBI needs to focus on whether credit is reaching the stressed areas of the economy and also if the viable firms were able to access credit and not the unviable ones.

"And I think that's where it has to focus its attentions, because resources, as you well know, are limited in India." — Reuters

Biz optimism slips to record low in Q2

New Delhi, Aug. 6: Business optimism for the July-September quarter slumped to a record low due to sharp rise in Covid-19 cases, the extension of lockdown in containment zones and staggered easing of restrictions, according to a report.

Dun & Bradstreet Composite Business Optimism Index for the July-September quarter fell to a record low of 29.4. The index registered a decline of 40.6 per cent over the last quarter. The BOI covered about 350 senior executives in June this year.

"The spike in the number of positive Covid-19 cases, the extension of lockdown in containment zones and the staggered easing of restrictions affected the business optimism levels," said Arun

Singh, Global Chief Economist, Dun & Bradstreet.

All six optimism indices — volume of sales, net profits, selling prices, new orders, inventories and employees — have registered a decline as compared to the previous quarter, the report said.

"The plethora of containment and non-containment zones, which are near-impossible to track in real time, and the rapid change in guidelines adopted by the various local governments have led to considerable uncertainty amongst businesses that are planning to resume their operations," Singh said, adding that outlook remained subdued in spite of measures taken to support the flow of capital. — PTI

Byju's acquires coding start-up co for \$300m

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 6

Leading ed-tech company Byju's has acquired Mumbai-based ed-tech start-up, WhiteHat Jr for \$300 million. With the National Education Policy pushing for skills such as coding, this will provide Byju's a major boost.

Founded in November 2018, WhiteHat Jr specializes in coding. With coding fast emerging as a key skill for the future, this integration will help Byju's to further expand its offerings. This partnership is timely with the government pushing skills such as coding from early classes with the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Byju's said in a release.

WhiteHat Jr has pres-

Gold can get you 90% of its value as loan

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, AUG. 6

In order to provide higher liquidity to households and small businesses, RBI has increased the Loan-To-Value (LTV) ratio of gold loans offered by banks from 75 per cent to 90 per cent. However, the higher LTV will not be available for non-banking finance companies.

As per the current guidelines, gold loans sanctioned by banks for non-agricultural purposes should not exceed 75 per cent of the value of gold ornaments and jewellery. "With a view to mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on households, it has been decided to increase the permissible loan to value ratio (LTV) for such loans to 90 per cent. This relaxation shall be available till March 31, 2021," said RBI.

Higher LTV will put more money in the hands of the customer for the same volume of gold pledged. Gold prices have appreciated more than 40 per cent since the beginning of the year. Due to the price appreciation, the loan amount has naturally increased by 40 per cent even at an LTV of 75 per cent. Once the LTV is increased to 90 per cent, this will increase the loan

amount by another 15 per cent. This will solve the liquidity issues of small scale business persons and traders, who account for the largest chunk of the customer base, as well as individuals to a great extent.

The new LTV will be available for a window of eight months. Fresh loans issued post March 31, 2021 will come under 75 per cent LTV.

"THE NEW LTV will be available for a window of eight months. Fresh loans issued post March 31, 2021 will come under 75 per cent LTV."

"THE HIGHER LTV will not be available for non-banking finance companies, including those operating in exclusive gold loan business."

"LTV of 90 per cent in an increasing gold price scenario is fine. Only we must keep an eye on the margin because 10 per cent is a small cushion. This is still manageable. This will help the small businesses, micro and small units who avail gold loans for business needs as well," said Padmaja Chunduru, MD and CEO of Indian Bank.

Sensex heaves a sigh of relief

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, AUG. 6

The Sensex and the Nifty-50 gained close to one per cent as RBI announced several measures to provide relief to borrowers and others hit badly by Covid-19 pandemic and kept it's policy stance as accommodative, raising hopes of further interest rate easing in future.

The Sensex gained 362.12 points or 0.96 per cent and regained 38,000 levels closing at 38,025.45. The Nifty-50 index closed at 11,200.15

up 98.50 or 0.89 per cent. Banks and real estate stocks gained as RBI didn't extend loan moratorium period, announced earlier till August 31.

Deepak Jasani, head, Retail Research, HDFC Securities said, "Banking stocks have reacted positively despite no rate cut as the feared extension of moratorium has not happened and they will be spared of the requirement of high provisions if by Septem-ber 30, the new committee's recommendations are implemented."

WhiteHat Jr helps kids aged 6 to 14 years build commercial-ready games, animations and apps online using the fundamentals of coding. The startup offers four levels of courses to children grades 1 to 9.

teacher base to cater to demand from new markets. WhiteHat Jr founder Karan Bajaj will continue to lead and scale this business in India and the US.

WhiteHat Jr helps kids aged 6 to 14 years build commercial-ready games, animations and apps online using the fundamentals of coding. WhiteHat Jr offers four levels of courses — beginner, intermediate, advanced and professional — for students in grades 1-9. Kids create complex games, animations and apps using logic, structure, sequence, commands and algorithmic thinking. Early graduates of the course have created professional-ready apps downloadable on the App Store at ages as young as seven years old, claims Byju's.

ence in India and the US. It had recently announced plans to expand to other global markets like Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand.

According to sources, the coding platform was acquired in an all-cash deal of \$300 million.

After the acquisition, Byju's will make significant investments in WhiteHat Jr's technology platform, product innovation while expanding the

US EMI firm plans to enter India by year end

Bengaluru, Aug. 6: Sezzle Inc is testing its buy-now-pay-later service in India for a potential launch at the end of the year, its chief executive officer said, capitalising on rapid global growth in online shopping as competition intensifies in the sector.

Moving into India would mark an ambitious plan for the firm as the second-most populous country gravitates more toward a cash-less society and more people purchase goods on the internet during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Minneapolis-based fintech, which offers interest-free instalment loans at certain online stores, undertook an \$A86.3 million (\$61.99 million) equity raise in July, out of which nearly a fifth was earmarked to test international markets.

Sezzle currently only operates in the United States and Canada.

"If this works, we have a massive opportunity in India ... We think it's well worth the opportunity," chief executive officer Charlie Youakim said, pointing to a digital boom

in India that presents a billion dollar-plus gold mine and could follow the success of firms like SoftBank-backed Paytm.

Youakim said Sezzle started the pilot in July, but was still integrating with the Unified Payments Interface — a

system that would power multiple bank accounts into a mobile application - and is evaluating repayment data.

"Assuming expectations are met, we launch UPI sometime this month and then we'll have some sort of sense come end of

October and then we can turn on ahead of the holiday season," Youakim added.

In the three months from March, Sezzle added more than 300,000 new customers, highlighting the growing appeal of BNPLs.

Spurred by recent growth, more players are moving into the industry, which first took off in Australia.

Tencent's investment in Afterpay this year was seen by analysts as a possible entry point into China for the BNPL leader. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Camps for junior athletes from Oct.

New Delhi: The national training camps for junior athletes will begin in a phased manner from October 1, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Wednesday. It was decided in SAI's Mission Olympic Cell review meeting that training of junior athletes at its National Centres of Excellence (NCOE), shut since March due to the COVID-19 outbreak, will start in a phased manner from October. The SAI, however, said that the respective state governments where the NCOEs are situated will take the final call, keeping in mind the health and safety of athletes and coaches amid the pandemic. In view of the preparation for Olympics and to ensure that athletes have world-class infrastructure and equipment to train with, the SAI has also decided to enhance the funds at all its NCOEs. To ensure a safe environment for all the athletes, especially those joining the camps in their teenage years, a series of sensitisation workshops will be held in these NCOEs. — PTI

258 juniors make TOPS scheme

New Delhi: The Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Wednesday shortlisted 258 athletes from across 12 sporting disciplines for support through Target Olympic Podium Scheme Developmental Group, also known as Junior TOPS. The support will be extended through a group/systems approach and a monthly out of pocket allowance of ₹25,000 will be given to every athlete. Of the 12 disciplines, 16 athletes have been shortlisted in athletics, 34 in archery, 27 in badminton, four in cycling, seven in table tennis, 70 in shooting, 14 in swimming, 11 in judo, 36 in boxing, 16 in weightlifting, five in rowing and 18 in wrestling. The SAI's Mission Olympic Cell shortlisted the athletes, including the 85 named before the Covid-19 lockdown. They will be groomed for the 2024 and 2028 Olympics. A SAI statement further said the formal induction of the athletes in the development group would be undertaken after setting an effective monitoring mechanism. — PTI

Yuvraj's house flooded in Mumbai

New Delhi: Out-of-favour India hockey striker Yuvraj Walmiki on Wednesday faced a peculiar problem as he tried to drain out water which flowed into his house in the wake of the heavy rains in Mumbai. Yuvraj posted a video on his Twitter handle, where he was seen trying to drain out ankle-level water from the drawing room of his flat. In the 28-second video, Yuvraj sought help from Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation as well as Maharashtra Tourism Minister Aaditya Thackeray. A red alert has been issued for 'extremely heavy' rainfall for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region as heavy showers continued for over 24 hours, crippling the city's lifelines. — PTI

ZIDANE LEAVES OUT BALE FOR CITY CLASH

Madrid: Gareth Bale has not been included in the Real Madrid squad for the Champions League match against Manchester City. Coach Zinedine Zidane left the Wales forward out of the list of 24 players who will travel for the round-of-16 match in England on Friday. Bale didn't get many playing minutes under Zidane in the final stage of the Spanish league, a competition Madrid won. His last appearance was on June 24. Madrid lost the first leg 1-2 at home in a match played before the pandemic. — AP

LIVE ON TV
Champions League Round of 16, second leg: Juventus vs Lyon from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Sony TEN 2; Manchester City vs Real Madrid from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Sony TEN 1.

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TIGHT ROPE WALK
BCCI sets strict guidelines for IPL teams

New Delhi, Aug. 6: Eight different hotels for the eight participating teams, two mandatory negative Covid-19 test reports before flying to the UAE and punishment for any breach of the bio-secure protocol are part of the BCCI's SOP for the IPL that was handed over to the franchises on Wednesday. The document, accessed states that every franchisee's medical team should obtain the "medical and travel history of all players and support staff" since March 1 this year.

"All Indian players and team support staff must undergo two Covid-19 PCR tests, 24 hours apart, in the week before assembling in the franchises' city of choice," it states.

"This will help reduce the risk of cross infection within the group before flying to the UAE."

"Breach of any Bio-Secure Environment protocols by players and team support staff will be punishable under the IPL Code of Conduct Rules."

Anyone testing positive for Covid-19 will be quarantined and after completion of a 14-day period, the individual will have to undergo two Covid-19 tests, 24 hours apart.

"...if both test reports are negative, he/she may be allowed to fly out to the UAE."

"After arrival in UAE, there will be tests on Day 1, 3 and 6 with testing every fifth day throughout the tournament."

The SOP states that all "franchise teams will be put up in different hotels."

"Team members must be allotted rooms in a separate wing of the hotel that has a separate centralised air conditioning (AC) unit than the rest of the hotel," it adds.

"After the third negative test, team members may be allowed to meet each other within the Bio-Secure Environment. However, wearing a face mask and social distancing protocols must be followed at all times."

The SOP also requires teams to order food in individual rooms and avoid use of common dining areas "to prevent cross infection and coming in contact with other hotel guests."

— PTI

● **Eight different participating teams will be put in eight different hotels.**

● **Team members must be allotted rooms in a separate wing of the hotel.**

● **Every player, staff and family members will have to get two mandatory negative Covid-19 test reports before flying to the UAE.**

● **Punishment for any breach of the bio-secure protocol.**



Royal Challengers Bangalore's captain Virat Kohli (left) and coach Gary Kirsten look on during a training session in this file photo.

Empty stands extended room

New Delhi, Aug. 6: The BCCI's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the upcoming IPL recommends that teams use "empty stands" as extended dressing rooms for training and matches while strategy meetings can now be held outdoors in order to maintain social distancing.

The IPL, to be held from September 19 in the UAE, won't feature any toss mascot this year which means the BCCI will lose out on another avenue of earning sponsorship money.

While players and support staff's families can join them, they won't be allowed to travel in the team bus and can't leave the bio bubble.

According to the SOP which was handed to the franchises the teams will be encouraged to use the stands for dressing room purpose which helps in maintaining social distancing.

The Bio-Secure Environment means only essential staff will be on site and no members of the public will be allowed. Therefore there will be more vacant areas at the

BCCI, VIVO OFFICIALLY PUT OFF DEAL FOR THE SEASON

New Delhi, Aug. 6: The BCCI on Thursday suspended the IPL title sponsorship deal with Chinese mobile phone company Vivo for the event's upcoming edition amid the Sino-India border face-off.

The BCCI sent out a one-line statement, without giving any details, to say that Vivo will not be associated with the IPL this year.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and vivo Mobile India Pvt Ltd have decided to suspend their partnership for Indian Premier League in 2020," the press release stated.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and vivo Mobile India Pvt Ltd have mutually decided to pause their partnership for the 2020 season of Indian Premier League," it stated.

— PTI

stadium and hence the dressing room does not have to remain within the traditional area.

"Venue Cricket Operation teams should consider using appropriate areas beyond the normal dressing room," the SOP states.

Also, the teams have been asked to use electronic team sheets rather than captains carrying hard copies of their playing XI list.

The SOP also states that

franchises might install "Scalene Hypercharge Corona Canon (Shyocan), a device that has the ability to neutralise 99.9 per cent of the coronavirus that might be floating in the air in closed spaces."

For the medical team, including physios and masseurs, the SOP recommends that if they need to get in physical contact with the player (massage sessions etc), they have to wear PPE kits.

— PTI

BOARDS OF OZ, INDIA TO MEET ON WORLD CUP

New Delhi, Aug. 6: The heads of BCCI and Cricket Australia will be connecting virtually to discuss the hosting of two T20 World Cups in the next two years when the ICC's all-powerful board meets on Friday.

The decision will also be impacted by the stand of the two boards on the next ICC chairman, the nomination process of which is yet to be announced.

It is expected that BCCI president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah along with CA's Earl Eddings and Nick Hockley will reach a consensus on the hosting of 2021 and 2022 editions.

It is expected that Cricket Australia will like to host the T20 World Cup in October 2021 as it had already started preparations and but BCCI also doesn't want to forego its right to host the tournament in 2021.

— PTI

WOMEN'S | TENNIS

Errani rallies for win at Palermo

Palermo, Aug. 6: Former French Open finalist Sara Errani showed signs of reviving her clay-court prowess by rallying past Kristina Pliskova 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 Wednesday to reach the Palermo Ladies Open quarterfinals.

It was the second consecutive three-set win for Errani, who received a wild-card entry for the first tour-level tournament — for men or women — following a five-month break due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Errani will next face rising French player Fiona Ferro, who beat eighth-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova 7-5, 6-2.

Also, qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich eased past Jasmine Paolini 6-0, 6-2 for her fifth win in five days; and 19-year-old Italian wild-card entry Elisabetta Cocciaretto eliminated sixth-seeded Donna Vekic in straight sets 6-2, 6-4.

Players and officials for the tournament are being tested every four days for Covid-19 and one player who tested positive withdrew over the weekend.

— AP

● **Italian Sara Errani showed signs of reviving her clay-court prowess by rallying past Kristina Pliskova in a hard-fought 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 match to make the quarterfinals.**

New protocols include fewer ball kids, a limited number of fans and no post-match handshakes between opponents.

Errani, who lost the 2012 French Open final to Maria Sharapova, had struggled to regain her form after serving a two-month ban in 2017 due to an anti-doping violation. Her ranking is down from a career-high of No. 5 in 2013 to No. 169.

Palermo brings back good memories for Errani, who won the Sicilian tournament twice and also finished runner-up twice — to go with three titles in the doubles event.

It was Errani's 180th career win on clay — more than any other active player.



Sara Errani returns to Kristina Pliskova during their women's singles quarterfinal match at the Palermo Open tennis tournament on Thursday. Errani won 3-6, 6-4, 6-3.

Kyrgios may nick off French Open

Sydney, Aug. 6: Nick Kyrgios dropped a huge hint Thursday that he will skip the French Open, saying the chances of him travelling to Europe this year were "slim to none".

The Australian last week pulled out of the upcoming US Open in New York due to the pandemic, with world number two Rafael Nadal following suit. Kyrgios, ranked just 40 but a big drawcard, said he wasn't surprised by the Spaniard's decision, noting that the clay court king was likely "eyeing the French Open" in late September.

"And if I was to play I'd probably definitely rather go to Europe (than America) at this time of year for sure with everything going on," he added to Channel Nine television from his Canberra base. But Kyrgios suggested

It's a very slim chance I'll play in Europe. Almost slim to none to be honest. I'm going to use this (time) to stay home, train, be with my family.

— NICK KYRGIOS
Australian tennis player

that was also unlikely, casting serious doubt over his presence at Roland Garros. "It's a very slim chance I'll play in Europe. Almost slim to none to be honest," he said.

"I'm going to use this (time) to stay home, train, be with my family, be with my friends and I'm just going to act responsibly, and wait till I think there's better circumstances to play," he added.

Kyrgios also cast doubt on the future of next year's Australian Open in January.

— AFP

Pakistan on top

Manchester, Aug. 6: Shan Masood joined a select group of Pakistan batsmen to have scored hundreds in three successive Test innings as his excellent century led the tourists to 326 all out against England on the second day of the series opener at Old Trafford.

Left-handed opener Masood batted for nearly eight hours in largely bowler-friendly conditions for a Test-best 156. He received excellent support from Shadab Khan

(45) in a sixth-wicket stand of 105 that turned the tide after Pakistan had been struggling at 176-5.

The pair ran England ragged, with even defensive shots producing well-taken runs. Pakistan had managed just 48 runs for the loss of three wickets in Thursday's first session to reach 187-5 at lunch.

— PTI
Brief scores: Pakistan 326 in 109.3 overs (B. Azam 69, Shan Masood 150, S. Khan 45, S. Board 3/54, J. Archer 3/59) vs England.



England fast bowler James Anderson (centre) celebrates taking the wicket of Pakistan's Babar Azam on the second day of the first Test cricket at Old Trafford in Manchester on Thursday.

— AFP

Lakers struck by Thunder

Miami, Aug. 6: Having clinched a Western Conference top seed in the NBA playoffs, the Los Angeles Lakers began experimenting for the post-season Wednesday and found they still have some work to do.

In their first game since taking the top spot, the Lakers were routed 105-86 by Oklahoma City, never leading for the first time all season.

Chris Paul scored a game-high 21 points and Italian forward Danilo Gallinari added 19 as the Thunder, 42-25, stayed one game behind Utah for fourth in the West.

Three-time NBA champion LeBron James led the Lakers with 19 points and 11 rebounds in 30 minutes on the court while Anthony Davis had nine points, eight rebounds and five assists. "Some things we need to continue to work on," James said.



LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers reacts during their NBA game against Oklahoma City Thunder at the HP Field House at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, USA, on Wednesday. Oklahoma City won 105-86.

— AP

Everyone on the Lakers' roster played as the purple and gold looked to the playoffs by testing combinations and talent to see who might work well together when needed later in the Orlando bubble,

where games resumed last week after a four-month Covid-19 hiatus.

The Orlando Magic and Brooklyn Nets each could have clinched an Eastern Conference playoff berth

with a victory, but both were beaten by title contenders.

Fred VanVleet scored a game-high 21 points and matched Kyle Lowry's game-high 10 assists to spark the defending NBA champion Toronto Raptors over Orlando 109-99.

The Magic fell to 32-37, a half-game behind the seventh-place Brooklyn Nets, who fell to Boston 149-115.

Australian guard Joe Ingles scored 25 points, hitting 6-of-11 from 3-point range, while Mike Conley added 23 and French center Rudy Gobert contributed 21 points and 14 rebounds to power the Utah Jazz over Memphis 124-115.

Dillon Brooks scored 23 to lead the Grizzlies, who had 20 points from rookie star Ja Morant plus 21 points and 14 rebounds from Lithuanian big man Jonas Valanciunas.

— AFP

NBA'S BUBBLE SECURE, NO PLAYERS +VE

Lake Buena Vista (US), Aug. 6: The NBA's bubble is still working. The league released its latest results on Wednesday for coronavirus tests performed on players participating in the restarted season at Walt Disney World, and the numbers are still perfect.

Of the 343 players tested since results were last announced July 29, none has been confirmed positive.

That means no player has tested positive since entering the so-called bubble last month. There were two players who tested positive on arrival at Disney.

"The NBA has done an amazing job, right? They've been great," Los Angeles Clippers coach Doc Rivers said.

— AFP

NOT GIVEN FAIR CHANCE IN FOOTBALL, SAYS BOLT

Sydney, Aug. 6: Sprint legend Usain Bolt on Thursday claimed he wasn't given "a fair chance" to prove himself in Australia's A-League after a failed attempt to become a professional footballer.

The Jamaican, an eight-time Olympic champion, tried out with the Central Coast Mariners in 2018 after quitting athletics, hoping to fulfil a childhood dream to become a footballer.

His quest garnered worldwide attention, which intensified when he scored two goals in a pre-season friendly.

But his abilities were questioned, notably by former Ireland striker Andy Keogh who said he had a "touch like a trampoline", and contract talks failed.

Bolt told Australia's Channel Nine television network: "I think I didn't get a fair chance. "I didn't do it how I wanted to do it, but it's something I think I would've been good at," he added.

"But it's just one of those things you miss out on and just have to move on." Bolt, the 100m and 200m world record holder, had previously tried out with clubs in Germany, South Africa and Norway.

— AFP