

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 29 | JUNE 2021

WEATHER



Max: 33°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: 1%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Aani 15
Tithi: Panchami
Star: Sathayam
Rahukalam:
3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam:
9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.25 am
Luhar: 12.16 pm
Asar: 3.37 pm
Maghrib: 6.38 pm
Isha: 7.57 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.48 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.03 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 11.05 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 11.58 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+37,012)	(+907)
3,03,16,000	3,97,668

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+4,804)	(98)
TN: 24,70,678	32,388

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

18,20,53,509

DEATHS

39,42,289

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

219

worldometers.info

Indian-American couple, child missing in US building collapse

Houston/London: An Indian-American couple and their one-year-old child are among more than 150 people who are still missing after the collapse of part of a 12-story residential building in the US state of Florida on Thursday, according to media reports on Monday. Search and rescue teams have been feverishly scouring the site since shortly after 55 of the beachfront condominium's 136 units fell.

Petrol price rise: Case filed against Union min

Muzaffarpur (Bihar): A case was on Monday lodged before a court in this north Bihar town against Union Petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan in connection with the spiralling rise in petrol prices. Local resident Tamanna Hashmi filed the case before the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Muzaffarpur, alleging that it was a "conspiracy" to sell petrol at high rates across the country though the price of crude oil was quite low.

COUNTER

POINT



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

Passenger burns to death as taxi catches fire

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 28

A passenger was charred to death and the cab driver suffered injuries after the car they were travelling in caught fire on the Koyambedu flyover on Monday. The incident happened when the car was travelling towards the 100 Feet road.

The driver, identified as Sunil Kumar of Mangadu was ferrying a passenger, identified as Arjunan, from



Sasi supporters to lay siege to houses of ex-AIADMK ministers

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US attacks Iran-backed forces

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UAE to host World T20, says Ganguly



TO HEALTH MIN

Stalin's advice on vaccine strategy

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUN 28

Chief Minister M K Stalin has urged the Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Harsh Vardhan, to revise the allocation of Covid-19 vaccine doses between the government and private institutions to 90:10 as against the current allocation of 75:25.

In a letter to Vardhan on Monday, the Chief Minister also demanded an evaluation of the vaccine doses allotted to various States so far, in terms of doses per thousand population, and ensure that necessary compensatory allocations were made to States that had been allotted lower number of doses.

Thanking the Union Minister for accepting the State's request to procure the vaccines centrally and issuing them free of cost to all States for vaccinating people above 18 years of age, Stalin said "the availability of vaccines has emerged as the principal constraint in the last few weeks."

He said his government's continuous efforts to eliminate vaccine hesi-



tancy and transform the vaccination drive into a people's movement had led to the tripling of vaccination during the current month.

"Since our allotment so far has been one of the lowest among the States in the country in terms of doses per thousand population, I had written to you requesting an allocation of 1 crore doses to correct the inadequate allotment in the past," he recalled.

Stalin said that under the new liberalised vaccination policy the Union Government was buying 75 per cent of the vaccines and the rest were being provided to private hospitals and added that the 25% allocation was grossly higher when compared to the actual vaccinations done by them.

■ P3

Drones seen in Jammu day after twin blasts

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, JUNE 28

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

This comes a day after two bombs believed to have been dropped by one or two drones rocked the high-security technical area of the Jammu Air Force Station.

Two security personnel got minor injuries in these blasts, one of which ripped off the roof of a barracks and the other took place on an open ground on the intervening night of June 26-27.

The Army said on the intervening night of June 27-28 two separate drone

activities -- one at 11.45 pm and the second at 2.40 am -- were spotted over the Ratnuchak-Kaluchak military area by alert troops who immediately opened fire at the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or unmanned aircraft systems (UASes).

Jammu-based defence spokesman Lt. Col. Devender Anand said: "Immediately after the drone activities were noticed, a high alert was sounded and Quick Reaction Teams engaged them (drones), following which both flew away." He added: "As a result of the alertness and proactive approach of our jawans, a major threat was thwarted in the area. The security forces are on high alert and the search operation is in progress."

Army sources said its men fired 20-25 rounds at the drones before these

"flew back under the cover of darkness". The drones were suspected to be flying at a height of 1.2 km and were possibly powered by long range batteries.

The sources added the security grid was on its toes as 14 drone stories had reportedly been launched from across the Line of Control and the international border with Pakistan lately. The areas where such activity was seen include Jammu, Rajouri, Samba and Kathua in J&K.

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

The probe by the Indian Air Force into the disquieting blasts at its overly sensitive airbase in Jammu, with the incident seen as a major security lapse by the authorities, is now rolling.

COURT ORDERS LIVE STREAMING OF CHAR DHAM SHRINES

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCIES INPUT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

The Uttarakhand high court on Monday stayed the state Cabinet's decision permitting Char Dham Yatra with a limited number of pilgrims. Instead, the high court has ordered live streaming of the Char Dham shrines. The division bench of Chief Justice R.S. Chauhan and Justice Alok Verma expressed dissatisfaction on the affidavit filed by the state government with regard to preparedness for the yatra, particularly with regard to the healthcare facilities and status of vaccination in the districts connected with the Char Dham yatra.

India on Monday recorded 46,148 fresh cases of Covid-19 and 979 deaths.

During a meeting of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on Covid-19 on Monday, Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan said the country's recovery rate has been steadily increasing.

Kashmir terrorists kill cop, family

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, JUNE 28

A Special Police Officer (SPO) was shot dead, and his wife and daughter critically injured by suspected militants in Jammu and Kashmir's southern Pulwama district late Sunday night. The mother-daughter duo succumbed to their injuries in hospital later. The SPO's son is reported-

ly serving in the Army.

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

The local sources said that the wife and daughter of the SPO had tried to save him from the assailants' bullets.

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

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

As the condition of the cop's daughter also deteriorated, she was brought to Srinagar's Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) for specialised treatment. But she too died at around 4 am on Monday, the hospital officials said.



Velappanchavadi Choolaimedu

to in Nungambakkam. Police

said that when the car came

The taxi that caught fire on the Koyambedu flyover in Chennai on Monday killing the sole passenger and injuring the driver.

— DC

suddenly caught fire. The passenger who was in the back seat was charred to death beyond recognition

The driver jumped out in time and suffered minor burns on his back. He was sent to Government Kilpauk Medical College Hospital. The charred body was sent for post-mortem and Koyambedu police who have registered a case are investigating. The forensic department was called in to inspect the car.

FM's ₹1.1 L cr loan guarantee scheme for Covid-hit sectors

■ Booster shots to help economy get over the virus effect

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

To stimulate the economy and ease the financial impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown, finance minister Nirmala Sitaraman on Monday announced eight economic measures amounting to Rs 6.29 lakh crore to provide relief to individuals as well as businesses in the country.

Apart from eight relief measures announced in health and other worst affected sectors, Ms Sitharaman announced a stimulus package for the tourism industry which included five lakh tourist visas to be issued free of charge, once the government resumes issuance. The total financial implication of the scheme will be ₹100 crore.

Briefing the media, Ms Sitharaman said, "We are announcing about eight economic relief measures, of which four are absolutely new and one is specific to health infrastructure. A stimulus package worth ₹6,28,993 crore will be used to sup-

HEALTH AND TOURISM IN FOCUS IN 8 SCHEMES

IN LOAN guarantee scheme of ₹1.1 lakh crore, health sector will get ₹50,000 crore. Other sectors will receive ₹60,000 crore at a maximum interest rate of 8.25 per cent annually

₹10 LAKH loan to travel agencies and ₹1 lakh loan to tourist guides. Free visas to the first 5 lakh tourists



A NEW SCHEME will give up to ₹1.25 lakh loan to 25 lakh small borrowers at lower interest rates

EXPORT INSURANCE cover of ₹88,000 crore for merchandise exports and ₹33,000 crore to project exports.

port the Indian economy in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic. For Covid-affected areas, we are announcing ₹1.1 lakh crore credit guarantee scheme, out of which ₹50,000 crore is for the health sector and ₹60,000 crore for other sectors. This credit guarantee scheme will facilitate new lending among the smallest borrowers, including stressed borrowers."

For the health sector, she said, the maximum loan

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

Apart from this, an additional ₹1.5 lakh crore under the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) has been announced. This is in addition to the ₹3 lakh crore

announced under the scheme last year.

"The new credit guarantee scheme will give loans to small borrowers through Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) where the maximum loan to individuals will be ₹1.25 lakh at an interest rate below 2 per cent, as prescribed by the RBI. Our focus will be new loans, stressed borrowers except NPAs to be covered and the loan duration of 3 years under the scheme," she said.

Twitter names employee in US as India grievance officer

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 28

Twitter on Sunday is reported to have appointed California-based Jeremy Kessel as the new Grievance Officer for India, as required under the new Information

Technology Rules, 2021, hours after Dharmendra Chatur quit from the post, according to a website report. His appointment, however, may not be in line with new IT rules, which mandate that the grievance redressal officer should be a resident of

India. Kessel is the Global Legal Policy Director of Twitter. The micro-blogging platform is in the midst of a tussle with the government over India's new social media rules. The government has been slamming Twitter for deliberate defiance.

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SHORT TAKES

Two foreigners steal ₹85,000 from petrol bunk in Pavunjur

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 28

A foreigner duo, claiming to be from the USA, escaped with ₹85,000 from a petrol bunk in Pavunjur near Madurantakam by diverting the attention of the supervisor on Monday.

The incident happened at around 12: 45 pm on Monday, in a petrol bunk on Madurantakam - ECR Junction road belonging to Sasikala Purushothaman, the police said.

The duo reportedly reached the petrol bunk and started a casual conversation with the supervisor. They allegedly told him that they are from the USA and had been employed in some MNC.

With one of them diverting the supervisor's attention, the other person flicked bundles of cash from the counter. The duo fled the spot immediately and the victim who noticed the counter a few minutes later was shocked to find Rs 85,000 cash missing.

Upon checking the CCTV footage, he found the foreigners had stolen the money. Based on Sasikala Purushothaman's complaint, Anaicut police have launched a hunt for the suspects.

It must be noted that two foreigners on Sunday, stole Rs 60,000 from a bike showroom in Sriperumbudur. Claiming to be from Greece, they diverted the attention of the owner by buying a t-shirt worth Rs 500 and escaped with the hefty amount.

The police are inquiring if the same persons were involved in both the incidents.

Spl court denies bail to ex-IL&FS chairman

Chennai, June 28: A special court has denied bail to Ravi Parthasarathy, former Chairman of the bankrupt Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) and arrested by the Economic Offences Wing of state police, for allegedly defrauding investors to the tune of Rs 200 crore.

Parthasarathy was refused bail recently by the special court constituted under the Tamil Nadu Protection of Interest of Depositors (in Financial Establishment) Act. Parthasarathy, one of the accused in the case, was arrested on June 9 for various offences under the IPC and the TNPID Act by the Economic Offences wing-II in Guindy and remanded in judicial custody. In his bail application, Parthasarathy stated he had resigned as director and non-executive chairman of IL&FS and also as a nominee director of other group companies including ITNL in 2018 itself. ITNL is a company engaged in building of toll roads and bridges and as such it is not a financial establishment for the purpose of attracting Section 5 read with section 2(3) of TNPID Act.

The police had no jurisdiction and they had the jurisdiction only with respect to incorporated financial establishments. The petitioner is a senior citizen with multiple health problems, he added. Rejecting the submissions and disposing of other intervening petitions from the affected persons/parties, the special court presiding officer M Jothiraman said that the contention of the petitioner that the TNPID Act is not applicable, cannot be entertained. The jail authorities can make available the medical facilities to the accused. Hence, he is not entitled to bail on health grounds. As pointed out by the special public prosecutor, the investigation is in the preliminary stage. "In view of the above circumstances, this court is not inclined to allow the bail petition," the judge said and dismissed it. —PTI

PRAYERS WITH SAFETY MEASURES



Devotees at Kapaleeswar temple, Mylapore, have a darshan of the Lord and the Goddess on Monday.

—DC

Temples re-open in TN

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 28

Temples in Tamil Nadu reopened on Monday as the state government eased the lockdown restrictions.

On June 25, the state government had announced that the Covid-19 lockdown will be extended till 6 am on July 5, with certain relaxation, including reopening all places of worship in the state.

Temples in districts such as Chennai, Chengalpattu, Thiruvallur and Kancheepuram reopened their doors for devotees, after 63 days on Monday.

In the temple town of Kanchipuram, devotees gathered outside the temples at 6 am and broke coconuts on the first day. The temples were cleaned and sanitized. Even barricades were set up in some temples in Chennai and



Devotees gather outside a temple in Kanchipuram at 6 am and break coconuts on Monday.

—DC

Kanchipuram to avoid large gatherings of devotees.

However, as per the government rules, archanas and prasads were not offered to the devotees, who had to pray and leave.

An official with the HR&CE said that the

helpline 044-28339999 can be used by the devotees between 10 am and 6 pm to log complaints related to temple lands, repair and restoration works or even complaints regarding the running of the temple under the HR&CE department.

Vandalur zoo welcomes swamp deer fawns, lion-tailed macaque

Chennai, June 28: The Arignar Anna Zoological Park (AAZP), popularly known as the Vandalur zoo, near here, has welcomed the birth of two swamp deer Barasingha fawns, a mouse deer fawn and a lion-tailed macaque. These new attractions in the zoo are in addition to the baby chimpanzee born to 23-year-old Gowri (Susie), a chimpanzee received from Singapore zoo and Gombe aged 28, earlier this month.

The Barasingha, also called swamp deer, is a deer species found in the Indian subcontinent. "This species is currently listed under vulnerable status in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List (of threatened species)," a release from the deputy director of AAZP said on Monday. These swamp deer fawns were born on June 11 and 14, respectively, the release said.

The zoological park has also recorded the birth of a mouse deer fawn on June 9 and with this the present population of mouse deer in the park increased to 13.

Also, the park recorded the birth of a Lion-tailed macaque infant on April 11 and this two-month-old infant is now fairly bonded with the troop. AAZP is a conserva-



tion breeding centre for lion-tailed macaques, the deputy director said and added that all the new-

borns are under continuous monitoring by the veterinary team and the zoo staff. —PTI

Normality returns, but raises fears of spread

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR / DC
CHENNAI, JUNE 28

A semblance of normality returned to Chennai and the three adjoining districts on Monday as places of worship, most offices, shops, malls and shopping complexes opened under the latest relaxations to the lockdown regulations.

The sudden rush of people into the public sphere in large numbers, however, raised fears of a potential surge in Covid-19 infections since social distancing was given a go by in the hustle and bustle.

Though the day broke with a heavy drizzle and overcast sky, most of the establishments that were poised for re-opening after a long gap of about 50 days started preparing for the redeeming moment by dusting, cleaning and washing their premises ahead of their opening time with staff reporting early.

With vehicles and pedestrians thronging the roads and pavements and shop-

ping hubs bustling with people it looked as though the Coronavirus threat had been fully eliminated with the jostling crowds going about their business in gay abandon.

The opening up of public transport led to passengers boarding buses in large numbers - more than the stipulated 50 per cent occupancy - and as the day went by and as the weather cleared, malls and textile shops started drawing good crowds.

Since many of the commercial establishments and private offices had suddenly stopped operations in the wake of the second wave of coronavirus taking a heavy toll in the state, their re-opening was welcomed by many customers waiting to complete much pending work.

Banks and other financial companies too started operating with 100 per cent attendance and the opening of shopping malls saw many offices located in such premises starting their operations, thus bringing back the peak

hour rush on the roads.

Parking spaces along the kerbs and elsewhere that remained empty all these days were filled up as the people returned to their hurried routine urban life, freely moving about in their vehicles with the police too removing all their check points on the roads set up at the onset of the lockdown.

Temples threw open their doors to devotees, who thronged in good numbers, and mosques and some churches resumed their worship after a long gap. Beaches also opened fully, drawing the crowds, particularly the Marina sands and the Besant Nagar beach in Chennai.

Restaurants, however, had to restrict their services to takeaway facilities alone and cinema theatres remained closed, despite museums in all the 27 districts that have reported a decline in the Covid-19 infections opening the doors for visitors.

Shopping hubs like T Nagar, Purasawalkam and

Triplicane became active with people congregating in large numbers to catch up on what they had been missing all these days.

The roads leading to industrial estates thrived with activities as in normal times with most of the industries and factories resuming operations, providing work and livelihood to a large number of people depending on their functioning.

Many roadside shops and eateries and poor caterers in such localities too returned from their isolations as the economic activities began with a bang providing employment to their regular customers.

At the state level, the 11 districts that were classified as Type 1 continued to be under strict lockdown norms with most of the activities banned. Those districts are Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Tiruppur, Erode, Salem, Karur, Namakkal, Thanjavur, Thiruvallur, Nagapattinam and Myladuthurai.

VACCINE FOR LAWYERS, HC STAFF



Special vaccination camp arranged for advocates, clerks, court staff and their family members at Madras high court on Monday.

—DC

HC equates temple idol to child, restores property to Palani temple

Chennai, June 28: Equating an idol to a minor child, the Madras High Court has come to the rescue of the famous Sri Dhandayudhapani temple in Palani by restoring its vast property worth several lakhs of rupees, to the shrine. It is 'trite' in law that the idol of a temple is akin to a minor child and the court is the guardian of a minor child both for person and property, Justice RMT Teekaa Raman said in a recent order. "The court is the guardian of a minor child both for person and property. Likewise, the court is the guardian of properties of the idol of the temple," he said.

"The court has to protect the properties of the idol like that of a minor child. According to the Hindu mythology, at Palani Lord Subramaniya Swamy alias Kartthick is abode as minor child and hence



(and) the court has to protect the property of the idol as that of a minor child," he said while dismissing a batch of second appeals from certain individuals, who enjoyed the property for generations. Being a guardian of the property of the idol, this court feels that the appellants/defendants were enjoying the property for generations by adopting dubious methods and hence should be evicted, the judge said.

He also directed the commissioner and secre-

tary of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment department to give suitable instructions to the executive officer of the temple to take possession of the property as per the earlier decree within four weeks after failing which, the Commissioner has to supervise its execution at the earliest. The suit property, a vast tract of land extending to 60.43 acres in Periyakumarapalayam village in Dharapuram in Tirupur district, was given as 'Inam' to the ancestors of the appellants in 1863 by the British government. The judge noted that the defendants were squatting on the temple land for generations through the 'grant' by the British Government followed by settlement proceedings under the Tamil Nadu Inam Abolition Act and in view of the various proceedings. —PTI

Off-centre Hide and seek drama by tribes in the Nilgiris

The health department officials who are battling to vaccinate the hesitant primitive tribes in the Nilgiris, especially in Gudalur and Pandalur taluks, encountered a hide and seek drama on Sunday as the tribes of a few remote hamlets adopted a different strategy to avoid taking the Covid-19 vaccine shot by hiding in the deep jungles. The residents of Kundrilkadavu, Erumaikulam, Pythalkadavu and Padikkanvayal tribal hamlets, which are dominated by the Paniyar and Kattunayakan tribal communities, vanished into the nearby jungles before the officials came. The health staff, who knew that the tribes would come out of the woods after sunset, entered the hamlets after nightfall and administered them vaccines.

—B. Ravichandran

A podcast on forgotten herbs

Food is much bigger than what is on their plate, according to two Chennai-based youngsters Akash and Harish, who have started a podcast to discuss forgotten herbs, species and their benefits. Harish, a petroleum engineer, and Akash Muralidharan, an architect and food designer, in their podcast 'Chukku Kaapi', talk about herbs and spices that have a lot of medicinal value and the need to experiment with them in daily cooking.

In the first episode of Chukku Kaapi, the food designer spoke about galangal (Sitharathai), a medicinal herb used in Asian kitchens. They shared a few tips and tricks on how to include them in cooking. For eg, it can be a simple tea recipe with galangal or how adding galangal in a fish or mutton curry helps avoid the heavy smell and ease digestion. Akash also shared a recipe of dishes using this medicinal herb like Sitharathai Rasam, Mango Sitharathai Ice cream etc.. —Sindhiya Samuel

Shivashankar Baba in CB-CID custody

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, JUNE 28

The special court for Pocco cases on Monday granted the CB-CID police custody of Shivashankar Baba, the founder of Sushil Hari School, arrested on charges of sexual abuse, for three days.

The Mamallapuram all women police arrested Shivashankar Baba on the charges of sexually harassing the girls at the residential

school in Kelambakkam. Based on the complaints from three victims, the police booked him under IPC sections 354 (Whoever assaults or uses criminal force to any woman, intending to outrage or knowing it to be likely that he will thereby outrage her modesty), 363 (Punishment for kidnapping), 365 (kidnaps or abducts any person with the intent to cause that person to be

secretly and wrongfully confined), 366 (Kidnapping, abducting or inducing woman to compel her marriage, etc) and section 8,10,12 and 17 of Pocco Act. He was remanded to judicial custody. The CB-CID police had sought 10 days custody for interrogation, however, the court granted only three days.

It ordered the police to produce the accused before the court on Thursday.

SHORT TAKES

DIDI EXTENDS
LOCKDOWN
TILL JULY 15RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, JUNE 28

Extending the Covid-19 lockdown till July 15 with an ease of curbs in West Bengal, chief minister Mamata Banerjee broke her silence on the fake vaccine scam on Monday and ruled out her government's link to the racket and its kingpin, Debanjan Deb, in wake of his viral photos with several Trinamul Congress leaders including two state cabinet ministers.

On the fresh relaxations, the CM informed that the movement of public transport including intra-state (inter-district) government and private buses, inland waterways transport, trams, local taxis, cabs and auto-rickshaws will be allowed with passengers not more than 50 per cent of seating capacity at a time.

L'DWEEP STAGES
'COCONUT LEAVES'
PROTESTS

Kochi, June 28: Residents of Lakshadweep on Monday staged "coconut leaves and palm" protest across inhabited islands against the administration's order to levy a fine if coconut palm leaves, shells or trunks were found in and around their dwelling places.

Holding placards which read "introduce mulching" and "stop imposing fine", the islanders, under the banner of Save Lakshadweep Forum (SLF), stood in front of a pile of coconut leaves in the properties urging the administration to withdraw the "anti-people" order.

In their one-hour long protest, the islanders urged the administration to withdraw the decision to impose fine on them and introduce technology to convert the organic materials from the coconuts as compost — a mixture of ingredients used to fertilise and improve the soil.

"Our demand is that the fine imposed on the people should be withdrawn and a proper waste management system should be implemented. Unless the waste management system is implemented there is no genuine right from the side of administration to collect fine on falling of coconut leaves and other palms in their property," Lakshadweep MP Mohammed Faizal PP said.

"Where do the people of islands are expected to do the scientific processing of leaves and palms," he asked.

He said an islander cannot afford to have his own scientific processing unit or incinerator and it is the prime duty of the Lakshadweep administration to provide such a facility.

SC JUNKS PLEA
FOR PROBE INTO
CONVERSIONPARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a petition seeking setting up of a Special Investigation Team to probe the alleged "forceful" conversion of the Hindus in Nuh district of Haryana.

Dismissing the plea, Chief Justice N.V. Ramana headed a three-judge bench also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice Hrishikesh Roy said, "This is not a matter for the Supreme Court to take up."

"Sorry, the plea is dismissed," the court said. The petitioners have alleged continuous erosion of life, personal liberty and religious rights of the Hindus in the area by a minority community having a dominating position in the area.

Senior lawyer Vikas Singh, appearing for the petitioners, referred to a score of media reports and told the court that two of them had visited the area and also met people including the family of 21-year-old Nikita Tomar, who was shot dead outside her college in Ballabgarh in October last.

One of the murder accused, identified as Tausif, was trying to force the student to marry him. A fast-track court in Haryana's Faridabad district had sentenced two men to life imprisonment in the murder case. "We do not think we can entertain this petition based on newspaper reports," the Chief Justice remarked.

The petition, filed by a group of lawyers and a social worker based in Uttar Pradesh, had claimed that the state government, district administration and the police have failed to exercise their powers and so need for a SIT probe, personnel of CBI and NIA under the supervision of a retired top court judge.

U.P. BJP EX-MLA
ALLEGES PARTY
OUTSOURCING
ITS LEADERS

Ballia (UP), June 28: A former UP BJP MLA and party office-bearer on Monday accused his party of "outsourcing" its leaders while reiterating his charge against the Yogi Adityanath government of mishandling the Covid crisis.

Within days after claiming at least ten deaths in each village of Uttar Pradesh due to Covid during its second wave, BJP's state Working Committee member Ram Iqbal Singh on Monday upped his claim, saying the Covid death toll in the state could be "over 10 lakh".

Singh made the assertion while talking to reporters at his residence in Mundera, near here.

Reacting to Ram Iqbal's statement, BJP's Gorakhpur region president Dharmendra Singh said the party has taken note of his continued anti-government statements and the state leadership will take action against him.

Details of his controversial statements are being collected and being sent to the party leadership, he added.

Earlier on Saturday, former MLA Ram Iqbal Singh had said at least ten people died due to corona infection in every village and this number could be many times more in villages having larger populations.

A large number of people have died in cities too, he added on Monday.

Taking a dig at leaders joining the BJP from other parties, he said, "The BJP has changed with the times and the leaders outsourced by the party have become dominant."

The one who made objectionable statements about the Ram temple has become a Cabinet minister in the Yogi government, he added.

Singh claimed he had raised the issue of corruption in tehsils and police stations in the BJP's State Working Committee meeting on March 15 but there has been no improvement, he said.

The situation has only worsened since then, he added.

Singh also accused the state government of favouring a BSP MLA, saying all criminal cases against him have been withdrawn. — PTI

● **BJP'S DHARMENDRA** Singh said the party has taken note of his continued anti-government statements and will take action against him.



Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel welcomes President Ram Nath Kovind and first lady Savita Kovind at Raj Bhavan in Lucknow on Monday. — PTI

Prez in Lucknow
on two-day visit

Lucknow, June 28: President Ram Nath Kovind reached here on Monday by the Presidential Express Train on a two-day visit.

The President, who is currently on a five-day trip to his home state, was received at the Charbagh railway station here around noon by Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, state ministers and a large number of senior officials and people's representatives.

From the railway station, the president went directly to the Raj Bhawan where he will spend the next two days. He is scheduled to attend a high tea programme at the Raj Bhawan in the evening with senior judges of the Allahabad High Court,

Prayers at Amarnath



J&K Lt Gov. Manoj Sinha, who is also the chairman of the Amarnathji Shrine Board, pays his obeisance at the holy cave shrine of Amarnath. The annual yatra has been cancelled this year due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. "May the divine blessings of Lord Shiva ensure good health and happiness in everyone's life and bless us with the strength to overcome the ongoing health crisis," said the Lt Governor. — PTI

Punjab crisis: Sidhu to meet
Rahul, Priyanka in Delhi today

Sidhu's utterances against CM have not gone down well with many in the party

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

Disgruntled Punjab legislator Navjot Singh Sidhu has been summoned by the Congress high command once again after support for state chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh appears to have grown within the party. Sidhu has been asked to meet senior leader Rahul Gandhi and AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Tuesday. The problem arose in Punjab when Sidhu opened a front against Capt. Amarinder Singh, accusing him with not keeping his promises to the people of the state.

Sidhu's utterances have not gone down well with many people in the party. Sidhu had gone on a tirade against the Punjab Chief Minister last week in several publications and on the social media.

The Punjab Chief Minister was in New Delhi last week, and besides meeting several top leaders, he also met the high-powered committee set up by Congress president Sonia Gandhi to find a solution to the Punjab problem.

Free electricity in Punjab
if AAP wins, says Kejriwal

New Delhi, June 28: Ahead of Assembly elections in Punjab next year, Delhi Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday promised free electricity in that state if his Aam Aadmi Party wins the polls.

A day ahead of his visit to Chandigarh, the AAP leader also claimed that women in Punjab are very unhappy with inflation.

"In Delhi we provide 200 units of free electricity to every family. The women are very happy. Women in Punjab are also very unhappy with inflation. The AAP government will also provide free electricity in Punjab. See you tomorrow in Chandigarh," Kejriwal tweeted in Punjabi.

After the meeting, committee member Harish Rawat said Sidhu had been speaking out of turn. He added, "You have to

AAP spokesperson and Delhi MLA Raghav Chadha said the Punjab Chief Minister's office has denied the party permission to hold a press conference at a pre-decided venue.

Chadha said Kejriwal will make a "mega announcement" in Chandigarh on Tuesday.

"@capt_amarinder's fear of Kejriwal has reached a point where his office has denied us permission to hold press conference at the pre-decided venue. Nevertheless, @ArvindKejriwal will make a mega announcement tomorrow in Chandigarh which will send 440 volt current to Captain and his party," Chadha tweeted. Assembly elections in Punjab are scheduled to be

held in February or March next year.

Dismissing the accusation, Punjab Chief Minister asked why would the state government stop Kejriwal from holding a press conference when he was allowed to hold a party programme a few days back.

"Totally not true. We let Arvind Kejriwal address a rally here just a few days back. So why should we stop him now from holding a press conference? If he wants I'd be happy to arrange his lunch too. Aam Aadmi Party just wants to do drama even if it means lying: Amarinder Singh," read a tweet by the Punjab chief minister's media advisor. — PTI

statements."

In a bid to solve the Punjab imbroglio, Rahul Gandhi has been meeting several leaders from the

state, including ministers, MLAs and MPs. Lok Sabha MP Ravneet Singh Bittu said after meeting Gandhi: "Captain Sahib met the committee for three hours. The entire exercise is for poll preparations. Within a week, all issues will be resolved. But statements against a sitting Chief Minister are not good and can be easily seen as indiscipline."

Several other leaders also told the high-powered committee that Sidhu's comments against a sitting Chief Minister of the party will only harm the interests of the Congress.

Sources say the Congress high command wants to end the Punjab crisis as soon as possible. As the elections are near, the party should be seen as united instead of fighting each other. The sources added that there was no question of replacing the Punjab Chief Minister as he has the support of a huge majority of party-men.

However, state unit chief Sunil Jharkhar is all set to be replaced as there are a lot of reservations about him. He was called to New Delhi last week to meet Rahul Gandhi.

SII asks Centre to take up inclusion of
Covishield in EU vaccination passport

New Delhi, June 28: Serum Institute of India (SII) has requested the government to take up the matter of inclusion of Covishield vaccine in the EU Covid-19 Vaccination Passport with the European Union and other countries, citing this will affect students and business travellers and cause severe disruptions to the Indian and global economy.

Only four vaccines —

Comirnaty of Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, Vaxzevria by AstraZeneca-Oxford and Johnson & Johnson's Janssen — have been approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and only those vaccinated by these vaccines will be given vaccination passports and will be allowed to travel within the European Union during the pandemic.

"India has a large popu-

lation. However, not including Covishield into the EU Covid-19 Vaccination Passport will not allow Covishield vaccinated people to travel to European countries and this will affect students, business travellers back and forth, and cause severe disruptions to our economy and to the global economy," a source quoted Adar C. Poonawalla, CEO of SII, as having communicated in a letter to external affairs

minister S. Jaishankar.

Sources said referring to Poonawalla's letter, director, government and regulatory affairs at SII, Prakash Kumar Singh, has also sought Jaishankar's intervention at the highest level, saying, "It will be in the national interest as well as in the interest of people at large globally if Covishield vaccine is included in the EU Covid-19 Vaccination Passport." — PTI

AIADMK power minister denies irregularities

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D
SEKAR / DC
CHENNAI, JUNE 28

Electricity Minister in the previous AIADMK government, P Thangamani, said that the alleged loss incurred by the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB), as pointed out in a CAG report, was only due to the government's principle to provide uninterrupted power to the people and not to burden the consumers unduly.

Denying any irregularities in the operations of the TNEB, Thangamani said in a statement on Saturday that it was com-

mon for the CAG to come out with such adverse reports even when there was no irregularity in it.

He accused the media of exaggerating the remarks in the CAG report, which said that 75 public sector organisations incurred a loss of Rs 20,000 crore. TNEB's loss of Rs 13,176.20 crore had been attributed to power loss, expenses in procurement of power and expenses for workers and not to any irregularity, he claimed.

Pointing out that welfare schemes like free supply of 100 units power to all households and round the clock three phase connection to farmers are there

only in the State, Thangamani said, without paying salary, buying coal for thermal stations and purchasing electricity from private companies the people could not be brought out of darkness.

Stating that the objectives of the transport and electricity departments were to provide cheap services to the people and not to make profits, he referred to a remark in the report that more freight charges were paid for transporting coal from Chennai to Mettur by not filling up the containers to the full and said that coal had to be rushed whenever there was a need and what-

ever was available would be transported.

He also pointed out that the State suffered from power cuts during 2006 to 2011 when the DMK was in power and the 2010 CAG report had pointed out to a loss of several thousands of crores due to purchase of coal at an expensive rate.

Unlike the DMK rule when 171.57 crore loss was reported in 2014 and 2019 due to use of low quality coal, the AIADMK regime never use poor quality coal, Thangamani said that his government was not responsible for the Rs 424.43 crore loss attributed to purchase of power.

DIGVIJAY FILES
COMPLAINT OVER
'TAMPERED'
CLUBHOUSE CHATRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, JUNE 28

Congress veteran and former chief minister Digvijay Singh on Monday lodged a complaint with the cyber cell of Madhya Pradesh police here alleging that his chat in the in Clubhouse app, leaked on June 12, was tampered with.

The purported chat in which Singh was heard saying that abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir was a wrong decision by the Centre and there should be a 'relook' at it when Congress returned to power at the Centre, had sparked an uproar landing Congress in an awkward situation.

Talking to reporters here, Singh said he filed the complaint under the Information Technology (IT) Act seeking action against those who 'edited, doctored, shared and distorted' my statement during a Clubhouse session with a motive to taint my image.

Singh wondered why an 'edited' portion of the chat was leaked and indicated that he was going to send a legal notice to the Clubhouse app for leaking his chat.

The Congress leader further said he has already sent a notice to Twitter for sharing the 'distorted' chat. "FIR should be filed against those who shared and re-tweeted the post", he added.

State cyber cell superintendent of police Gurkaran Singh said no case has so far been registered in connection with the complaint filed by the Congress leader.

A-G VENUGOPAL
GETS ANOTHER
EXTENSIONDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

The Centre on Monday extended by another year the term of Attorney General K.K. Venugopal who will turn 90 on September 6. He will continue to serve as Attorney General till June 30, 2022.

Being the oldest serving Attorney General of India, Venugopal was appointed as A-G by the Modi government on July 1, 2017 for a three-year term.

On the expiry of his initial term last year, Venugopal was given one year extension which ends tomorrow (June 30). In view of the fresh extension, he will continue to serve as Attorney General for another year.

Venugopal was appointed as A-G after his predecessor senior lawyer Mukul Rohatgi had resigned as Attorney General citing personal reasons.

Venugopal has been a practicing lawyer for nearly six decades. He was Additional Solicitor General once in late prime minister Morarji Desai's government.

He enrolled at the Bar in January 1954 in the then Mysore High Court and thereafter in the Madras High Court. He was designated as senior lawyer by the Supreme Court in 1972.

When the earlier previous AIADMK government relinquished office in 2006, TNEB's debt was Rs 9,583 crore but the DMK government that came after that not only made the people languish with 10 to 18 hours power cut a day but also added a debt of Rs 36,000 crore, taking it to a grand total of Rs 45,000 crore, he alleged.

While the CAG had not pointed out any irregularities in the AIADMK regime, it had said that there had been mismanagement by the previous DMK government causing heavy losses to the TNEB, running to several thousand of crores, he said.

SHORT TAKES

1 DEAD, 13 HURT
IN TWO CHICAGO
SHOOTINGS

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

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

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

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

UKRAINE, U.S.
BEGIN BLACK
SEA DRILLS

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

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

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

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

U.S. NORTHWEST,
CANADA RECORD
HIGHEST TEMP.

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

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

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

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

SWEDISH PM
RESIGNS AFTER
NO-TRUST VOTE

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

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

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

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

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

US attacks Iran-backed forces

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

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

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

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

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

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

The United States took necessary, appropriate, and deliberate action

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

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

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

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

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

The Hashed, an Iraqi

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

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

— AFP

designed to limit the risk of escalation but also to send a clear and unam-

biguous deterrent message, Kirby said.

Sunday's strikes mark

the second time the Biden administration has taken military action in

Threatened scribes



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

— AFP

Iran yet to finalise on camera deal

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

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

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

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

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

In order to limit diplo-

matic damage amid ongoing negotiations in Vienna to resurrect the nuclear deal, Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency reached a last-minute February agreement over Tehran's newly imposed limits on inspections. The move to erase the surveillance footage would steeply escalate tensions, complicating diplomatic efforts to find a path for America to lift sanctions and Iran to reimpose curbs on its nuclear program.

— AP

Russia, China extend 20-yr-old friendship ties

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

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

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

Xi in his opening remarks emphasised the

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AP

GLOBAL | INFLUENCE

CPC seeks control over Chinese nationals who have moved abroad

Ahead of centenary, China heralds CPC's impact
China launches hydropower stn

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

Party officials on Monday heaped praise on President Xi Jinping, who has established himself as China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong, and has eliminated any limits on his term in office. China has seen huge improvements in living standards over the past four decades, accompanied by rising international economic and political heft. Yet, while many countries have benefit-

Beijing, June 28: China on Monday launched two units of a massive hydropower station in the country's southwest, said to be the world's largest, which is under construction and costs about USD 34 billion.

The two units of the Baihetan hydropower station

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

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

China has already built the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River and approved plans to build another massive dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to Arunachal Pradesh. The dams cost about 220 billion yuan (USD 34 billion), according to media reports.

external liaison department told reporters at a news conference held at the opening of a media centre for the centenary celebrations.

— AP

Current vax less
effective against
Beta variant: Study

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

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

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

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

— PTI

UK DEFENCE MIN.,
TOP BRASS BEGIN
SELF-ISOLATION

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

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

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

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

— AFP

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

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

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

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

— AFP



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

— AFP

Blinken meets Pope as
US bishops dare Biden

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

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

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said the

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

PUBLIC NOTICE

My clients, **LIC Housing Finance Ltd**, having office at 657, Avinashi Road, Coimbatore are intended to give Housing Loan to **Mr. MANIKANDAN** who states that her vendor **Mrs. BANUMATHI** is the absolute owner of the scheduled property by **Document No. 13369/2012** and represents that one of the original parent **Document 6522/2008** was lost and non traceable. The applicant is also intended to Mortgage the property with my clients. Anybody having objection are hereby called upon to inform the same within 15 Days, or my clients will proceed for the same.

SCHEDULE OF PROPERTY
Coimbatore District, Narasimma Naickenpalayam Village, periyar Naickenpalayam SRO, Coimbatore, SF.No. 112/1D Part, Site No. 27, in Nethaji Nagar

D. AYYAPPAN - ADVOCATE, RAMNAGAR, COIMBATORE - 641009

TAMIL NADU VETERINARY AND ANIMAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY				
e - Tender Notice No.01 / E.O / DB / Tender / 2021-2022, dt. 25.06.2021				
For and on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University's e tenders (Lump sum) are invited by the Estate Officer, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Madhavaram Milk Colony, Chennai-51 online for item wise rate. Bids are invited from the eligible contractors for the following work.				
Sl. No.	Description of Work	Approximate value of work (including GST)	EMD (Rs)	Period of completion
1	Formation of road in Madras Veterinary College campus at Chennai - 07 (Re-Tender)	Rs. 97.32 Lakhs	58,800/- including GST	Six Months
Starting and End date for bid loading and uploading tender : 07.07.2021 at 04.00 P.M. and 19.07.2021 at 10.00 A.M.				
Last date for submission of bid : 19.07.2021 by 10.00 A.M.				
Opening of Tender : 20.07.2021 at 11.00 A.M.				
For notice inviting tenders please log on to : www.tanuvas.ac.in / http://tenders.gov.in The bid forms and other details can be obtained from the website : http://tenders.gov.in Subsequent corrigendum / addendum if any shall only be available in website indicated above				
DIPR/1868/TENDER/2021				Estate Officer, LIC TANUVAS, Chennai

DECCAN Chronicle

29 JUNE 2021

Drone attacks on Jammu carry ominous signals

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

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

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

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

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

Who spied on UK minister?

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

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

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

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

Subhani



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



K.C. Singh

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The PM's session with the Kashmiri political leaders is a recognition that the government's Kashmir policy has yielded poor results at home and abroad.

LETTERS

TRAFFIC DEATH

It made painful reading that a 50-year-old chairperson of the women's wing of the Kanpur chapter of the IIA, Ms Vandana Mishra (a Covid survivor) died, struck in traffic while being taken to the hospital. It is tragic and pathetic that she was caught in the traffic. The president was in Kanpur at that time and the traffic was halted. VVIP protocol has taken a precious life. Blocking of traffic on a busy road causes immense trouble to ordinary citizens. The old, sick, school children, pregnant women and of course the Aam Aadmi are put to trouble. Why not the VVIPs take a circuitous unscheduled route or go by air and not inconvenience the public. VVIP culture should go lock, stock and barrel.

N. R. Ramachandran, Ooty

RAHUL'S COMMENTS OUT-BURST

While the world and organisations like WHO and the UN General Assembly have lauded India for its unrelenting fight against Covid, despite facing many constraints and criticisms of every kind, here is the voice of Rahul Gandhi that strikes a discordant note of mockery and abuses of the efforts and achievements of the Government in controlling, curing and containing Covid. WHO recorded its appreciation of the Government of India for its achievements of vaccinating Indians to protect them from Covid. The UN General Assembly also expressed similar views. It will be better both for Rahul and the party if senior leaders advise him to cultivate the habit of rushing to comment.

Bharadwaj Puthran, Coimbatore

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Aakar Patel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52735.59	-0.36
Nifty 50	15814.70	-0.29
S&P 500*	4,281.34	0.01
Dollar (₹)	73.87	0.28
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.18	0.31
Euro (₹)	88.36	0.19
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,337▲116	0.25
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	75.08	-1.44
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.056	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.490	-0.046
* As of 8:30 PM IST		

Dr Reddy's Lab launches Covid drug 2-DG

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

Emirates may resume flights to India from July 7



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

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

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

Rohini Nilekani to retire from own foundation

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



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

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, JUNE 28

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

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

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

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

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

CENTRE TO PAY PF SHARE TILL MARCH

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

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

— FC Bureau

GUARANTEE ON TRAVEL & TOURISM LOANS

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

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

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

— FC Bureau

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

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

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

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

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

SAT STAYS SEBI ORDER ON FRANKLIN TEMPLETON

New Delhi, June 28: The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) on Monday stayed a Sebi order that had barred Franklin Templeton Asset Management (India) from launching new debt schemes for two years and had asked the fund house to refund a little over Rs 512 crore.

Terming the refund amount "excessive", SAT asked the asset management company to deposit a sum of Rs 250 crore in an escrow account within three weeks.

The appeal was filed against an order passed by the Sebi on June 7, which said Franklin Templeton violated certain provisions of mutual funds norms in relation to the management of the six debt schemes, which are now shut.

Through the order, Franklin Templeton was directed to refund investment management and advisory fees along with interest at the rate of 12 per cent per annum amounting to Rs 512.50 crore.

Further, the firm was prohibited from launching new debt schemes for a period of two years and penalty of Rs 5 crore was levied on it.

In its order on Monday, SAT noted that 21 debt schemes are still being managed by Franklin Templeton and no complaint of these schemes have come to the fore.

"The mere fact that the appellant (Franklin Templeton) have chosen to wind up six schemes does not mean that they should be debarred from launching any new debt schemes," it added.

— PTI

Indians invest nearly \$40 bn in crypto assets

SUVASHREE GHOSH & RONOJOY MAZUMDAR JUNE 28



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

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

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

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

"I'd rather put my money in crypto than gold," Ms Sood said. "Crypto is more transparent than gold or property and returns are more in a short period of time." She's part of a growing number of Indians—now totalling more than 15 million—buying and selling digital coins. That's catching up with the 23

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

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

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

One of the biggest barriers preventing wider adoption is the regulatory uncertainty. Last year, the Supreme Court quashed a 2018 rule banning crypto trading by banking entities, resulting in a trading surge. However, authorities show no signs of embracing cryptocurrencies. The nation's central bank says it has "major concerns" about the asset

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

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

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

He's already got contingency plans in place to move his trading to an offshore Singapore bank account if a ban was to be introduced. To be sure, the value of Indian digital asset holdings remain a sliver of its gold market. Still, the growth is clear, especially in trading—the four biggest crypto exchanges saw daily trading jump to \$102 million from \$10.6 million a year ago, according to CoinGecko. The country's \$40 billion market significantly trails China's \$161 billion, according to Chainalysis.

— Bloomberg

Game streaming startup Loco gets funds from PUBG firm

SARITHA RAI JUNE 28

Loco, an Indian streaming platform for video games, received \$9 million from investors, including South Korean gaming company Krafton Inc in its first fundraising effort to capitalise on the growing popularity of games-based entertainment in the South Asian nation.

The Mumbai-based startup was also backed in its seed round by Lumikai Ltd, India's first gaming media fund, London-based Hiro Capital and early stage investors including 3one4 Capital and Axilor Ventures.

Loco will use the funds to upgrade its technology and content, the startup said in an announcement on Monday.

Livestreaming of games has been popularised globally by the likes of Amazon.com Inc's Twitch in the US and DouYu International Holdings Ltd and Huya Inc in China. In India—which has no legacy of gaming on consoles or desktops—the genre received a boost during the pandemic, as



the hundreds of millions locked indoors turned to their smartphones for entertainment. Krafton's PUBG Mobile, previously distributed in India by Tencent Holdings Ltd, had been among the most popular games in the country before it was banned last year and is now re-entering the market.

"Cheap data and inexpensive phones brewed a perfect situation in India, creating a completely new category of entertainment," co-founder Anirudh Pandita said in an interview. "Over 100 million monthly active users in India engage with these games, imagine a 100 million people playing a sport that no one's watching—that's what Loco set out to solve for."

Loco Interactive Pte, as the startup is officially called, was founded by Pandita and Ashwin Suresh, who met as engineering undergraduates at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The duo went on to work on Wall Street before starting Pocket Aces Pvt Ltd, a digital studio creating streaming content to provide an alternative to traditional television entertainment. The gaming startup will be spun off from Pocket Aces with this funding, the statement said.

Loco has expanded rapidly in the past year, with monthly active users growing six times and monthly active streamers increasing 10 times. Its main competitor is YouTube, the startup said.

Loco has a roster of the country's most best-known streamers playing popular games such as Clash of Clans, FreeFire and Call of Duty Mobile. It also hosts top esports teams. It also hosts top esports teams and their tournaments, though the genre remains a niche in India.

—Bloomberg

Second wave impact milder: CEA

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, JUNE 28



K. V. Subramanian

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

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

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

Though he admitted that small companies were impacted by the pandemic more than larger companies, he said the macro-economic impact of second-wave would not be large during the current financial year.

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

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

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

Highlighting the reforms in labour, agriculture, financial markets, and production-linking incentives for exports, Dr Subramanian exuded confidence that the Indian economy would be one of the top high-growth economies of the decade because of the reforms undertaken by the government.

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

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

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

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

SKODA PRICES KUSHAQ SUV AT ₹10.49 LAKH



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JUNE 28

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

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

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

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

How does it feel to be sacked by a bot?

SPENCER SOPER JUNE 28

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

The 63-year-old Army veteran was stunned. He'd been fired by a machine. Normandin says Amazon punished him for things beyond his control that prevented him from completing his deliveries, such as locked apartment complexes. He said he took the termination hard and,

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

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

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



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

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

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

Amazon started its giga-

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

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

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

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

BWF cancels India & Hyderabad Open

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

Lankans banned for bubble breach

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

Deepika reclaims world no.1 ranking

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

SA level series against Windies

St George's (Grenada): South Africa turned the tables on the West Indies in the second match of their T20 series, winning by 16 runs to level the five-match series at 1-1. Only 24 hours after losing the opening match by eight wickets, an unchanged South Africa lineup produced an improved but still imperfect bowling and fielding performance to restrict the West Indies to 150-9 in reply to their 166-7 on Sunday. — *PTI*

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

Shot putter Toor hits a purple patch

Patiala: Olympic-bound shot putter Tajinder Pal Singh Toor continued his impressive form as he produced yet another big throw while winning gold on the fourth and penultimate day of the National Inter-State Athletics Championships here on Monday. Toor, who booked an Olympic ticket on last Monday with a national record throw of 21.49m during the Indian Grand Prix 4 here, came up with a best effort of 21.10m to win the gold in the event. — *PTI*

Live on TV

EURO

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

THOR'S THUNDER

Hazard strikes as Belgium knock Portugal out of Euro

Belgium	1
(Thorgan Hazard 42)	
Portugal	0

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

said had even more talent than him.

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

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

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

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

England, Germany to renew age-old rivalry

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

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

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

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

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

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

SWEDISH CHALLENGE FOR UKRAINE

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

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

CR7 proud of Portugal effort

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

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

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

"Congratulations to all the teams left in. As for us, we shall return stronger," vowed the veteran who at least could console himself with having matched the 109 international goals record of Iran's Ali Daei during the tournament. Ronaldo scored five times during the competition to take his European Championship tally to a record 14, matching Daei's achievement with his goal in the 2-2 group game draw with world champions France.

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

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

ECUADOR HOLD BRAZIL TO ENTER COPA QUARTERS

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

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

A free kick in the 37th minute set up Eder Militao, who headed the ball at a sharp angle into the top right corner of the net, well clear of Ecuador keeper Hernan Galindez's outstretched arm.

COPA RESULTS

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

PERU WIN

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

SHOOTING | WORLD CUP



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

Sarnobat clinches gold in 25m pistol

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

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

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

"After I got assurance about the gold, it was more about technicalities for me

in the last few series as I wanted to try out a few things so I was doing that," she said.

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

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

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

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

Olympic briefs

Japan ups health controls

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

USA Basketball reveal roster

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

UAE to host T20 World Cup

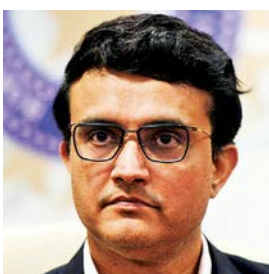
New Delhi, June 28: The T20 World Cup scheduled to be held in India is being shifted to the UAE owing to the health safety concerns posed by Covid-19, BCCI President Sourav Ganguly said on Monday, ending weeks of speculation surrounding the mega-event in October-November.

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

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

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

Asked if October 17 has been finalised as the start



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

— **SOURAV GANGULY**
BCCI President

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

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

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

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

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

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

holders is of paramount importance..."

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

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

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

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

Greek tragedy: Tsitsipas bows out

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

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

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

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

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



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

delayed play on outside courts for five hours.

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

to stun the top seed.

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

RESULTS	
Men's first round: Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Jack Draper (GBR) 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2; Frances Tiafoe (USA) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x3) 6-4, 6-4, 6-3.	
Women's first round: Sloane Stephens (USA) bt Petra Kvitova (CZE x10) 6-3, 6-4; Lauren Davis (USA) bt Jodie Burrage (GBR) 6-2, 6-1; Madison Keys (USA x23) bt Katie Swan (GBR) 6-3, 6-4; Lesley Kerkhove (NED) bt Svetlana Kuznetsova (RUS) 6-3, 6-3; Garbine Muguruza (ESP x11) bt Fiona Ferro (FRA) 6-0, 6-1; Ekaterina Alexandrova (RUS x32) bt Laura Siegemund (GER) 6-1, 6-3; Maria Camila Osorio (COL) bt Anna Kalinskaya (RUS) 1-6, 6-0, 6-4; Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x2) bt Monica Niculescu (ROM) 6-1, 6-4.	

remainder of the tie.

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

ed. "I probably had one of the best serving performances that I can recall on any surface," said Djokovic who fired 25 aces and 47 winners.

With the Australian and French Open titles under his belt, the Serb is bidding to become only the third man in history to claim a calendar Grand Slam.

His match was preceded by a standing ovation for Professor Sarah Gilbert, one of the key scientists behind the Oxford AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine who was a special guest in the Royal Box.

Tiafoe won a second-tier grass court Challenger event in Nottingham this month before making the quarter-finals at Queen's Club. He made that match hardness pay against Tsitsipas, playing only his 16th match on grass. It was the first time in 12 attempts that 23-year-old Tiafoe had beaten a player ranked in the top five.

— *AFP*

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