

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | SATURDAY | 8 AUGUST 2020

WEATHER

Max: 35.0°C
Min: 19°C
RH: 71%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 35/19 °C

COVID-19 CUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+60,622)	(+923)
20,85,124	42,554

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+2,207)	(+12)
TS: 75,257	601
(+10,171)	(+89)
AP: 2,06,960	1,842

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

1,93,92,016

DEATHS

7,20,193

COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES

213

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana

Tithi: Shravana Bahula Panchami till 4.19 am (Sunday)

Star: Uttarabhadra till 4.12 pm

Variyam: 5.39 am to 7.27 am (Sunday)

Durmuhurtam: 6.01 am to 7.43 am

Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

HIMRI CALENDAR

Zulhijja 17,1441 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.31 am

Zohar: 12.26 pm

Asar: 4.28 pm

Maghrib: 6.05 pm

Isha: 7.21 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.52 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.00 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 9.03 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 9.29 PM

COUNTER POINT

Double trouble, sir... you have tested positive and GDP negative!

IN BRIEF

2 lakh Covid cases in state

Vijayawada: Andhra Pradesh crossed two-lakh Covid-19 positive cases with the addition of 10,171 cases taking the tally to 2,06,960. It also witnessed 89 deaths in a single day taking the toll to 1,842 in the last 24 hours. The state health department in its Covid-19 bulletin released on Friday reported that out of 62,938 samples tested, 10,171 individuals were found infected with Coronavirus. Over 23,62,270 samples have been tested so far in the state.

■ Full report on Page 2



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■ Full report on Page 2

CAPITAL | SAGA

HC stay order scuttles Vizag plan; YSRC cadres upset I-Day fete to be in Vijayawada

MD ILYAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7

The YSR Congress government has decided to conduct Independence Day (I-Day) celebrations in Vijayawada, indicating that it will not shift to Visakhapatnam to establish the executive capital in a hurry.

Earlier, the plan was to hoist the national flag in Visakhapatnam and lay the foundation for the establishment of the executive capital, but the government

decided to celebrate the I-Day because of the status quo ordered by the High Court and the next hearing being on August 14.

Chief secretary Neelam Sawhney conducted a review meeting and directed officials of all departments to make arrangements for the I-Day celebrations in Vijayawada following Covid-19 protocol. The I-Day celebrations will be held in IGMC stadium on August 15.

After getting consent for

three capitals and the APCRDA repeal bills from Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan, municipal administration minister Botsa Satyanarayana had said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy would hoist the national flag in Vizag on August 15 and further will lay foundation stone for the establishment of the executive capital. Further, several other leaders also affirmed the shifting of the administrative capital on August 15.

TDP and other opposition parties created hype about the CM shifting his residence to Visakhapatnam immediately after getting approval for three capitals bills. The YSRC cadres expected Mr Reddy to hoist national flag at Vizag and begin working from CM camp office in the city.

Sources said the YSRC is not in a hurry to shift to Visakhapatnam overnight and that the government will go to Vizag after clearing all hurdles.



NATION | 4

ED grills actor Rhea in money laundering case



WORLD | 5

Lebanon Prez suspects missile caused blasts

SPORTS | 7

Barca bank on Messi in Champs League knockout



New J&K Lt. Gov. to resume talks, eliminate terror

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, AUG. 7

Jammu and Kashmir's new Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday set "ridding it completely of years of militancy and putting it on the path of development with peace" was his agenda.

Speaking to reporters after taking oath at the picturesque Raj Bhavan on the foothills of Zabarwan overlooking Dal Lake here, he said, "My mission in J&K is to bring peace, end militancy and ensure development without any disparity or discrimination with any section of the people or region. I will stay in direct contact with people of J&K and the media".

He pledged to open free dialogue with the people of the UT to have a better understanding of their problems and issues and then try to address these. He said there is a need to instill confidence among the "aam janata (general public) of J&K" in democracy.

Sinha said, "There won't be any bias against anyone. Constitutional powers will be used for people's welfare. I assure the people that their genuine grievances will be listened to and we will try to find a way to the solution. It is my aim to take forward the development here." He said that his other main priority would be 'zero tolerance for corruption'.

Pledging to take forward "developmental initiatives" launched during the last year and establishing dialogue with the



Former Union minister Manoj Sinha takes oath as the new Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir in Srinagar on Friday. — PTI

people, he asserted that J&K embarked on a 'new journey' on August 5 last year when it was fully integrated with the Union of India, "ending a long era of isolation, discrimination and lack of development". He asserted that because of its geographical, climatic, cultural and ethnic diversity, J&K is like a colourful bouquet; hence truly called the 'Crown of India'.

Mr. Sinha who earlier quit from the basic membership of the BJP said that the people of J&K have suffered enormously but the "new dawn promises hope, optimism, and bright future" for them. He said that he was told by officials that J&K has achieved tremendous results in some of the programmes and schemes during the last one year.

He reiterated, "I'm hopeful that I will be able to carry forward the agenda of development, inclusiveness and restoration of peace in J&K."

India, US discuss crisis with China

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, AUG. 7

The Sino-Indian military stand-off as part of "recent destabilising actions in the region" by China was understood to have been discussed during a phone call between external affairs minister S. Jaishankar and US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo on Friday.

During the conversation, both nations decided to hold a meeting in the four-nation "Quadrilateral" format — involving India, the US, Japan and Australia — to increase cooperation amid increasing Chinese military assertiveness in the region.

The US State Department's principal deputy spokesperson Cale Brown said, in a statement, that the two sides discussed ongoing bilateral and multilateral coop-

eration on issues of international concern, including efforts to combat the Covid-19, support the peace process in Afghanistan, and address recent destabilising actions in the region."

The US added, "Secretary Pompeo and minister Jaishankar reiterated the strength of the US-India relationship to advance peace, prosperity, and security in the Indo-Pacific and around the globe. Both leaders agreed to continue close cooperation on a full range of regional and global issues and look forward to Quadrilateral consultations and the U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue later this year."

Meanwhile, Jaishankar tweeted on Friday, "A wide-ranging conversation yesterday night with @SecPompeo. Reviewed our bilateral cooperation including working of relevant mechanisms."

16 die as AI flight falls into valley

Pilot among dead; plane overshoot Kozhikode tabletop runway, broke apart

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC with agency inputs THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 7

At least 16 persons including pilot D.V. Sathe were killed when an Air India Express aircraft from Dubai overshoot the runway at the Kozhikode International Airport and fell into a 35-feet valley at its far end before breaking into two pieces on Friday evening.

There were 174 passengers on board, including 10 infants, two pilots and five crew members. Aviation ministry said there were 190 passengers. The flight was part of Centre's Vande Bharat Mission to bring back expatriates from the Gulf region.

According to officials, the casualties are likely to go up considering the critical injuries sustained by many passengers, who are currently under treatment in various hospitals.

The co-pilot and a majority of passengers who sustained serious injuries have been admitted to the Kozhikode Medical College Kozhikode, Malabar Institute of Medical Science (MIMS) and Baby Memorial Hospital.

Air India Express AXB1344, a Boeing 737 aircraft, which took off from Dubai at 4.45 pm landed on Runway No 10 at



Airport officials and rescuers gather around the Air India Express flight that skidded off the runway while landing in Kozhikode on Friday. There were 190 persons on board en route from Dubai in the flight. — PTI

Kozhikode at 7.41 pm amid heavy rain and low visibility. According to a DGCA statement, the aircraft after landing continued moving till it hit the boundary wall, fell into a valley and broke in two.

The front portion of the aircraft from the cockpit to

the main passenger door got ripped off due to the impact of the accident. Several passengers who were trapped inside the aircraft were rescued by police personnel, CISF, fire and local people.

Over 60 ambulances from various hospitals of

Kozhikode and Mala-ppuram districts rushed to the airport to take the injured to hospitals.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan directed ministers A.C. Moideen and minister K.T. Jaleel to rush to the airport and oversee rescue operations. The North

Zone IG was asked to coordinate the rescue operations, the district administration of Kozhikode and Malappuram asked to provide medical care to the injured.

The rescue operations were carried out amid heavy rains.

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*As per standard laboratory test on representative organisms

IN BRIEF

Aug. 25 last date for AP Model Schools

Visakhapatnam: The government has extended the date to Aug. 25 for the admissions into the Andhra Pradesh Model Schools for the academic year of 2020-21. The parents can apply for their wards' admissions into the Model Schools online. The government has informed that the last date will not be extended further.

14 islands identified for defence infra

Kakinada: The Union Home Ministry has identified 14 islands off the East Coast, including Hope Island off Kakinada, as very important for defence and communication purposes. In this regard, studies are being conducted by central officials for improving defence and communication infrastructure on the Island. District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy has instructed officials to prepare a detailed project report on improving infrastructure facilities and communication development system on the island.

CS Nilam gets another extension

Vijayawada: The services of Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney have been extended up to December 31. This is the second three-month extension for Ms Sawhney, who was scheduled to retire on June 30. The Centre has approved both extensions following requests by the state government. Principal Secretary to government (political) (FAC) Praveen Prakash issued GO Rt: 1242 on Friday night issuing orders of extension of Ms Nilam's services for three months beyond September 30 and she will retire on December 31.

Sanitisers misused, SCB holds drives

Vijayawada: Officials of Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) have been conducting surprise checks for the last three days as part of a special drive against misuse of sanitisers in the absence of liquor. SEB Commissioner Vineeth Brijlal said that as many as 345 vulnerable places were identified and 144 people were counseled against such an addiction. He explained that sanitiser manufacturing units were inspected for licensing norms, quality control measures and sales. He said that about 303 awareness campaigns were organised against consumption of sanitisers.

Panel set up to study 12 new dist

Vijayawada: The state government has formed a Committee to study the restructuring of districts on Friday. Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney issued GO Rt: 2098 to study the various aspects related to the creation of new districts and the measures to be undertaken to optimally utilize the existing resources in their creation. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy earlier had stated about formation of 12 new districts taking the total to 25 districts. According to the order, the Committee will be named as the "Committee to study the restructuring of Districts in AP" with the Chief Secretary as chairperson, and CCLA, secretary GAD, secretary Planning Department CMO representative as members and principal finance secretary as convener.

Cops grill Shruti hosp traffickers

Visakhapatnam: The Maharanipeta police continued to grill universal Shruti hospital managing director, Dr. P. Namratha, for the second day on Friday. The police took her into their custody for two days from the judicial remand to find more about the trafficking racket. During the investigation, it was found that one more baby was sold two months before the current incident. The police on Thursday evening arrested Dr. Chekuri Padmaja of Padmaja hospital, Seethammadhara and N. Nooka Ratnam, a resident of Cheedikada in Vizag district. Dr. Namratha and Dr. Padmaja ganged up and sold a new-born baby girl to a couple from Vizianagaram, informing the mother of the infant that the baby was born dead.

CM urges MLAs to lead virus prevention drives

Jagan asks officials to check performance of call centres**MD ILYAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7**

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said that the rate of positive Covid-19 cases and mortality rate in Andhra Pradesh has been less than the national average even as the government is extensively carrying out tests, more so, in containment clusters.

He said it was pertinent that legislators should be part of all preventive measures besides helping to create awareness about Covid do's and don'ts among people.

Chairing a review meeting on Covid-19 here on Friday, the Chief Minister said that about 85 to 90 per cent of tests are being conducted in containment zones. He instructed that "Call centres, 104 and 14410, should function effectively and officials should monitor their performance levels at regular intervals."

On scope for further reduction of the mortality rate, officials briefed the Chief Minister that for those with severe respiratory problems around five to 10 beds are available at PCH level and that clinical protocol was being strictly followed. Patients with fever and low oxygen levels are being immediately admitted to hospitals. If the problem aggravates, the patient is being shifted to Covid hospitals, they pointed out.

The officials informed that while the national average of positivity was 8.87 per cent, the state average has been 8.56 per cent, whereas in Karnataka it was 9.88 per cent, Tamil Nadu 9.26 per cent, Maharashtra 19.36 and Delhi 12.75 per cent.

The national mortality rate average is 2.07 percent while it was at 0.89 per cent in Andhra Pradesh while



Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

UK DIPLOMATS LAUD STATE GOVT'S EFFORTS TO COMBAT COVID-19**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7**

British diplomats have lauded the steps being taken by the government to deal with the Covid pandemic and invited CM Jagan Mohan Reddy to visit Britain after normalcy returned.

During a video conference with CM here on Friday, acting British High Commissioner Jan Thompson and Deputy High Commissioner for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Andrew Fleming appreciated public health initiatives of the state government. They said AP has been doing an excellent job by conducting a huge number of tests to identify positive

cases and check mortality rate. Telemedicine came for special appreciation of the diplomats.

Jagan told them that the state was conducting about 62,000 tests per day. "Testing, tracing and isolating Covid patients is being done quickly. As a result of this, the mortality rate is as low as 0.89 percent as against the national average of 2.07 percent, he said.

They expressed optimism that the MoU signed by the state with AP Med Tech zone for manufacture of medical equipment would help the government contain Covid. They assured that the UK would encourage start-ups in this regard and jointly work in containing the virus.

Karnataka recorded 1.85 per cent and Maharashtra 3.52 per cent. Tests per million were recorded at 43,059 in Srikakulam, Kurnool, Kadapa, Krishna, Nellore, West Godavari and Chittoor districts and tests conducted were more than the state average.

On the functioning of

telemedicine, he asked officials to return calls in order to get feedback and take corrective measures wherever there were complaints about shortcomings. He directed that apart making available medicines for emergencies, there should be consistency in medicare.

Naidu asks Jagan to explain hatred towards Amaravati

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7

TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Friday clarified to AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy that he would be able to achieve true decentralised development in all the three regions only with the help of a centrally located capital like Amaravati.

Naidu demanded that Reddy explain to the people why he had so much "hatred" for the present capital that he was "viciously bent upon destroying an excellent project." He expressed the fear that YSRC's actions would only push the state into darkness and destroy the opportunities of future generations.

Addressing a press conference here, Naidu said that from the Chief Minister to ministers, all YSRC leaders made had pre-poll assurances that they would not change the capital but were now not even coming forward to accept the TD challenge to go for a fresh mandate on the three capitals plan.

The TD chief claimed that all-round development of AP was started by the TD government under which 132 projects were started in Amaravati, and 160 in the 13 districts from Srikakulam to Anantapur.

GALLA BLAMES CENTRE FOR STAYING OFF CAPITAL SELECTION CONFLICT**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7**

Guntur TDP MP, Galla Jayadev, said that the centre filing an affidavit in the court that they do not have any role in the choice of capital for Andhra Pradesh (AP) is just a way to shake off responsibility.

Blaming the central gov-

JAGAN GREETES WEAVERS, PROMISES SOP**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7**

Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, greeted the weavers' community on the occasion of national weavers' day on Friday. He said, "Andhra Pradesh is one of the most important states in the handloom industry, with the second-largest concentration of weavers in India. We are proud of our weaver community and are making every effort to preserve the rich textile heritage of the state."

Pointing out that the YSR Nethanna Nestham scheme has provided annual assistance of ₹24,000 to all eligible weaver families for two consecutive years, positively impacting the lives of all the weavers, especially during the Covid-19 induced lockdown, Jagan added, "Besides taking up the welfare activities to boost the handloom sector in the state, we introduced e-platforms, through which marketing of handloom and handicrafts can be done easily. The state government is planning to launch the initiative on October 2 this year."

Minister for BC welfare, Chelluboyina Srinivas Venugopalakrishna, said, as promised during his 3648 kms praja sankalpa yatra, Jagan launched Nethanna Nestham on December 21. He explained that under the scheme, 81,783 families have benefited, accounting for nearly ₹200 crore per annum.

ernment for the decision to split the state, which forced AP to identify and develop a new capital, Jayadev stated that it is clearly mentioned in the AP Reorganisation Act passed by the parliament that the central government would fund the development of the new capital in AP.

COURT'S INTERFERENCE IN LEGISLATIVE DECISIONS WRONG, SAYS SPEAKER**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7**

Assembly speaker Tammineni Sitaram refuted the allegations of the opposition Telugu Desam that three capitals and APCR-DA repeal Bills were passed without proper discussion in the House.

The two Bills were debated in the House for 11 hours including 2.17 hours used by the opposition

party to present its view, he said. "Despite the fact that the opposition TD doesn't have good number in the Assembly, more time was given to it."

Maintaining that the courts should not interfere in the decisions taken by the Assembly, Sitaram recalled that the same line was taken by TD leader Yanamala Ramakrishnu as speaker in 1997.

He claimed that five clusters were visualised under the Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor

and another three were planned under the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor.



Sri City founder managing director Ravindra Sannareddy (right) presents a memento to finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy (left) when the latter attended a meeting on Friday. Shamsher Singh Rawat, Principal Secretary (Finance) Government of AP, and Dr Arja Srikanth, IRTS MD & CEO, APSSD, are also seen.

Min invites opinions on Skill Development Varsity

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC NELLORE, AUG. 7

Finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy has sought suggestions and inputs from CEOs and senior manager of industries in Sri City for the proposed Skill Development Varsity. During a visit to Sri City along with a high level team of senior IAS officers on Friday, the minister appreciated the growth of the SEZ.

"It is one of the successful and most efficiently managed business cities in the country, and it is our duty to support it in all respects."

Briefing on the intent of his visit, he said that the government had taken up

● **RAVINDRA SANNAREDDY**, founder MD of Sri City, said that the visit of the minister and senior officers reflected the strong will and seriousness of the government on skill development and creation of better employment opportunities in the state. He said, "We wholeheartedly extend our support to the government in making the skill development initiative a grand success."

The minister was accompanied by Shamsher Singh Rawat, principal secretary (Finance), Arja Srikanth, MD & CEO, APSSDC, Narayana Bharathi Gupta, Chittoor collector, and Koneti Adimulam, MLA, Sathyavedu.

Rajendranath Reddy launched Sri City's new online portal www.sricityjobs.in on the occasion.

Passengers seeking exemption under five specific categories are to fill in the e-form available on www.newdelhiairport.in and submit all relevant documents at least 72 hours before boarding the flights. In case, the passengers fill in a self-declaration form, no such time-limit is there.

Five categories for exemption to passengers include: pregnant women, a death in the family, serious illness, parents accompanying children below 10 years and Covid-19 negative report in recent RT-PCR test (within 96 hours prior to undertaking the journey as per government guidelines).

Delhi airport builds web portal for isolation relief

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7

Delhi International Airport Limited has developed a web portal called 'Air Suvidha' for the benefit of India-bound international flyers to seek exemption from mandatory institutional quarantine either by filling up the self-declaration form or by submitting it online.

The DIAL, a GMR-led consortium in a release on Friday stated that online forms have been developed in collaboration with the Centre and several state governments, including AP, for the benefit of all international travellers from Saturday.

Passengers seeking exemption under five specific categories are to fill in the e-form available on www.newdelhiairport.in and submit all relevant documents at least 72 hours before boarding the flights. In case, the passengers fill in a self-declaration form, no such time-limit is there.

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JR DOCTORS THREATEN TO BOYCOTT DUTIES OVER NO STIPEND INCREASE

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7

Junior doctors are threatening to boycott their elective duties soon if the state government failed to resolve several pending issues such as stipend hike, insurance cover, incentives, etc.

Andhra Pradesh Junior Doctors' Association has submitted representations to the top brass of the department of health, seeking their intervention to resolve their long-pending issues.

In a release issued here on Friday, the JUDA demanded a 45% hike in their monthly stipend with retrospective effect from January, 2020.

Their contention was that they were getting much less than their counterparts in other states like Karnataka, Maharashtra and West Bengal. They also demanded insurance cover and gratuity for those treating Covid-19 patients apart from such incentives as were being given in Odisha and Maharashtra.

TENSION AT TADIPATRI AS PRABHAKAR REDDY IS ARRESTED FOR ABUSING C-I

NAGABUSHANAM HOSKOTE | DC ANANTAPUR, AUG. 7

Tense situation prevailed at Tadipatri on Friday after police detained and rearrested former MLA J.C. Prabhakar Reddy within 24 hours of his release on bail.

Police have registered several cases against Prabhakar Reddy, including under the SC/ST Atrocity Act, for abusing Tadipatri rural inspector Devendra Kumar near Bondladinne village in Tadipatri mandal on Thursday night.

Kadapa police too have registered cases against Prabhakar Reddy, his son Asmith Reddy and J.C. Pavan Reddy, son of J.C. Diwakar Reddy, for violation of norms at the Kadapa prison. Prabhakar Reddy and Asmith Reddy had been arrested on June 13 following a case registered against them in Anantapur for forging documents to convert banned BS-III vehicles into BS-IV and selling them to other transporters. They had got bail on Wednesday and were released on Thursday evening. A large number of Telugu Desam party cadres and close aides of J.C. family reached the Kadapa prison to offer them a grand welcome.

When Prabhakar Reddy came to Tadipatri Town police station on Friday to sign on his conditional bail, police reportedly kept him at the station for about four hours. Towards the evening, police announced that Prabhakar Reddy was being arrested under the SC/ST Act for abusing the inspector. The former MLA was then shifted to Gooty court.

J.C. Prabhakar Reddy was shifted to Kadapa central prison after Gooty court ordered judicial custody till August 21. Prabhakar Reddy was produced at Gooty court on Friday night.

COVID | RISE

Out of 62,938 samples tested in 24 hrs, 10,171 tested +ve

AP records 2 lakh cases, 89 deaths

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 7

The number of Covid-19 cases in Andhra Pradesh has crossed the two-lakh mark and reached 2,06,960, with 10,171 new Coronavirus cases reported during the last 24 hours. The period also witnessed the highest number of 89 deaths in a single day, raising the death toll to 1,842.

The state health department, in its Covid-19 bulletin released on Friday,

reported that out of 62,938 samples tested during the last 24 hours, 10,171 individuals have been found infected with Covid-19. Out of total number of 23,62,270 samples tested so far in the state, 84,654 infected patients are undergoing treatment, while 1,20,464 patients have been discharged after recovery.

Among new infections, Kurnool district has been affected badly with 1,331 cases, followed by 1,270 in East Godavari, 1,100 in Anantapur, 980 in

Chittoor, 941 in Nellore, 852 in Visakhapatnam, 817 in Guntur, 596 in Kadapa, 548 in West Godavari, 530 in Vizianagaram, 449 in Srikakulam, 420 in Krishna and 337 in Prakasam.

With regard to cumulative number of Covid-19 positive cases, East Godavari district has topped the list with 28,850 cases, followed by 24,679 in Kurnool, 22,273 in Anantapur, 20,236 in Guntur, 17,534 in Visakhapatnam, 16,334 in

West Godavari, 15,286 in Chittoor, 12,089 in Kadapa, 11,646 in Nellore, 10,085 in Srikakulam, 9,462 in Krishna, 7,998 in Vizianagaram and 7,593 in Prakasam.

Among the total 89 deaths of Covid-19 infected patients during the last 24 hours, Chittoor registered 10 deaths, followed by nine each in Anantapur, Guntur, Nellore and West Godavari, seven each in East Godavari, Kadapa and Prakasam, six in Krishna, five each in

Kurnool and Visakhapatnam, and three each in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts. AP has conducted Covid-19 tests on 44,237 samples per million population and has registered Covid-19 positive rate at 8.76, while Maharashtra has recorded a positive rate of 19.25, Telangana 13.44 and Karnataka 10.01.

State health authorities have discharged 7,594 patients after recovery from various hospitals during the last 24 hours.



IN BRIEF

Dial your EO on Aug. 9

Nellore: The monthly Dial your EO programme by TTD Executive Officer Sri Anil Kumar Singhal will be held on August 9 between 9 am and 10 am at the Conference Hall in TTD Administrative Building. During the programme, the devotees could directly interact with the TTD EO on phone no. 0877-2263261 and present their suggestions and issues if any. The program will be telecasted live on SVBC.

COVID TEST EQUIPMENT IN ALL GOVT HOSPITALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, AUG. 7

Prakasam collector Pola Bhaskar said that they would install equipment to carry out Covid tests including Truenat, VRDL and Rapid Antigen at all the government hospitals in Prakasam district.

During a review with the medical officers and lab technicians of Government General Hospital (GGH) in Ongole on Friday, the collector has underlined the need for high alert given the unprecedented rise in Covid positive cases.

He underlined the need to speed up the examination of swab samples soon after collection of the samples. Mr Bhaskar said that they had taken steps to recruit lab technicians to speed up the process.

TWO DIED AFTER CONSUMING SANITISER

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, AUG. 7

Notwithstanding the campaign against consuming hand sanitisers, which caused a series of deaths in the recent past, the lower strata of society continues to drink and succumb to the liquid in several parts of the state. The malady is being attributed to the skyrocketing prices of liquor in the government outlets.

Two more were killed after allegedly consumed large quantities of sanitiser in Tirupati town on Friday. The deceased have been identified as Veeraiah, 50, and Kumaraswamy, 30.

According to the police, Veeraiah was working in the Municipal Corporation of Tirupati. The duo was residing in Scavengers Colony of Tirupati. Veeraiah and Kumaraswamy have some residents of the Colony rushed them to SVR Ruia Government General Hospital when they found them in an unconscious stage.

Both of them breathed their last while undergoing treatment at the hospital. Tirupati East Police led by the SI S. Jayachandra registered a case and launched an investigation.

Two more were killed after allegedly consumed large quantities of sanitiser in Tirupati town on Friday. The deceased have been identified as Veeraiah, 50, and Kumaraswamy, 30.

SP PAYS TRIBUTES TO POLICE COVID VICTIMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, AUG. 7

The Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi on Friday paid rich tributes to the police personnel who died due to Covid-19 in the police department. Mr Asmi and other police officials observed a two-minute silence to the deceased. Mr Asmi expressed hope for the speedy recovery of Covid-19 infected police personnel. He said that 326 police personnel were detected Covid-19 virus out of which 151 are home isolation, and nine are getting treatment in different hospitals and three different Covid care centres and 159 recovered from the infection. However, he said that five police personnel died due to Covid-19 so far. He urged the police personnel to take Covid-19 treatment in early stages without waiting until the condition is severe. He said that the police officials should enquire about the health of Covid-19 patients through a zoom conference.

Assistant Sub-Inspector Yerramala Satyanara-yana of Atreyapuram Police station and Pithapuram Town Police Station Head Constable Chintala Surya Prasad died due to Covid-19 on Thursday.

Almost empty



Few passengers travelling to Vijayawada from Guntur city in a bus leaving many seats vacant on the day of resuming Vijayawada - Guntur service on Friday.

— E. TEJO ROY

Plasma therapy helps 24 patients at Kurnool hosp

All the 36 convalescent plasma donors were doctors

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC
KURNOOL, AUG. 7

Plasma therapy success rate at the Kurnool General Hospital is 90 per cent as 26 of 29 Covid patients recovered in the past two weeks.

"It should serve as a strong motivation for plasma donors," avers Prof. Bajeswari, a pathologist. Curiously all the 36 convalescent plasma donors were doctors as the response from outside medical fraternity is poor.

The pathologist said that of the 36 plasma therapy donations that the hospital received so far, none of them was outsider.

There are 13,314 people recovered from the virus, but finding donors is proving difficult.

Plasma therapy, touted as one of the effective Covid treatment proto-

Plasma treatment begins in EG dist

VADREVV SRINIVAS | DC
KAKINADA, AUG. 7

Plasma treatment started at the Government General Hospital, Kakinada, on Friday. This was the first time a Covid patient in East Godavari district was put on plasma therapy. A sanitary worker, K. Appala Raju, came forward and donated blood to the patient.

In response to a call given by district collec-

tor D. Muralidhar Reddy, three doctors donated plasma on Friday. According to doctors here, plasma can be donated by persons within 32 days of their getting recovered from the virus infection and each patient is given 200 ml of plasma.

Mr Muralidhar Reddy said that plasma donation would help Covid patients a lot and there would be no harm to the donors.

Joint collector Keerthi Chekuri said that the blood banks including that of Indian Red Cross Society should make arrangements to collect plasma from the Covid-19 recovered persons.

The blood bank in Government General Hospital has one Single Donor Platelet (SDP) machine and Indian Red Cross at Kakinada has two machines.

Red Cross Society chair-

man Y.D. Ramarao said that it would cost ₹7,000 to extract plasma from each person and ₹1,000 to test fitness of each donor.

Each machine has capacity to collect plasma from 7 to 10 Covid-19 recovered persons a day. Red Cross medical officer Dr P. Durga Raju said that the government hospital should confirm the fitness of the donor and also the receiver.

cols, has been successfully tested at the GGH, which is designated as state Covid hospital.

Though no clinical trials have been conducted on its effectiveness, it is being used on a trial-and-error basis as there is no specific medicine or vac-

cine to control the virus.

However, the pathologist said that plasma therapy was not yielding desired results in case of patients in advanced stage of the infection. It is observed that the plasma therapy is effective in treatment of patients suf-

fering from mild to moderate symptoms of the infection.

State Covid Control Room special officer Professor Prabhakaran said that World Health Organization guidelines also prescribed plasma therapy as one of the line

of treatments to contain the virus.

He said that people were being misled by drug companies and other vested interests about the efficacy of plasma therapy and creating confusion among patients and donors.

CHITTOOR POLICE SEIZES 4,320 BOTTLES OF FAKE HONEY BEE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, AUG. 7

Gangavaram police in Chittoor district seized 4,320 quarter bottles of fake Honey Bee brand Brandy worth ₹6.5 lakh from a Bolero Maxi Truck during vehicular checks at the check

post in Gandrajupalle in Gangavaram mandal of Chittoor District.

The police apprehended eight persons including three persons riding motorcycles and a driver of a car acting as pilots apart from the driver of the truck.

SEMBCORP DONATES TO HOSPITALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, AUG. 7

Sembcorp Energy India has donated nine haematology analyser machines worth ₹25 lakh to the district administration in Nellore on Friday. The machines were handed over to district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu by Sembcorp's corporate social responsibility head Dr Prabhakar Varma.

Appreciating the gesture, the collector said these machines will be distributed to various government hospitals across the district. They will be very useful in identifying the percentage of infection and provide treatment accordingly in both the hospitals and triage centres.

Chakradhar Babu appealed to corporate firms and industrialists to support the state administration.

Villagers told to vacate by Oct 15

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, AUG. 7

In keeping with the aspirations of the people of the district, the government has taken up the Gandikota project and is working towards ensuring storage of 20 TMC of water this year.

As part of this, District Collector Chevuri Hari Kiran asked the villagers to build a house and vacate the village of Talla Poddutur by October 15.

He, along with JC M. Gowthami and RDO Naganna spoke to the people at a gram sabha organised at Tallaprodutur ZP High School on Friday with the flood victims about relief and rehabilitation process related to Talla Proddutur floods as part of Gandikota project.

ROB AT UNDI GETS DISPLACED CLEARANCE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA/UNDI, AUG. 7

Way has been cleared for construction of Railway Over Bridge (ROB) at Undi in West Godavari district as the displaced persons have given their nod for taking

Disha police arrest man for harassing woman

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, AUG. 7

Disha police arrested an engineering graduate from Bengaluru on Friday for harassing a married woman and her husband hailing from Samachenamitta in Palamaneru mandal.

According to J. Babu Prasad, DSP of Disha police station, the accused, Charan Raj, had befriended the woman through Facebook while she was working in a private firm in Bengaluru.

He promised to marry her and take care of her family. However, she had cut her ties with Charan Raj after coming to know about his affairs with several women.

After a while she married another person and returned to her native village during lockdown. Charan Raj managed to

secure her husband's phone number and Facebook account details and forwarded the screen shots of his conversation with her when they were friends.

He also threatened to kill the husband if he did not leave her. After understanding the plight of his wife, he approached the Palamaneru urban police, seeking action against Charan Raj.

Taking the issue seriously, Chittoor SP Senthil Kumar transferred the case to Disha police station and the latter booked cases under various sections against the accused.

Though Charan Raj changed his mobile numbers and address after coming to know about the case, police led by DSP Babu Prasad traced him after thorough investigation and arrested him on Friday. He was sent to remand for 15 days.

Congress demands EWS quota in jobs

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, AUG. 7

The Congress party demanded the state government to implement economically weaker sections (EWS) reservations in all public sector recruitments. To bring pressure, they began a three-day relay hunger-strike in the party's district office.

On Friday, PCC working president Dr N. Tulasi Reddy and others demanded the government to issue an order to implement the EWS quota in the state. Mr Tulasi Reddy said that the Union Government has made constitutional amendment 103 on January 12 of 2019 and the Act was implemented from February 1 of the same year.

The Union Public Service Commission selected 78 candidates for the 2019 civil services based on this very Act, he said. The state gov-

ernment issued orders to implement 10 per cent EWS reservations in higher educational institutions on July 27, 2019.

He said that the State government had assured a separate GO for government jobs, but had failed to do so in the last one year. Consequently, candidates from economically backward sections lost 26,807 village/ward volunteers and 12,859 ward/Village secretarial jobs.

The government is now filling 9,712 doctors, paramedical staff, nurses and other posts and EWS candidates will lose almost 971 posts.

He urged the government to clear EWS reservations and render justice to the poor people.

Party leaders Nazir Ahmmed, Neeli Srinivasa Rao, Bandi Jakariah and others were present in the protest.

MAN DUPES WOMAN AFTER MARRIAGE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, AUG. 7

A friendship forged through passionate messages on Facebook resulted in the marriage of a boy and girl. But, the man hailing from Kurnool district vanished from her life. The cheated girl from Hyderabad came to her in-laws and staged a protest in front of their house.

According to police, Anusha of Hyderabad became friends with Rakesh of Nandavaram through Facebook. The friendship culminated in marriage and the couple spent marital life in Hyde-

rabad. After three months, Rakesh came to his native place and ignored phone calls from his wife. Anusha came to Nandavaram in search of Rakesh. On learning about her arrival at Nandavaram, he locked his house and fled. However, Anusha taking the help of women groups, staged a sit-in in front of Rakesh's residence. The Nandavaram police on learning about the incident rushed to the spot and took the woman to the police station for enquiry.

Sub-inspector of Nandavaram police station J. Nagaraj said that both were Facebook friends.

SRIVARI ONLINE KALYANOTSAVA SEVA BEGINS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, AUG. 7

The online Kalyanotsava Seva commenced at Srivari temple in Tirumala on Friday with 118 couples taking part in the first of its kind Arjita Seva.

The Kalyanotsavam is hitherto performed in Ekantham at the Srivari temple given the Covid-19 restrictions since the closure of darshan on March 20. Ever since darshan resumed on June 8, Kalyanotsava Seva is being performed in Ekantham.

Upon the request of the devotees, TTD has commenced online Kalyanotsava Seva. The online bookings began on August 6, and TTD enabled the bookings from August 7 to 31.

On the first day on Friday, 118 devotees who booked online for Kalyanotsavam followed the instructions by the Archakas of Tirumala, participated from their homes, in the holy event which was telecasted live by the SVBC.

Earlier the Arachakas submitted the Gotra Namas of the devotees.

SHORT TAKES

NEP FOUNDATION OF NEW INDIA, SAYS PM MODI

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday that India's education system needs to change according to the changing times, and therefore the new National Education Policy (NEP) has introduced a new structure of a 5+3+3+4 curriculum.

Addressing a higher education conclave via video conferencing, Modi said the new policy stresses on "how to think", instead of "what to think", and its emphasis was on inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based and analysis-based learning methods for children.

Modi added that the new policy also provides for a "credit bank" so that students can have the freedom to leave a course in the middle and utilise them later when they want to resume their courses.

The Prime Minister expressed happiness that no section of the country had claimed that the NEP had any bias. "After the NEP came, no section of the country said the policy has any bias. It is a matter of happiness," the PM said while addressing a "Conclave on Transformational Reforms in Higher Education".

ED GRILLS ACTOR RHEA IN MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 7

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday grilled actor Rhea Chakraborty in connection with the alleged money laundering case that stems from a complaint filed by late actor Sushant Singh Rajput's father. The officials questioned Chakraborty, business manager and brother on some shell companies that were registered in the addresses of Navi Mumbai. The action comes a day after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filed a case against her and others taking over the suicide probe.

The central agency is investigating the monetary trail in connection with the properties owned by Chakraborty and her family to ascertain how the funds were arranged to buy them. The officials found a flat measuring 500 sqft in the name of Chakraborty located at Khar (east). The ED questioned her to find out how she arranged money to partly pay the total cost of ₹85 lakh.

SC DISMISSES BAIL PLEA OF ACTIVIST REHANA

New Delhi, Aug. 7: The Supreme Court dismissed activist Rehana Fathima's plea seeking anticipatory bail in cases against her for allegedly circulating a video in which she was semi-nude and allowing her minor children to paint on her body, and said the court was baffled at the case.

The top court observed as to what kind of impression the children will get about the culture of this country through such videos. A bench of Justices Arun Mishra, B.R. Gavai and Krishna Murari said this kind of thing is unthinkable and would leave a bad taste in society.

Senior advocate Gopal Shankaranarayan, appearing for the petitioner, said that strangely, the allegation of child pornography has been made. He said that a lady, a mother, had asked her children to paint on her half nude body.

— PTI



Locals move through a flood affected area near Mavoor in a boat, following heavy rainfall in Kozhikode district on Friday.

— PTI

15 dead, 50 trapped in Kerala landslide

Police, NDRF get into rescue mode after heavy rains

GILVESTER ASSARY I
DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
AUG. 7

Kerala woke up to a major tragedy on Friday with a landslide in Rajamalai near Munnar, in Idukki district of Kerala, leaving 15 persons dead and over 50 persons feared trapped under debris.

The dead include a 12-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl, eight men and five women.

The state police, National Disaster Relief Force (NDRF), fire force and defence personnel are engaged in a massive rescue operation in the area to save the lives of people trapped under the debris.

At a press conference here Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan said the landslide occurred in Pettimudi near Rajamalai in which 30 rooms of a residential cluster known as layams, of tea estate workers, was completely destroyed.

Over 80 people residing in the quarters were trapped in the landslide, of which 15 died, 15 were rescued and rescue operations are on at the site to retrieve the others safely from under the debris.

The seriously injured have been shifted to Kolenchery medical college and the others are

Talacauvery temple chief priest, wife, others missing

SHILPA P. I DC
MYSURU, AUG. 7

Heavy rains continued to create massive floods and landslides in Kodagu, hitting normal life and road connectivity on Friday too.

Landslides at more than 30 places in the past three days, according to Kodagu collector Annies Kanmani Joy, the disrupted National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) team operations on Friday too. The team is trying to trace five missing people, suspected to be stuck under the debris

of their house which collapsed due to landslides on Thursday at Brahmagiri hills in Talacauvery, the birth place of river Cauvery in Kodagu.

Chief priest of Talacauvery temple, 80-year-old Narayan Achary, his wife Shantha, his brother, 86-year-old Anandatheerthawamy, assistant priests, Pavan and Ravikiran, are the ones missing. Their 40 cows have also reportedly got stuck under the debris of the landslides.

Twenty other families at Bagamandala are

being moved to a relief centre. People in landslide and flood prone parts of Aiyappa hills, Nehru nagar and other unsafe places are being moved to relief centres.

There were landslides at Gaalibeedi road, Mangaluru road, Madikeri-Siddapura road and other places too in Kodagu. Chedukaaru bridge, near Chettimaani, was submerged and Tavarekere road in Kushalnagar, Second Mannangeri near Karthoji road and other areas were flooded.

— PTI

RAILWAYS TO END COLONIAL-ERA KHALASI SYSTEM

New Delhi, Aug. 7: The Railways is set to end a colonial-era practise of appointing khalasis or 'bungalow peons' who worked at the residences of senior officials, following an order from the Railway Board barring any new appointment to the post.

In an order issued on August 6, the Railway Board has said the issue regarding telephone attendant-cum-dak khalasis (TADKs) is under review.

"The issue regarding the appointment of TADK is under review in Railway Board. It has, therefore, been decided that any appointment of fresh face substitutes as TADK should not either be processed or made with immediate effect. Further, all cases approved for such appointments since 1st July 2020 may be reviewed and position advised to Board."

This may be complied with strictly in all Railway establishments," the order said. Upon joining Railways as temporary staff, TADKs become Group D staff following a screening process after a period of around three years.

In earlier days, officers posted in remote areas or working in the field during odd hours would be provided a TADK to ensure security for his family as well as do odd official work like take phone calls or ferry files.

These TADK staff would usually become ticket examiners, porters, mechanics for air-conditioned coaches and cooks in the running room.

However, over the years, the role was relegated to that of domestic helps and then to office peons, officials said.

Bhojpuri actress Anupama ends life by suicide

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 7

Bhojpuri film actress Anupama Pathak allegedly committed suicide by in Mumbai's Dahisar suburb on Thursday. The 40 year-old-actor was found hanging at her rented flat on August 2. Police said that a suicide note has been recovered from the late actor's residence.

Pathak hailed from Patna and had shifted to Mumbai to work in Bhojpuri films and TV shows. A day before her death, she had shared a Facebook video and said that she felt cheated and was unable to trust anyone.

In the video, she spoke about not having friends who can be of help. She allegedly killed herself when her husband was not at home, police said.

"If you confide to someone that you are going through some problems and feel suicidal, that person, no matter how good a friend he or she is, will immediately ask you to keep them away from your problems so that they don't get into trouble after you die. Also people will make fun of you and disrespect you in front of others. So never share your problems with any-

one and never consider anyone your friend," Anupama said in Hindi in her Facebook live video. An official said that a case has been filed under section 306 of the Indian Penal Code.

Reports said that the late actress has mentioned in her suicide note that she invested ₹10,000 in a company named Wisdom Producer Company in Malad, but she did not get the money after maturity date in December 2019.

Pathak's death comes at a time the entertainment industry is reeling from the shock of the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput, who was found hanging at his apartment in suburban Bandra on June 14.

On June 9, Rajput's former manager Disha Salian jumped from a high-rise building.

The month earlier, on May 15, TV actor Manmeet Grewal had hanged himself at his Mumbai home.

Television actor Samir Sharma, 44, best known for his roles in 'Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi' and 'Left Right Left', was on Wednesday found dead at his home in suburban Malad where he lived alone.

Cong questions PM's silence on China, deleted document

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 7

The Congress Party on Friday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "running for cover" when questioned on the issue of Chinese incursions into Indian territory.

"The Prime Minister either keeps quiet on the issue or misleads the country, gives a clean chit to China by saying 'no one entered our territory'..." So much so, that a document that talks about Chinese incursions is removed from the website of the ministry of defence. We have also seen the loud silence of the Prime Minister on questions asked about Chinese companies con-

tributing to the opaque PM Cares Fund," Congress spokesperson Pawan Khara said.

Claiming that the Prime Minister had crafted an image for himself – an image of a leader who, before 2014, roared on issues of border security, the Congress leader said: "Today we see the same man running for cover when it comes to the issue of Chinese incursions into Indian territory".

"The country is surprised at attempts being made by Prime Minister and his colleagues to intimidate those who question the Prime Minister on his surrender to China, into silence. Modiji, we are only reminding you of your Raj Dharma. Your Raj

Dharma is to protect the territory and people of India".

He posed some direct questions to the Prime Minister including what was the NDA government's relationship with China, why was his government submissive in the relationship with China and what influence does China wield on the Indian establishment.

"Why did your party take the help of China in the Lok Sabha elections? In doing so, why did you give away vital data of Indian citizens to China? Why did you compromise the data security and privacy of crores of Indians by involving Chinese companies linked to the PLA?" he asked.

India sees steady recovery rate, reduced fatality rate

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 7

India had registered a total of 20,85,124 lakh Covid-19 cases, and the toll stood at 42,554, as per covid19-India.org.

There were 60,622 new cases and 923 deaths during the day. The Union health ministry said India continues on the path of Covid-19 management boosted by two significant achievements—continuously rising recovery rate and reducing case fatality rate (CFR) which is much below the global average. The recovery rate on Friday was recorded 68 per cent, while

the CFR dropped down to a new low of 2.05 per cent.

"These two in tandem have enabled a higher and rising difference (more than 7.7 lakhs) between the number of recovered patients and active cases in India. Ramped up hospital infrastructure and emphasis on efficient treatment of hospitalised patients through the standard of care incorporated in the clinical treatment protocol issued by the Centre, have effectively ensured improvement in the recovery rate.

The average daily recovered cases (seven day moving

average) have increased from around 26,000 cases to 44,000 cases in the last two weeks," health ministry officials said.

The recoveries were 13,78,105 after close to 50,000 persons were discharged in one day. Health economist Rijo M. John, India is expected to add another ten lakh (one million) cases in the next 14 days. "While some of the big burden states seem to have either reduced the daily new cases or plateaued, at least for now, there are others who see daily new highs. 33 States/UTs now have at least a 1,000 plus Covid-19 cases," he said.

IAF VICE-CHIEF VISITS AIRFIELD AT DAULAT BEG OLDI

PAWAN BALI I DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 7

Indian Air Force Vice Chief Harjit Singh Arora on Friday visited Daulat Beg Oldi Advanced Landing Ground (ALG), where Chinese have intruded in the Depsang plains in an attempt to dominate this strategically important sector which is near Aksai Chin.

This is one of the world's highest airstrips, built in 1962 and reactivated in 2008. This airstrip could play an important role in case of any armed confrontation with China in providing logistic support to the Indian Army.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army is unhappy with the construction of the 255-kilometre Darbuk-Shayok-Daulat Beg Oldi road which ends near the airstrip. It provides all weather road connectivity with Leh. China is sensitive to India building its capability at Daulat Beg Oldie as it is near CPEC in PoK.

Air Marshal Arora visited forward air bases in Ladakh sector of Western Air Command, said IAF in a statement. Besides reviewing the operational preparedness at these bases, he interacted with air force personnel of the combat units currently operating at these locations. He was briefed about the operational readiness of IAF assets deployed in the area.

He asked Air Force personnel to ensure a high state of combat readiness at all times. During the visit Air Marshal Arora also flew the Chinook and the Light Combat Helicopter.

Maha govt forms flying squads to check hosps

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, AUG. 7

Amid the complaints of hospitals and ambulance operators overcharging the Covid-19 patients, the state government on Friday has set up flying squads to keep a check on the medical bills of hospitals and ambulance service charges across the state.

Maharashtra public health minister Rajesh Tope said that the state had issued directives to officials to act on complaints about hospitals and ambulances charging exorbitant rates. He said, "To check if the decisions are being implemented, flying squads have been set up". In this connection, the public health department's principal secretary Dr Pradeep Vyas has sent a letter to all divisional commissioners, district collectors and municipal commissioners and sought a report within next three days.

The government, by an order on May 21, had fixed upper limits for charges of private hospitals. The GR stated that the private hospitals are

allowed to charge ₹4,000 per day for a general bed, ₹7,500 per day in the intensive care unit (ICU) and ₹9,000 per day in ICU with a ventilator. Another order, on June 30, fixed rates for private ambulances. But despite government orders, private hospitals are still charging exorbitant rates. Besides this, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojana has been extended to all in view of the Covid-19 pandemic from May 23. The state also acquired 80 per cent beds of the private hospitals for Covid patients.

A senior official said that the flying squads will verify if the government decisions aimed at providing relief to Covid-19 patients are being implemented by hospitals. They will check, among other things, if private hospitals have displayed the government orders at their main gates, he added.

There should be a system to audit the final bills issued to coronavirus patients by private hospitals and rates charged by private ambulances should also be audited, the health minister said.

NATH ACCUSED OF 'SAFFRONISING' CONGRESS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, AUG. 7

Veteran leader Digvijay Singh's brother Lakshman, a sitting Congress MLA, on Friday accused former chief minister Kamal Nath of 'saffronising' the party by trying to cultivate his image as a devotee of Lord Ram.

In a statement issued here, Singh, a 5-time MP and 3-time MLA, said it was fine for Congress leaders to don saffron robes while visiting temples. But, the leaders should refrain from projecting them as devotees of Lord Ram in public.

He was referring to the call given by Nath to all Congress leaders in MP to recite 'Hanuman Chalisa' and 'Sunderkand' in their houses and near-by temples on August 5 when PM Narendra Modi performed the groundbreaking ceremony for Ram temple in Ayodhya.

PEACE DEAL War memorial, separate statute part of agenda

NSCN (I-M) to hold talks in Delhi

MANOJ ANAND I DC
GUWAHATI, AUG. 7

The Prime Minister's envoy for Naga peace talks, R. N. Ravi, also the Governor of Nagaland, will be leaving for New Delhi next week to hold talks with the collective leadership of the nationalist Social Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) led by its general secretary, Thuinga-leng Muivah, to sort out variances on rhetorical issues like flag, separate constitution for Nagaland and setting up a memorial of arms and ammunition of Naga

rebels at Kohima. Disclosing that a delegation of NSCN (I-M) has left for New Delhi on Friday to join its 86-year-old general secretary, Th. Muivah, who is in New Delhi and also battling health issues, security sources however clarified that the NSCN (I-M) delegation was asked to reach New Delhi early because of Covid-19 restrictions.

Asserting that consensus has already been created on majority of issues, security sources said that NSCN (I-M) has been insisting on rhetorical issues like a flag and

separate constitution of Nagaland, besides a museum or war memorial of the arms and ammunition of Naga armed rebels at Kohima.

Indicating that the government of India may allow NSCN (I-M) and other stakeholders to have their own flag, security sources said that all the terms and conditions for surrender of arms and ammunition and disbanding the armed rebel group have already been finalised.

Pointing out that all the arms and ammunition surrendered by Naga rebels would be in the cus-

tody of the government, security sources said that the government of India may agree to set up a memorial of arms and ammunition surrendered by all the rebel groups.

Clarifying a report in a section of media that government of India was prepared to sign the peace accord with Naga rebel groups by August 15, security sources said that it was not possible as a lot of constitutional and legal exercises relating to the resolution of Naga issues have to be completed before the signing of the peace accord.



IN BRIEF

China sentences Canadian to death

Beijing: China has sentenced a fourth Canadian citizen to death on drug charges in less than two years following a sharp downturn in ties over the arrest of an executive of Chinese tech giant Huawei. Ye Jianhui was sentenced on Friday by the Foshan Municipal Intermediate Court in the southern province of Guangdong. Ye had been found guilty of manufacturing and transporting drugs, the court said in a brief statement. Another suspect in the case was also given the death penalty and four others sentenced to between seven years and life in prison. Death sentences are automatically referred to China's highest court for review.

Malaysia's Mahathir forms new party

Putrajaya: Two-time former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad announced on Friday that he is forming a new ethnic Malay party more than two months after he was sacked from his previous party during a political struggle with his successor. Mahathir, 95, quit as prime minister in protest in late February after fellow party member Muhyiddin Yassin withdrew their Bersatu party from the ruling coalition, triggering its collapse less than two years after a historic victory in 2018 national polls. Muhyiddin was sworn in as new prime minister in March with a new government supported by ex-Prime Minister Najib Razak's corruption-tainted party that was ousted in 2018.

Bush's new book honours immigrants

New York: A new book by former President George W. Bush will highlight an issue which now sets him apart from many of his fellow Republicans — immigration. Crown announced Thursday that Bush's "Out of Many, One: Portraits of America's Immigrants" will be published March 2. The book includes 43 portraits by the 43rd president, four-color paintings of immigrants he has come to know over the years, along with biographical essays he wrote about each of them. Bush, who served as president from 2001-2009, has often praised the contributions of immigrants, a notable contrast to President Donald Trump's rhetoric and policies.

Iran is No. 1 sponsor of terrorism: US

United Nations: The US ambassador to the United Nations called Iran "the world's number one sponsor of terrorism" on Thursday and warned Russia and China that they will become "co-sponsors" if they block a resolution to extend the UN arms embargo on Iran. Ambassador Kelly Craft said the United States hopes Russia and China "will not be co-sponsors of the number one state that sponsors terrorism" and "will see the importance of peace in the Middle East." But she said the partnership between Russia and China, not only on backing Iran, is very clear: "They're just going to be promoting chaos, conflict and mayhem outside their borders, so we have to just corner them."

BOY SWEEPED OUT TO SEA SURVIVES WITH FLOATING SKILLS

London, Aug. 7: A 10-year-old Indian-origin boy, who was swept out to sea during a family trip to the beach in northern England, has spoken about how he survived using the floating advice he picked up on a television documentary show.

Ravi Saini was able to battle the waves for more than an hour and even earned praise from the rescuers who found him on his back, with his arms and legs spread, shouting for help in the water near Scarborough, on the North Sea coast, on July 31.

As someone who takes weekly swimming lessons and is a fan of the BBC documentary 'Saving Lives at Sea', Ravi says that is where he saw the 'Float to Live' technique of lying on your back, staying calm and spreading out like a starfish.

"I felt like 'yeah I finally got a second chance to live'," said Ravi, in reference to his rescue. The schoolboy from Leeds had been at the beach in South Bay with his father, Nathu Ram, 37, his mother, Puspita Devi, 34, and his nine-year-old sister, Muskan.

Trump cites India to ban TikTok, WeChat



Donald Trump

Washington, Aug. 7: President Donald Trump, citing India's recent ban on Chinese social media apps, has signed executive orders that would prevent TikTok and WeChat from operating in the US as they threatened America's national security and economy.

The ban comes into effect in 45 days, Trump said in two separate executive orders signed on Thursday. India was the first country to ban TikTok and WeChat, citing national security concerns. India has banned as many as 106 Chinese apps, a move welcomed by both the Trump administration and US lawmakers.

"The United States must take aggressive action against the owners of TikTok to protect our national security," Trump said in his executive order. In his next executive order he said the country must take "aggressive action" against WeChat to protect America's national security. In a communique to the Congress, Trump said the spread in the United States of mobile applications developed and owned by companies in China continues to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the country.

Trump noted that these risks have led other countries, including Australia and India, to begin

restricting or banning the use of TikTok and WeChat. TikTok which has up to 80 million active monthly users in America - has exploded in popularity in recent years, mostly with people under 20. TikTok, a video-sharing mobile application owned by the Chinese company ByteDance Ltd, automatically captures vast swaths of information from its users, Trump said.

This data collection threatens to allow the ruling Chinese Communist Party access to Americans' personal and proprietary information - potentially allowing China to track the locations of federal employees and contractors, build dossiers of personal information for blackmail, and conduct corporate espionage, he alleged.

TikTok also reportedly censors content that the Chinese Communist Party deems politically sensitive, such as content concerning protests in Hong

Kong and China's treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

The US will end its reliance on China and other foreign nations for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, President Donald Trump has said, asserting that Beijing would have to pay the price for the wound it has inflicted on America and the world by spreading the deadly Coronavirus.

President Trump and leaders of several countries have accused China of not being transparent in reporting the deadly disease, leading to huge human casualties and economic crisis across the world.

China, however, has denied US' accusation of covering up the extent of its Coronavirus outbreak and accused America of attempting to divert public attention by insinuating that the virus originated from a virology laboratory in Wuhan.

"What China did is a terrible thing. Whether it was incompetence or on purpose, it was a terrible thing that they did not only to the United States, but to the world. A terrible thing," Trump told reporters at the White House on Thursday before flying to Ohio to visit a Whirlpool manufacturing plant has over one billion users worldwide, including users in the United States. — *Agencies*

Global virus cases top 19 million, deaths top 7 lakh

Berlin, Aug. 7: Coronavirus cases worldwide passed 19 million on Thursday, as European nations imposed new travel restrictions and containment measures with fears growing over a second wave of infections.

Global deaths from the pandemic have topped 7,00,000, and Europe remains the hardest-hit region worldwide with more than 2,00,000 fatalities since the virus first emerged in China late last year. More than half of Africa's cases are in South Africa, which has the fifth highest number of infections in the world, after the US, Brazil, India and Russia.

Nevertheless the African continent remains one of the least affected, according to the official figures, with only Oceania registering fewer Covid-19 cases.

As governments across the globe struggle to salvage economies ravaged by months of lockdown, many have been forced to look at new measures to curb outbreaks of Covid-19 since they lifted initial containment orders.

In Australia, the second-largest city Melbourne entered the country's toughest lockdown yet on Thursday, closing non-essential businesses and requiring hundreds of thousands more people to stay home.

The pandemic has killed at least 7,12,315 people worldwide with the United States recording the most deaths with almost 1,60,000, followed by Brazil with nearly 1,00,000. Globally, 40 percent of all cases have been recorded in the two countries. Germany is the latest to introduce mandatory tests for travellers returning from designated risk zones. — *AFP*

Russia's race for virus cure raises concerns

Moscow, Aug. 7: Russia boasts that it's about to become the first country to approve a Covid-19 vaccine, with mass vaccinations planned as early as October using shots that are yet to complete clinical trials — and scientists worldwide are sounding the alarm that the headlong rush could backfire.

Moscow sees a Sputnik-like propaganda victory, recalling the Soviet Union's launch of the world's first satellite in 1957. But the experimental Covid-19 shots began first-in-human testing on a few dozen people less

than two months ago, and there's no published scientific evidence yet backing Russia's late entry to the global vaccine race, much less explaining why it should be considered a front-runner.

"I'm worried that Russia is cutting corners so that the vaccine that will come out may be not just ineffective, but also unsafe," said Lawrence Gostin, a global public health law expert at Georgetown University. "It doesn't work that way... Trials come first. That's really important." — *AP*

GERMAN STATE SHUTS 2 SCHOOLS AFTER NEW CASES

Berlin, Aug. 7: Officials in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania have shut down two schools after new cases of Coronavirus were confirmed only days after the northeastern German state became the country's first to resume classes.

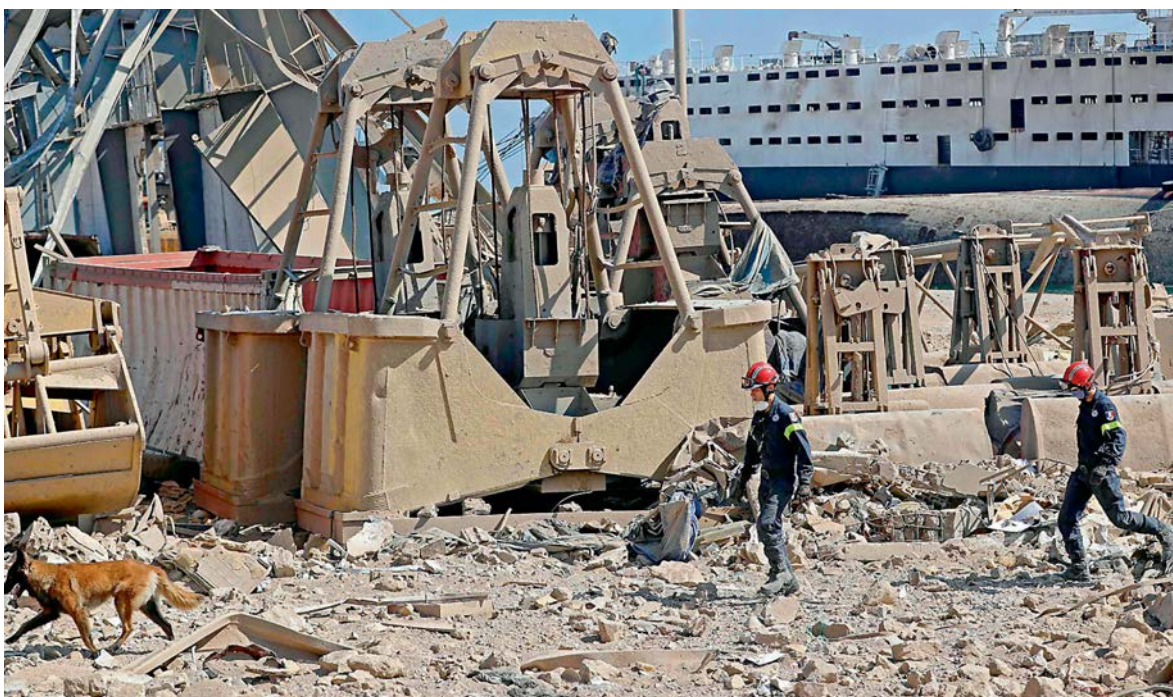
The *dpa* news agency reported on Friday that a high school in Ludwigslust was shuttered after a teacher tested positive for the virus and a primary school in Graal-Mueritz was closed after a student was confirmed to have Covid-19.

Schools fully reopened on Monday with no mask or distancing requirements, but with children divided into fixed groups. — *PTI*

BEIJING SEES FIRST NEW LOCAL VIRUS CASE IN WEEK

Beijing, Aug. 7: China's capital is reporting its first new case of locally transmitted Covid-19 in a week. State media said on Friday the case in Beijing is linked to a recent outbreak in the northern port city of Dalian. Beijing has registered only a few scattered new cases since containing a June outbreak linked to a wholesale food market.

China's northwestern region of Xinjiang has 26 new cases as authorities continue to fight to curb an outbreak through travel restrictions and the lockdown of some residential areas. The semi-autonomous city of Hong Kong reports 95 new cases and three additional fatalities reported. — *PTI*



French rescuers search the Beirut port on Thursday, three days after a massive blast there shook the Lebanese capital. Rescuers combed through the rubble in a search for survivors watched breathlessly by relatives of the missing, after an investigation. — *AFP*

Lebanon Prez suspects missile caused blasts

Rejects international probe as an attempt to dilute truth

Beirut, Aug. 7: Lebanon's president on Friday rejected any international probe into the catastrophic port blast, saying a missile or negligence could have been responsible as rescuers desperately combed the rubble for survivors.

The entrenched ruling class has come under fire once again since Tuesday's explosion, which killed at least 154 people and devastated swathes of the capital.

The revelation that a huge shipment of hazardous ammonium nitrate fertiliser had languished for years in a warehouse in the heart of the capital served as shocking proof to many Lebanese of the rot at the core of their political system.

Even Lebanese President Michel Aoun admitted Friday that the "paralysed" system needed to be "reconsidered." "We are facing changes and reconsidering our system, which is built on consensus, after it was seen to be paralysed and incapable of swiftly executing decisions," Aoun told reporters.

He pledged "swift justice" but rejected widespread calls for an international probe, telling a reporter he saw it as an

ISRAELI ARMY DOWNS DRONE FROM LEBANON

Jerusalem, Aug. 7: The Israeli army said it had shot down a drone overnight on Thursday into Friday that came from Lebanon, a border on heightened military alert due to recent skirmishes.

Israeli troops overnight "identified a drone which infiltrated into Israeli airspace in the Mount Hermon area, along the Israeli side of the Blue Line" demarcating the Jewish state and Lebanon, the army said.

"The drone was monitored and downed," it said, adding Israeli troops were conducting searches in the area. — *AFP*

attempt to "dilute the truth." "There are two possible scenarios for what happened: it was either negligence or foreign interference through a missile or bomb," he said, the first time a top Lebanese official raised the possibility that the port had been attacked. What ignited the mas-

Rescuers scour blast zone as arrests made

Beirut, Aug. 7: Rescuers combed through the rubble of Beirut port on Friday in a search for survivors watched breathlessly by relatives of the missing, with authorities making five new arrests in a high-profile probe.

Shock has turned to anger in Lebanon since Tuesday's colossal explosion killed at least 154 people and devastated swathes of the capital, with security forces firing tear gas at demonstrators who gathered near parliament late on Thursday.

The revelation that a huge shipment of hazardous ammonium nitrate fertiliser had lan-

guished for years in a warehouse in the heart of the capital served as shocking proof to many Lebanese of the rot at the core of their political system.

What ignited the 2,750 tonnes of fertiliser is still unclear — officials have said work had recently begun on repairs to the warehouse, while others suspected fireworks which were stored either in the same place or nearby.

Near the seat of the explosion, by the carcass of the port's giant grain silos, rescue teams from France, Germany, Italy and other countries coordinated their search efforts. — *AFP*

JUDGE DISMISSES TRUMP BID TO DELAY LAWSUIT

New York, Aug. 7: A New York judge knocked down President Donald Trump's bid to delay a lawsuit from a woman who accused him of rape, ruling in a decision released Thursday that the presidency doesn't shield him from the case.

Pointing to a recent US Supreme Court ruling that the president isn't immune from a New York prosecutor's criminal investigation, Manhattan judge Verda Saunders said the same principle applies to E Jean Carroll's defamation suit, in which Trump's lawyers have argued that the Constitution bars presidents from being dragged into lawsuits in state courts. "No, it does not," Saunders wrote. The decision allows Carroll — who's seeking Trump's DNA as potential evidence — to keep pursuing her suit. — *AP*

Afghans meet on freeing prisoners

Kabul, Aug. 7: A traditional council met on Friday in Kabul to decide whether to release a final 400 Taliban prisoners, the last hurdle to negotiations between Afghanistan's political leadership and the Taliban under a peace deal the insurgents signed with the United States earlier this year.

The meeting of the council of elders, known as Loya Jirga, was initially expected to last three days but could end as early as Saturday.

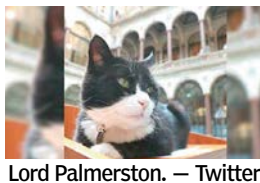
The Kabul-Taliban negotiations are seen as a critical step toward lasting peace in Afghanistan and a roadmap to what the country might look like after decades of war, with the Taliban joining the political mainstream. They are also to decide what constitutional changes would be made

in a post-war Afghanistan, and how the rights of women and minorities would be protected.

The negotiations would also determine the fate of the tens of thousands of heavily armed men on both sides of the conflict — the Taliban on one side, and the warlords and armed militias loyal to Kabul on the other. The Taliban have rejected Friday's gathering in Kabul, claiming it had no legal status.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement late Thursday saying the 400 prisoners had to be released if peace talks with the Taliban were to move forward.

"We acknowledge that the release of these prisoners is unpopular," Pompeo said. — *AP*



Lord Palmerston. — Twitter

RESIDENT CAT PALMERSTON SET TO RETIRE IN UK

London, Aug. 7: The resident cat at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London, dubbed "Lord Palmerston the Chief Mouser" in reference to its mouse-catching duties, is to retire from diplomatic service, the FCO said on Friday.

Lord Palmerston, famed for regular territorial tiffs with neighbouring Downing Street mouse-catcher Larry, will see out his retirement in the English countryside, where he has been spending lockdown already at the home of a member of Foreign Office staff. — *PTI*

LANDSLIDE | VICTORY

Mahinda will be sworn in as the new prime minister for the fourth time on Sunday

Rajapaksa clan wins 2/3rd majority in Lanka polls

Colombo, Aug. 7: Mahinda Rajapaksa will be sworn in as Sri Lanka's Prime Minister for the fourth time on Sunday after his party registered a landslide victory in the general election, securing two-thirds majority in Parliament needed to amend the Constitution to further consolidate the powerful Rajapaksa family's grip on power.

The Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP), led by prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, won in 145 con-

stituencies, bagging a total of 150 seats with its allies, a two-thirds majority in the 225-member Parliament, according to the results announced by the election commission on Friday.

It won all but four of the 22 electoral districts on offer, polling 6.8 million votes (59.9 per cent).

The 74-year-old Prime Minister Mahinda thanked the Sri Lankan people for putting their faith in the SLPP and said that the country will not

stand disappointed during its tenure.

"Heartfelt gratitude to all Sri Lankans for placing their trust in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, myself and the Podujana Party and voting for the 'Saubhagye Dakkama' election manifesto in overwhelming numbers. We will ensure Sri Lanka will not stand disappointed during our tenure," he said.

Mahinda will be sworn in as the new prime minister for the fourth time on Sunday at a ceremony at

the historic Buddhist temple of Kelaniya, a north Colombo suburb, according to an official statement.

He created a record in polling over 5,00,000 individual preference votes, the highest ever recorded by a candidate in the history of elections.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the first world leaders to congratulate Mahinda on the outcome of the elections and said the two sides will work

together to further advance all areas of bilateral cooperation and to take their special ties to ever newer heights.

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



Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa greets Buddhist monks at his home in the southern town of Tangalle on Friday. — *AFP*

DECCAN Chronicle

8 AUGUST 2020

RBI loan policy spells relief for borrowers

The Reserve Bank of India's decision to allow banks to restructure retail and corporate loans to mitigate unexpected financial damage caused by Coronavirus to individuals and companies will give a great relief to stressed borrowers. The move fulfils the demand of bankers, who sought a one-time recast of loans accounts instead of a further extension of a loan moratorium.

While the six-month-long moratorium offered relief to thousands of people, it impacted the fund flow of banks and, more importantly, Non-Banking Financial Institutions (NBFCs). A longer pause of loan repayments could make it difficult for NBFCs to service debt, which could have a cascading effect on the fundamentals of the Indian economy. A loan restructuring, on the other hand, could allow the banks to extend the tenure of the loan, thereby making Equated Monthly Instalments (EMIs) smaller and, therefore, easy on the borrower's pocket.

While industrial activity has picked up pace, it is nowhere near the old normal. The RBI's Monetary Policy itself admits that the economic growth could be in the negative territory for some time. With several sectors, such as hospitality, food and beverages, construction, infrastructure, travel and tourism reporting subdued performance, lakhs of people, if not crores, have either lost their jobs or are facing reduced incomes on account of salary cuts or lower business income.

A survey conducted by Finway showed that 45 per cent of people who borrowed from NBFCs and 30 per cent of those who borrowed from banks had applied for the loan moratorium till August 30. Most of them were found to have applied for the moratorium as they were unsure of the future and wanted to hold on to cash in the uncertain times.

Additional liquidity window provided by the RBI to the National Housing Bank, the home loan refinance, hints at stress in financial institutions. An offer to restructure corporate loans mirrors the strain on their fund flow. The higher loan-to-value ratio for gold loans too indicates that the RBI is cognizant of the financial stress faced by a significant number of people. Apart from these concerns, RBI fears that inflation too could be on the rise.

In such a scenario, it would be a grave mistake on the part of bankers to expect a regular repayment of EMIs. When faced with a choice between basic essentials required for his and his family's survival and his commitment to pay EMIs regularly, an average person would use the money for his survival. It would be prudent on the part of bankers to restructure loan repayment to ensure that borrowers are not forced to default — which is obviously not good either for the borrower or the lender. So the RBI giving a green-signal to loan restructuring is a step in the right direction. However, it should ensure that such loan restructuring does not affect the credit rating of an individual. Otherwise, it would leave people with no option but to default on EMIs or get debt-trapped by borrowing at higher rates. The RBI hopefully has its ear to the ground.

When documents disappear

In what looks like an attempt at damage control via obfuscation, executed in a tearing hurry, the defence ministry, without an explanation, removed from its website a document containing its first official admission that China had "transgressed" into Indian territory in May.

The move has sparked some consternation. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi flagged it on Twitter, bluntly accusing the Prime Minister of "lying" to his citizens. At an all-party meeting called by the government on June 19, the PM had famously said, "Neither has anyone intruded into our frontier there, neither is any intruder there, nor is any of our posts occupied by someone else." That was good news for Beijing — the Chinese media had then used it to justify its assault on Indian soil. The statement was indeed contradicted by 14 Corps Commander Lt Gen Harinder Singh as well as external affairs minister S. Jaishankar who earlier called for restoration of status quo ante. It dishonoured the sacrifice made by 20 Indian soldiers in Galwan valley on the night of June 15. The disappearance of the document, which had thus crossed Mr Modi's line, acts as a face-saver for him and his government. It also keeps intact the triumphalism following the egregious *bhoomi puja* gathering at Ayodhya on Wednesday.

Following the Galwan valley face-off, there have been five rounds of talks between India and China. China has resisted putting Pangong Tso on the table in the latest round. Beijing is firm in its assertion that it is on its own territory and has, citing a road constructed by it during the 1999 Kargil war to stake claim, asked India to pull back instead. The ministry's document, too, reflected this reality as it had mentioned a "protracted stand-off". So all isn't glory and hunky-dory in days ahead.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Subhani



Playing cops & robbers in Mumbai-ishstyle drama



Shobhaa De

The tragic SSR suicide saga was raging away, with two state governments (Bihar and Maharashtra) battling each other aggressively and publicly, to control investigations and dominate the case. Till — trumpets and bugles, please — a monster was introduced. Enter the Dragon: the CBI! Meanwhile, the main protagonist, 34-year-old actor Sushant Singh Rajput, has been reduced to three letters of the alphabet. And we remain as clueless about his untimely death today as we were when the controversy broke. This week, all the loose ends were supposed to be tied up neatly by the Mumbai police, but wait! The Bihar police dramatically arrived in Mumbai to rain on their parade. The focus shifted to the Cops vs Cops confrontation, and totally idiotic voices started taking sides while pointing fingers at just about anybody remotely connected to the tragedy. Overnight, the spotlight was turned on Bihar. I was vastly amused by the dramatic arrival of an IPS officer from the state, Patna SP Vinay Tiwari, who made his Mumbai debut in style! There he was, a slim and trim young man with so much swag! I loved his attitude. And above all, I loved that he kept his sunnies on while addressing the media, even though it was 8.30 pm. He came with *bhaari* backing from his bosses back home and didn't mince words as he criticised the sloth/ineptness of his Mumbai counterparts. He all but accused them of messing up a sensitive case, and everybody cheered. Everybody, that is, who is not politically aligned.

By now, the case had ceased to be an open and shut suicide investigation. Murder! They said. There were wild rumours and wilder names flying around. All eyes were on the son (Aaditya Thackeray) of a top politician (Uddhav Thackeray), known for his self-declared close connections to Bollywood. Bandra folks talked about late night parties and fights, leading up to the tragedy... and a whole new can of worms got opened. What was already a shocking death by hanging, suddenly became a much grislier story — involving money, fisticuffs, booze, drugs, girls, assaults, gangsters, coverups and more. A masala script, with a terrible ending.

Why can't our Mumbai cops be smarter? And develop a spine? The thing is — left to themselves, they are smart, competent AND bloody good at what they do. But the political interference they have to endure completely stymies their best efforts. Left to their own devices, and permitted to do their job, our police force is second to none. Unfortunately, the political environment being toxic and corrupt, they are forced to compromise, and in so doing, they end up looking like clowns. Mumbai's legendary top cop Julio Ribeiro has written often and forcefully about unseemly political involvement, especially when it comes to transfers and appointments in the police force. He has mentioned an urgent need for police reforms, combined with more autonomy granted to the cops. Does anyone listen or care? In this case, it is obvious how hard political foes of the current lot controlling Mantralaya are working to discredit

the government in power and topple it. Back in Bihar, the stakes are equally high, with elections around the corner. What better than a juicy, high-profile case like this one, to fling mud, make allegations and divert attention from the real issues that both Maharashtra and Bihar are facing? Surprisingly, the glamorous wife of a former CM of Maharashtra, Amruta Fadnavis, pitched in with her own personal dig aimed at the present CM and his minister son, taking the battle directly into the opponent's camp.

Meanwhile, the lady at the centre of the controversy — SSR's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty — has turned invisible! Easily and smoothly. Initially, the Mumbai police confessed they were "unable to locate" her or her family members — all of them in the eye of the storm, after being accused by SSR's father of being responsible for his son's death. Some said Rhea had left for Canada on a private jet, while others scoffed, joking that she was hiding under a *charpoy* in the suburbs. At the time of writing, she, her kin and two associates have been booked by the CBI and an FIR filed. And she is being questioned by the ED. Mr Tiwari, the dashing, straight-talking SP from Patna, ignominiously packed off to quarantine himself at the SRPF Guest House in the suburbs by Mumbai's cops, must have chewed his nails in frustration till he was allowed to leave on Friday. The other four cops had slyly managed to give everybody the slip and were already back in Patna.

What better than a juicy, high-profile case like this one, to fling mud, make allegations and divert attention from the real issues that both Maharashtra and Bihar are facing?

Phew! All this drama just to fix Uddhav Thackeray, get the CBI to handle the SSR case, and have the BJP back in the saddle in Maharashtra! Had Mumbai's police commissioner been a tougher person, with no political patronage involved (as is alleged), this investigation would not have taken such a strange turn.

The real tragedy is that SSR's death is being used by so many agencies to further their own agendas. He has become incidental! What started off as a much-needed debate on showbiz nepotism and how Bollywood can destroy the dreams of people who are not considered a part of the power structure, soon disintegrated into a sleazy crime thriller, with wild conjecture and crazy theories floating around. The chances are, a week from now, this too will become one more high-profile death with nothing further to push the narrative to the next level. Unless, of course, there is a fresh development involving Aaditya Thackeray — will he be summoned? People are taking bets on this. Nobody is actually interested in solving the mystery of either SSR's money, or his horrific death.

Meanwhile, there is a lot of irresponsible talk about his fragile mental health, with publicity-seeking psychotherapists showing up on television shows and disclosing confidential client information. This is shockingly intrusive and unprofessional. Prominent television anchors too have made utter idiots of themselves commenting on whether or not SSR had "looked depressed". Like depression is a "look". Nearly everything about this awful incident has been trivialised and bowlderised in the most vulgar manner. Surely, Sushant Singh Rajput deserves better.

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

BEIRUT LESSONS

Lessons have to be learnt from the explosion of ammonium nitrate in Beirut, Lebanon (*In Beirut, avoidable tragedy, DC, Aug. 7*). It claimed hundreds of lives. It is a wake-up call for all those industries storing hazardous chemicals in warehouses. Protocols for these risky chemicals must be adhered to.

Ghanshyam Chirravoori
Visakhapatnam

HEALTH WORKERS

Recently, AP issued an order to take care of the health of lawyers, clerks and their families during pandemic. This is an appreciable move. Covid care centres, whenever necessary, are based on the advice of Medical Health Officer. However, the key people like doctors, nurses, lab technicians and health department officials are prone to get infected. The government should help health workers and not drain their services.

Lingala Sai Rishitha
Anantapuramu

RAM TEMPLE

We understand that the construction of Ram temple will be completed in three-and-a-half years, perhaps to coincide with the general elections. Seneca, the Roman senator in the 1st century had once said, "Common people believe in religion, for the wise it is false and the rulers find it useful."

P.A.S. Prasad
Visakhapatnam

Email your letters to info@deccanmail.com, editor@deccanmail.com. You can also send them to Editor, Deccan Chronicle, 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad-500 003.

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Israel, UAR agree to ceasefire

WASHINGTON, August 7 Israel and Egypt have agreed to a full ceasefire effective at 2200 GMT today (0330 hrs IST—Saturday) Secretary of State William Rogers announced.

Mr Rogers said that the two countries had accepted the US proposal for a stand-still ceasefire.

Discussing action on the Israeli-Jordan front, officials stressed that neither Israel nor Jordan had followed the United Nations; ceasefire resolutions adopted at the end of the 1967 June war.

Manan Kumar



Progressives must unite to expose govt's 'Ram' narrative

Notwithstanding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's impressive address in Ayodhya to build an inclusive India based on the ideals of *Ramrajya* of social harmony, justice, piety, love and peace, the edifice of the Indian republic remains damaged.

By performing *bhoomipujan* for Ram Mandir, PM Modi junked his constitutional oath of office that makes it mandatory for him to "discharge all duties faithfully and conscientiously" for the Union and "do right to all manner of people in accordance with the Constitution and the law, without fear or favour, affection or ill-will". The very act signals a resolve to replace constitutional virtues of justice, secularism, equality and fraternity with equivalent concepts acceptable to Hindu majoritarianism.

There is no parallel of such gross departure from the Constitution in the history of independent India. Only two acts come close enough — installation of Somnath temple after its renovation in May 1951 by President Rajendra Prasad and,

Rajiv Gandhi's approval to open Babri mosque's locks (where idols were surreptitiously installed in 1949) in 1986.

The first act was strongly opposed by Jawaharlal Nehru. After cautioning his minister K.M. Munshi of the dangers of "Hindu revivalism", Nehru told Rajendra Babu, "I confess I do not like the idea of you associating yourself with a spectacular opening of the Somnath temple. This is not merely visiting a temple... but rather participating in a significant function which unfortunately has a number of implications."

Nehru's warning, not to mix religion with statecraft, proved prophetic. The blunder by his grandson led to *shilanyas* of the temple in 1989 and a militant movement to release the idols from "captivity". It prompted L.K. Advani to launch Ram Rath Yatra in 1990 that culminated in demolishing Babri Mosque, thus, badly scarring the syncretic fabric of India. Innumerable communal riots and rise of extremist Islam in the immediate aftermath bear a testimony of this folly.

Justice suffered a blow in

November 2019 when the Supreme Court overturned Allahabad high court judgement and handed over the entire 2.77 acres of land to the deity despite no archaeological evidence to back such a claim. With this, it removed the final hinge holding the secular character of India to pave way for a *de jure* Hindu Rashtra.

Why the foundation ceremony in times of crises?

The answer lies in the word — crises. The Hindutva forces chose August 5 precisely to smother the rising anger against the blunders the Modi government committed through draconian demonetisation, faulty GST, accosting crony capitalists at the expense of public exchequer and erroneous handling of Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite efforts to hide and manipulate data, the ground realities show the deep crises India has been sucked into. PM Modi managed to hide poverty by constructing a wall around a shanty alongside President Trump's route from Gandhinagar Airport to Motera stadium but walls

cannot be built across India. A rosy picture cannot be painted in the midst of a plunging economy when millions start marching to villages for fear of dying of hunger.

In such a scenario, any people-centric government would pull all stops to tackle the crises. But what a government would do whose sole concern is to win elections to forward its bigoted agenda? It will do what it knows best, build a smokescreen to divert people's attention from real issues and keep them on a high with a sense of purpose to win elections.

This is precisely what the Modi government has done despite the dangers of Covid-19 that is now growing fastest in India. The rest of the agenda has already been put to practice. A web of pliant television channels and an army of social media trolls will try to keep the public discourse limited to Ram Mandir and PM Modi's aura to help BJP win upcoming elections in states of Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. The ultimate aim is to keep crises shrouded in this smokescreen until the inauguration of Ram Mandir in 2024 to ensure a dream

run for a third straight win in Lok Sabha elections.

The onus to save Indian democracy now squarely lies upon Opposition parties and democratic, progressive liberal forces that lie scattered on the Indian political scene. It has been made a wee bit more difficult by PM Modi's smart move to change the narrative, from militant Hindutva to Ram's inclusivity. Yet they can still do the impossible by getting together to pull down this smokescreen and help people see the reality that lies exposed everywhere.

By doing so they will do justice to the *Maryadapurshottam* who gave up his throne and embraced exile to help his father satisfy the whims of crafty stepmother, Kaikeyi. He is again being used to break the *maryada* of the Constitution to establish a New Republic by an equally crafty political party. Hey Ram!

The writer is a senior journalist with over 22 years of experience in reporting on politics, internal security and social issues

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,040.57	0.04
Nifty 50	1,1214	0.12
S&P 500*	3,346.33	-0.08
Dollar (₹)	74.93	0.00
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.12	0.53
Euro (₹)	88.64	0.20
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	55,120*725	1.30
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	44.54	-0.55
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.886	0.025
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.531	-0.005

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Amara Raja Q1 net profit falls 56% to ₹62.5 cr

Amara Raja Batteries Ltd on Friday reported a 56 per cent decline in consolidated profit after tax at ₹62.49 crore in the first quarter ended June 30 impacted adversely by the coronavirus pandemic. The company had posted a consolidated profit after tax of ₹140.73 crore in the same period last fiscal. Consolidated revenue during Q1 stood at ₹1,151.22 crore as compared to ₹1,814.95 crore.

BHEL begins civil works at WB power plant



State-owned engineering firm BHEL on Friday said it has commenced civil works at 660-MW Sagardighi supercritical thermal power project in West Bengal. Following the strategic completion of pre-engineering activities, ground breaking has begun on zero date itself, a BHEL statement said. This is a major achievement as conventionally it takes a few months after the zero date to initiate civil works on-site.

FB employees to work from home until July 2021

Facebook Inc will allow employees to work from home until July 2021 due to the coronavirus outbreak and will give them \$1,000 for home office needs, a spokeswoman said on Thursday. The company joins other big technology firms that have taken similar steps recently. Late in July, Alphabet Inc's Google said it would allow employees who do not need to be in the office to work from home until June 2021.

Mitsubishi Motors chairman resigns on health grounds

Mitsubishi Motors Corp said on Friday Osamu Masuko resigned as chairman due to health reasons and has handed over the role to CEO Takao Kato on a temporary basis. A veteran of the Mitsubishi conglomerate, Masuko joined the automaker in 2004, and became president in 2007. He oversaw the creation of the partnership between Mitsubishi and Nissan in 2016, which saw Nissan take a controlling stake in the firm.



Higher loans for gold may put banks at risk

■ NBFCs seek relaxation in loan-to-value for their customers

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 7

Increasing loan-to-value ratio to 90 per cent for gold loans will put the portfolio under risk for banks. NBFCs, which were left out from the LTV decision, have sought parity with the RBI.

RBI had on Thursday allowed banks to increase the LTV of gold loans for non-agricultural purposes from 75 per cent to 90 per cent till 31 March 2021.

Though this will help the borrower with additional liquidity and will increase retail lending avenues for banks sitting on excess liquidity, such lending is not devoid of credit risk for banks.

Both principal and inter-

● **PRINCIPAL AND** interest components will not be fully covered by the collateral if the bank provides 90 per cent of the value of the gold as loan.

● **IF THE** gold prices fall from their record high levels, it will drag down the value of the collateral even lower. This will increase the chances of borrower defaulting or renouncing their asset.

est components will not be fully covered by the collateral if the bank provides 90 per cent of the value of the gold as loan.

Further, if the gold prices fall from their record high levels, it will drag down the value of the

collateral even lower. This will increase the chances of borrower defaulting or renouncing their asset.

“Gold loans with an LTV of 90 per cent would result in a negative carry for banks as the total exposure will exceed the value of the pledged gold. It could adversely impact the recoverability and asset quality of banks in the case of a weakening in the borrower credit risk profile or sharp decline in gold prices,” said Vydianathan Ramaswamy, director, Brickwork Ratings.

Earlier, when gold prices had started falling from their 2011 highs, RBI, anticipating a systemic risk, had brought in a series of regulations, which saw lowering of pe-

rmissible LTV and diversification of businesses by gold loan companies. The latest LTV hike is not applicable for non-banking finance companies.

“Now RBI has gone back on what it has been teaching us,” said a gold loan industry veteran. The NBFCs have made a representation to the RBI governor seeking parity in LTV.

A maximum 75 per cent LTV against 90 per cent by banks will dent the market share of NBFCs, finds Brickwork.

However, Thomas George Muthoot, director of Muthoot Fincorp begs to differ. “Our kind of customers do not go to banks to pledge gold. If not us, they will go to pawn brokers,” he said.

RBI appoints panel on debt restructuring

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, AUG. 7

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday announced the names of the members of the expert committee to oversee the resolution of stressed loan accounts resulting due to Covid-19 pandemic.

The committee under the chairmanship of K.V. Kamath will recommend financial parameters to be factored in the resolution plans, along with sector specific benchmark ranges. It shall also undertake a process validation for the resolution plans to be implemented under this framework, without going into the commercial aspects, in respect of all accounts with aggregate exposure of ₹1,500 crore and above at the time of invocation.

The other members of the committee are Diwakar Gupta, who is completing his term as Vice President, ADB; TN Manoharan, who is completing his term as Chairman of Canara Bank; and Ashvin Parekh, Strategy Advisor and CEO, Indian Banks' Association, as the member secretary.

A day earlier, Shaktikanta Das, governor of the RBI, in his monetary policy address had announced a 'Resolution Framework for Covid19-related Stress' as a special window. The scheme will be open for borrower who are under stress due to the pandemic and the loans were classified as standard as on March 1, 2020.

The model would be manufactured at company's facility in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh and would also be exported to other markets. Sonet, which is Kia's third product in India after Seltos and Carnival, would compete with the likes of Hyundai Venue, Maruti Vitara Brezza, Tata Nexon and Mahindra XUV300 in the domestic market.

The segment is also going to be more products like Toyota Kirloskar Motor's Urban Cruiser and Nissan's Magnite. With its aggressive and modern design language,

Nussbaum added. Prices for the machine start at \$60,000, a cost that Nussbaum expects will drop over the next three to five years. The company also plans a smaller tabletop device with a lower price tag early next year.

“The devices can be equipped with AI technology from Los Angeles-based company StoryFile to produce hologram recordings that can be archived.” — Reuters

China: Buy local to skip foreign food

Beijing, Aug. 7: China stressed the importance of keeping the people's “rice bowl” filled with domestically grown grain at a time when available farmland is shrinking, the weather's turning more extreme and imports are cheaper.

“If you have enough grain, you don't need to panic,” agriculture minister Han Changfu wrote in an opinion piece in the *People's Daily* on Friday. “Chinese people's rice bowls must always be held firmly in our own hands, and should be full mainly of Chinese grain.”

The country buys hefty amounts of soybeans, corn, cotton and pork from the US, and the comments come as tensions escalate with Washington over everything from cyber security to Hong Kong. US President Donald Trump has signed executive orders prohibiting American residents from doing business with the Chinese-owned TikTok and WeChat apps beginning 45 days from now.

China, the biggest consumer of agricultural commodities, should always be self-sufficient in rice and wheat, while maintaining an “appropriate volume” of imports, Han said. The minister's opinion piece appears about a week before a review of the phase-one trade deal with the US. While China has committed to honouring the agreement, purchases of farm products during the first half of the year were only about 20 per cent of the target.

THE GREAT FACE-OFF

Trump told to act on China firms

Washington, Aug. 7: Trump administration officials have urged the President to delist Chinese companies that trade on US exchanges and fail to meet U.S. auditing requirements by January 2022, Securities and Exchange Commission and Treasury officials said on Thursday.

The remarks came after US President Donald Trump tasked a group of key advisers, including Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and SEC Chairman Jay Clayton, with drafting a report with recommendations to protect US investors from Chinese companies whose audit documents have long been kept from US regulators.

It also comes amid growing pressure from Congress to crack down on Chinese companies that avail themselves of US capital markets but do not comply with US rules faced by American rivals.

“We are simply leveling the playing field, holding Chinese firms listed in the US to the same standards as everyone else,” a US Treasury official told reporters in a briefing call about the report.

The Trump administration's recommendations, if implemented via an SEC rule-making process, would give Chinese companies already listed in the United States until January 1, 2022, to ensure the US auditing watchdog, known as the PCAOB, has access to their audit documents.

— Reuters

Serum to sell Covid-19 vaccine for ₹225 a dose

FC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, AUG. 7

Serum Institute of India (SII) has decided to cap the price of its future Covid-19 vaccine at \$3 (approximately ₹225) per dose for low and middle-income countries, including India.

Partnering with Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, SII will manufacture up to 100 million doses for these countries.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, through its Strategic Investment Fund, will provide at-risk funding of \$150 million to Gavi, which will be used to support the SII to manufacture the potential vaccine candidates from AstraZeneca and Novavax.

The collaboration will

● **THE BILL** and Melinda Gates Foundation, through its Strategic Investment Fund, will provide \$150 million to Gavi, which will be used to support the SII to manufacture vaccine candidates from AstraZeneca and Novavax.

provide upfront capital to SII to help them increase manufacturing capacity so that, once a vaccine or vaccines gain regulatory approval and WHO prequalification, doses can be produced at scale for distribution to India and LMIC as part of the Gavi COVAX AMC mechanism as early as the half of 2021.

The Gavi COVAX AMC, which is currently seeking at least \$2 billion as initial seed funding, will

meet at least part of the cost of procurement for the vaccine doses. Last week the Gavi Board agreed to the final list of 92 countries that will be supported by the AMC.

Under the new collaboration, AstraZeneca's candidate vaccine, if successful, will be available to all 92 countries supported by the AMC.

“The rampant spread of the virus has rendered the entire world in an unimaginable halt of uncertainty. And to ensure maximum immunisation coverage and contain the pandemic, it is important to make sure that the poorest countries have access to affordable cure and preventive measures,” said SII CEO Adar Poonawalla.

Kia to enter compact SUV space with Seltos

New Delhi, Aug. 7: South Korean automaker Kia Motors Corporation on Friday globally unveiled its sub-four metre compact SUV Sonet which it plans to launch in India next month.

The model would be manufactured at company's facility in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh and would also be exported to other markets. Sonet, which is Kia's third product in India after Seltos and Carnival, would compete with the likes of Hyundai Venue, Maruti Vitara Brezza, Tata Nexon and Mahindra XUV300 in the domestic market.

The segment is also going to be more products like Toyota Kirloskar Motor's Urban Cruiser and Nissan's Magnite. With its aggressive and modern design language,

fun-to-drive dynamics, and Kia's latest high-tech features, the Sonet puts an exclamation point on our ambition to make Kia the brand of choice, especially among millennial and Gen Z consumers,” Kia Motors Corporation president and CEO Ho Sung Song said.

The model fills a need in the growing SUV market, in India and further afield, and will attract a wider number of consumers to the Kia brand, he added.

Kia Motors India MD and CEO Kookhyun Shim said that after the success of the Seltos and Carnival, the company is confident that it will revolutionise another market segment in India with the Sonet by addressing the unmet needs and aspirations of customers. — PTI

M&M reports 94% decline in Q1 profit

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, AUG. 7

Mahindra and Mahindra, India's auto major on Friday saw its quarterly profit nearly wipe out as the Covid-19 pandemic hit the supply chain.

India's biggest tractor maker's net profit fell 97 per cent year-on-year to ₹68 crore in the June quarter, according to an exchange filing. M&M results include the financials of Mahindra Vehicle Manufacturers.

The company had seen a ₹3,255-crore loss in preceding three-month period because of a one-time impairment.

Mahindra's revenue fell 56.4 per cent over the year ago to ₹5,589 crore in the April-June period, compared with the ₹5,567-crore forecast, dragged by a low inventory pipeline and challenges in reviving production amid mounting coronavirus cases.

The company's earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation declined 67.9 per cent to ₹575.7 crore, while Ebitda margin contracted to 10.3 per cent from 14 per cent.

Mahindra's passenger vehicles sales fell 78 per cent year-on-year during the quarter compared with an 81.5 per cent drop seen across the industry.

The company in June, however, recorded the second-highest tractor sales it has ever seen, aided by rural demand.

Mahindra's tractor sales for the quarter fell 22 per cent year-on-year.

Conversion rate in realty improves in top metros

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 7

As serious buyers start enquiries for residential properties in top cities, conversion rates have increased. In the top cities, enquiries for housing properties have now reached 50 per cent of pre-Covid-19 levels. Recovery is fastest in Bengaluru, where enquiries have reached 70 per cent, followed by Gurugram with nearly 65 per cent.

Site visits too have picked up, though lesser than earlier. However, the site visit-to-sales conversion is higher, finds Anarock Property Consultancy.

In Gurugram, site visits are back to pre-Covid-19 levels with a sharp increase in conversion ratios - from nearly 5 per cent earlier to 10 per cent now. In Noida and Ghaziabad serious end-user enquiries have increased to 40 per cent of pre-pandemic levels and site visits are increasing steadily. July alone saw more than half the number of sales recorded between April and June.

Similarly, in Mumbai site visits were back to nearly 50 per cent towards July-end, from predominantly serious buyers. July alone witnessed 40 per cent of sales seen in the April-June period. In Pune too, enquiries have reached nearly 50 per cent, site visits are increasing steadily and conversions have moved up from 9-10 per cent on an average earlier to nearly 12 per cent now. This

Mindspace REIT lists at premium

FC BUREAU MUMBAI, AUG. 7

Mindspace Business Park's second real estate investment trust (REIT) public offer has made a successful debut on the stock exchanges at ₹304, a 10 per cent premium to issue price of ₹275.

The units traded in a narrow range of ₹299 on the lower side and ₹308.90 on the higher side on the BSE and finally closed at ₹303.87 up 10.50 per cent.

Mindspace REIT's market capitalisation on the close of first day's trading stood at ₹18,020.04 crore.

Mindspace REIT public offer raised ₹4,500 crore last month, the

issue was subscribed 12.96 times. India's first REIT listing by Embassy Office Park has a market capitalisation of ₹29,259.23 crore.

Real estate consultants and market analysts expect more REIT offerings in near future as it's a good asset class to invest for post tax benefits and also helps channelise fund flow into the real estate sector.

“The MindSpace REIT listings at a 11 per cent premium is a great sign for the future of commercial real estate in India as it shows market and investor confidence for the long term,” said Shishir Baijal, chairman and MD, Knight Frank India.

has helped sales volumes reach more than 40 per cent of pre-Covid levels.

Conversions have gone up from 8 per cent on an average earlier to nearly 15 per cent in Hyderabad and site visits have touched 40 per cent of earlier levels.

“Despite site visits far from the previous levels, the site-visit-to-closure conversion rate has increased considerably as only serious buyers are venturing out, with casual window shoppers fairly dormant currently,” said

Prashant Thakur, director and head, research, Anarock Property Consultants.

Customers also prefer larger sized units and 2BHKs and 3BHKs are in highest demand. While buyers in Bengaluru, Gurgaon, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Noida are more inclined towards 3BHKs and upwards, Mumbai has a higher preference for 2 BHKs over the previous 1BHK. Work-from home and online classes have increased the demand for additional space.

Holoportation seeks to replace Zoom meet

Los Angeles, Aug. 7: Looking for a new way to communicate during the pandemic? A Los Angeles company has created phone booth-sized machines to beam live holograms into your living room.

The device made by PORTL Inc lets users talk in real time with a life-sized hologram of another person. The machines also can be equipped with technology to enable interac-

tion with recorded holograms of historical figures or relatives who have passed away.

Each PORTL device is seven feet tall, five feet wide and two feet deep, and can be plugged into a standard wall outlet.

Anyone with a camera and a white background can send a hologram to the machine in what CEO David Nussbaum calls “holoportation.”

“We say if you can't be

there, you can beam there,” said Nussbaum, who previously worked at a company that developed a hologram of Ronald Reagan for the former president's library and digitally resurrected rapper Tupac Shakur.

“We are able to connect military families that haven't seen each other in months, people from opposite coasts,” or anyone who is social distancing to fight the coronavirus,

Nussbaum added.

Prices for the machine start at \$60,000, a cost that Nussbaum expects will drop over the next three to five years. The company also plans a smaller tabletop device with a lower price tag early next year.

The devices can be equipped with AI technology from Los Angeles-based company StoryFile to produce hologram recordings that can be archived.

Covid, protests batter Hong Kong's realty market

Hong Kong, Aug. 7: Some Hong Kong foreclosed homes have been recently sold at steep discounts, adding to signs that the world's most expensive housing market could be heading for price declines both this year and next.

With the economy hit by anti-government protests and the coronavirus pandemic, foreclosures in the Asian financial hub jumped 54 per cent in the first seven months of the year to 675, according to property auctioneer Century 21 Surveyors.

Both speculative investors and ordinary people are walking away from their mortgages, financing companies and auctioneers said. Some warn foreclosures could surge next year to their highest levels since the global financial crisis.

Unlike Hong Kong's commercial property market which has seen a 30 per cent drop in building values in the past year, home prices have so far been relatively resilient due to strong demand, even edging up 1.8 per cent in the first half of this year.



But two foreclosed properties belonging to a mainland Chinese investor recently sold at discounts of 25 per cent and 12 per cent to their respective purchase prices of around

HK\$30 million (\$3.9 million) and HK\$20 million, according to a person with direct knowledge of the matter. The person declined to be identified discussing client matters.

Henry Choi, a director at Century 21 Surveyors, also said his company has had three recent cases where banks put auctions on hold after deciding to go back to court to ask for a lower base price.

“The original valuations were too optimistic and they would be hard to sell now in this market,” he said.

With demand far outstripping supply, prices for Hong Kong private homes have surged more than six times since 2003. There has only been one year of annual decline in

that period — a drop of 3.6 per cent in 2016.

Some analysts, however, expect current economic stresses will soon hit the market harder and predict a fall of roughly five per cent this year to be followed by a bigger drop next year.

Industry sources also note foreclosures last month were artificially low as courts have been processing cases very slowly for several weeks due to social distancing measures imposed after new outbreaks of the virus.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Manpreet, three others Covid +ve

New Delhi: The Indian men's hockey team captain Manpreet Singh and three other players have tested positive for Covid-19 ahead of the national camp's resumption in Bengaluru, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Friday.

Besides Manpreet, defender Surender Kumar, Jaskaran Singh and drag-flicker Varun Kumar have also tested positive for the deadly virus.

"I am self quarantined on the SAI campus and I am very happy with the way SAI authorities have handled the situation... I am doing fine and hope to recover very soon," the 28-year-old Manpreet said in the statement issued by SAI. "I am very happy that they made the testing of athletes mandatory. That proactive step helped in identifying the problem right in time."

The players tested positive after returning to the national hockey camp at the SAI South Centre in Bengaluru following a month-long break.

They were earlier stranded at the centre for over two months (till June). — PTI

London marathon only for the elite

London: The pandemic-delayed London Marathon will be staged on October 4 using a different route than usual and with only elite runners participating.

Rather than starting in Greenwich in east London, there will be a looped 26.2-mile (42.2-kilometre) course featuring 19.8 laps around St James's Park within a biosecure bubble with spectators excluded. It will finish in the traditional place in front of Buckingham Palace. Times will be eligible for qualification for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, which had to be rescheduled until 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Olympic marathon champion Eliud Kipchoge and Kenenisa Bekele are expected to feature in the men's race. The women's field is headlined by world record holder Brigid Kosgei. Manuela Scher and David Weir will feature in the wheelchair event.

The London Marathon usually takes place in April, but organizers have already pushed back the 2021 event until October 3 to maximise the possibility of a mass race. — AP

Malik to fly to Eng if tests negative

Karachi: T20 specialist Shoaib Malik will need to clear two Covid-19 tests before he can leave on August 15 to join the Pakistan team at Southampton ahead of the three-match series against England beginning August 28.

"The PCB is planning to fly-out T20 specialist Shoaib Malik to Southampton on 15 August, provided he returns two negative Covid-19 tests as per the agreed protocols and processes," the Board said in a statement.

The T20 series, which follows the ongoing Test rubber between the two nations, will be held in a bio-secure environment in Manchester on August 28, August 30 and September 1.

The PCB had allowed Malik permission to join the squad in England late as he wanted to spend time with his family in UAE. — PTI

JASON HAS A DAY OUT AT PGA TOURNEY

San Francisco: Australia's Jason Day shot a bogey-free five-under-par 65 to take a share of the lead Thursday in the opening round of the PGA Championship, the first major of the pandemic-interrupted season.

The 2015 PGA champion Day rolled in five birdies for a one-shot cushion with co-leader Brendon Todd atop a star-studded crowded leaderboard at the TPC Harding Park course in San Francisco.

Day and Todd are just in front of a group of nine players that includes four former major champions, including two-time defending PGA champ Brooks Koepka and Martin Kaymer. The other two former major winners are Zach Johnson and Justin Rose. — AFP

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SEVILLA SURGE ON
Blank Roma to make Europa quarterfinals

Duisburg, Aug. 7: Sevilla beat Roma 2-0 in the round of 16 to stay in the hunt for a record sixth Europa League title, as Wolverhampton, Bayer Leverkusen and Basel also qualified for the quarterfinals.

Sergio Reguilón gave Sevilla the lead with a surging run through the Roma defense and a shot past keeper Pau Lopez in the 22nd minute. Youssef En-Nesyri added the second just before halftime, tapping in a low cross from Lucas Ocampos.

Sevilla could easily have scored more, with two shots hitting the crossbar and a goal overturned for offside on video review. Playing after a packed run of Italian league games, Roma didn't muster a single shot on target in the first half and just one in the second.

It was a single game at a neutral venue in Germany because no first leg was played in March before the season was suspended amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

Sevilla next faces a quarterfinal Tuesday against Wolves after the English team squeezed past Olympiakos 1-0 on the night and 2-1 on aggregate for its first European quarterfinal in 48 years.

Bayer Leverkusen earned a quarterfinal against Inter Milan, beating Rangers 1-0 on Thursday thanks to a powerful shot from Moussa Diaby for a 4-1 aggregate win.

Basel already had a 3-0 lead from the first leg and made the quarterfinals after Fabian Frei scored the only goal of the game in a 1-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt. — AP

GOVERNMENT NOD FOR IPL ALL BUT GIVEN

New Delhi, Aug. 7: An "in principle" government approval has come for the BCCI to take the IPL to the UAE this year and the eight franchises have started their preparations by initiating quarantine and Covid-19 testing protocols for their players and support staff.

A BCCI source confirmed that the permission in writing is due to come any time in the next few days. "We have got the approval in principle to go ahead and the papers will be landing anytime," a top source said.

Most of the franchises will be leaving base after August 20 mandated by the BCCI. The Chennai Super Kings are set to leave on August 22.

The Mumbai Indians, on the other hand, has quarantined its Indian players at its base. Some franchises are arranging Covid-19 tests for their players in their respective cities before heading for departure bases (Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru) for UAE.

"It's always good if they have a PCR-Test done and land with a negative report. Then they can have two tests done 24 hours apart as the BCCI SOP mentions before we fly to the UAE," a senior franchise official said. — PTI

Satwik-Chirag to train from Sept.

New Delhi, Aug. 7: Wary of the Covid-19 threat, Olympic hopefuls Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy will wait for another couple of weeks before deciding on joining the national badminton camp, which resumed in Hyderabad on Friday.

The men's doubles pair is currently apart with Shetty at his home in Mumbai and Rankireddy lodged at his base in Amalapuram in Andhra Pradesh.

"It is great to hear that the training camp has



Sergio Reguilón (right) of Sevilla scores his side's first goal during their Europa League Round of 16 match at the Schauinsland-Reisen-Arena in Duisburg, Germany, on Thursday. Sevilla won 2-0. — AP

Biggies back for Champs league

Milan, Aug. 7: Gennaro Gattuso's reign as Napoli coach may have started amid turmoil but the former Italy international has put the Italian club on the path towards a potential Champions League triumph against Barcelona.

The southern Italians head for the Camp Nou on Saturday with a first ever Champions League quarterfinal berth beckoning.

Both sides are 1-1 after the last 16, first leg in the San Paulo Stadium in February.

But Lionel Messi's

Spaniards have not been beaten at home in the Champions League in seven years as they target a 13th consecutive quarterfinal berth.

Barcelona finished second in Spain while Napoli were seventh in Italy, but having secured a Europa League spot thanks to their Italian Cup victory.

The big question will be how to stop six-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi, a problem which former AC Milan midfielder Gattuso would have happily tackled as a player.

In Naples, more than

rage he has brought calm to a locker room traumatised after a disastrous first half of the season under Carlo Ancelotti, his former coach in Milan.

BAYERN TAKE ON CHELSEA AT HOME

Bayern Munich are hoping Champions League success can convince Thiago Alcantara and David Alaba, who are stalling over extensions, to stay. Bayern host Chelsea on Saturday in the last 16, second leg of the Champions League holding a 3-0 lead after

hammering the Blues in London in February when Serge Gnabry scored twice in a gala display.

Since then, Bayern have secured an eighth straight Bundesliga title and lifted the German Cup putting them on course for the treble, having won all 11 games post lockdown. — AFP

LIVE ON TV

■ **Champions League Round of 16, second leg:** Bayern Munich vs Chelsea from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 1; Barcelona vs Napoli from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2.

INDIA TO HOST 2021 T20 WC, Oz IN 2022

Dubai, Aug. 7: India on Friday retained the right to host the 2021 T20 World Cup while Australia will conduct this year's postponed edition in 2022, the ICC announced after its board meeting, straightening out a schedule that went topsy-turvy due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The International Cricket Council (ICC) today confirmed that the T20 World Cup 2020 that was postponed due to Covid-19 will be held in Australia in 2022. India will host the T20 World Cup 2021 as planned," the ICC stated in a press release.

The global body also confirmed that next year's women's ODI World Cup in New Zealand has been postponed until February-March 2022.

ENGLAND'S INDIA TOUR PUT OFF TILL 2021

India's white-ball series against England, scheduled at home in September-October, was on Friday postponed until early 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Both teams were scheduled to play three ODIs and as many T20s and the matches could now be held after the Test series between the two in India early next year. — Agencies

WOMEN'S | TENNIS

Martic rallies for a place in Last 8

Palermo, Aug. 7: Top-seeded Petra Martić rallied past Russian qualifier Liudmila Samsonova 5-7, 6-4, 6-2 to reach the Palermo Ladies Open quarterfinals Thursday in the first tournament following a five-month break due to the coronavirus.

"The struggle was real out there today," Martić said after the two-hour match.

"She's not the type of player I like to play. She plays really fast, hits really flat and low. And especially on these (clay) courts it can be tricky," she added.

"Overall I didn't really enjoy myself out there. But I realised right away that it was not going to be easy and I was going to have to fight," she said.

Martić will next face another qualifier, Aliaksandra Sasnovich.

Also advancing was fourth-seeded Anett Kontaveit, who also had to come from behind to defeat Laura Siegemund 3-6, 6-2, 6-2. Kontaveit's quarterfinal opponent will be

● **Top seed Petra Martić had to overcome a stubborn opponent in Liudmila Samsonova 5-7, 6-4, 6-2, in a match that lasted over two hours, to make the quarterfinal at the Palermo Ladies Open.**

Italian wild-card entry Elisabetta Cocciaretto.

In yet another three-set comeback win, Italy's Camila Giorgi eliminated Slovenian qualifier Kaja Juvan 3-6, 6-2, 6-4.

Players and officials for the tournament are being tested every four days for Covid-19 and one player who tested positive withdrew over the weekend. New protocols include fewer ball kids, a limited number of fans and no post-match handshakes between opponents. — AP



Kyle Kuzma (in yellow) of the Los Angeles Lakers makes a backward shot against the Houston Rockets during their NBA game in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, on Thursday. The Rockets won 113-97. — AP

Bucks bring down the Heat in NBA

Miami, Aug. 7: Giannis Antetokounmpo says the biggest challenge in the championship quest for the Milwaukee Bucks, who clinched a top seed in the NBA playoffs on Thursday, isn't a rival, but the Bucks themselves.

The 25-year-old Greek forward scored 33 points and grabbed 12 rebounds for Milwaukee as the Bucks rallied from a 23-point deficit to defeat Miami 130-116 and clinch the top seed in the Eastern Conference at an NBA-best 55-14.

The Bucks, who won their only NBA title in 1971, could face Miami in the second round of the playoffs with Toronto, Boston, Indiana and Philadelphia threats as well. But Milwaukee's star forward sees the Bucks' main worry as playing to their potential.

Khris Middleton had 33 points and eight assists and combined with Antetokounmpo to shoot 22-of-31 from the floor.

Duncan Robinson scored 21 points to lead the Heat, who are fourth in the East at 43-26. If the standings stay as they are, the Bucks

and Heat could meet in round two of the playoffs.

It was the feature of the eighth day of NBA games in a quarantine bubble at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, to finish a regular season shut down on March 11 by the Covid-19 pandemic.

LEONARD STARS AS CLIPPERS TRIUMPH

Kawhi Leonard, who led the Toronto Raptors to an NBA crown last year, scored 29 points to lead the Los Angeles Clippers over Dallas 126-111, pulling them a game ahead of Denver for second in the Western Conference.

HARDEN FIRES ROCKETS PAST LA LAKERS

NBA scoring leader James Harden poured in 39 points and passed around 12 assists while grabbing eight rebounds to ignite the Rockets over the Lakers 113-97. Anthony Davis had 17 points and 12 rebounds for the Lakers, who were 2-of-19 from 3-point range while Houston went 21-57 from beyond the arc.

— AFP

BOTTAS SETS THE PACE AT BRIT GP PRACTICE-1

Silverstone, Aug. 7: Valtteri Bottas set the fastest time in the first practice session for the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix at Silverstone on Friday, just ahead of his Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton.

Bottas posted a lap of 1 minute 26.166 seconds, beating Hamilton's best time by .138 seconds. Max Verstappen was third-fastest for Red Bull in 1:26.893.

Nico Hulkenberg placed fourth as the German stands in at Hacking Point for Sergio Perez, who has tested positive for the Coronavirus.

Ferrari was again off Mercedes' pace, with Charles Leclerc fifth-fastest and Sebastian Vettel seventh. Mercedes has won every race so far this year.

The race marks the 70th year since the Formula One championship began. — AFP



Coach Park Tae-Sang (from left), chief coach Pullela Gopichand and P. V. Sindhu are all smiles on the first day of resumption of training camp at the SAI Pullela Gopichand Badminton Academy in Hyderabad on Friday.