

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 6 AUGUST 2020



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Shivraj discharged from hospital, advised home quarantine for a week



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Defending champion Rafael Nadal won't play US Open, slams schedule

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Jacqueline gets nostalgic as she looks back at her hits *Beat pe booty, Chandralekha*



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WINDOWS
Beirut blast toll rises to 113; 4,000 injured



The damaged grain silos of Beirut's harbour and its surroundings on Wednesday, a day after a powerful explosion tore through Lebanon's capital, resulting from the ignition of a huge depot of ammonium nitrate at the main port. The death toll has risen to at least 113, health minister Hamad Hassan said. At least 4,000 people have been wounded.

Report on Page 6 — AFP

Centre to SC: Nod to plea for CBI probe in Sushant death case

New Delhi: The truth behind the unfortunate death of a "gifted and talented artist" Sushant Singh Rajput should come out, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday, while the Centre apprised it of having accepted the Bihar government's recommendation for a CBI probe in the matter. The top court also directed Rajput's father as also Bihar and Maharashtra to respond within three days to the plea of Bollywood actress Rhea Chakraborty seeking transfer of an FIR, accusing her of abetting the actor's suicide, from Patna to Mumbai.

Full report on Page 4

Nun rape case: SC rejects bishop plea

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed Bishop Franco Mulakkal to face trial as it dismissed his plea seeking discharge in the rape case lodged against him by a nun, saying that there is no merit in his petition. Mulakkal, in his plea has challenged the Kerala HC order of July 7, dismissing his discharge plea in the rape case.

Full report on Page 4

COUNTERPOINT



Not Arabian sea, sir... these are the main roads of Mumbai!

WEATHER

Max: 34°C
Min: 28°C
RH: 63%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Shravana Bahula
Tadiya till 12.16 am (Friday)
Star: Satabhisham till 11.19 am
Variyam: 6.19 pm to 8.04 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.15 am to 11.06 am; 3.20 pm to 4.11 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.08 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.45 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.06 AM
MOONSET TODAY 7.57 PM

PM Modi lays first brick of Ram Rajya

‘LORD RAM LIVING IN TENTS FOR YEARS, WILL FINALLY GET A TEMPLE’: PM MODI AT AYODHYA

YOJNA GUSAI
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

At 12:44 pm on Wednesday, or "abhijit muhur" which many believe is the same auspicious time of the day when Lord Ram was born, Prime Minister Narendra Modi performed the "bhumi puja" and laid a 40-kg silver brick at the "garbha griha" (sanctum sanctorum) of the soon-to-be-constructed "bhavya Ram Mandir" in Ayodhya.

Calling it a "historic and proud day for India," he said that Lord Ram is a thread that binds India and its unity in diversity. "Ram sabke hain, sab main Ram main," the Prime Minister, wearing a golden coloured kurta and dhoti, said and added that the temple will be a "modern symbol of India's tradition, its eternal faith, national spirit and collective pledge of crores of people."

The construction of the Ram Mandir will be completed ahead of the next general elections in 2024.

Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat, who was also invited for the ceremony, asserted that the wait of centuries has ended and added that it is a joyous occasion as it is a culmination of a pledge taken almost three decades ago and because Mr Modi was performing the ceremony.

The construction of the Ram Mandir on the land where the Babri Masjid stood till 1992 is a hugely emotive and polarising issue. It's also one of the core demands of the RSS-led Sangh Parivar and a poll promise of the BJP. Before the Supreme Court's verdict last year, some portions of the temple complex were part of the disputed site where Babri Masjid, construct-

ed in the 16th century, once stood. It was demolished in 1992 by kar sevaks as the Sangh Parivar, the BJP and some Hindus maintained that the mosque was built by demolishing a temple on what was the birth place of Lord Ram.

The "bhumi puja" ceremony on Wednesday coincided with the first anniversary of abrogation of the contentious Article 370 by the Modi government, another core issue of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP's poll promise.

"I believe that like Lord Ram, the grand temple will be a symbol of Indian culture and tradition and will inspire humanity till eternity... Lord Ram teaches us to move forward with time, he favours change, he favours modernisation... one must never forget that when humanity believed in him, it developed, when it strayed on the destructive path... through mutual affection and brotherhood we need to build the temple," the PM said while addressing saints, seers and other invitees after the ground-laying ceremony.

Mr Modi, who began his speech by chanting "Jai Siya Ram", also said that social harmony was the core principle of Lord Ram's governance and asked people to make sure that the teachings of Lord Ram, the message of the Ram Mandir is spread across the world. He also paid respect to those who sacrificed their lives for the Ram Mandir.

He later tweeted: "A blessed day in Ayodhya. This day will remain etched in the memory of every Indian. May the blessings of Bhagwan Shri Ram always be upon us. May India scale new heights of progress. May

Turn to Page 4



PM Narendra Modi (clockwise from left) performs 'bhumi puja' in Ayodhya on Wednesday. UP CM Yogi Adityanath greets yoga guru Ramdev during the function. Devotees offer prayers and light lamps in Ram Mandir at Wadala in Mumbai. More reports, photographs on Page 3 — PTI



We had taken a resolution. I remember the then RSS chief Bala-sahab Deoras telling us that we'll have to struggle for 20-30 yrs... We struggled for 30 yrs and in the 30th year, we've attained the joy of fulfilling our resolution.

— Mohan Bhagwat, RSS chief

A 500-year-long wait for this historical day culminated today because of PM Modi. The wishes of India's 135 crore people and the well-wishers of Sanatan Dharma followers have been fulfilled.

— Yogi Adityanath, UP CM

No Cong or Opp. leaders invited for event

Rahul: Ram is love, Ram is compassion, Ram is justice

AGE CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday offered his prayers to Lord Ram after the "bhumi puja" ceremony, calling him the ultimate embodiment of the best human qualities. "Maryada Purshottam Lord Ram is the ultimate embodiment of supreme human values. He is the core of humanism embedded deep in our hearts. Ram is love, he can never appear in hatred. Ram is compassion, he can never appear in cruelty. Ram is justice, he can never appear in injustice," Mr Gandhi tweeted.

Other Opposition leaders also reacted to the

Maryada Purshottam Lord Ram is the ultimate embodiment of supreme human values...

— Rahul Gandhi, Cong leader

"ground breaking ceremony" of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. BSP chief Kumari Mayawati credited the Supreme Court for paving way for the construction of the Ram temple, while Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav struck a cautious note when he expressed his hope that present and

future generations will do well to sincerely follow the path shown by the "Maryada Purushottam".

In Kolkata, Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee called for preserving brotherhood between communities and the age-old legacy of unity in diversity. "Our country has always upheld the age-old legacy of unity in diversity, and we must preserve this to our last breath!" Ms Banerjee tweeted.

In a series of tweets, CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury pointed out that it was the Supreme Court that had paved the way for the construction of the temple and that it was supposed to be built by "The Trust".

Today is a historic and proud day for India.

The consecration of the grand Ram temple by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Lord Ram's birthplace has written a golden chapter in the history of great Indian culture and civilisation and heralded the beginning of a new era

— Amit Shah

Congratulations to the entire country on the occasion of bhoomi puja. May we continue to receive Lord Ram's blessings. With his blessings, our country will get rid of hunger, illiteracy and poverty, and India becomes the most powerful nation in the world. May India show the path to the world in times to come. Jai Shri Ram! Jai Bajrang Bali

— Arvind Kejriwal

Today is a victory of Hindutva over secularism. Today is a victory of majoritarianism over liberty and equality... The Prime Minister has not only laid the foundation of a mandir, but also the foundation of a Hindu Rashtra... I am emotional Mr Prime Minister because you have completely discarded your constitutional duty of upholding the basic structure of the Constitution. I am emotional Mr Prime Minister because you have violated your oath.

— Asaduddin Owaisi

Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Isai aapas mein hain
Bhai Bhai! Mera Bharat Mahaan, Mahaan Hamara Hindustan. Our country has always upheld the age-old legacy of unity in diversity, and we must preserve this to our last breath!

— Mamata Banerjee

Kashmir L-G Murmu quits, may get top Central post

New Delhi, Aug. 5: Jammu and Kashmir lieutenant-governor G.C. Murmu abruptly resigned on Wednesday, officials said.

His resignation came on the day the Union Territory marked the first anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, which scrapped J&K's special status.

The 60-year-old former IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre had on October 29 last year taken over as the first L-G of the UT after the state of J&Kashmir was downgraded and sliced into two UTs, the other one being Ladakh.

There was no official word on the reasons for the resignation of Mr Murmu, a 1985-batch IAS officer who has served as principal secretary to Narendra Modi during his tenure as Gujarat CM. Highly-placed sources said that Murmu was likely to be given a new assignment at the Centre.



G.C. Murmu

Longest religious dispute in India finally comes to an end

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

The Ayodhya ground-breaking ceremony Wednesday possibly drew the curtain on the longest religious dispute in India. Since the Babri Masjid was built in 1528-29 by Mir Baqi, commander of Mughal emperor Babar, till the Supreme Court ended the dispute in November 2019, there has been a lot of turbulence, tension and violence, with both Hindus and Muslims asserting their rights to pray there.

The first recorded case of communal violence near the site was in 1855 when Hindus tried to take possession. This was followed by the first unsuccessful legal claim filed by Raghubar Mahant Das the same year, that was dismissed by the Faizabad sub-judge, but as the dispute intensified a fence was erected in 1857 to allow separate access to both communities.

In 1934, another communal incident took place, in which the mosque was damaged, but later restored.



declared the site disputed and locked its gates.

The government took charge of the site on January 5, 1950, after which a legal battle began

Twelve years later, in 1946, the Akhil Bharatiya Ramayana Mahasabha, a Hindu Mahasabha wing, began an agitation for possession of the site, after which a police picket was put up on November 12, 1949.

On December 10, 1949, waqf inspector Mohd Ibrahim gave a report to the mosque secretary that Muslims were being prevented from offering namaz at night, due to fear of Hindus and Sikhs. The first major clash began on the night of December 22-23, 1949, when Ram and Sita idols were placed under the central dome, leading to Muslim protests. The government declared the site disputed and locked its gates.

The government took

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The government took charge of the site on January 5, 1950, after which a legal battle began

charge of the site on January 5, 1950, after which a legal battle began. In 1950, Gopal Simla Visharad and P a r a m a h a n s a Ramachandra Das filed different suits in the Faizabad district court for the right to worship Ram idols. In 1959, the Nirmohi Akhara filed suit for possession of the site and in 1961, the UP Sunni Central Waqf Board also filed suit.

In 1986 the Faizabad district court ordered removal of the lock and opened the site for Hindu worshippers. Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister, and on the advice of his close adviser Arun Nehru, allowed the shilanyas, hoping "Hindu

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Advani's isolation in BJP total with Ayodhya absence

ANIMESH SINGH
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

He was the architect of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement who catapulted the BJP from two Lok Sabha seats in 1984 to 120 in the 1991 general election. But on Wednesday, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi presided over the Ram Mandir "bhoomi puja" in Ayodhya, Lal Krishna Advani possibly watched the ceremony on television as the party and organisers tried hard to "explain" his absence at the event.

In September 1990 Mr Advani began his rathayatra from Somnath till Ayodhya to mobilise nationwide opinion for building a Ram temple at the "exact location" where Lord Ram was believed to have been born (and where the Babri Masjid stood). His "Mandir Wahin Banayenge" slogan was a nationwide chant during the Ram Janmabhoomi stir, that led to the Babri

Destiny made me perform a pivotal duty in the form of the Ram Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya in 1990

— L.K. Advani, Veteran BJP leader

Masjid's demolition on December 6, 1992, making Mr Advani the party's Hindutva poster boy. Ironically, though, neither Mr Advani nor Murli Manohar Joshi, who was BJP president when the Babri Masjid was demolished, were on the dais with Mr Modi at Wednesday's bhoomi puja ceremony. The snub to Mr Advani, while others like Kalyan Singh, Uma Bharti and Vinay Katiyar were invited, signals the complete isolation of the veteran leader, who simply issued a statement expressing his "happiness" at the event.

SHORT TAKES

Minor girl assaulted in Paschim Vihar

New Delhi: A 12-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by unknown person in West Delhi's Paschim Vihar area, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place on Tuesday. The girl has injury marks on her body and is currently admitted in a hospital at national capital where her condition stated to be serious, they said. Police said they received information regarding the incident on Tuesday evening. The victim was taken to a nearby hospital where she was treated and later referred to another hospital in the city. The police has registered a case under relevant sections. "We received information on Tuesday regarding assault with a minor girl in Paschim Vihar West police station. An FIR under section 307 (attempt to murder) and POCSO Act has been registered and further investigation is under progress," Deputy Commissioner of Police (outer) A. Koan said.

2 injured in firing at Outer Delhi area

New Delhi: A 22-year-old man and one of his friends were shot at allegedly by a group of people in outer Delhi's Narela, police said on Wednesday. According to the police, Sagar and his three friends — Sandeep, Sagar and Adil — were returning home in a car late on Tuesday night, when six men arrived at Saboli Road on two motorcycles and a four-wheeler and fired upon them. Sagar and Sandeep, who were seated in front of the car, were injured while their other friends who were sitting at the backseat escaped unhurt and immediately informed police about the firing, police said. The accused were known to the victims, they said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Gaurav Sharma said, "Sagar and Sandeep were rushed to a nearby hospital. Sagar was discharged after treatment but Sandeep has been referred to another hospital. His condition is stated to be stable." All the culprits involved in the incident have been identified and will be nabbed soon, the DCP said, adding that it is suspected that monetary dispute might be the reason for the attack. — PTI

Contactless tickets in Delhi govt buses

New Delhi: A three-day trial for contactless ticketing began in Delhi government buses plying between Anand Vihar ISBT and Badarpur Border on Wednesday. The city government is going to introduce e-ticketing system to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in buses, Transport minister Kailash Gahlot said. The trial of contactless ticketing system began in all the cluster buses of route number 473, running between Anand Vihar ISBT and Badarpur Border. The trial will continue till August 7, a government statement said. The passengers can take an e-ticket through a mobile app after boarding the bus. — PTI

South Delhi engineer escapes shooting bid

New Delhi: An executive engineer with the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) escaped being shot after a gun jammed when he was allegedly attacked by a 'Beldar' on Wednesday afternoon in south Delhi's Gulmohar Park area, police said. The information about the alleged shooting attempt was received at Hauz Khas police station at 2.30 pm and the 'Beldar' (worker) was booked, they said. "After reaching the spot at MCD Office, Gulmohar Park, executive engineer Sunil Gehlot said the 'Beldar', Manoj Mandal, came to his office regarding some complaint and started arguing with him," Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Atul Kumar Thakur said. Gehlot alleged that Mandal took out a gun and tried to fire, but the weapon got jammed. Later, he hit the butt of the gun on Gehlot's head and managed to escape, police said. Mandal was arguing with Gehlot over providing him uniform. Gehlot received injury on his forehead, police said. However, while running outside, Mandal fired in the air. An empty cartridge was also found there. A case has been registered. — PTI

Homes and temples lit up for 'bhumi puja'

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

Earthen lamps, colourful lights and saffron flags were put at temples in the national capital and chants of "Jai Shri Ram" rent the air as devotees thronged them to perform special puja on the occasion of ground-breaking ceremony for a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Not only the temples but several houses and housing societies adorned similar look and it seems that Diwali was early for scores of people. The jubilant people who were waiting for this day burst firecrackers in the evening.

Rakesh Kumar, who was waiting for this day from past three decades, said, "I was 39 when this entire scenario accelerated in 1990s and since then my only dream was to see the grand temple, but never thought that I would be able to see it in my lifetime. For us this is more special day then Deepawali."

From Hanuman mandir at Kashmiri Gate to Jhandewalan temple, devotees started arriving around 5 am.

"A puja has been going on non-stop for three days. The 'Ram darbar' has been decorated. A replica of 'shila' (foundation stone) has been prepared and it will be sent to Ayodhya along with other material," said Kishor Chawla of Chattarpur temple.

Thirty-two pandits performed a special puja amid beating of dholaks and tambourines and recital of bhajans.

Considering the restric-



An artist is dressed as Lord Hanuman as members of Vishwa Hindu Parishad celebrate the bhumi puja of Ayodhya's Ram Mandir at Connaught Place in New Delhi on Wednesday.

tions due to Covid-19, only a limited number of people are allowed at any given time. A self-dispenser machine has been installed for 'prasad' distribution, Chawla said.

Alankar Yadav, a 57-year-old resident of Chattarpur, clapped vigorously as the loudspeakers blared "Ram dhun". "It's a dream come true. I am lucky that I am alive to see this day," he said.

Anukriti Bansal, 41, drove to the temple in the middle of rain to have darshan of 'Ram lala'.

"I could have watched it on television, but I chose to come here and spend some time listening to 'Sunderkand'," she said.

At the Jhandewalan temple in Karol Bagh, people started trickling in as early as 5 am.

Vinod Gandhi, the manager of the temple, said the entire premises has been decorated with colourful lights and recital of the Ramayan has been going on for the last 24 hours.

The staff will distribute special prasad to devotees

after the puja. The temple has also planned a diya lighting event in the evening. There will be fireworks too, its staff said.

Vinod Mishra of the Birla Mandir in central Delhi said the temple had sent its soil to Ayodhya which will be used in the construction of the Ram temple. Saffron flags adorned the walls of the temple and colourful bulbs hung from its dome. Devotees performed puja amid non-stop Ram bhajan and kirtan.

Mr Mishra said the

administration has not allowed large gatherings as per the Covid-19 protocols.

There was a similar atmosphere at Hanuman Mandir which is popularly known as Marghat wale Balaji. Devotees started coming and offered prayer from early morning and chanted Hanuman chalisa and other devotional Bhajans of Lord Ram and his sewak Hanuman.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi performed the bhoomi puja of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

■ 1,076 fresh Covid cases reported in capital

Ensure 'zero' deaths in city, CM to health dept

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday directed the city's health department to bring deaths due to Covid 19 to zero. The chief minister's direction came after "death monitoring committees" submitted its report to him.

The national capital recorded 1,076 fresh coronavirus cases taking the tally to over 1.4 lakh, while the death toll from the disease climbed to 4,044. Eleven deaths have been recorded in the last 24 hours, as per the latest bulletin, which is the lowest number of COVID-19 fatalities reported in a day, since July 1. The total number of cases climbed to 1,40,232. The active cases tally on Wednesday rose to 10,072, from 9,897, the previous day.

Mr Kejriwal convened a meeting with the committees which were constit-



Arvind Kejriwal

ed last month to inspect the 10 hospitals (government and private) in the city with the highest mortality rate and give hospital-wise recommendations on following standard operating procedures and protocols.

In the meeting, each of the four committees submitted their reports and presented recommendations to the chief minister to induce measures for the betterment of COVID patient care services and reducing mortality in the hospitals. Mr Kejriwal reiterated that all steps should be taken to bring deaths to zero.

During the inspection by the committees, it was

found that the death rate in all these hospitals has decreased as compared to earlier. Delhi government in a statement said that chief minister Mr Kejriwal is personally monitoring all critical Covid-19 patients and due to his direct intervention immediate steps have been taken to reduce the rate of deaths in the city.

"On July 16, a checklist was sent by the Health department to the hospitals for Covid patient management which further helped reduce deaths due to Covid. As a result, the deaths in Delhi have come down to just 11 today," it added.

The committees were constituted on July 30 as a part of chief minister's efforts to reduce the death rate in the city. Various government and private hospitals such as Lok Nayak Hospital, Safdarjung Hospital, Max East and West are being inspected by the panel.

Army: HC upholds ban on FB & Insta

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

If the government has concluded that permitting use of certain social networking websites, including Facebook and Instagram, by its defence personnel is enabling enemy countries gain an edge, the courts would be loath to interfere with the decision, the Delhi high court said on Wednesday.

It said warfare in today's world is not confined to "accession of territory" but extends to affecting

the economy and "inciting civil unrest" by enemy nations.

The high court's order came while dismissing a senior Army officer's petition challenging the Indian Army's recent policy banning armed forces personnel from using 89 social networking platforms.

A bench of justices Rajiv Sahai Endlaw and Asha Menon, while pronouncing the order, said, "Sorry we are dismissing. Thank you."

The high court, while

considering the controversy for the stage of admission only, said other means of communication are still available to the petitioner officer and the ban was with respect to certain social networking websites only.

It dismissed the petition of Lieutenant Colonel PK Choudhary seeking a direction to the Director General of Military Intelligence to withdraw its June 6 policy by which all Indian Army personnel were ordered to delete their accounts from

Facebook, Instagram and 87 other applications.

"We may also notice that warfare and inter-country rivalries and animosities today are not confined to accession of territory and destruction of installations and infrastructure of enemy countries but also extend to influencing and affecting the economies and political stability of enemy country including by inciting civil unrest and disturbance and influencing the political will of the citizens of the enemy country.

BJP organises bike rally, distributes 'desi ghee' ladoos

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

From distribution of ladoos and a bike rally to live telecast of bhoomi pujan of Ram Mandir, Delhi BJP organised a series of events in the city to celebrate the occasion.

Lok Sabha member from Parvash Verma distributed ladoos made of desi ghee to passersby outside his official residence at Janpath along with his family members. While New Delhi MP Meenakshi Lekhi flagged off a 'bike rally' organised by youngsters residing in the constituency.

"The bhoomi puja by Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji today is the end of civilisational exile and beginning of a New India with its ethos entrenched in an ancient value system based. It is a model of governance which seeks its authority vested in the principles of Ramrajya. Ramayana depicts an Ideal teacher (Guru), ideal brother, ideal son, ideal husband, ideal wife, we got a lot to learn from Ramayana," said Ms Lekhi.

Giant LED screens were installed in all 70 Assembly constituencies in Delhi, where senior leaders including Delhi MPs watched the Bhoomi Pujan ceremony, along with party workers and local residents.

Former Delhi BJP president and Lok Sabha member Manoj Tiwari witnessed the event with Rajya Sabha member and party national general secretary Arun Singh, Lok Sabha member from Jharkhand Nishikant Dubey and former Union

'Jai Shri Ram,' tweets Kejriwal

New Delhi: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday congratulated the entire country on the occasion of the 'bhoomi puja' of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in Ayodhya to lay the foundation stone of the Ram Temple there. "Congratulations to the entire country on the occasion of bhoomi puja. May we continue to receive Lord Ram's blessings. "With his blessings, our country will get rid of hunger, illiteracy and poverty, and India becomes the most powerful nation in the world. Jai Shri Ram! Jai Bajrang Bali," Kejriwal tweeted in Hindi.

minister Vijay Goel at his official residence. Mr Tiwari also released a new Ram Bhajan on the occasion. Mr Tiwari, also a well known as bhojpuri singer, recited Ramcharit Manas on the occasion and distributed soil brought from Ayodhya and stones from Ramsetu in Rameshwaram among the gathering.

South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri watched the live telecast with the residents of Tughlakabad Village. Cricketer turned politician Gautam Gambhir, Lok Sabha member from East Delhi, watched the live telecast of bhoomi puja with his electorate at Vivek Vihar's Ram Temple.

Sisodia asks DDC to carry out survey to boost revenue

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday directed the Dialogue and Development Commission (DDC) to carry out a detailed study to improve the AAP government's revenue base, which has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr Sisodia, who also holds the finance portfolio, said DDC should suggest short and long-term measures to improve the revenue base and submit its report within two months.

"The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has put a huge strain on government rev-

enue and therefore, all-out efforts need to be made towards revenue augmentation so that the government is able to undertake all necessary works and programmes for the welfare of people of Delhi," Sisodia was quoted as saying in an official statement.

He also directed the DDC to consult leading experts in the field and relevant organisations working in public finance to carry out the study.

"There is scope for improving tax to GSDP by improving the revenue base. DDC may carry out a detailed study on all factors by analysing all relevant tax-related data," the deputy CM said.

Open book exam to curb Covid, DU tells HC

New Delhi, Aug. 5: The Delhi high court was informed by the Delhi University on Wednesday that the idea behind holding online Open Book Examination (OBE) was to prevent students from assembling in one hall where it would be difficult to maintain social distancing in the times of Covid-19 pandemic.

The university's counsel told Justice Prathiba M Singh that the challenge in the petition to withdraw the notification on OBE does not survive in view of the matter being heard by the division bench of this court on allowing OBE to commence.

The argument seems to be that there should be no OBE... The idea behind OBE was to prevent students from assembling in one hall as it would be difficult to maintain social distancing during the pandemic situation. There were detailed deliberations, senior advocate Sachin Dutta, representing the DU, said. — PTI

Prashant Bhushan defends tweets

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

Activist Prashant Bhushan on Wednesday defended in the Supreme Court his two alleged contemptuous tweets saying they were against the judges regarding their conduct in their personal capacity and they did not obstruct administration of justice.

A bench comprising Justices Arun Mishra, B R Gavai and Krishan Murari, which on July 22, had issued a show cause notice to Bhushan after

initiating the criminal contempt against him for his two alleged derogatory tweets against the judiciary, reserved the verdict in the case. Heard the senior counsel appearing in the matter. Arguments concluded. Judgment reserved, the bench noted in the order.

While reserving the order in the contempt case, the top court dismissed a separate petition filed by Bhushan seeking recall of the July 22 order by which notice was issued against him in a contempt proceeding. The bench, during the

hearing, did not agree to the contention of senior advocate Dushyant Dave, representing Bhushan, that the separate plea had raised objection against the manner in which the contempt proceedings were started without the opinion of Attorney General K K Venugopal and it be sent to another bench. Bhushan has sought a direction to declare that the apex court's secretary general has allegedly "acted unconstitutionally and illegally" in accepting a "defective contempt petition" filed against him.



A girl runs for cover as it rains in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI

Today is new beginning of new India: Bhagwat

Bhumi puja in Ayodhya has spread joy, will establish self-confidence for making India self-reliant, says RSS chief

Ayodhya, Aug. 5: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Wednesday said that today is the beginning of a new India.

Speaking on the occasion soon after the “bhumi puja” ceremony of Ram temple in Ayodhya, Mr Bhagwat said, “Our country believes in ‘Vasudev Kutubham’ i.e. World is One Family. We believe in taking everyone along. Today is a new beginning of a new India.”

Recalling the three-decade-old struggle of RSS and its ideological family members for the construction of the temple, he hailed the contribution of veteran BJP leader L.K. Advani, late VHP president Ashok Singhal and Mahant Ramchandra Das Paramhans.

“So many people had sacrificed, they couldn’t be here physically. There are some who couldn’t come here, Advaniji must be at his home watching this. There are some who should have come but could not be invited because of the situation (Covid-19),” he added.

There are many people who worked hard and some even sacrificed their lives for the temple, many may not be here physically, Mr Bhagwat said remembering Singhal and spiritual face of the temple movement late Paramhans.

Mr Bhagwat, the guest of honour for the ground breaking ceremony, termed it is a moment of joy asserting “there is a wave of happiness in the country”.

“There is a pleasure of fulfilment of a dream for years. But the greatest joy is establishment of the self confidence and self-sufficiency needed for making India self-reliant is realised today,” said the RSS chief, who sat along with Modi at the havan ceremony. With the bhumi puja, the Sangh’s three-decade-old pledge of con-



Artists (clockwise from left) dressed as Lord Ram, Lakshman and Hanuman celebrate the Bhoomi Puja in Ayodhya’s Ram Mandir in Bengaluru on Wednesday. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat during the foundation laying ceremony in Ayodhya on Wednesday, devotees light earthen lamps at Ramchandra Ji Temple in Jaipur on Wednesday. — PTI



structing the Ram temple in Ayodhya is being realised, he said.

“When we had taken the pledge, our then Sangh chief Balasahab Deoras had told us we would have to work hard continuously for 20-30 years and we did,” Mr Bhagwat said, adding today the society is realising the joy of fulfilment of its pledge.

Emphasising that the foundation stone of the temple laid on Wednesday signifies the spirit to take everyone along, he said it is being done by the able leadership of the country to make India a global leader.

Requesting people to follow the ideals of Lord Ram to regain the past glory of the country, Mr Bhagwat said people should also build an Ayodhya inside them based on values and teachings of its king to make

India great. Projecting Ram as an universal king, the RSS chief said he belongs to all and all belongs to him.

Mr Bhagwat was one of the selected invitees at the ‘bhumi puja’ ceremony of the Ram temple at the site where a large number of Hindus believe Lord Ram was born.

Construction of the Ram temple has been a core issue of the RSS, and it has been providing all necessary support to its ideological family members BJP and VHP to realise this long awaited mission of the saffron organisations.

Besides Mr Bhagwat, top office bearers of Sangh — its general secretary Suresh Bhaiyyaji Joshi, its joint general secretaries Krishna Gopal and Dattateya Hosabale were also present at the ceremony. — Agencies



Credit for temple goes to Modi: Yogi

Ayodhya, Aug. 5: Uttar Pradesh Chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s foresight and wisdom paved the way for peaceful resolution of the Ram temple issue and fulfilling the dream.

The power of Indian democracy and judiciary under the leadership of PM Modi has shown the world how solutions to problems can be found

through democratic and constitutional means, he said at the groundbreaking ceremony for the temple here.

“Prime Minister’s foresight and wisdom paved the way for peaceful resolution of Ram temple issue,” he said.

Mr Yogi said people have struggled for 500 years for the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Prime Minister Modi earlier performed the

Prime Minister’s foresight and wisdom paved the way for peaceful resolution of Ram temple issue

— Yogi Adityanath, UP chief minister

‘bhoomi puja’ of a Supreme Court-mandated Ram temple in Ayodhya,

bringing to fruition the BJP’s ‘mandir’ movement that defined its politics for three decades and took it to the heights of power.

On November 9, 2019, the Supreme Court settled the fractious issue going back more than a century and backed the construction of a Ram temple by a trust at the disputed site. It also ruled that an alternative five-acre plot must be found for a mosque in the Hindu holy town. — PTI

1992: RSS, Bajrang Dal briefed us, the kar sevaks

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

I covered BJP veteran L.K. Advani’s Ram Rath Yatra as it passed through Delhi way back in 1990. I was surprised by the number of people who came out on the roads, scattering rose petals on the Yatra. Delhi seemed a long way off when I finally made my way to Ayodhya two years later.

Armed with a letter of introduction from a Delhi unit of the BJP, I wormed my way into kar sevaks ranks at the holy town in 1992. During my first three-day maiden visit to Ayodhya, I was put through intense grilling to establish my credentials as a kar sevak. After I was accepted as a “genuine” kar sevak, I saw the face that lay behind a façade of religious drama and masked by political hoopla. It was terrifying to see the extent to which the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, BJP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal combine had gone to ensure there was no infiltration.

I lived in Guru Gobind Singh camp with kar sevaks from Delhi and Haryana. I was briefed by pracharaks of the RSS and “indoctrinated” by the Bajrang Dal. I met sages and mendicants. Some of them seemed genuinely good people, and some charlatans. I also met many men who would listen to no reason, suffer no attempts to veer them away from fanaticism. There were some people who told me that they did not expect the temple to come up at the disputed site, but all that was going on in Ayodhya was necessary to rejuvenate the nationalist spirit. Many others, including UP policemen, were certain that the temple would come up at any cost.

After my first night’s stay, one early morning (a few days before the December 6 demolition), hundreds of people gathered near my tent. They were carrying boulders and shovels and shouting “Jai Shri Ram”. I too joined the mob, which was led by then BJP MP B.L. Sharma ‘Prem’. Soon, the mob started breaking down three gravestones. I also carried the debris to a nearby pond, along with other kar sevaks.

One day, I was shown a broken windscreen and shattered glass panes — a car-load of “infiltrators” had been reportedly inter-

cepted by kar sevaks — beaten up and handed over to the UP police.

It was after the publication of my reports that the disputed structure was brought down on December 6, 1992. In his defence, then Union home minister S B Chavan told the Parliament that had he read these news reports, the disputed structure could have been saved.

After the stone-laying ceremony of Ram temple on Wednesday, all eyes will be on the special court in Lucknow which is to pronounce its verdict in the criminal case filed against those responsible for the demolition of the disputed structure.

It was after a gap of about 25 years that the special court recorded my testimony as a prosecution witness in this matter. Shockingly, the CBI, which is the prosecuting agency in this case, has not filed original copies of my newspaper reports as a documentary evidence in the matter.

My day-long testimony in the court was recorded on the basis of a statement recorded by a senior CBI officer soon after the demolition of the disputed structure.

PM reaches out to Nepal, Sri Lanka & Indonesia

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out on Wednesday to South-east Asian countries like Indonesia and also parts of India’s immediate neighbourhood like Nepal and Sri Lanka where the cultural influence of the ancient epic Ramayana is still felt, adding significantly that when a nation is strong, it is able to ensure peace. At a time of Sino-Indian military tensions, PM Modi also mentioned China in his speech as a country where references to Lord Rama have been found. He also pitched for a continued strong cultural outreach by India to the world.

In his address on Wednesday at the temple town of Ayodhya, PM Modi mentioned five south-east Asian nations — Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia where the cultural influence of the Ramayana and Lord Rama are still felt. In India’s immediate neighbourhood, he mentioned Nepal and Sri Lanka in this regard. PM Modi also said references to Lord Rama were found even in China as well as Iran, which is in India’s extended neighbourhood.

Social distancing norms followed at Ram Mandir

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

With a limited number of guests attending the Ram Temple bhumi puja ceremony led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the social distancing norms were strictly followed at the venue as guests sat at a respectable distance from each other in different enclosures and every one wore a mask.

Due to coronavirus pandemic, the number of guests was restricted to 175 at the venue as several who had participated in building the momentum for Ram Temple were

omitted from the list of invitees. Roads were sanitised and empty, both for security and pandemic reasons though people stood on their terraces to have a glimpse of PM Modi while he was on his way to the venue.

“There are many people who worked hard and sacrificed their lives for the temple, but they could not be here physically...While there are some like Advani ji who led rath yatra but could not come due to the current situation (of Covid-19 pandemic). He must be watching this from his home on TV,” said RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat.

At the helipad, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Governor Anandiben Patel and state officials stood at demarcated places as they received the PM. At the venue, the priests maintained distance from each other as they guided the PM to perform the Bhoomi Puja. On the dias too after the Bhoomi Puja, where only five special invitees sat, there was sufficient gap between them. It is learnt that only corona free priests and policemen were allowed.

All invitees at the venue were screened several times.

RAM RAJYA

Chhattisgarh govt to flaunt Ram connection

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, AUG. 5

A sleepy village in Chhattisgarh, believed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram’s mother Kaushalya, may emerge as a major pilgrim centre like Ayodhya.

Chief minister Bhupesh Baghel has announced a grandiose plan to develop Chandkhuri, around 30 km from Raipur, by upgrading the existing Mata Kaushalya shrine into a grand temple.

“Ram’s Nanihal (maternal place) Chandkhuri will be developed like a city in mythological tales. The existing Mata Kaushalya shrine in the village will be made a grand temple without disturbing its original form,” a Twitter post by Mr Baghel said. The eighth century Mata Kaushalya temple is the only shrine of the kind in the country.



People gather on rooftops to have a view of the foundation-stone laying ceremony in Ayodhya on Tuesday. — PTI

Early Diwali in Ayodhya

Ayodhya: Deepawali came early in the temple town of Ayodhya, as people from different sections of the society lit earthen lamps to celebrate the bhoomi puja for Ram temple, which was held on Wednesday morning.

The road leading from Hanumangarhi to Naya Ghat wore an illuminated look in the evening, with several earthen lamps lit outside shops, houses, guest houses and dharamshalas. — PTI

Many injured in clashes over temple in Assam

Tezpur: Several persons were injured in a clash between two communities in Assam’s Sonitpur district on Wednesday after a bike rally was organised by Bajrang Dal activists to celebrate the foundation stone laying ceremony of a Ram temple in Ayodhya, officials said.

To control the situation, police fired in the air and deployed additional forces after many bikes and other vehicles were burnt, they said.

Indefinite curfew was also imposed in areas under the jurisdictions of Thelamara and Dhekiajuli police stations, they added.

The incident took place when a large number of bikers were heading to a Shiv temple in Bhora Singori, playing loud music and shouting slogans.

SP Mugdhajyoti Dey Mahanta is at the spot to monitor the situation. — PTI



Sadhus celebrate in Ayodhya on Tuesday. — PTI

‘Balasahab’s dream fulfilled’

Mumbai: The Shiv Sena said the “bhoomi puja” for Ram temple construction “fulfils” the dream of its founder Bal Thackeray, while the party’s ruling ally in Maharashtra NCP termed the development as a “matter of joy”. The Sena, an ex-BJP ally which has been a strong supporter of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, congratulated the people over the long-awaited foundation stone laying ceremony for the grand temple. — PTI

Golden chapter in history of India, says Shah

New Delhi, Aug. 5: Terming the foundation laying of Ram temple in Ayodhya as a “historic and proud day” for India, home minister Amit Shah



said on Wednesday that it heralds the beginning of a new era. He said by starting the construction of the grand Ram temple in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written a golden chapter in the history of the great Indian civilisation, and asserted that the government remains committed to the preservation of Indian culture and its values.

“Today is a historic and proud day for India. The consecration of the grand Ram temple by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Lord Ram’s birthplace has written a golden chapter in the history of great Indian culture and civilisation and heralded the beginning of a new era,” Shah, who is recuperating at a private hospital in Gurgaon after contracting Covid-19, said.

He said the construction of the temple is the result of centuries long sacrifice, struggle and penance of the innumerable devotees of Lord Ram.

“On this day, I salute all those ascetics who fought for this priceless heritage of them who struggled for years to preserve this precious heritage of Sanatan civilization. Jai Shree Ram,” he tweeted in Hindi. — PTI

BJP workers clash with police in Bengal

Kolkata, Aug. 5: BJP workers clashed with police in some parts of West Bengal on Wednesday over celebrating the ground-breaking ceremony of a Ram temple in Ayodhya, amid a total lockdown in the state, officials said.

Clashes were reported from Kharagpur in West Midnapore district, Narayanpur in North 24 Parganas, and Alipurdwar town in North Bengal, among others.

A procession by BJP workers to mark the day was stopped by police in Kharagpur, leading to a scuffle.

“When they were stopped from going ahead with the march, a scuffle broke out between police and BJP activists. Several BJP workers have been arrested,” a senior police officer said.

Some policemen were also injured in the incident, he said.

In Alipurdwar town, BJP workers were stopped from organising a “bhoomi poojan” due to the total lockdown, leading to a tense situation.

BJP workers also tried to organise a yagna in Narayanpur area but were stopped by some locals. Police said they had to use “force” to disperse the crowd.

“The BJP was trying to disturb the peace in the area but locals stopped them,” local Trinamool Congress leader Tapas Chatterjee said.

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh, who organised a “bhoomi poojan” at his New Town residence, said the crackdown by police reflects the “anti-Hindu mindset” of the state government. — PTI

Ram not the ‘property’ of BJP: Tharoor

New Delhi, Aug. 5: With the Congress under attack from various quarters over what was seen by many as a subtle shift in its position on the Ram temple issue, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Wednesday rejected allegations that the grand old party was being “BJP-Lite” and asserted that Lord Ram is not the “property” of the saffron party.

Mr Tharoor put out a series of tweets to spell out his party’s stand on the Ram temple issue.

In his tweets, Tharoor also addressed those Muslims who say that they feel let down by the Congress and cited verses from the holy Quran, asking “who exactly betrayed you?”

“Not those who stand for an inclusive India, who have neither attacked you nor preached hatred against you,” he said, addressing the section of Muslims riled by the Congress’ stand. Tharoor’s remarks assume significance as they came after Indian Union Muslim League passed a resolution expressing displeasure over Priyanka Gandhi Vadra’s statement on the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Shivraj discharged from hospital

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday discharged from a private hospital where he was admitted on July 25 after testing positive for coronavirus. He was advised to be home-quarantined for a week. A health bulletin issued by the hospital said Mr Chouhan had been asymptomatic and all his clinical parameters were within normal limits. "They (doctors) advised discharge as per ICMR policy dated May 8, 2020 wherein patients can be discharged after ten days of symptoms onset and no fever for three days. There will be no need for testing prior to discharge," it said. Mr Chouhan later thanked the hospital staff and said there was no need to panic, but people should be careful. He asked people not to hide coronavirus symptoms and and follow the guidelines.

Disha Patani's dad, 2 officers Covid +ve

Bareilly, UP: Three officers of the vigilance unit of the Uttar Pradesh power department, including the father of Bollywood actress Disha Patani, have tested positive for coronavirus. Jagdish Patani and the two other officers, who came here from Lucknow, have tested positive for Covid-19, additional CMO Ashok Kumar said on Wednesday. The three officers were investigating a transformer scam, he said. Disha Patani's father is a deputy SP in the vigilance unit of the state power department here. The zonal chief engineer's office has also been closed for next 48 hours. — *PTI*

PM Modi lays first brick of Ram Rajya

■ **Continued from Page 1** every Indian be healthy and prosperous." Hailing the occasion as a "sabko saath lekar saath chalne ki vidhi ka adhisthan (establishment of a method to walk along with everyone)," Mr Bhagwat said the occasion marks the beginning of India which is "paramvaibhav sampann aur sabka kalyan karne-wala (glorious and welfare for all)." The RSS chief also urged that before the mandir is completed, people should build an Ayodhya in their hearts, which is free of all evils so that Lord Ram can reside there.

The much awaited ceremony, after the Supreme Court paved the way for it by delivering a landmark judgment last year in the long-pending and contentious Ram Janambhumi-Babri Masjid land dispute, saw Mr Modi performing the ritual amid chanting of shlokas from the Vedas by priests at the grabha griha. Also present were Uttar Pradesh governor Anandiben Patel, state chief minister Yogi Adityanath, and Salil Singhal, the nephew of Ashok Singhal, the late VHP leader who is considered the flag-bearer of the Ram Janambhumi movement.

The apex court appointed Shri Ram Mandir Teerth Kshetra Trust's chairman Mahant Nrityagopal Das, who was not present during the ceremony but was later present on the dais.

It was Mr Modi's first visit to Ayodhya after BJP veteran L.K. Advani's Rath Yatra of 1990 and also the first occasion when the Prime Minister shared the dais with the RSS chief.

Ahead of the "bhumi puja" ceremony, Mr Modi offered prayers at the Hanumangarhi temple — a shrine to Lord Hanuman — and then offered prayers at the shrine to Ram Lalla and performed "dandvat pranaam" (prostration) before the deity. He also planted a "parijaa" (coral flowering sapling), which finds mention in the Vedas and Puranas, at the Ram Mandir complex.

Noting how soil from different religious places and water from various rivers has reached Ayodhya for temple construction, Mr Modi said that Lord Ram and Ram Katha are revered in various parts of the country and other countries, including Nepal, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, and even finds mention in Iran and China.

Nine shilas (bricks), including the main "koornashila", were placed at the "grabha griha" out of the 100 picked for the "bhumi puja" ceremony out of the 2.75 lakh shilas sent by devotees during the Ram Janambhumi movement.

Police stalls Opp. meet at Farooq's residence

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, AUG. 5

The authorities on Wednesday stalled the Opposition leaders' move to meet here to deliberate on the prevailing situation and formalise a joint strategy on issues, a year after Jammu and Kashmir was stripped of special status and split up into two Union Territories.

The meeting was scheduled to take place at the residence of former chief minister and NC president Farooq Abdullah along Srinagar's high-security Gupkar Road. However, the J&K police, with the help of CRPF, sealed the area by laying Concertina razor wire and erecting steel barricades at all entry and exit points to foil the meet. A spokesman of the NC said, "Evidently, the government has abandoned any pretence of being democratic."

CPI(M) leader Muhammad Yousuf Tarigami, who was among the invitees said, "It would have been after months of incarceration and denial of liberty that we could sit somewhere to open our

India snubs China for comments on Art 370

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 5

India on Wednesday snubbed China and asked it to refrain from interference in India's internal affairs, just hours after Beijing termed the revoking of Article 370 a year ago as "illegal and invalid", saying China had no locus standi on the issue. Wednesday marked the completion of one year of the abrogation of special status to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370.

"We have noted the

comments of the Chinese MFA (ministry of foreign affairs) spokesperson on the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The Chinese side has no locus standi whatsoever on this matter and is advised not to comment on the internal affairs of other nations," ministry of external affairs spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said on Wednesday evening.

"China follows closely the situation in the Kashmir region. China's position on the Kashmir issue is clear and consistent. This issue is a dis-

pute leftover from history between Pakistan and India. That is an objective fact as laid out by the UN Charter, UN Security Council resolutions and the bilateral agreements between Pakistan and India. Any unilateral change to the status quo is illegal and invalid. This issue should be properly resolved peacefully through dialogue and consultations between the parties concerned," Chinese MFA spokesperson Wang Wenbin was quoted by media as saying at a briefing in Beijing.

ference here on Monday that the party would be holding a protest rally on August 5, were taken into preventive custody.

Also, large contingents of policemen were deployed outside the residences of politicians belonging to both mainstream and separatist camps across the Valley. The security had been beefed up further in Jammu region.

hearts, inquire about each other's welfare, discuss the issues and decide how best we could help the people towards coming out of the miseries they undergo."

Srinagar on Wednesday virtually remained under curfew whereas strict security restrictions were imposed in other major towns of the Valley. The authorities said that the restrictions on the movement of people are neces-

sary in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The police, apart from denying the Opposition leaders' the chance to converse for real, foiled the PDP's plan to hold a demonstration here against the abrogation of Article 370 and bifurcation of J&K.

Several mainstream activists, including PDP's Rouf Bhat who had announced at a press con-

Bihar flood situation worsens



An aerial view of the flood-affected Darbhanga district of Bihar. The flood situation in Bihar deteriorated on Wednesday as waters from overflowing rivers originating in Nepal inundated fresh areas and the number of affected people rose to 66.60 lakh across 16 districts. Chief minister Nitish Kumar made an aerial survey of the affected areas of north Bihar and visited a village in Darbhanga district. — *PTI*

India sees highest recoveries in a day

Recovery rate rises to 67.19%

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

India on Wednesday recorded the highest ever single day recoveries in the last 24 hours. With this, the recovery rate has reached a new high of 67.19 per cent and continues to improve each day. The recoveries till now total up to 12,82,215, more than twice the active cases.

The country has tested more than 6 lakh samples for the second consecutive day. The women and child development ministry (WCD), meanwhile, instructed mothers to initiate and continue to breastfeed their infants as per guidelines even if they have tested positive for Covid-19.

The country has registered 52, 509 new novel coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, taking the tally to over 19 lakh, while the toll rose to 39,795 with 857 more deaths. The total number of cases climbed to 19,08,254.

According to the health ministry, the aggressive testing along with ramped up hospital infrastructure has ensured the increasing recovery rate which has improved from 63 per cent to 67 per cent

Cardiac surgeon dies of Covid-19

Kolkata: A 36-year-old cardiac surgeon has died of Covid-19 in Kolkata. Dr Nitish Kumar was diagnosed with Covid-19 in mid-July and was undergoing treatment at a private hospital where he worked. Dr Kumar got infected around 25 days ago. He died on Tuesday but had no comorbid condition or any other illness. — *PTI*

in the last 14 days. "With such consistent increase in recoveries, the gap between recovered patients and active Covid-19 cases has reached nearly seven lakh. Due to the record highest daily recoveries, the active cases have reduced to 5,86,244 (less than 5,86,298 recorded yesterday) and all are under medical supervision. The Case Fatality Rate stands at 2.09 per cent today," said the health ministry.

With 6,19,652 tests conducted in the last 24 hours, the cumulative testing as on date has reached 2,14,84,402. The Tests Per Million has seen a sharp increase to 15568.

Heavy rain hits Mumbai local, Best services hard

Mumbai, Aug. 5: Incessant heavy rain lashed parts of financial capital Mumbai and Maharashtra's Thane and Palghar districts from Tuesday night, throwing local train and bus services out of gear due to water-logging on railway tracks and arterial roads, officials said on Wednesday.

The NDRF and RPF rescued 290 passengers from two local trains stranded on flooded tracks between the CSMT and Sandhurst Road station here on Wednesday. Two local trains came to a standstill in chest-high water around 4 pm.

While the NDRF rescued 39 passengers using inflated boats, the RPF rescued 251 passengers, he said.

The bus services of Best were also hit due to water-logging on arterial roads. The services were diverted on more than 30 routes, including two locations in Thane district, till 9 am. — *PTI*

■ Truth behind death in unusual conditions must come out: SC

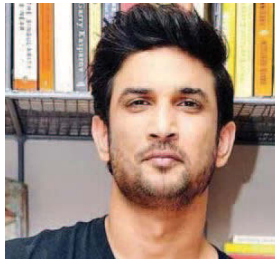
In a blow to Maha govt, CBI to take over Sushant death probe

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

The Centre on Wednesday gave its approval for a CBI probe into the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput on a recommendation by the Bihar government as the Supreme Court said the truth behind the death of a gifted and talented artiste under unusual circumstances must come out.

As the death of the 34-year-old actor in Mumbai on June 14 snowballed into a full-blown political row, the move for a CBI probe did not go down well with the ruling Shiv Sena-led coalition in Maharashtra whose NCP minister Nawab Malik raised jurisdictional issues on Bihar's plea. But Bihar's ruling JD(U) said the Centre's nod will ensure justice to the dead actor and expose the dark underbelly of Bollywood.

According to sources, a notification has been issued by the department of personnel and training



Sushant Singh Rajput

(DoPT), paving the way for the CBI probe in Rajput's death case. A copy of the notification issued by the Centre has been sent to the CBI, asking it to probe the case.

Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court was apprised by the Centre that it has accepted the Bihar government's recommendation for a CBI probe.

A very unfortunate incident has taken place. A gifted and talented artiste has passed away in circumstances which are unusual. Now, the circumstances in which this death took place needs to

be inquired into, a bench headed by Justice Hrishikesh Roy said during the hearing held through video conferencing.

The court was hearing the plea of Chakraborty, 28, seeking transfer of the Bihar Police FIR.

It directed Rajput's father, Bihar and Maharashtra governments to respond within three days to the plea.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) meanwhile recorded statement of Rajput's manager Samuel Miranda. The officials are probing the alleged laundering of funds that were supposed to have been transferred fraudulently from the dead actor's account, as per his father.

"We will soon record statement of Chakraborty and the statement of all those questioned will be compared. The financial reports and account transactions have also been sought from the banks," said an officer.

BMC refuses to free Bihar cop from quarantine

Mumbai: The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has turned down the request from Bihar police to exempt their IPS officer Vinay Kumar from home quarantine. Instead, it has asked him to make use of digital platforms to conduct his investigation proceedings in the Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput death case.

Sanjay Singh, Patna's IGP, had written a letter to the BMC seeking exemption of home quarantine for Mr Kumar. However, the civic body had shot back a letter to him expressing its inability to do so citing the Covid-19 situation prevalent in Bihar.

Mr Kumar was quarantined by the BMC soon after his arrival in Mumbai on Sunday.

J&K L-G quits, may get fresh Central posting

New Delhi, Aug. 5: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant-governor G.C. Murmu abruptly resigned on Wednesday, officials said.

His resignation came on the day the Union Territory marked the first anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, which scrapped Jammu and Kashmir's special status.

The 60-year-old former IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre had on October 29 last year taken over as the first L-G of the Union Territory after the state of Jammu and Kashmir was downgraded and sliced into two UTs, the other one being Ladakh.

There was no official word on the reasons for the resignation of



G.C. Murmu

Murmu, a 1985-batch IAS officer, who has served as Principal Secretary to Narendra Modi during his tenure as Gujarat chief minister.

He was a secretary in the ministry of finance at the time of his appointment as the lieutenant-governor.

Highly-placed sources said that Murmu was likely to be given a new assignment at the Centre. There was no immediate information as to who would succeed Murmu as the J&K lieutenant-governor. — *PTI*

Nun rape case: SC rejects Bishop's plea for discharge

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a plea by former Bishop Franco Mulakkal seeking to be discharged from a nun rape case.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde while dismissing Bishop Mulakkal's plea for discharge from the case, however, said, "we are not saying anything on merit but we are dismissing on discharge".

Mulakkal is facing trial for allegedly raping a nun several times between 2014 and 2016 in Kerala.

He had moved the top court for his discharge from the case, after his plea to close the case was rejected both by the trial court in Kottayam and later by Kerala High Court.

Mulakkal was based Jalandhar in Punjab when allegations surfaced against him.

The former Bishop had claimed that he is innocent and was implicated by the said nun after he questioned her financial dealings.

This is the first case of a high profile priest being accused of raping a nun.

The Bishop has been charged with rape, wrongful confinement, and criminal intimidation.

The nun has said that she approached police after the church authorities did not act on her

EWS quota plea sent to Constitution Bench

New Delhi: The Supreme Court referred to a five-judge Constitution Bench a batch of petitions challenging 10% reservation for economically weaker sections amongst the general category on the grounds that it breached the 50% ceiling on the reservation put by the top court by its 1992 judgment by a nine-judge bench known as Indira Sawhney case. A top court bench comprising Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justices R. Subhash Reddy and B.R. Gavai referred the bunch of petitions, including the transfer petitions, to be heard by a five-judge Constitution bench at a later date.

repeated complaints. She and other nuns live in the same hostel alleged intimidation and pressure from the church authorities to end the case which was giving a bad name to the church.

Mulakkal was removed as the Bishop of Jalandhar after police registered a case on a complaint filed by the 43-year old nun with the Kottayam police in June 2018. He was arrested by the Kerala police in September 2018.

Longest religious dispute finally comes to an end

■ **Continued from Page 1** consolidation" would benefit the Congress. This was described as one of his worst mistakes.

On July 1, 1989 a title suit was instituted on behalf of the deity Bhagwan Shri Ram Virajman and the birthplace of Lord Ram (Asthana Shri Ram Janmabhoomi). More title suits were filed and on July 10, 1989, all suits were transferred to the Allahabad high court.

In September 1990 then BJP chief L.K. Advani took out a nationwide rathayatra, which eventual-

ly led to the Babri Masjid's demolition on December 6, 1992. Communal riots erupted across India on December 8 and continued till January 1993, with Mumbai as its epicentre. The Centre set up the Liberhan Commission on December 16, 1992 to probe the mosque's destruction.

Before the Allahabad high court could hear the matter, the Supreme Court said in the Ismail Faruqui case in October 1994 that the mosque was not integral to Islam. In 2002, the high court began hearings to determine who owned

the disputed site. In 2003, the Supreme Court directed no religious activity be allowed at the acquired land till the high court decided the title suit.

On September 30, 2010 the Allahabad high court in a 2-1 majority ruling

■ **IN 2018,** the Supreme Court started hearing all civil appeals. In 2019 it made one last effort for mediation, failing which from August 6, 2019 it began day-to-day hearings.

In 2016, BJP leader Subramanian Swamy filed a Supreme Court petition seeking building of a temple at the disputed site. In 2017, the court suggested an "out of court" settlement.

In 2018, the Supreme Court started hearing all civil appeals. In 2019 it made one last effort for

said the disputed site be split between the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara and Ram Lalla. This was challenged in the Supreme Court, which in 2011 stayed the high court ruling.

On February 5, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the formation of a 15-member Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra to oversee construction of a Ram Mandir at the erstwhile disputed site.

THE ASIAN AGE

6 AUGUST 2020

Ditching secular legacy won't protect Congress

Political expediency cannot be blamed for All India Congress Committee general secretary Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra's volunteering to pledge her support to the Ram temple project in Ayodhya and calling it a symbol of national unity. Even political novices are aware of the energy and efforts Hindutva forces have spent for the project, and the blood of innocent people they caused to spill across the nation after Lal Krishna Advani mounted the "Ramrath" in the 1990s. Even a distant observer of Nehruvian legacy, leave alone his political heirs, will not miss the objection the first Prime Minister of India raised when President Rajendra Prasad chose to attend the consecration of the renovated Somnath temple in Gujarat, for the celebration of a community is rightfully theirs, not of a secular state nor its head. That the temple is coming up on a spot where Babri Masjid once stood, and the apex court had sanctioned its construction there only after calling the vandalism at the Masjid, including damage done to it in 1934, placing of idols under its central dome in 1949 and its destruction in 1992, "egregious violations of rule of law", would have been reason enough for the Congress leader to hold back her horses, instead of joining forces with those who are out to display "triumphalist bigotry", as another senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor would put it.

Ms Vadra and those in the Congress who smart at being not invited for the programme in Ayodhya owe the people an explanation how their interpretation of national unity as seen in the Ayodhya project squares with the 'the ideals Lord Ram epitomises'

Narasimha Rao, then Prime Minister and Congress president, watched in silence when karsevaks razed the minarets in 1992. The Congress' attempts were clearly to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare, but it failed, miserably and naturally. The party that had placed itself at the secular liberal side of the polity lost pathetically when it chose to run the rightist course, for the people had a better lineup to represent that ideology to opt for.

Ms Vadra and those in the Congress who smart at being not invited for the programme in Ayodhya owe the people an explanation how their interpretation of national unity as seen in the Ayodhya project squares with the "the ideals Lord Ram epitomises: justice for all, righteous conduct, fairness and firmness in all dealings, moral rectitude and courage", as Shashi Tharoor would put it. It is time the Congress realised that secularism is not a standalone idea; it's very much part of a larger project which seeks to recognise every human being shorn of all the artificial classifications such as caste, religion, sex, region and so on. The party has to make a choice whether it sides with that grand project. Otherwise, the *bhajang*s heard at Ayodhya could be the requiem for the grand old party of Indian politics as well.

IPL must drop China firms

The IPL will have to look for a title sponsor now that the Chinese mobile phone maker Vivo is pulling out of the 2020 season. Otto Bismarck said, "Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable," and Indian cricket seems to have taken to that path of reconciling competing interests. To say politics and sport must be kept separate is idealistic but it hardly applies to the current situation in which each Indian is sacrificing a lot in the time of the pandemic. Furthermore, he is sacrificing a lot in terms of nationalistic pride when the dragon is breathing fire on the border. China is, in fact, an aggressor now occupying chunks of Indian territories across the LAC.

Globally, pro sport sees itself as an entertainment industry and cricket in India is very much in that category. But it was extremely poor form on the part of a cash-rich league run by the BCCI to be seen to be so willing to accommodate Chinese sponsors on the premise that they are long term supporters who should be retained because, come what may, the show must go on. Not just Vivo, but Paytm, Alibaba and many others supporting the eight teams are also part of the game. The league must drop all of them and not wait conveniently for Chinese sponsors to walk out on their own.

TV rights and sponsorships drive the engine of modern sport more than spectators and jingoism. The IPL, an international smorgasbord barring only players from Pakistan, is more a medium of tribal loyalties than flag-waving nationalism. Even so, the IPL has to behave responsibly and always in the larger national interest. Sacrificing a little money is the least it can do now. The BCCI is morally obliged to filter out all Chinese companies from the forthcoming IPL edition lest it be seen as a selfish beast uncaring of the national mood when India is facing a Chinese threat.

THE ASIAN AGE

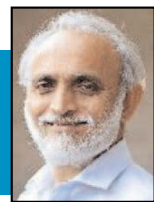
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Subhani



Puja at Ayodhya: Modi's bid to seal BJP's future?



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

It will be futile to bewail the violation of secularism with Prime Minister Narendra Modi participating in the "bhoomi puja" of the Ram Mandir a little after Wednesday noon. Secularism has been squarely checkmated time and again from the 1989 Lok Sabha election onwards. The question now is how this would benefit the future of the BJP and Mr Modi himself.

Will Wednesday's ceremony ensure that the BJP and Mr Modi will return to power in 2024? The BJP and Mr Modi would like to believe that it will, and they have taken all the pains to prove that the temple was now happening because the party had fought for it, turned a local property dispute in obscure Ayodhya into a political issue of national importance. But he did not say any of this in his address to the limited gathering at the Ram Janmabhoomi site after the foundation stone-laying ceremony.

He waxed eloquent about the Ram of Valmiki and Tulsī, of Kabir and Nanak, of Mahatma Gandhi, though he deftly inserted the Hindutva narrative of undoing a historical injustice, which was a half-truth. He tried to project Ram as the symbol of national culture, of inclusiveness and modernity. But it was simply rhetoric in the service of BJP politics. He was careful enough to avoid mentioning the other part of the Ayodhya settlement as directed by the Supreme Court in its November 2019 ruling — the allotment of land for Muslims to build a mosque in the place of the Babri Masjid that stood at the temple site. Obviously, the

Prime Minister did not want to dilute the "Hindu civilisation and culture" line of his argument.

The dispute was settled in favour of the Hindu side by the Supreme Court and not by the Narendra Modi government. The BJP leaders know that they cannot take credit for what the court had done, because if they were to do it that would mean that the Modi government had influenced or arm-twisted the highest court in the land. But the non-government trust set up to build the temple as mandated by the court was handpicked by the BJP, as is evident in the choice of the former principal secretary to Prime Minister Modi as head of the panel of the temple construction committee, and to express their gratitude to the BJP and the Prime Minister, the members of the trust asked Mr Modi to be the chief guest at the stone-laying ceremony.

The BJP government in Uttar Pradesh under chief minister Yogi Adityanath had walked the extra mile to conduct the temple construction ceremony to make the bold declaration that this was a BJP event and that the temple trust was almost like a fig leaf to keep the separation between the BJP's Modi government and the tem-

Did the BJP ever dare fight an election on the Ayodhya issue? It did not because its leaders, including Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani, were not too sure that it would pay dividends

ple, between state and religion.

As Mr Modi and his colleagues project themselves to be admirers of the Constitution as the supreme philosophy of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, they are keen to maintain the fictional distance between the government and the Hindu faith. Mr Modi might have participated in the temple ritual like a believer — and he has every right to do so as a private citizen — but he did not keep it as an affair in the private sphere of Hindus, whether they are in India or abroad. The Prime Minister seemed to have got carried away by the emotion of the moment and said the temple marks a happy moment nationally and globally. Of course, he meant Hindus. He spoke as Prime Minister and for the nation, and he seemed to genuinely believe that Ram as a national symbol was acceptable to the followers of all religions in the country. But he would not want to say it because then he would lose the Hindu base of his party, and neither he nor the party can afford to do so.

Did the BJP ever dare fight an election on the Ayodhya issue? It did not because its leaders, including Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani, were not too sure that it would pay dividends. Despite the 1990 rath yatra of Mr Advani, the party did not gain much in the 1991 Lok Sabha election, nor did it forge far ahead in the 1996, 1998 and 1999 general elections. After the defeats in 2004 and 2009, the party again

fought two general elections in 2014 and 2019 under the redoubtable Hindutva icon, Mr Modi. But it still did not dare fight the election on the issue of the temple in Ayodhya. It can be argued that the BJP leaders displayed sufficient political savvy in keeping silent on the temple issue, along with that of the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. They were not whether they would be able to romp home based on these two evocative questions. Mr Amit Shah, when he was in charge of the BJP's election campaign in Uttar Pradesh in 2014 and as president of the party in 2019, followed the rule-book as it were. He said that the Ayodhya issue had to be settled either through mutual consent between the two communities — the Hindus and Muslims — or through the court's decision. Neither he nor his party said that if they get a parliamentary majority, they would bring in the necessary legislation to enable the construction of the temple.

The sense of triumph of Hindu nationalism is unmistakable, and it is useful to remember that since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, religion has been the defining characteristic of national politics in many countries, in Russia and Turkey, and also partially in the United States of Donald Trump. India is following a global trend. The question is to see how it will play itself out because the politics of religion is generally based on hatred. It is sure to come in the way of India's economic progress and social well-being. Mr Modi wants modernism as well as divisive religious nationalism. But history shows that religion is beautiful and sublime if it is not made a national political issue. However, the BJP has chosen, like many others elsewhere, to make it a national issue.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

UNLIKELY UNITY

Just like M.A. Jinnah's pious call of equality for all citizens, irrespective of religion, cannot bear fruit in neighbouring Pakistan the foundations of which are laid on religious acrimony, so also the Ram temple, built on the land where an eight century old mosque once stood, whose demolition caused pain to our Muslim brethren and threatened to erase their identity, would not lead to unity and amity for all. It is especially ironical to hear leaders like L.K. Advani say it will lead to "exclusion of none", since Mr Advani it was who pioneered the start of the whole episode.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata

TRUST KASHMIRIS

APROPOS THE EDITORIAL, "Repression, mistrust rule Valley 1 yr later" (5 August), the double lockdown, complete absence of a political process, and the new definitions for the eligibility for domicile in J&K have not won the government any friends among the people. Silencing Kashmiris cannot be the strategy of a democratic India. The need of the hour is to win the hearts of Kashmiris and only trust begets trust in return. Trust Kashmiris.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

TIPPING POINT?

THE "BHOOMIPUJAN" for the Ram temple in Ayodhya, done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the serious Covid-19 situation amid a collapse of the Indian economy with China and Pakistan threatening the borders, is worrying, more so because the people seem to be lapping up this gimmick of his for hoped-for benefits in the afterlife. They seem to be enjoying this break from the coronavirus anxiety. But not all people are fooled. If the economy takes a turn for the worse, will this event spell the beginning of the end of the BJP?

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Aakar Patel



How the media, like politics, has become bigoted and intolerant

The mainstream media refers to the established houses of journalism, mostly newspapers but to some extent also television. Newer sources of media like websites or apps that don't have a physical presence in the form of a printed product or broadcast channel are not yet thought to be mainstream media even though some of them have quite a deep presence. In India, websites like *The Wire* and *Scroll* have been around for about a decade or so and have large readerships. However, these new places don't have the size of reporting resources that the mainstream media does. And at least so far, they haven't been able to fill the space that the mainstream media is rapidly giving up. The media space in India is funded primarily by advertising. The reader or viewer pays very little by way of subscription and our newspapers are the cheapest in the world. But the share of print in the overall advertising pie is shrink-

ing. In 2019, for the first time, digital jumped over print in India, and by a lot. Digital got 27 per cent of advertising money spent in India, while print got 22 per cent. Television remained number one at 43 per cent, but both TV and print were expected to shrink further in 2020 and give up share to digital. The Covid crisis has accelerated this process. We should understand that "digital" means essentially two companies, Google and Facebook, which now take more advertising money in India than the Times of India or Hindustan Times or any other large Indian newspaper. This process will continue, and newspapers will continue to fade away. This trend is visible and is happening before our eyes. There is a second trend that is also visible and has also come before our eyes. It's that the media has taken a majoritarian, Hindutva edge. What is meant by Hindutva or majoritarianism? The idea that one part of society is privileged and entitled to primacy. Conversely,

that the others must exist on sufferance and have to be tolerated. Of course this has happened hand in hand with a change in the political language and narrative of the State in India. During the Congress period, whether or not you agreed with the party, the fact is that the tone and tenor was inclusive. It was not trying to divide Indians on the basis of the background they were born into. The BJP exists precisely because it was successful at mobilising on the basis of division. It has nothing else that is markedly different from any other party except the fact that it is willing to be openly bigoted. This view is now mainstream and acceptable in the media. It's acceptable to blame one religion for spreading a virus that has infected the entire world. It is fine to look away when members of another religion go ahead with their events despite the same threat of spread. The media can look away today from the government's failures at the actual business of governance. The enemy occupies land that 3,000

Indians died fighting to defend in 1962. But we are being regaled with shlokas about the landing of five warplanes. Are they going to be used to kick the invader out? No, the story is merely that they have arrived. Last Saturday brought the news that there was 70 per cent more demand for MNREGA work in July 2020 than July 2019. More than three crore households had asked for it, meaning that at least 15 crore Indians were dependent on it. Another piece of news was that the government was considering extending the "moratorium" on defaulting loans. Companies had been allowed to skip EMIs on their term loans and individuals with house and automobile loans had also been given this opportunity to not pay now and pay with more interest later. The finance minister said it was possible this facility would be extended because of demand from some sectors that were still, four months after the lockdown began, unable to make their regular pay-

ments. Automobile and two-wheeler sales in India have been declining year-on-year for 18 of the last 19 months. Commercial vehicle sales have not grown since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014, meaning that industrial growth has been hammered. But the media is focused on the suicide of one young man. The misuse by the Prime Minister's Office of the Enforcement Directorate even in this matter is not a problem or issue of concern. The story is that people of one religion have captured the entertainment industry. A decade ago, even though that sentiment might have been felt in large parts of the media, it was not expressed. There was a reserve and there was a culture that adhered to the principles enshrined in the Constitution. That we were a diverse and secular nation. That has ended now in politics, and it has ended in the media too.

Aakar Patel is a senior journalist and columnist

IN BRIEF

Tropic storm Isaias whips up, 6 killed

Windsor (US): At least six people were killed as Tropical Storm Isaias spawned tornadoes and dumped rain Tuesday along the US East Coast after making landfall as a hurricane in North Carolina, where it caused floods and fires that displaced dozens of people. Two people died when Isaias spun off a tornado that struck a North Carolina mobile home park. Another person died in Pennsylvania when their vehicle was overtaken by water and swept downstream. Two others were killed by falling trees toppled by the storm in Maryland and New York City, and a sixth person died in Delaware when a tree branch fell on them, authorities said.

Brazil firemen rush to stop Wetland fire

Pocon: A tractor cuts a fire-break through the vegetation of the Pantanal, the world's biggest tropical wetlands, as firefighters race to contain the blazes that have been devastating one of the most biodiverse regions on Earth. The Brazilian Pantanal suffered a record 1,684 fires last month, triple the number from July 2019, according to satellite images. It was the worst month on record for fires in the region, which sits on the southern edge of the Amazon rainforest and stretches from Brazil into Paraguay and Bolivia. Firefighters have been working around the clock to contain the blazes, with the help of residents of the city of Poconé and the surrounding area.

Cruise in Norway docks amid virus

Copenhagen: A cruise ship with 123 passengers on board and a crew of 85 docked on Wednesday in the Norwegian harbour of Bodø but no one could disembark after a former passenger from Denmark tested positive for the coronavirus upon returning home. "We take the situation very seriously," Mayor Ida Pinnerød told Norwegian broadcaster NRK, adding that authorities were in contact with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health on whether the remaining passengers should be tested. The crew will be tested. In a statement, ship owner SeaDream Yacht Club said "we sincerely hope that there is no Covid-19 on board, and we are not aware of any other guests or crew who are infected or have any symptoms, but we are taking all necessary precautions."

Major fire breaks out in Ajman, UAE

Ajman: A massive fire broke out in a fruits and vegetables market in Ajman, UAE. The fire broke out in the emirate's new industrial area. Several fire engines were seen rushing to the spot to put out the blaze. The Ajman civil defence had urged motorists to take alternative routes. "Ajman firefighters have cordoned off the site and used water and foam in extinguishing the blazes which have broken out in many shops therein," sources told the local media outlets. "Four civil defence centres are involved in fighting the big inferno," they said. No one was reported to be injured in the mishap. The cause of the fire was not ascertained.

SEVEN DEAD, 60 INFECTED BY NEW VIRUS IN CHINA

Beijing, Aug. 5: A new infectious disease caused by a tick-borne virus has killed seven people and infected 60 others in China, official media here reported on Wednesday, warning about the possibility of its human-to-human transmission. More than 37 people in East China's Jiangsu Province contracted with the SFTS Virus in the first half of the year.

Later, 23 people were found to have been infected in East China's Anhui province, state-run Global Times quoted media reports. A woman from Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu, who suffered from the virus showed onset of symptoms such as fever, coughing. Doctors found a decline of leukocyte, blood platelet inside of her body. After a month of treatment, she was discharged from the hospital.

At least seven people have died in Anhui and East China's Zhejiang province due to the virus, the report said. SFTS Virus is not a new virus. China has isolated pathogen of the virus in 2011, and it belongs to the Bunyavirus category

Beirut blast toll over 100, PM seeks help

2,700 tons of ammonium nitrate stored at port since its seizure in 2014 were triggered by fireworks

Global leaders reach out to help Lebanon

LEBANON'S MAIN GRAIN SUPPLY TO LAST A MONTH

Beirut: Lebanon's main grain silo at Beirut port was destroyed in a blast along with the wheat inside, leaving the nation with less than a month's reserves of the grain although other vessels with supplies are on the way, the economy minister said on Wednesday.

Raoul Nehme said, a day after Tuesday's devastating blast that Lebanon needed reserves for at least three months to ensure food security and was looking at other storage areas.

He said reserves now stood at "a bit less than a month". The explosion was the most powerful ever to rip through Beirut.

— Agencies

Beirut, Aug. 5: Russia's emergency officials say the country will send five plane loads of aid to Beirut after an explosion in the Lebanese capital's port killed at least 100 people and injured thousands on Tuesday.

Russia's Ministry for Emergency Situations will send rescuers, medical workers, a makeshift hospital and a lab for coronavirus testing to Lebanon.

International aid in the form of emergency workers and medical personnel is heading to Lebanon a day after a massive explosion devastated Beirut's port, killing at least 100 people and wounding thousands.

France says it is sending two planes with dozens of emergency workers, a mobile medical unit and 15 tons of aid.

French President Emmanuel Macron's office says the aid should allow for the treatment of some 500 victims.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday offered condolences and medical support to Lebanon after a huge blast at Beirut port devastated entire neighbourhoods of the city.

Tehran "is ready to offer medical and medicinal aid and help treat the injured and other assistance", Rouhani wrote in a message to his Lebanese counterpart, according to the government website.

Qatar began flying field hospitals and medical aid to Beirut on Wednesday, to ease pressure on Lebanon's strained medical system after the previous day's devastating explosions.

— Agencies



An aerial view shows the massive damage done to Beirut ports grain silos and the area around it on Wednesday, one day after a mega-blast tore through the harbour in the heart of the Lebanese capital with the force of an earthquake, killing more than 100 people and injuring over 4,000.

— AFP

Trump: Generals suspect an attack

Washington, Aug. 5: President Donald Trump said US military generals have told him that they "seem to feel" the massive explosion that rocked Beirut on Tuesday, killing at least 70 people, was a "terrible attack" likely caused by a bomb.

Trump was asked why he called it an attack and not an accident, especially since Lebanese officials say they have not determined the cause of the explosion.

He told reporters at the White House: "It would seem like it based on the explosion. I met with some of our great generals and they just seem to feel that it was. This was not a — some kind of a manufacturing explosion type of an event. ... They seem to think it was an attack. It was a bomb of some kind, yes." Trump offered condolences to the victims and said the United States

stood ready to assist Lebanon. "It looks like a terrible attack," he said. A Pentagon spokesman declined to comment on the matter Tuesday night, referring questions back to the White House. The explosion flattened much of a port and damaged buildings across the capital, sending a giant mushroom cloud into the sky. In addition to those who died, more than 3,000

other people were injured, with bodies buried in the rubble, officials said. The cause of the blast was not immediately known, but initial reports suggested a fire had detonated a warehouse at the port. Abbas Ibrahim, chief of Lebanese General Security, said it might have been caused by highly explosive material that was confiscated from a ship some time ago and stored at the port.

— AP

Mar Mikhail, Beirut's 'beating heart' snuffed out by blast

Beirut, Aug. 5: Heritage buildings, trendy bars and hip art galleries, all gutted: the vibrant Mar Mikhail district, once one of Beirut's gems, is now a wasteland of broken glass and destroyed cars.

A short walk from Lebanon's main port, where a huge blast on Tuesday flattened buildings and killed more than 100 people, the bustling nightlife hotspot was among the hardest-hit

areas. Today it is unrecognisable even to those who grew up there. "Mar Mikhail, was Beirut's beating heart," said Lina Daoud, a 45-year-old volunteer distributing food and water. "Now, I feel like I'm entering an unfamiliar place," she said. "I never thought there would come a day... when I would see Mar Mikhail like this." Inside a damaged house

more than a century old, Michel Asaad gathered shards of glass in a bucket. In a room that looked like it was hit by a tornado, a toppled statue of the Virgin Mary had been resurrected — but was missing its head. "I've lived in this house my entire life," said Asaad, 53. "I could have died here." "Worse than the war," Asaad pointed to other

architectural gems that gave the street its traditional character, popular with Lebanese and foreigners alike. The oldest among them have totally collapsed, while those that sustained less damage now have craters in their walls or are missing roofs. Beirut's governor has said the blast made nearly 3,00,000 people homeless. Asaad said he was "only one of the hundreds, if not

thousands, of people" affected in the neighbourhood. Mar Mikhail's concrete pavement was carpeted with broken glass that cracked underfoot as residents streamed in to check on their properties on Wednesday morning. Mangled vehicles with air bags poking out of broken windows lined the sidewalk, their owners waiting for them to be lifted. Dozens of people drag-

ging heavy suitcases made their way up a steep road, joining the exodus from a district rendered almost uninhabitable. Rescue workers carried an elderly woman out of her house on a wooden chair from her living room. Another frail and elderly woman pushed past crowds, four heavy tote bags dangling from her thin arms as debris fell overhead.

— AFP

Video suggests explosions in N. Korean city

Seoul, Aug. 5: A video shows plumes of black smoke rising from a North Korean city near the border with China amid reports that deadly explosions occurred there earlier this week.

There has been no official word from North Korea or China about what happened in the North Korean city of Hyesan on Monday. But South Korean media and outside monitoring groups reported that gas explosions in a residential area left dozens of people dead or injured.

The video acquired by the AP shows orange flames and black smoke shooting into the sky from Hyesan as loud explosion-like sounds are heard. A few people can be seen watching the scene from the Chinese side of the border. The video was provided by Wang Bo, a travel agent who said he shot it from a park in the Chinese border town of Changbai.

"I just saw explosions and there were a lot of onlookers who were looking in that direction. We don't know the reason why there were explosions," Wang said. Wang, who said he has previously visited Hyesan, said the explosions happened not far from the city's orphanage and tourism office.



Video provided by Wang Bo via AP Video, plumes of smoke and fire can be seen rising from Hyesan, a North Korean city.

— AP

US to send high-level team to Taiwan

Taipei, Aug 5: The United States announced on Wednesday its highest-level visit to Taiwan since it switched diplomatic recognition to China in 1979, a move Beijing blasted as a threat to "peace and stability". The visit, headed by health chief Alex Azar, comes as relations between the world's two biggest powers plunge to historic lows.

"This marks... the first Cabinet member to visit in six years, and the highest

level visit by a US Cabinet official since 1979," said Washington's de facto embassy, the American Institute in Taiwan, with no date yet given for the visit. Washington remains the leading arms supplier to the island but has historically been cautious in holding official contacts with it.

Beijing views Taiwan as its own territory — vowing to one day seize it — and bristles at any moves

● **RELATIONS HAVE** warmed dramatically under President Donald Trump, who has used embracing democratic Taiwan more closely as a way to hit back at authoritarian Beijing as he clashes with China on a host of issues, including trade and coronavirus.

by other countries to recognise or communicate with Taipei. "China firmly opposes

official exchanges between the US and Taiwan," Wang Wenbin, a spokesman for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said as he called for the visit to be cancelled.

"We urge the US to abide by the one-China principle... to avoid seriously endangering Sino-US relations, as well as peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait." Taiwan said Azar would meet President Tsai Ing-wen. "(The) timely visit is

another testament to the strong Taiwan-US partnership based on our longstanding friendship and shared values," Tsai wrote on Twitter.

Relations have warmed dramatically under President Donald Trump, who has used embracing democratic Taiwan more closely as a way to hit back at authoritarian Beijing as he clashes with China on a host of issues, including trade and coronavirus.

— AFP

High voter turnout in Covid-19 delayed elections in Sri Lanka

Colombo, Aug.5: Sri Lankans turned out in large numbers to vote in parliamentary elections on Wednesday despite the coronavirus pandemic, as the ruling Rajapaksa brothers sought a fresh mandate to cement their grip on power.

The parliamentary election had been postponed twice due to the virus epi-

demic, but finally got under way at 7 am (0130 GMT) with strict hygiene measures in place to prevent the spread of the disease.

The siblings are seeking a two-thirds majority to roll back constitutional changes introduced by the previous administration that limit the president's powers.

Analysts expect them to easily secure a majority in the 225-seat parliament. First results are expected by Thursday evening, with the final tally due late Friday. People began lining up outside polling stations even before they opened across the island, where 16.23 million of the 21 million residents are eligible to vote.

Turnout was up to 30 percent in most parts of the South Asian country in the first three hours, election officials said.

"There were about 20 people ahead of me in the queue, but it took nearly an hour to vote," a woman in Kaduwela suburb in the capital Colombo said, referring to health measures at her booth.

— AFP

ROYAL | VICTORY

Legal team for ANL, which denies allegations had resisted the application

Meghan wins plea to protect her friends

London, Aug. 5: Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, on Wednesday won an attempt to keep five of her friends anonymous in her ongoing High Court legal action in London over breach of privacy against The Mail on Sunday newspaper owners Associated Newspaper Limited (ANL).

Lawyers for Markle, who turned 39 on Tuesday, had argued for the friends who gave an interview to People's magazine to

remain anonymous in reports of the proceedings. The legal team for ANL, which denies all allegations, had resisted the application.

"I have concluded that for the time being at least the court should grant the claimant the orders she seeks, the effect of which will be to confer protection on the sources' identities, said Justice Mark Warby in a ruling at the Royal Courts of Justice.



Meghan Markle

"That is confidential information, the protection of which at this stage is necessary in the interests

of the administration of justice. This is an interim decision," he noted.

The People's article referenced in court involved the former actress' friends speaking out against her alleged bullying and they have so far only been identified in confidential court documents, according to The Daily Telegraph.

Markle, the wife of Prince Harry, says her friends gave the interview without her knowledge,

and denies a claim made by ANL that she "caused or permitted" the article to be published in People's.

The UK court battle revolves around the reproduction of sections of a "private and confidential" handwritten note Markle sent to her estranged father, 75-year-old Thomas Markle, in August 2018.

The focus is on five articles in total two in the Mail on Sunday and three on MailOnline's

which were published in February 2019 and reproduced parts of the letter.

Markle is seeking damages from ANL for alleged misuse of private information, copyright infringement and breach of the UK Data Protection Act.

Publishers ANL wholly deny the allegations, including the claim that the letter was edited in any way that changed its meaning, and have pledged to strongly contest the case.

— PTI

"Whether you call it Vote by Mail or Absentee Voting, in Florida the election system is Safe and Secure, Tried and True. Florida's Voting system has been cleaned up (we defeated Democrats attempts at change), so in Florida I encourage all to request a Ballot & Vote by Mail!" Trump tweeted Tuesday.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	37,663.33	-0.07
Nifty 50	11,101.65	0.06
S&P 500*	3,327.08	0.62
Dollar (₹)	74.94	0.14
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.85	0.14
Euro (₹)	88.47	-0.04
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	56,181▲1,365	2.42
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	46.06	1.63
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.826	-0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.539	0.026

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Services PMI contract for fifth month in July

The services industry shrank for a fifth straight month in July as restraining measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus hurt business activity. The Nikkei/IHS Services Purchasing Managers' Index increased to 34.2 in July from 33.7 in June, however, it was still well below the 50-mark separating growth from contraction. July was the fifth straight month the index was sub-50, the longest stretch since a 10-month run to April 2014.

Ajay Tyagi gets 18 months' extension at Sebi



Ajay Tyagi was given an 18-month extension, till February 2022, as the chairman of Sebi, a Personnel Ministry order said. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by PM Modi has approved extension of Tyagi's term for 18 months, with effect from Sept. 1, 2020 up to Feb. 28, 2022, it said. Tyagi, a 1984 batch IAS (retired) officer of Himachal Pradesh cadre, was appointed as the Sebi chairman in March 2017 for three years.

ITR scrutiny reduced to 0.25% in AY 2018-19

Income tax returns picked up for scrutiny has reduced to 0.25 per cent of the total ITRs filed in assessment year (AY) 2018-19, from 0.55 per cent in AY 2017-18, the finance ministry said. The IT Dept is changing its role from enforcement to facilitating taxpayer services. In continuation of the same, the number of cases selected for scrutiny has reduced drastically over the years, the ministry said in a tweet.

Jyothy Labs Q1 net up 34% to ₹50 crore

FMCG firm Jyothy Labs reported 33.78 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 50.01 crore for the June quarter against Rs 37.38 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total income stood at Rs 436.93 crore, up 2.22 per cent. Jyothy Labs managing director M. R. Jyothy said: "Our team with flawless execution combined with our portfolio comprising daily use 'essential hygiene' has delivered positive sales growth."

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Precious metal races past \$2,000-mark Gold at new high, set to rally more

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 5

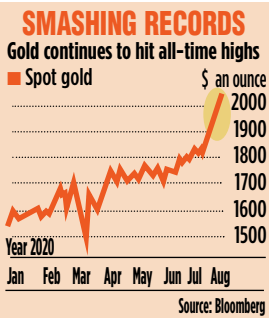
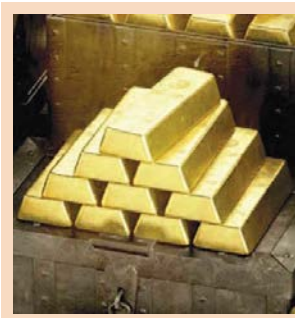
Gold in the international market breached the psychological level of \$2,000 per ounce as the dollar continued to weaken amidst a gloomy global economy.

In the international market gold made a new high of \$2,043 per ounce after crossing the crucial level. This took gold prices to record high on the Multi Commodity Exchange to Rs 55,280 per 10 gm. In the Delhi bullion market, 24 carat gold was seen trading above Rs 57,000 per 10 gm.

In the international market, gold has provided handsome year-on-year return of 34 per cent and year-to-date return of 29.7 per cent. In the Indian futures market, gold has given returns of 40.7 per cent since the beginning of the year.

The weakening US dollar provided the necessary trigger for gold to move up above \$2,000. Falling US treasury yields and expectations of another stimulus package have been pulling down the US dollar, which has an inverse correlation with gold.

From 103 levels in March, the dollar index has come down to 92.5 levels and was seen trading around 92.9 on Wednesday as the market kept guessing on another stimulus, said Himanshu Gupta, vice president and head of commodities and currencies research, Globe



Capital.

"We believe that a \$1 trillion (stimulus) or something along those lines has already been priced in. At the same time, we also believe that markets could be looking close to \$3 trillion in the next round of stimulus. However, in order for gold prices to move much higher, substantially more additional stimulus would be needed from the Federal Reserve," said Sriram Iyer, senior research analyst at Reliance Securities.

Most of the central banks have been adopting an accommodative monetary policy, supporting safe haven demand in gold. "The liquidity push by central banks across the globe has been a deciding factor for premium in gold prices as the pandemic continues to ravage the global economy. The easy money policy is resulting in to chasing higher yields on asset classes which are considered to be safe in times of uncertainty, and nothing like gold, the safe haven asset which has his-

torically been a go-to investment for investors," said Prathamesh Mallya, AVP-research, Angel Broking.

Technically, a resistance is seen for August gold at \$2,055 and a break above that could push prices to \$2,088 and a break above the second resistance could push prices to \$2,125, says Iyer.

"A possible level of \$2,200 in the medium term might see gold moving above Rs 58,500 in the Indian market," said Gupta.

A Bloomberg report said gold could extend gains as governments and central banks respond to slowing growth with vast amounts of stimulus. Goldman Sachs Group Inc. forecasts a rally to \$2,300.

"The stage has been set for gold to continue to climb higher," Paul Wong, market strategist at Spratt Inc., said in a report. "We see increased fiscal spending ahead, extremely accommodative monetary policy in place for years and a challenging economic recovery."

Maruti brings new S-Cross petrol SUV



MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, AUG. 5

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest carmaker, on Wednesday drove in the new S-Cross petrol SUV to boost sales in the fiercely competitive auto market.

Priced Rs 8.39 lakh at Delhi showroom, Maruti S-Cross will compete with the likes of the Renault Duster, Nissan Kicks, Kia Seltos and Hyundai Creta. The S-Cross is offered in four variants—Sigma, Delta, Zeta and Alpha manual costing Rs 8.39 lakh, Rs 9.60 lakh, Rs 9.95

Motown Buzz

lakh and Rs 11.15 lakh, respectively. The automatic Delta is priced Rs 10.83 lakh, Zeta Rs 11.18 lakh and Alpha Rs 12.39 lakh.

KTM DUKE 250 BS6 COMES AT ₹2.09 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, AUG. 5

Bajaj Auto on Wednesday launched the BS6 model of KTM Duke 250 motorcycle priced at Rs 2.09 lakh at Delhi showroom. The KTM Duke 250 is a direct rival to the likes of Suzuki Gixxer 250 and the Husqvarna 250 Twins. With the latest update, the bike has turned costlier by around Rs 4,000. Select KTM dealerships have started bookings with a down payment of Rs 5,000.



Ban to cover more apps from Xiaomi, Baidu

SANKALP PHARTIYAL & ADITYA KALRA NEW DELHI, AUG. 5

The government has banned some mobile apps of Chinese companies such as Xiaomi Corp and Baidu Inc, three sources told Reuters on Wednesday. The government in June outlawed 59 Chinese apps for threatening the country's "sovereignty and integrity", including ByteDance's video-sharing app TikTok, Alibaba's UC Browser and Xiaomi's Mi Community app.

Another ban was imposed in recent weeks on about 47 apps which mostly contained clones, or simply different versions, of the already banned apps, the sources said.

Unlike its June move, the government did not make its latest decision public, but there are a few new apps that have made it to that list, including Xiaomi's Mi Browser Pro and Baidu's search apps, the sources said.

India's IT ministry and the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi did not respond to a request for comment.

A spokesman for Xiaomi in India said the company was trying to understand the development and will take appropriate measures.

—Reuters

Hotel occupancies stay below 20% in June qtr

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 5

Occupancies of hotels in key cities remained well below 20 per cent in the June quarter as the revenue per available room (RevPAR) dropped by more than 80 per cent.

Goa hotels witnessed the lowest occupancies at 9.4 per cent. The highest occupancy was recorded in Mumbai at 23.2 per cent in June quarter, as per JLL's Hotel Momentum India Q2 2020 report.

Vande Bharat Mission remained a major demand generator for hotels in key cities. Under the mission, Indians who were repatriated from other countries were kept under quarantine in hotels of their respective cities.

All key markets in India reported a decrease in RevPAR performance in Q2 2020 over the same period last year. Mumbai remained the RevPAR leader in absolute terms, despite a decline of 81



per cent compared to Q2 2019. Goa saw the sharpest decline in RevPAR in Q2 2020, with a 93.9 percent drop. Other cities such as Kolkata (88.9 per cent), Bengaluru at 88.5 per cent, and Ahmedabad (85.5 per cent) also witnessed sharp decline in performance.

According to another report by global hospitality consultancy HVS and Anarock, in the month of June, average occupancies across the country were down 67 per cent against the same month last year. This led to an 80.5 per cent decline in RevPAR.

Driven by the weak numbers of Q2, the hos-

pitality industry reported a decline of 43.5 per cent in RevPAR for the first half of the year over the same period of 2019, found JLL.

Average daily room rate (ADR) too was the highest in Mumbai and the lowest was in Jaipur. While Jaipur saw a decline of 54 per cent in ADR, the lowest decline was seen in Gurugram at 29 per cent.

"Whilst hotels in certain cities opened in early June, guests have not yet returned. We believe that demand in business cities will take time to recover and it will only happen when companies allow their employees to travel through their revised travel advisories. Leisure demand may pick up around large cities wherein close friends and family groups may start traveling by road in the coming months," said Jaideep Dang, managing director, Hotels & Hospitality Group (India), JLL.

Airtel partners Amazon to grow cloud biz

New Delhi, Aug. 5: Bharti Airtel Ltd and Amazon Web Services (AWS) will join forces to develop the Indian telecoms firm's cloud business, allowing it to offer a wider range of products to its enterprise clients, the two companies said on Wednesday. Airtel Cloud currently provides data centre and cloud services to companies and governments via

different partnerships. "AWS with the depth and breadth of our platform, and Airtel with its deep reach and expertise and focus, I think together we can build a set of really differentiated cloud products and go serve customers at scale in India," Puneet Chandok, president, India and South Asia at Amazon Internet Services told a virtual

news conference. New products could include data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and security services among others, the two companies said. The public cloud services market in India is expected to be worth \$7.1 billion in 2024, up from \$3.4 billion this year. —Reuters

Kuwait's \$112 bn pension fund has cash to burn

FIONA MACDONALD AUG. 5

Kuwait's \$112 billion pension fund plans to boost investments in private equity and infrastructure following an overhaul that left it sitting on too much cash.

A new management team was brought in during 2017 to transform the state-owned institution after a corruption scandal involving a previous manager. The fund has since exited more than \$20 billion in questionable deals in a "major clean-up" of its portfolio, according to Raed Al-Nisf, deputy general manager for investments and operations.

"The revamp is paying off. The Public Institution for Social Security, also known as PIFSS, had a record investment profit of \$7.3 billion in the three months through June, an almost fourfold increase from a year earlier.

The fund aims to have 12 to 17 per cent of its portfolio in real estate, followed by private equity at between 8 per cent and 13 per cent, and infrastruc-



ture at 3 to 10 per cent, he said, without detailing current holdings. "This is a moving target, but it's a range we're normally in," Al-Nisf said. "We're long-term investors by definition, we don't have a need for cash on a yearly basis."

Cash accounts for about 11.5 per cent of its investments, which the fund aims to cut to 4 per cent over the next seven months, he said. At one stage the fund had a "catastrophic" 41 per cent of cash available for investments, Al-Nisf said.

"We aim to have the best stocks and best-performing managers, it's not a political role," he said. "We follow opportunity." —Bloomberg

Zydus Cadila vaccine found safe in early human trial



Bengaluru, Aug. 5: Zydus Cadila said on Wednesday its Covid-19 vaccine candidate was found to be safe and well-tolerated in an early-stage human trial.

The company will now start a mid-stage trial of the vaccine candidate, ZyCoV-D, in over 1,000 healthy adult volunteers from Thursday to test its effectiveness, it said in a regulatory filing.

Zydus plans to complete late-stage trials for ZyCoV-D by February or March and could produce up to 100 million doses a year initially, the company's chairman told Reuters last month.

The safety of the vaccine candidate in volunteers enrolled in the early-stage trial, who were administered doses since July 15, was endorsed by an independent data safety monitoring board.

Zydus is also among the several Indian generic drugmakers that have licensing agreements with US-based Gilead Sciences to produce remdesivir, the antiviral that has been approved in the country as an emergency treatment to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

India reported a daily jump of more than 50,000 coronavirus infections for the seventh straight day on Wednesday. Total cases now stand at 1.91 million, the third biggest, after the United States and Brazil. —Reuters

It's a different Prime Day for Amazon this time

SARITHA RAI AUG. 5

Amazon.com Inc will kick off its first Prime Day since the coronavirus outbreak from Thursday in India, modifying almost everything about the retail bonanza to navigate the realities of a new era.

Prime Day will have the customary deep discounts, hundreds of exclusive products, new launches and cashback offers. But in a profound departure from the past, the global retailer will have a virtual operations room instead of a real one, with thousands of employees coordinating the sale from their homes, and stringent hygiene protocols for its armies of packers, sorters and deliverymen.

India is a test case for the e-commerce pioneer and founder Jeff Bezos, the

world's richest person. The US version of Prime Day has been postponed from its usual spot in July, with the new date yet to be announced. "After a lot of conversations, we decided to go ahead with Prime Day," said Akshay Sahi, head of Prime at Amazon India. "Life has to go on. Sellers have to get back on their feet." That Amazon is holding its 48-hour sale despite the pandemic underscores the intense competition in the country's online retail sector. The Seattle-based retailer is fighting giant rival Walmart Inc-owned Flipkart as well as the powerful Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries Ltd, whose Jio Platforms launched its grocery delivery service in 200 cities and is fast expanding into categories like electronics and apparel.



Flipkart has announced its own Big Savings Day, clashing with its rival's dates. The sales events have overlapped for years, vying for the attention of both shoppers and sellers listing on their platforms. This year's Amazon event will be devoid of the usual Bollywood dancing and the endless supply of Indian street foods, foot massages and costume parties. Instead, hundreds of employees will plan and coordinate the sale from home; their only respite, virtual mood-boosters like standup comedy and selfie

competitions. The critical element is safety preparation for workers, customers and deliverymen, said Sahi. In-person training has been suspended and new workers are being trained via apps. There will be no customary stand up meetings at the start of each shift. Instead, it will be white-board communication. Shift and break times have been staggered to more evenly to distribute attendance at cafeterias and communal areas. Markings on the floor will prevent loaders and

sorters from stepping too close to each other. The online retailer said it has made over a hundred such process changes in its buildings, stipulating new rules on face coverings and daily temperature checks.

Hand cleaning is mandated no less than eight times during a shift. Even the slightest sign of elevated temperature requires a worker to remain at home for three days. When a delivery person arrives at a customer's door, he is required to ring the door bell and then step several feet back. India's Prime Day schedule has skirted the inauspicious early September Shraad fortnight when Hindus pay homage to their ancestors. The sale could not be scheduled later because of the onset of the festival season. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Babar shines in first Test vs Eng

Manchester: Pakistan's Babar Azam underlined his status as one of the world's leading batsmen with a fine unbeaten fifty before rain stopped play on the opening day of the first Test against England at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Pakistan were 121-2, with Babar 52 not out, when the umpires ordered an early tea in Manchester.

Together with left-handed opener Shan Masood (45 not out), he had put on an unbeaten 78 for the third wicket before the weather intervened.

Pakistan were 43-2 when Babar came in to bat after captain Azhar Ali, who had won the toss, fell lbw for a duck to Chris Woakes.

After the interval the 25-year-old, who had scored four hundreds in his five previous Tests, unfurled an array of stylish attacking shots.

— AFP

Brief scores: Pakistan 121/2 in 41.1 overs (Shan Masood 45, Babar Azam 52, C. Woakes 1/14) vs England.

Stirling, Balbirnie star in Irish win

Southampton: Paul Stirling and Andrew Balbirnie starred as Ireland claimed only a second win over England in its history after overcoming the world champions in the final over. Set a target of 329 the same score they finished on to beat England at the 2011 World Cup the Irish laid the foundations with a 214-run stand between Stirling and captain Balbirnie in the final match of the Royal London series on Tuesday. Stirling was run out for 142 while Balbirnie holed out for 113 with 50 still required from 33 deliveries, but Kevin O'Brien — the hero of Bangalore — fittingly got them over the line from the penultimate ball.

After being asked to bat first, England had stuttered to 44-3 but Eoin Morgan's 106 from 84 balls was the cornerstone of 328 all out in 49.5 overs.

Brief scores: England 328 in 50 overs (Morgan 106, Banton 58, Willey 51, Young 3/53) lost to **Ireland 329/3 in 49.5 overs** (Stirling 142, Balbirnie 113).

India Run As One to start on I-Day

Mumbai: The largest citizen led movement dedicated in support of livelihoods — the Sunfeast India Run As One — will commence on the Independence Day, it was announced recently by the organiser Procam International.

This is a first-of-its-kind digitally supported active participatory event, to encourage purposeful fundraising from within India and across the world. The initiative is aimed at providing support to vulnerable sections of society who have been distressed and have lost their livelihoods due to the pandemic. The registrations for the movement began on August 1.

Being the 74th year of Independence Day, Sunfeast India Run As One has set itself a lofty goal to cover the total distance between Kashmir to Kanyakumari 74 times.

Participants can register at a nominal fee starting at '99 upwards. For more details log on to: sunfeastindiarunasone.procam.in.

STEFAN NAMED CHAMP MARC'S REPLACEMENT

Paris: Reigning MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez will miss his second straight race after he was ruled out of Sunday's Czech Grand Prix following another operation on his fractured right arm, his team said on Tuesday. "After undergoing a second operation on his injured right arm, Marc Marquez and HRC have decided that the world champion will not ride in the Czech Republic in order for him to recover more," Repsol Honda said in a statement.

The Spaniard underwent further surgery Monday in Barcelona on the arm he broke in the season opener in Spain on July 19. He missed the following race in Jerez despite initially being declared fit.

Marquez will be replaced this weekend by German test rider Stefan Bradl. — AFP

New Delhi, Aug. 5: The IPL teams want a three-day quarantine for their players arriving in the UAE instead of the six days mentioned in the BCCI draft SOP and have also sought the board's permission to organise team and family dinners with "adequate" advanced notice.

"These points, along with their request to have food ordered from outside via contactless deliveries to the hotel, will be discussed in the team owners' meeting with IPL officials on Wednesday evening, a BCCI official said.

As per the existing BCCI SOP which can be tweaked, the players and support staff will be tested on Day 1, Day 3 and Day 6 of their quarantine in the UAE and after clearing that, they will be allowed to train. After this, they will be tested every fifth day during the 53-day event beginning September 19.

"Most players have not had much game time in the last 6 months and are looking forward to as much practice as possible," the official said.

The BCCI has told the teams to leave for UAE not before August 20 though some of the teams, including CSK, wanted to leave early.

"Can teams be allowed to arrive anytime post August 15, instead of August 20 as mentioned to accommodate the quarantine period and still have enough time for practice and preparations of players? Currently the SOP suggests that they cannot interact with the squad, unless they are a part of the bubble. Owners will not be able to spend 3 months in a bubble" read the note.

During the quarantine in the UAE, players will not be even allowed to interact with other team members and can only do so after clearing at least three Covid-19 tests.

Teams will be staying at separate hotels and since it is a long tournament, they want the players to unwind by playing golf and attending team and family dinners.

"One big area of concern is the wellbeing of the players as they stay in a bubble for 80+ days. The

SOP OPERA

IPL franchises want procedures tweaked



In this photoshopped photo shared by Chennai Super Kings, captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni is seen leading his team out of the dugout donning Keffiyehs.

● **IPL teams want three-day quarantine instead of the proposed six days by BCCI.**

● **Franchises also seek permission to organise family dinner with adequate notice.**

● **Sides want access to facilities like golf among others to unwind during the league.**

● **Requests have also been made for contactless food delivery options at hotels.**

pressures of competitive sport do not make it any easier.

"We understand protocol and bubble strategy from the England versus West Indies series included activities such as golf, visits to specific restaurants and visits to some pre-determined places. Can IPL consider this with advice of medical professionals?" the note read.

"Can the IPL also consid-

er allowing food orders from designated delivery outlets using contactless deliveries to the hotel," the note added. Amidst other things, they also want early on-boarding of players coming in from the Caribbean Premier League and the bilateral series between England and Australia which concludes on September 16.

— PTI

LEAGUE IN UAE WILL BE CHALLENGING: RAINA

Mumbai, Aug. 5: Chennai Super Kings' star all-rounder Suresh Raina believes the upcoming Indian Premier League, to be played in the UAE amid the Covid-19 pandemic, will pose a lot of new challenges for the players, and clarity of thought would be key for a player to succeed.

"This IPL would be very interesting to see how the players are thinking," Raina said in a webinar after being named as the global brand ambassador for a sporting app.

"You are playing in different circumstances and you have a lot of protocol from ICC and at the same time you are going to go through (Covid-19) tests every two-three weeks," he added.

"So, I would say coming out from all those tests you need to be clear with your head on what you are going to do on the field because at the end of the day when you are playing a sport, you need to enjoy the game," the vice-captain of Chennai Super Kings further added on the testing protocol in place.

— PTI

ENGLISH | FOOTBALL

FULHAM EARN SPOT IN TOP TIER LEAGUE

London, Aug. 5: Fulham secured an instant return to the Premier League after one season away by beating west London rival Brentford 2-1 in the Championship playoff final.

Joe Bryan scored twice in extra time at Wembley to give Fulham the win in what is widely called the most lucrative game in football.

Fulham will receive at least 135 million pounds (\$176 million) over three years after securing promotion, a year after being relegated from the world's richest football league.

Fulham owner Shahid Khan failed with a bid to buy Wembley a year ago, and his team had to celebrate in an empty stadium on Tuesday due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Bryan broke the deadlock after catching goalkeeper David Raya by surprise with a free kick from nearly 35 yards in the 105th minute as both teams expected a cross into the box.

The goalkeeper comes ridiculously far off his line, Bryan said.

The left back netted again in the 117th minute after playing a one-two with Aleksandar Mitrovic to clinch promotion in Scott Parker's first full season in charge of Fulham.

Brentford, which boasted a 59-goal strike force in Said Benrahma, Bryan Mbeumo and Ollie Watkins, was kept in check in the most important match of the season.

— AP

● **Joe Bryan scored twice in extra time at Wembley to help Fulham make it back to the Premier League after being relegated last season.**

Champ Nadal no show at US Open

Madrid, Aug. 5: Defending champion Rafael Nadal will skip the U.S. Open because of the coronavirus pandemic, putting on hold his bid to equal Roger Federer's men's record for Grand Slam titles.

Nadal explained his decision in a series of Tweets sent in Spanish and English on Tuesday.

"The situation is very complicated worldwide, the Covid-19 cases are increasing, it looks like we still don't have control of it," Nadal wrote.

The 34-year-old from Spain said, "sitting out the tournament scheduled to begin August 31 in New York a decision I never wanted to take," but added "that he would rather not travel."

"Rafa is one of the greatest champions in our sport and we support his decision," U.S. Open tournament director Stacey Allaster said.

The current No.1-ranked woman, Ash Barty, already had announced she would be missing the U.S. Open.

Nadal's plan to skip the U.S. Open came shortly after the Madrid Open, scheduled for September, was canceled because of the pandemic.

"We know that the reduced tennis calendar is barbaric this year after four months stopped with no play. I understand and thank for the efforts they are putting in to make it happen," Nadal wrote on Twitter.

— AP

NAGAL IN MAIN DRAW FOR GRAND SLAM

New York, Aug. 5: Young Indian tennis player Sumit Nagal is set to compete in his second Grand Slam main draw after receiving a direct entry into the US Open, which several top players will miss due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The world number 127 is the last man to receive a direct entry, according to the tournament website.

It will be Nagal's second appearance at the US Open, starting August 31, and he is the only Indian in the men's field with Prajnesh Gunneswaran, ranked 132, missing out.

"It feels good to make a main draw of a Slam again since I have only made one main draw yet. I understand the situation is not the same this year. I am looking to fly to USA after my challengers in Czech Republic," Nagal said from Germany before a training session.

Last year, Nagal reached his maiden Grand Slam at the US Open after winning all his qualifying round matches to set up a dream encounter with the legendary Roger Federer.

In the much-anticipated clash, the 22-year old from Jhajar took a set off Federer before going down 6-4, 1-6, 2-6, 4-6.

— PTI



Camila Giorgi of Italy returns to Rebecca Peterson during their singles match at the Palermo Ladies Open on Wednesday. Giorgi won 7-5, 6-4.

Juvan upsets top seed at Palermo

Palermo (Italy), Aug. 5: Slovenian qualifier Kaja Juvan upset second-seeded Marketa Vondrousova of the Czech Republic 1-6, 7-5, 6-4 in the first round of the Palermo Ladies Open, the first official tennis tournament since March.

Vondrousova won the first set in just 29 minutes and then came from 4-0 down in the second to take a 5-4 lead and was just two points away from winning the match before Juvan recovered.

Juvan took another 4-0 lead in the third set and secured the match when Vondrousova hit a forehand into the net. It was her first career win against a top-20 ranked opponent.

A limited number of fans were allowed into the 1,500-seat stadium court and had to follow social distancing measures.

There are also strict rules for the players, such as handling their own towels,

not shaking hands with their opponents, and no autographs or photos with fans.

Juvan was spoken to by the umpire after throwing items including her visor and wristbands to the crowd.

Juvan will next face Camila Giorgi, who became the fourth Italian to progress to the second round after beating Rebecca Peterson 7-5, 6-4.

Sara Errani, Elisabetta Cocciaretto and Jasmine Paolini won their first-round matches on Monday.

Top-seeded Petra Martic eased into the second round with a 6-0, 6-3 win over Alison Van Uytvanck. The Croatian will face Russian qualifier Ludmilla Samsonova, who beat Kirsten Flipkens 6-4, 6-2.

But fifth-seeded Elise Mertens lost 4-6, 1-6 to qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich.

— AP

MAVERICKS TRIUMPH

Orlando, Aug. 5: Luka Doncic delivered a monster triple-double performance as the Dallas Mavericks bagged their first win of the NBA's regular season in an overtime thriller against the Sacramento Kings on Tuesday.

The 21-year-old Slovenian scored 34 points, with 20 rebounds and 12 assists as the Mavericks completed a 114-110 victory to get their campaign back on track in the Western Conference.

Tim Hardaway Jr. and Kristaps Porzingis also came up big with 22 points apiece as the Mavericks overturned an 11-point deficit to seal victory at the HP Field House on the NBA's Orlando campus.

— AFP

Sindhu hits gym on Day 1

MOSES KONDETY
HYDERABAD, AUG. 5

Confined to home for four months, P. V. Sindhu grabbed the first opportunity to get a full training session on Wednesday when gyms in the City opened up post the Covid-forced lockdown.

The badminton world champion sweated it out at the Suchitra Academy in the morning as she went through the grind. "The focus was on strengthening muscles but overall it was a full body exercise which felt really good, a satisfying session," a pumped-up Sindhu told this newspaper.

She's understandably delighted. "I am happy that we all are back on track again. All these months I've been training at home but then we don't have the kind of equipment a full-fledged gym has. Also, my trainer is here to guide me, which is an advantage," she said.

How did her muscles respond? "Not too bad," she beams. "They were already fine as I had been training regularly at



Sindhu shows the paintings that she made during the lockdown in Hyderabad on Wednesday. — R. PAVAN

home all this while — my trainer used to give me exercise schedules to work on. I'd say it was not too hard for me to get back," she explains.

Now, she wants to get back on the court. "I wish the on-court training also starts soon and we'd be playing again but we don't know how it's going to be. It's not an easy task — we don't know how many people are going to be there, how we will practice... we have to wait

and see," the 25-year-old said. Once that happens, the tall title-holder has plans to "learn new strokes" to add to her armoury.

Thanks to apprehension around the world, Sindhu is unsure about the tournaments to target. "As of now many of them have been cancelled... the next available event is in October but much depends on the quarantine norms in different countries. If we're quar-

antined for two weeks on arrival, we can't go out or practice, which negates the trip. In that context we just don't know where we are right now or what tournament we're gonna play," she's bemused.

Amidst the Covid gloom Sindhu has managed to paint bright pictures, literally. "I have always liked painting. I used to draw in my diary but never painted on the canvas. In this lockdown I thought I will try that since I had not much to do... it came out well, so I carried on and did about 10 of them," she chuckles.

Among scenes of her imagination is a tree with a couple of people around, just the buildings, the moon on a dark night and water. "I really like nature. It gives me a very good vibe," Sindhu says.

Are her brush strokes as fast as her shots on court? "It doesn't take me long," she laughs. "I complete one painting in a day... need two hours at best to apply the finishing touches," she deftly adds, much like the drop shot that gently ends a point.