

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | FRIDAY 7 | AUGUST 2020

WEATHER



Max: 28°C
Min: 24°C
Rainfall: 1MM

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Aadi 23
Tithi: Chaturthi
Star: Puratathi/ Uthirathathi
Rahukalam:
10.30 am to 12 noon
Yamagandam:
3 pm to 4.30 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.41 am
Zohar: 12.20 pm
Asar: 3.28 pm
Maghrib: 6.39 pm
Isha: 7.49 pm

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+64,680)	(+892)
20,24,702	41,631

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+ 5,684)
TN:2,79,144 4,571

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

1,91,15,986

DEATHS

7,13,901

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

213

worldometers.info

COUNTER POINT



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

STATE | 3

E-pass process simplified, says CM



WORLD | 5

Times Square displays Lord Ram's image

SPORT | 7

BCCI sets strict guidelines for IPL teams



8 PATIENTS DIE IN A'MD HOSPITAL FIRE

Ahmedabad, Aug 6: Eight coronavirus patients died in a fire inside the ICU ward of a private hospital in Ahmedabad city in the early hours of Thursday, officials said. A paramedical staff member of the hospital was injured in the tragedy. A cumulative compensation of Rs 6 lakh each for the families of the deceased -- five men and three women -- was announced by the Centre and Gujarat government.

The blaze broke out around 3.30 am on the top floor of the four-storey Shrey Hospital in Navrangpura area, officials said. — PTI

RAJAPAKSA CLAN HEADING FOR LANDSLIDE WIN

Colombo, Aug 6: Sri Lanka's powerful Rajapaksa family-run Sri Lanka People's Party (SLPP) appeared to be heading for a landslide win in the country's twice-postponed parliamentary election, according to early results announced on Thursday.

The SLPP has polled more votes than its rivals, scoring over 60 per cent of the total votes in the 16 seats declared so far from the South, dominated by the Sinhala majority community. The party won 13 seats out of 16.

In Galle district, the SLPP won seven out of nine seats on offer while in the neighbouring Matara district they did even better by winning six out of seven seats on offer. — PTI

RBI panel leaves rates unchanged

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, AUG 6

Belying expectations, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday kept rates unchanged on Thursday owing to uncertainty around inflation despite signs of growth faltering further.

The MPC voted to maintain an accommodative stance, thus opening up possibilities for more future rate cuts, even as the RBI held interest rates steady, it proposed restructuring of individual and corporate loans to provide relief to certain segments of borrowers whose cash flows have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With a view to mitigating the impact on households, the RBI also decided to increase the permissible loan to value ratio (LTV), for loans sanc-

tioned by banks against pledge of gold ornaments and jewellery for non-agricultural purposes, to 90 per cent from existing level of 75 per cent. This relaxation shall be available till March 31, 2021.

The RBI also announced additional liquidity to the National Housing Bank and NABARD along with several other measures to strengthen credit discipline; improve credit flow and deepen digital payments.

In his monetary policy address, Shaktikanta Das, RBI governor said that the RBI will do whatever is required to revive the economy in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The MPC refrained from providing growth-inflation forecasts while sticking to the direction based guidance. It expects headline inflation to remain elevated in Q2FY21 and sees it easing in the second half of the financial year.

Min pulls docu on China incursion

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

The defence ministry on Thursday took down a document from its website that had for the first time officially acknowledged that Chinese troops had "transgressed" in at least three places in Ladakh and said the situation in the area due to "aggression by China" was "sensitive", with the standoff likely to be "prolonged".

There was no official word why the document uploaded on Tuesday was removed after two days.

This comes as the fourth and fifth round of corps commanders' talks between India and China seems to have been unable to reach any major breakthrough on further disengagement in Pangong Tso and other friction areas. The government is yet to come out with any statement on the outcome of

Chinese Aggression on LAC

(i) Chinese aggression has been increasing along the LAC and more particularly in Galwan valley since 5th May, 2020. The Chinese side transgressed in the areas of Kugrang Nala, Gogra and north bank of Pangong Tso lake on 17-18 May, 2020.

(ii) Consequent to this, ground level interactions were held between armed forces of both sides to defuse the situation. Corps Commander Level Flag Meeting was held on 6th June, 2020. However, a violent faceoff incident took place between the two sides on 15th June, 2020, resulting in casualties of both sides.

The fifth corps commanders' meeting last Sunday, that indicate difference between China and India on disengagement. China has refused to move out its troops from Pangong Tso's Finger area and the Depsang-Daulat Beg Oldie sector.

The defence ministry document had said Chinese aggression has been increasing along the LAC and particularly in Galwan Valley since May 5. "The Chinese side transgressed in the areas of Kugrang Nala, Gogra and north bank of Pangong Tso lake on 17-18 May," it said. It added while engagement and dialogue

Defence ministry document acknowledging Chinese transgressed in Ladakh which has now been removed.

at the military and diplomatic levels were continuing, "the present standoff is likely to be prolonged".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi continued his attack on the Narendra Modi government over its handling of the Ladakh situation and said in a tweet: "Denying China is in our territory and removing documents from websites won't change the facts."

Sources said China built up its forces not only in Ladakh but all along the LAC. Army Chief Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane is on a two-day visit to Tezpur-based 4 Corps to review the situation.

700 TONNES AMMONIUM NITRATE

Explosive chemical stored in Chennai for over five years

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
CHENNAI, AUG 6

Customs authorities in Chennai on Thursday sought to allay fears over safety regarding the storage of nearly 700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate at a container freight station in Manali. The fact is such a vast quantity of an explosive chemical has been in storage for close to five years and the risk of an

accidental explosion as in the Lebanese capital of Beirut last Tuesday has been highlighted by PMK founder Dr Ramadoss.

The chemical worth ₹1.80 crore was seized from a Tamil Nadu-based importer in 2015 who had allegedly declared it as fertiliser grade although it was explosive grade, a Customs official said, adding that the chemical, imported from South Korea, was safe and an e-

action process was on to clear it. It has been pointed out that the timeline seems to be following that of Beirut.

Customs sleuths had in November 2015 seized 697 tonnes of ammonium nitrate in 37 containers valued at Rs 1.80 crore from the importer. The containers were seized. While seven tonnes of the chemical got spoilt during the deluge in December 2015.

India surpasses 20L Covid-19 cases mark

S. UMAMAHESHWAR I
DC
HYDERABAD, AUG. 6

India became the third country in the world to have the unenviable record of having 20 lakh Coronavirus infections. The country on Thursday reported 56,282 new Covid-19 cases, which took the total caseload to 20,21,264.

India which crossed 10 lakh mark on July 17 witnessed the cases doubling in just 20 days — report-

ing on an average five per cent increase in new cases every day in this period.

The spurt in new infections was seen mainly because of states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar reporting higher numbers. The disease, which was mostly an urban phenomenon in the initial days, has spread to the hinterland after guest workers moved back to their villages or hometowns.

The Centre's decision to appoint former minister of state for railways Manoj Sinha as Jammu and Kashmir's new lieutenant-governor, replacing G.C. Murmu (who is tipped to be the next Comptroller and Auditor-General after incumbent Rajiv Mehraishi retires on August 7), is to send a clear signal that it wants to restart the J&K political process.

Sources said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was keen that a "seasoned politician" than someone with a bureaucratic or military/intelligence background be made the new lieutenant-governor. Home ministry sources said in order to restart the political process, the government wanted an experienced politician as the UT's administrative head.

Mr Sinha reached Srinagar Thursday evening by a state plane, soon after his predecessor flew out, and is likely to be administered the oath of office on Friday. He held an informal meeting with the chief secretary and the four advisers to the former L-G. Mr Sinha is a three-time Lok Sabha MP who lost the 2019 election from Gorakhpur.

A TATA PRODUCT



Up to 25% off

on diamond jewellery value.

Up to ₹300 off

per gram on gold jewellery.

Get 100% Exchange Value*

on gold above 22kt

Valid on gold bought from any jeweller

For buying online, appointments through video calling, store locator and offer details check

tanishq.co.in

* Offer and dates may vary across cities • *Conditions apply.

NO 46, NORTH USMAN ROAD, T NAGAR, PH: 044-28149333/34.

CHENNAI - ADYAR, PH: 044-42151919, 65517251, ANNA NAGAR, PH: 26194810/4811, CATHEDRAL ROAD, PH: 28110368/ 0405, CHROMPET, PH: 044 - 4332322/24222, SOUNDARIYA NAGAR, GOWRIWAKKAM, PH: 044-22780066, NO 10 HARLEY'S ROAD, KILPAUK, PH: 044-43501234, VALASARAVAKKAM, PH: 044-40349999, VELACHERY, PH: 044-22440100, ALSO AT - KANCHIPURAM, PH: 044-27230630; PONDICHERRY, PH: 0413-2225911/12; VELLORE, PH: 0416-4205669; VILLUPURAM, PH: 223224, 98373 71616.

For store location information visit tanishq.co.in/stores | Call: 1800 258 2598

SHORT TAKES

E-pass racket busted

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, AUG. 6

Police busted an e-pass racket following the arrest of a three-member gang who announced through WhatsApp audio messages, originated from Vellore, demanding Rs 1,500 for e-passes.

Police said, the Vellore district administration noticed this messages and ordered a detailed inquiry into the matter. Police secured Jagadeesh Kumar (18) of Periyaallahpuram, Vellore, and based on his confession, arrested P Vadivelu (27) and M Stalin (26) of Tiruchy, in this connection. Investigations revealed that so far they have issued over 100 duplicate e-passes in various districts in the state, and also to neighbouring states. Investigations are on.

Chennai has an explosion threat: Ramadoss

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

Chennai city was facing a threat of an explosion similar to the one that caused widespread devastation in Lebanon's capital city of Beirut, PMK founder Dr S Ramadoss warned on Thursday.

The news that in a warehouse adjoining the Chennai harbor 740 tonnes of the explosive substance, Ammonium Nitrate, was being stored for the past five years was shocking as it was the same chemical that caused the explosion in Lebanon, Ramadoss tweeted.

Since there was a danger of a similar explosion happening in the Chennai godown, the chemical should be safely shifted out and used for constructive purposes like manufacturing fertilisers, he said in the tweet.

More FPOs in Thanjavur dt

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR AUG. 6

Farmers producers organisations (FPOs) will be formed with respect to coconut and banana farmers in the district soon, said Collector M Govinda Rao here, on Thursday. Speaking at an official meeting to discuss the formation of FPOs through national bank for agriculture and rural development (NABARD) here, Rao said that 13 FPOs were functioning in the district so far. The district monitoring committee for the formation of FPOs has suggested formation of FPOs for coconut and banana farmers. These will be formed after getting approval from national monitoring committee. District development manager, NABARD, Balamurugan, joint director, agriculture, Thanjavur district, Justine, Joint registrar, cooperatives, Manoharan, participated in the meeting.

School reopening not now

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

Schools in the state will not be opened in the near future, minister for school education K. A. Sengottaiyan informed through a tweet on Thursday. "In the present situation there is no chance for opening schools. After the spread of Coronavirus declines, based on people's perceptions and the ground situation schools will be opened later," he said.

E-pass process has been simplified: Palaniswami

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

Coronavirus infections and deaths continued linger at the same level of the previous few days with the State total on Thursday being 5,684 new cases and 110 deaths, while in Chennai city it was 1091 fresh infections and 22 fatalities.

Compared to the other districts, the three districts adjoining Chennai continued to throw up big numbers. Infections in Chengalpet was 408, Kanchipuram 336 and Tiruvallur 320.

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, addressing a review meeting at the Madurai collectorate, said the spread of coronavirus in the state had been brought down step by step by following the advice of medical experts, the WHO, Central health minister and ICMR.

Earlier answering questions from media persons in Dindigul, he said that



Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami distributes welfare schemes to the beneficiaries during an event organised at Madurai Collectorate on Thursday. Revenue minister R.B. Uthayakumar and district collector T.J. Vinay also seen.

the government was making efforts to bring normalcy with a view to opening up tourist spots like Kodaikannal. People's cooperation was of para-

mount importance to return to normalcy, he added.

On e-pass, he said that the process had been simplified and all essential

services were being issued passes with a help of a committee. There is no bar on the issue of e-passes for genuine reasons, he said.

Kumaravel is Vc in-charge of Central varsity

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUVARUR, AUG. 6

Prof Karpaga Kumaravel on Wednesday assumed office as 'acting Vice-Chancellor' of the Central University, Tiruvarur, as present Vice-Chancellor, Prof A P Dash, has completed his five-year term.

Prof Kumaravel is an awardee of the prestigious Senior Fulbright Fellowship (USA), as well as the Commonwealth Fellowship (London). Previously, he had served as Vice-Chancellor of Madurai Kamaraj University. Prof Kumaravel is a senior professor and dean, School of Education and Behavioural Sciences, and also an executive council member of the Central University.

With a long and varied service of 36 years in higher education, Prof Kumaravel has been a Professor of Educational Technology and Education for more than two decades, and also served as Director, UGC, Human Resource Development Centre, and as Research Coordinator, UGC -SAP and ICSSR project on 'Digital Culture in Teacher Education'.

He had completed consultancy assignments for UNESCO, and served as consultant for Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) and conducted Capacity Development Programmes abroad on Instructional Design Skills.

Soon after assuming office, Kumaravel said, all-round efforts for the development activities of the university to accelerate the growth of CUTN, in terms of NIRF ranking as well as NAAC score would be my priority," he added.

Prof Kumaravel is an awardee of the prestigious Senior Fulbright Fellowship (USA), as well as the Commonwealth Fellowship (London)

Don't harass people with e-pass, says Stalin

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

Demanding the immediate cancellation of e-passes for the movement of people within the state, DMK president M. K. Stalin said the continuation of the system with a view to frightening and harassing the people was not only inhuman but would also lead to a series of needless repercussions.

Wondering why the State government was continuing with the e-passes, which hampered the movement of people from one district to another even for emergencies, even after the Central government had done away



with it, Stalin, in a statement on Thursday, said people had been suffering for the past five months due to the system.

He accused the Chief Minister of being apathetic to the sufferings of the people and said that the passes were not being issued for emergencies,

though it had been announced that people could apply for reasons like marriages, medical reasons and deaths.

Stalin also alleged that there was widespread corruption in the issue of e-passes and that the government was turning a blind eye to it.

The continuation of e-pass system had denied an opportunity for people to make use of the relaxations in the lockdown and save their livelihoods as unorganized workers, employees of private companies, small traders and those who went to their native places in the districts from Chennai were unable to return.

First ringwell structure



The state archeology department traces a first ringwell structure along with mud pots at a trench in Agaram, one of the cluster villages of Keeladi.

Tiruchendur MLA dispels rumours of defection

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

"I am a loyal cadre of the DMK, who has been wholeheartedly striving to make party president M. K. Stalin the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu." So avers 'Anitha' R. Radhakrishnan, Tiruchendur MLA and DMK's party in-charge of Thoothukudi South district, through an open statement, reflecting the compulsions of the times.

For the past few days, some anti-social elements, with a view to spoiling my name, have been spreading falsehood about me through the social media," he said in the statement, which was basically meant to tell the world that he was not switching loyalties to the

BJP as mentioned in those social media messages.

Close on the heels of Thousand Lights MLA Ku Ka Selvam's trip to Delhi to call on the BJP national president J. P. Nadda followed by a visit to the BJP state headquarters in Chennai to a rousing welcome, the rumour mills have whirring with speculations about more defections from the DMK.

Though the trend was started by V. P. Duraisamy, a senior leader of the party, switching over the BJP and also landing in a party post, social media had been abuzz even before Selvam undertook the journey to Delhi apparently to seek help for installing a lift at the Nungambakkam railway station, raising the question 'who next', referring to a possible defection.

Keeping with the trend, after Selvam's 'did not join the BJP' claim took the thunder out of the floating conjectures, more social media posts and tweets targeted Radhakrishnan in the southern district.

So now he had to come out with an open statement, expressing his loyalty to not just to Stalin but also the Youth Wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin and Thoothukudi MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi by printing all their pictures on top of the statement and also proclaiming that nobody can separate him from the DMK and Stalin.

Radhakrishnan had also threatened legal action against rumour mongers if they indulged in such malicious campaigns in future.



Commemorating the 40th martyrs day of the four police personnel who laid down their lives in an axal attack in 1980 in Tirupattur, Commercial Taxes minister K C Veeramani paid homage to the fallen martyrs by laying a wreath on their memorial located at the Tirupattur city police station, along with a 21-round gun salute. Collector M P Sivanarul along with DIG, Vellore range, N Kamini, Tirupattur SP, Dr P VijayaKumar, and other officials participated.

Cop succumbs to Covid in Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

A 55-year-old special sub-inspector (SSI), attached to the Kundrathur police station, succumbed to Covid-19 at a private hospital in Nandambakkam early on Thursday morning.

The victim has been identified as V. Pandi Muni who joined the police service in 1986 and was serving as an SSI with the Kundrathur law and order wing.

Sources said the SSI tested positive for Covid-19 at a private hospital in Chrompet when he went for a regular check-up. He was later admitted to a private hospital in Nandambakkam, where he succumbed to the infection on Thursday morning.

Over 1,500 police personnel have tested positive for the virus so far across the State. Over 1,250 police personnel have recovered and rejoined duty.

Five police personnel have so far succumbed to the virus in the city. On June 17, S. Balamurali, who was an inspector at Mambalam, was the first police officer in the city to die of Covid-19.

On July 1, R. Manimaran, 57, who was SSI, Pattinampakkam succumbed to Corona. On July 6, G. Nagarajan, 32, an armed reserve police constable died. Another SSI, Gurumurthy, died on July 13.

According to statistics from Indian Police Foundation, the Tamil Nadu police ranks third in the list of police departments with the maximum number of Covid cases after Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

Five police personnel have so far succumbed to the virus in the city. On June 17, S. Balamurali, who was an inspector at Mambalam, was the first police officer in the city to die of Covid-19

Lankan gangster's death RAW team meets CB-CID officers

Coimbatore, Aug. 6: A five-member team of officials from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) have met CB-CID senior officers in connection with the recent mysterious death of a Sri Lankan gangster here, a senior police officer said on Thursday.

The Crime Branch CID police, which has taken over the investigation into the death of Maddu-mage Lasantha Chandana Perera alias Angoda Lokka, has formed seven special teams to look into various aspects, including his 'illegal' stay and fabrication of documents to get Aadhaar card for him. According to the officer, the RAW team was in the city yesterday and held discussions with CB-CID Inspector General of Police K Shankar and other senior officers, as Lokka was wanted in connection with serious offences in the Island nation and in the wake of a 'red notice' issued by Interpol. The team report-

edly collected some important documents with regard to Lokka, the official said.

Meanwhile, Shankar told reporters the CB-CID will take Sivakami Sundari, a Madurai-based lawyer, into custody to find if there was any possibility of LTTE connection after it emerged that she had transactions of nearly Rs 1 crore in seven accounts. Sundari had allegedly assisted the other two in taking the body for cremation in Madurai. Sundari's father is allegedly a known LTTE sympathiser and one of the seven special teams was on the job to establish his possible links with the LTTE, Shankar said. The agency is checking these money transactions and wanted to know from where she was getting the money and if there was any foreign link, he added. The CB-CID IG said that all the three arrested will be taken into custody for interrogation.



A worker on Thursday paints the flag pole at the secretariat ahead of Independence Day.

Avalanche records 581 mm of rainfall

B RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, AUG. 6

There was no let up in the SW monsoon fury here in the hills, as torrential rains lashed the central and western parts of the Nilgiris for the fifth consecutive day, on Thursday. Avalanche near here, is one of the major catchment areas, which recorded 581 mm of rainfall in a single day.

Five more places received over 200 mm of rainfall in a single day.

Rainfall (in mm) recorded in various centres across the Nilgiris on Thursday is as follows - Gudalur - 334, Upper Bhavani - 319, Upper Gudalur - 305, Naduvattam - 226, Glenmorgan - 212, Devala - 220, Pandalur - 181,

Water from Kabini, KRS dams fill Mettur dam

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC
SALEM, AUG. 4

Water released from the Kabini and the Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) dams reached Mettur dam by 5:05 pm on Thursday, pushing the dam's water level from 3,625 cubic feet per second to 6,000 cubic feet per second, said officials of the public works department (PWD).

The Kabini and Krishna Raja Sagar dams are filling

Emerald - 175, Kundah - 58, Ooty town - 42.

Uprooted trees and electric poles account for the frequent disruption traffic,

up fast.

The total storage height of Kabini dam is 65 feet with a total capacity of 19.5 TMC. Due to the intensity of monsoon rains, water level in the dam has gone up, and the sluices of the dams were opened to drain out excess water.

Water from Karnataka had traveled 240 kilometers in 36 hours, crossed Biligundlu on Thursday and reached Hogenakkal by 11 am. The water which

reached Mettur dam by 5:05 pm, is expected to gradually rise, and surpass the 16,000 cubic feet mark, by Friday morning.

The Cauvery delta was opened for irrigation on June 12 this year, when Mettur dam water level was 101.73 feet. Continuous use of the dam's water for agricultural operations in the delta region saw water level drop by 37.20 feet, and on Thursday morning it stood at 64.53 feet.

taluku bordering Kerala, went without power for the second consecutive day on Thursday. Disruption in power supply has begun to

hit water supply also in many areas here.

While stagnation of storm water and over flowing streams and channels have become a cause for concern, officials and disaster management teams are monitoring the situation, to quickly evacuate people living in low-lying areas in landslide prone areas to safer places, if need arises.

As the weathermen sounded a red alert for the Nilgiris for the next two days, the district administration here has alerted the public over the public address system, requesting them to restrict their movement outside, but confine themselves within the four walls of their houses till this weekend.

SHORT TAKES

SUSHANT CASE: CBI BOOKS FIR AGAINST RHEA, OTHERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rain havoc in Mumbai



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

— Rajesh Jadhav

India snubs China for remarks on J&K

Urges Beijing not to interfere in India's internal affairs

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

The Chinese move in

'India committed to its objective'

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PUTIN LIKELY TO VISIT INDIA IN OCT.

New Delhi, Aug. 6:

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

TV ACTOR SAMEER SHARMA ENDS LIFE BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

PM remembers Sushma on her first death anniversary

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lalu shifted to RIMS director's bungalow

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PYTHON RESCUED FROM COVID-19 HOSP. IN ODISHA

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, AUG. 6

An eight-foot long python was rescued in front of Malkangiri Covid hospital in Odisha on Wednesday night.

Locals spotted the snake, an Indian rock python, crawling on the main road near the hospital after rainfall in the area. On being informed by them, a member of the Snake Helpline reached the spot and rescued the reptile. Later, it was handed over to the forest department and eventually released into the nearby forest.

Meanwhile, in Ganjam district, a 9-foot long King Cobra was rescued from a temple at Chaitanpur Sasan under Patrapur block of Odisha's Ganjam district, also on Wednesday evening.

A priest of the temple spotted the snake under the donation box and informed the villagers. A member of the Snake Helpline and forest officials rescued the reptile.

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

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Equality before law does

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

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

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

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

CPM slams Muslim League for its reply to Cong's Hindutva stand

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 6

Kerala state unit of the CPM and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan have stepped up attack on Muslim League for what they called their "meek" response to Priyanka Gandhi's statement welcoming bhumi puja ceremony in Ayodhya.

Though the Muslim League national leadership which met in Malappuram on Wednesday passed a resolution slamming Priyanka's statement and terming it untimely, the party stopped short of commenting on the Ayodhya ceremony presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Muslim League's 'soft' stand has irked secular

parties in the Left camp who expected this most formidable political group of Muslim community in Kerala to come out with a decisive position on the temple issue.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who is also member of the CPM politburo recalled that Muslim League had supported Congress even at the time of Babri Masjid demolition in 1992.

The League failed to put up a strong opposition even when the Congress led government stood like a mute spectator as Babri Masjid was razed to ground in 1992. With the local bodies' election in the state scheduled for later this year and crucial assembly elections in 2021, the ruling Left Democratic Front is keen to trigger a debate on Congress' dithering stand on the issue of

Secularism and rights of minorities. The Muslims constitute nearly 30 per cent of Kerala's population and the community has political clout in many parts of the state especially in Malabar region.

The party had played a crucial role in getting former Congress president Rahul Gandhi elected from Wayanad constituency in 2019 elections. Besides, the party also succeeded in rallying a sizable section of Muslims behind Congress led UDF which won 19 of the 20 Lok Sabha seats. The CPM led ruling LDF faced a near rout winning just Alappuzha constituency.

The Left is trying to woo the Muslims by expressing public opposition to the Prime Minister's bhumi puja ceremony in Ayodhya.

WAR OF WORDS

Shivraj: MP deserves GI tag for aromatic rice

MP, Punjab fight over Basmati

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, AUG. 6:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IN BRIEF

Court indicts Shehbaz, son

SHAFQAT ALI | DC
ISLAMABAD, AUG. 6

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

5 dead in Denver home arson fire

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

Bombs damage ATM in NZ mall

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

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

NIRAV MODI IN CUSTODY TILL AUGUST 27

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Test travellers from 'risk areas': Germany

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

The national disease control centre, the Robert Koch Institute, said 1,045 cases were recorded on Wednesday — the first time since May 7 that it has counted more than 1,000 new cases in a day.

Daily figures can be volatile or distorted by delays in reporting, and

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

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

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

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

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

statement.

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

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

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

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

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

US TALKS TOUGHER ON CHINESE TECH, BUT OFFERS FEW SPECIFICS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lebanon officials shift blast blame as Macron calls for serious reforms

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

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

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

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

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



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

Explosion likely an attack: Trump

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

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

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

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

OZ PLEDGES \$1.4MN FOR BEIRUT RELIEF

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

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

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

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

Rajapaksas set for landslide win

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

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

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

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

"great victory" for the ruling party.

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

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

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

PEACE | CEREMONY

Attack witnesses urge world leaders to commit to nuclear disarmament

Survivors mark 75th anniv of 1st atomic attack

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

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

Weapons," Matsui said in his peace declaration.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DECCAN Chronicle

7 AUGUST 2020

Did PM just discredit India's freedom fight?

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

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

The land on which the temple will now come up is freed through acts of violence, a fact underlined by the Supreme Court, which ordered construction of the temple. Mr Modi's call for seeing the temple as a symbol of India's unity would have better acceptance had he mentioned those innocent victims and begged their pardon. Perhaps, it would have been a true tribute to Lord Ram.

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

In Beirut, avoidable tragedy

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

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

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

ADITYA SINHA
Editor

R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

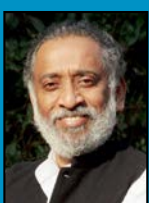
K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748
Coimbatore: 77 Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore 641009. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256
Bengaluru: 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: 08043460500; Fax: 080-22960551/52/55
Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax: (0891) 2755285
Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patnamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/2555287, Fax: (0866) 2555234
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618
Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904
Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax: (0861) 2348580
Karimnagar: Survey No. 1341, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar 505 001. Phone: (0878) 2228908; Telefax: (0878) 2220433
Kochi: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloorkadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408
Kozhikode: No 6/1002 E, First Floor City Mall, Opp. YMCA Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001 Fax : 0495 4019018
Thiruvananthapuram: St Joseph Press Thycaud post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/6/7, Fax: 0471-4016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss

Dilip Cherian

Dilli Ka Babu

Officer sent to PMO won laurels in TN



Any appointment in the all-powerful Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is viewed with great interest. So, when P. Amudha, who is a 1994 batch IAS officer of Tamil Nadu cadre, was appointed to the PMO as joint secretary, on a lateral shift basis, for the remainder of her five-year central deputation period, observers are speculating about her talent that can meet the high standards of the PMO. Before this appointment, Amudha was serving as a professor at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie. Interestingly, minutes after the news of her appointment emerged Tamil Nadu chief minister E. Palaniswami congratulated the IAS officer in a tweet and said that she had earned the goodwill of the state government as well as the

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

WHO WILL BE NEW RBI DEPUTY GOVERNOR?

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

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

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

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

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

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

HALT OR GO TO J&K CADRE CHANGE?

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

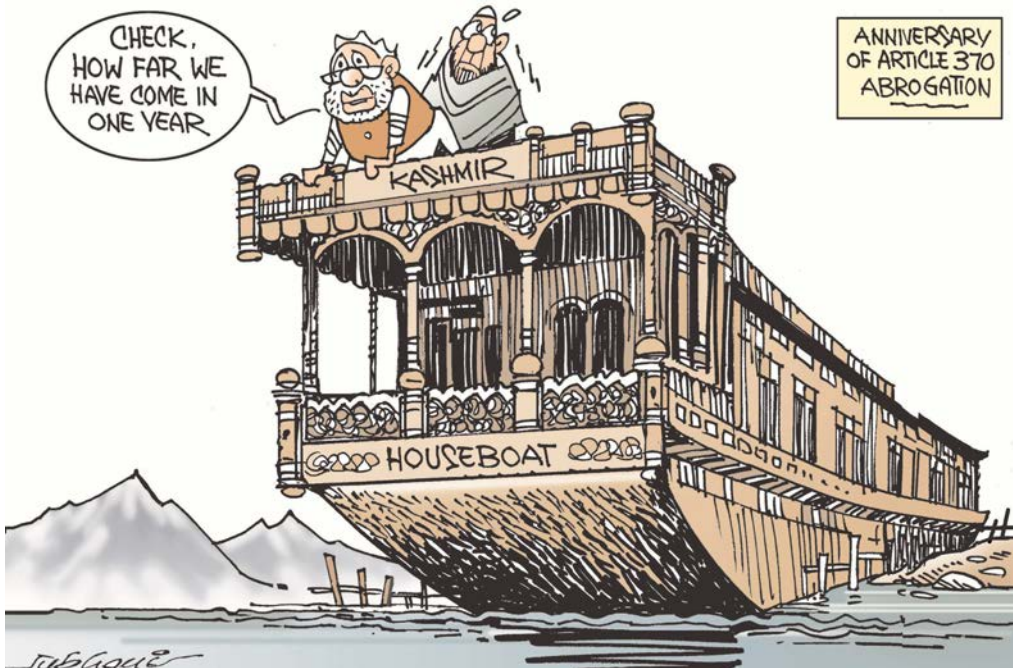
The J&K cadre of IAS, IPS and IOFS officers was to be merged into the AGMUT cadre. However, according to the regulations, officers already serving in the J&K cadre at the time would continue in

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

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

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

Subhani



Pandemic on rise: More questions than answers



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

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

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

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

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

There are masses of data swirling around.

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

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

is on the right track.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS ROLE MODEL

Apropos your report, *Visually impaired candidate cracks civil service exams*. Hats off to you Poorna Sundari the pride of Tamil Nadu for clearing the Union Public Service Commission Exams. 'The mother of all exams' poses a real challenge to every candidate but barring her problems with vision, she has proved to be a role model for other aspiring students who want to achieve their goals like the IAS. This reminds me of the first visually challenged woman IAS officer Prajan Patil who was appointed as Sub-collector in Thiruvananthapuram in 2019. I wish Poorna Sundari also gets a suitable posting and the very best for her future endeavours.

Jacqueline Netto
Chennai

RELIGIOUS BEGINNING

THE GROUND-BREAKING ceremony for Sri Ramar Temple at Ayodhya was awesome with a chain of lamps lit on the banks of Sarayu river, the enchanting decoration of the proposed area at the site and vedic pandits chanting mantras imparting power and grace of Sri Rama to the silver brick placed by the PM as the first stone in the pit dug for making the foundation for the proposed temple. But the part of the ceremony to be appreciated most was the way the Prime Minister conducted himself from the beginning. He behaved like an ordinary human being with was no exhibition of his position in the visit to the temple except for security reasons. These spontaneous acts moved many of the viewers of the ceremony on many channels telecasting it. Even his speech was not studded with political views. No doubt he has proved himself as a leader leading us by example.

V. Rajagopalan
Chennai

SETBACK FOR TRUMP

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump's pitch to delay the November presidential election is ill-conceived and reeks of desperation. Trump has no authority to push back the election without an act of Congress, and even congressional leaders of the president's party do not support his idea. With just 3 months to go for the scheduled election, Trump is again in political hot water.

R. Sivakumar
Chennai

Banks and real estate stocks gained as RBI didn't extend loan moratorium period.