

SHORT TAKES

HC ORDERS 4-WK HALT TO GROUP-1 INTERVIEWS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 16

The AP High Court on Wednesday ordered that the Group-1 interview process be suspended for four weeks. Notices to the effect were sent to secretaries of Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) and General Administration Department (GAD). The APPSC was scheduled to start the Group-1 interview process from Thursday.

Counsel for petitioners, Yogesh Thandava said that judge D. V. S. S. Somayajulu issued the interim orders after hearing petitions challenging the digital evaluation of Group-1 Mains exam answer scripts.

Counsel for the petitioners argued that the examinations were not conducted as per the rules and the applicants were told about digital valuation at the last minute. They said that evaluation of English medium papers of Group-1 exams was held in other States and it had caused severe injustice to the aspirants.

Government's counsel told the court that the Group-1 tests were conducted as per rules and there was no need to inform in advance about the evaluation. After hearing both sides of the arguments, the court on Tuesday reserved its judgment. On Wednesday, judge D. V. S. S. Somayajulu issued the interim orders, thereby putting the whole process in limbo for another four weeks.

Around 326 candidates have been short-listed for the interview based on the marks obtained by them in the main written exam which was held from December 14 to December 20, last year. A total of 169 vacancies in various departments are to be filled through this exam.

TD QUESTIONS INDIA CEMENTS LEASE EXTENSION

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 16

The sitting MLA and state TD president K. Atchannaidu on Wednesday questioned the propriety and legality of extending the lease period for the mines of India Cements by 50 years by the state government in blatant misuse of power and authority.

Atchannaidu said that a similar arbitrary extension of lease was already given for Saraswati Cements immediately after Jagan Mohan Reddy came to power. Obviously, the AP Chief Minister was bent on giving permissions to the co-accused in his CBI and ED cases to loot the natural resources. The ongoing mining benefits were only aimed at influencing the witnesses in the illegal assets cases.

WEAPONS & KITS RECOVERED FROM ENCOUNTER SPOT

From page 1

Weapons including AK-47, carbine, 303, tapancha and country-made weapons, were recovered from the spot along with literature, kit bags belonging to the extremists.

According to sources, these extremists earlier escaped from the Greyhounds during the last combat operation at Pala Samudram in Koyyuru mandal on May 20.

The sources further said a group of 30 Maoists had been roaming in the area for the last few months due to health problems arising out of Covid-19 infections. They used to rely on locals for medicines and food. The police might have tracked them with the help of a few reds who surrendered before the East Godavari police recently.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Visakhapatnam district SP B. Krishna Rao said that Wednesday's encounter was a major one after the five deaths of Maoists in a gunfight with the AP in September 2019. Before that, a total of 24 Maoists including top leaders were killed in 2016, he added.

The SP called upon the Maoists to surrender and avail benefits as per the existing policy. Referring to a case, he said one female Maoist named Sake Kalavathi alias Bhavani was severely injured in an exchange of fire at Nallajarla a few years ago. She surrendered before the government. She was admitted in a hospital for better treatment and she recovered soon.

Staff crunch ails food safety department

Under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, AP registers 402 cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 16

Staff crunch in the food safety department, coupled with lack of necessary infrastructure, seems to be taking a big toll on the public health in the state as many unregulated erring food outlets are going undetected.

The recent raids in Chittoor and Prakasam districts by the food safety officials exposed the menace of adulterated food items like milk and ghee. Though the department is supposed to conduct regular raids to control such malpractices, manpower shortage is coming in the way.

There are only four food

1.72 LAKH NEW BENEFICIARIES IDENTIFIED

From page 1

The Chief Minister was interacting with Collectors and SPs on a wide range of issues including e-cropping, housing, Spandana grievances, and other welfare schemes. He noted that water and electricity facilities were provided in 4,120 housing colonies and directed the officials to provide them in the rest of colonies by the end of June.

The officials informed that 1.72 lakh new beneficiaries were identified, of whom 38,000 were receiving house sites in the current layouts, 9,794 would be accommodated in new layouts. Around 11,740 applications are yet to be processed. The Chief Minister instructed the officials to complete the construction of 15.6 lakh houses in the first phase.

The Chief Minister also emphasised on e-cropping and said that Collectors, Joint Collectors should monitor at least 10 per cent of the e-cropping and fix responsibility on officials for any failures.

Farmers must be given receipts along with digital acknowledgment, listing out all e-crop details such as input subsidy and crop insurance.

He stated that the farmers should not be facing any hassles because of the officials' mistakes. In case of any doubts, farmers should have the right to question the authorities, thus providing a physical receipt along with digital acknowledgment.

The Chief Minister said that quality seeds should be provided to the farmers through RBKs and directed the authorities to keep a check on black marketing and spurious seeds by conducting regular inspections.

He said that even during the curfew, agricultural and allied activities must be taken up. Custom hiring centers and hubs must be set up as they could transform the agriculture sector in coming days, by providing machinery services at affordable prices to local farmers. Committees at the district level should be set up by the farmers themselves, where they can decide on the machinery they could rent including the price fixation.

The Chief Minister said that in the first phase, 3,000 custom hiring centres would be launched in the RBKs on July 8, followed by the second phase in October and the third phase in January. He also directed the authorities to make available banking services at RBKs and told the Collectors to take it up the banks.

● **CM emphasised on e-cropping and said that Collectors, Joint Collectors should monitor at least 10 per cent of the e-cropping and fix responsibility on officials for any failures.**

● **THERE IS** a need for at least 24 FSOs for urban areas and over 30 FSOs in rural areas in the district, besides infrastructure and laboratories.

safety inspectors (FSO) in Chittoor district, which has a population of around 41.74 lakh – 12.31 lakh in urban and 29.42 lakh in rural areas (2011 census). As per the guidelines of WHO (World Health Organisation), there should be one FSO for every 50,000 urban population or one lakh rural population. As such, there is a need for at least 24 FSOs for urban areas and over 30 FSOs in rural areas in the district, besides infrastructure and laboratories.

The department is woefully inadequate in respect

of staff and infrastructure, with the result that there are no tabs on thousands of licensed and unlicensed businesses across the district. It also suffers from acute shortage of vehicles, and depends on public transportation or own vehicles. There are more than 25,000-30,000 small and big hotels, shops, restaurants and stalls in the district, of which over 1000-1500 are in Tirupati city alone.

Faced with such hurdles, issuing licence, checking safety norms etc has become a tedious job for the FSOs. “We are taking

steps to recruit at least 30 FSOs and also steps are being taken to have full-time designated officers.

A proposal has already been sent to the government in this regard,” a senior food safety inspector said on condition of anonymity.

However, despite skeletal staff and inadequate infrastructure, as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data for 2019 shows, AP registered 402 cases under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. It comes third after UP and Maharashtra with 1027 and 497 cases respectively. Telangana managed to register only 222 cases in 2019.



CPI leaders and activists stage a novel protest against the property tax notification based on the value of the property, at Besant Road in Vijayawada on Wednesday. — DC

New tax hike limited to 15% of existing rate, says Botsa

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 16

Condemning the “false propaganda” of a section of media and Opposition parties on the new taxation system, Municipal Administration Minister Botsa Satyanarayana asserted on Wednesday that the hike would be limited to 15 per cent of the existing rate. This will be implemented in the most transparent manner, he said.

Speaking to the media, the minister warned against “attempts” to create panic among the people with false propaganda and said the revised taxation system is proposed on the basis of central government recommendations, and after studying the taxation system in other states and also reviewing the feedback from taxpayers.

The state would earn an additional revenue of only ₹186 crore by way of the new taxation. But the Opposition is portraying a scenario of the state extracting as high as ₹10,000 crore from the people, the minister said.

“Out of the 33 lakh tax assessments in the state, 4 lakh houses were of less than 375sqft area and the tax for each such house was just ₹50. Though the government will be getting less tax, the decision was taken for the good of the ordinary people, he claimed.

The minister flayed BJP leader G. V. L. Narasimha Rao for making “baseless” allegations against the government on tax hike and said everyone has seen how the central government was increasing the price of petrol despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

The state government would organise debates in cities like Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada and Tirupati on the new taxation system.

APCUF STAGES STIR, SEEKS ROLLBACK OF INCREASE IN PROPERTY TAX

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 16

The Andhra Pradesh Urban Citizens' Forum (APUCF) staged protests in front of ward secretariats and municipal offices in 13 districts of the state demanding rollback of increased property tax and cancellation of proposed garbage collection tax. The APUCF alleged that the BJP government elected by people was turning all citizen services into commercial services.

APUCF convener Ch. Babu Rao said people in large numbers following Corona protocol joined the protests opposing property tax hike and submitted

memorandums to the officials in secretariats and municipal offices.

He said the protests would continue on Thursday also and APUCF was planning to further intensify the agitations by conducting a state-level meeting with all stakeholders.

Babu Rao said minister for municipal administration Botsa Satyanarayana was claiming that the government was imposing only ₹186 crore through property tax hike, but ₹186 crore was not a meagre amount. It would put extra financial burden on the public who were already facing severe problems due to the Corona crisis, he said.

WITHDRAW MOVE ON PROPERTY TAX HIKE, DEMAND BJP AND RPS

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 16

BJP functionaries demanded the state government to withdraw the proposal to hike property and water taxes in municipalities and corporations besides introducing the garbage tax.

Strongly opposing the government's move, they held a demonstration at the premises of Municipal Corporation office here on Tuesday.

Addressing the protesters, BJP State Spokespersons G. Bhanuprakash Reddy and Samanchi Srinivas said that the taxes will be an additional burden on public, who are already suffering financially due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They said the state government,

which actually should extend a helping hand to the people who are in distress due to the pandemic, is putting a burden on people by increasing the taxes.

They alleged that the YSRC government is doing this to fund the freebies.

Meanwhile, Rayalaseema Porata Samithi Convener P. Naveen Kumar Reddy, speaking to media here on Wednesday, said it was deplorable that the government, which is supposed to support the people of the state by giving tax exemption for one year during the Covid-19 crisis, is giving a return gift to them by increasing the taxes after winning the local body elections.

three months, said superintendent engineer Sreerama Chandra Murthy.

Krishna Water Dispute Tribunal (KWDT) has allocated 4 tmc for AP to be drawn from RDS and the works are going on, he said.

However, the Telangana government argues that AP was trying to draw more water to irrigate five

lakh acres by constructing four lifts at the RDS. TS engineers claim that AP was going ahead without the concurrence and permission of Central Water Commission (CWC), Apex committee

Karnataka, Telangana, and AP, and the Centre. With this illegal construction, TS is likely to lose irrigation facilities to 87000 acres of land.



Lella Appireddy (centre) thanked Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for nominating him as MLC, at the CM's Camp Office in Tadepalli on Wednesday. CM programme co-ordinator Talasila Raghuram is also seen.

Speed up constructions of BMCUs, AMCUs, says CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 16

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Wednesday that 9,899 buildings will be constructed for Bulk Milk Chilling Units (BMCU), for which administrative clearance is pending for only 352 units.

Nearly 38 per cent of the building construction has not yet begun, he noted, and asked officials to release the pending permissions and start the construction of those buildings immediately.

“We have also set a target of constructing 2,633 buildings in the first phase for Auto Milk Collection Units (AMCU), but only 1,946 are under construction while approval has already been

given for 2,583 building permits.”

The CM said the 9,899 buildings for BMCUs would provide reassurance to every dairy farmer on the quality of the milk they are supplying. Also, matters like how many litres of milk and how much money they get can be found on the spot by the issue of slip. This will prevent any fraud.”

The CM told officials to focus on NREGS works as they are very important especially in the pandemic situation.

Jagan asked officials to constitute teams to monitor and review the construction process of various buildings and hold fortnight-long celebrations from June 17 - July 2.

As for the secondary food processing units, the CM directed the authorities to complete the land identification process in each constituency by the month-end. The government is bringing digital libraries in every village panchayat. By December, the fiber grid services will be taken to 2824 villages.

He said there is a need to identify lands and focus on building libraries, where NREGS tasks should be outsourced to JC Development.

Jagan announced the implementation of welfare schemes for June and July. The Cheyutha scheme will be launched on June 22, the YSR Bima on July 1, and the Vidya Deevena and Kapu Nestam in July.

Long way to go in Covid fight: CM

From page 1

Although 3.5 crore people have to be vaccinated, so far only 26,33,351 received two doses of vaccine, and 6,90,710 received a single dose of vaccine. There was a long way to go, he said. Masks, sanitisers, and social distance should continue to be a part of our lives, he said. In regard to testing, he instructed the authorities to conduct only RT-PCR tests to those having Covid symptoms and get them treated immediately. He also stressed on conducting fever surveys every week in all villages for quick tracing and treating.

Jagan Mohan Reddy congratulated the Collectors for successful implementation of YSR Aarogyasri as 89 per cent of the patients took treat-

ment under the scheme. As on date, over 16,000 people were undergoing Covid treatment in the state and of them more than 14,000 were being treated under Aarogyasri. Officials were asked to keep tabs on Aarogyasri implementation at private hospitals. They should not brook any violations.

The Chief Minister informed that it was decided to give lands as an incentive to set up 16 private multi and super specialty hospitals in each district center and each corporation, if anyone is ready to invest ₹100 crore or more in the next three years.

Speaking of the '104' call center, the CM reiterated the need to ensure it serves as Covid one-stop centers.

SRIKAKULAM & EAST GODAVARI SAND FOR HOUSING, SAYS SRIRANGANADHARAJU

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 16

Housing minister Ch. Sriranganadharaju said they would take the help of Srikakulam and East Godavari district administrations for supply of sand for the Jagananna Colonies in Visakhapatnam, which do not have any proper sources for the sand required for construction of houses.

All infrastructure facilities like roads, drinking water, electricity, drainage apart from internet would be provided in the YSR Jagananna Colonies, the minister said, while reviewing the project's progress with district officials here on Wednesday.

In the first phase, nearly

● **DIRECT** AND indirect employment would be provided on a large-scale during the implementation of the mega housing project, said the minister.

5,019 houses would be built by September as against the target of 5,000 houses set by the government. Officials and staff should be available to the beneficiaries and provide them full assistance in the construction of houses, he insisted.

The government would spend around ₹30,000 crore for all the houses in the state, he said. Direct and indirect employment would be provided on a large-scale during the implementation of the mega housing project, the minister added.

AP HELP SOUGHT FOR PROJECT FUNDING

From page 1

It sought the support of the Government of Andhra Pradesh in terms of viability gap funding for the project.

The minister said that on June 10, CM Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy met Dharumendra Pradhan and requested for the support of GoI in taking forward the strategic project. He said that the project will place the state in a strong position to contribute to Prime Minister's vision of \$5 trillion economy by 2024, as being an anchor unit to the Petroleum, Chemical and Petrochemical Investment Region (PCPIR) proposed by the Centre to promote investments and industries in these sectors. He said that the Union minister responded positively and promised to extend all support in taking forward the project.

Gowtham Reddy said that their team also had a detailed discussion with the Union minister on the establishment of a petrochemical cracker complex in Andhra Pradesh by HPCL-GAIL consortium, given the recent regulatory changes. He said that as a result of the discussions, a working group has been constituted under the chairmanship of joint secretary (refineries), ministry of petroleum and natural gas, with the state government officials. Engineers India Limited and SBI Caps are advised to re-work the financials in view of the recent regulatory changes in corporate tax and interest rates to take forward the strategic project in Andhra Pradesh without any viability gap funding.

Gowtham Reddy said this project would provide employment to 50 lakh persons and investments to the tune of ₹25,000-30,000 crore would flow into the petrochemical sector in the coming two or three years. He said that recently the Union government increased use of ethanol to 20 per cent in petrol which would attract more investments in the coming days. He informed that AP provided 45,000 employment opportunities amidst the pandemic Corona crisis.



SHORT TAKES

WOMAN SET ON FIRE BY PARENTS OVER LOVE AFFAIR

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JUNE 16

The family members attempted to murder a young woman in Rayachoti. Police arrested three accused involved in the case.

The family members were looking for marriage proposals to the girl, but she was refusing all the alliances which were fixed by them. They came to know that she fell in love with someone and asked her to stop the relationship. As she did not relent, father, mother and brother decided to kill her and set her on fire. She was rescued by her elder sister and shifted to Kadapa RIMS for treatment.

According to Sub Divisional officer, Rayachoti, Reddyvari Vasudevan, Patan Tahseen (20), a resident of Rahiman Masjid Street at Kothapalli in Rayachoty fell in love with a close relative Imaran. But the parents of Tahseen opposed it and started looking for alliances. As she kept refusing the proposals, Munvar Jahan (mother), Mahammad Shareef (father) and her younger brother Tajuddin poured petrol on and set fire to her on Tuesday evening. But she was rescued and shifted to hospital by her elder sister. Based on the statement of the victim, a case was registered at Rayachoty urban PS. On Wednesday morning, a team led by Raju, Inspector, arrested the accused and produced them before court.

MAN KILLED BY BROTHER-IN-LAW FOR HARASSMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JUNE 16

A person named Sheikh Fayaz was brutally killed by his brother-in-law at Amrita Nagar in Proddatur in Kadapa district on Tuesday night.

According to Proddatur DSP Y. Prasada Rao, Sheikh Fayaz has been residing with his wife in Amritnagar in Proddatur for some time. The couple frequently quarreled over some issues. On Tuesday night, he was intoxicated and assaulted his wife.

Her younger brother Karimullah, who lives on the same street, intervened and tried to take his sister to their house. An enraged Fayaz brandished a knife and tried to attack Karimullah who in a fit of rage attacked him with an iron rod, resulting in his death. The DSP said that on receipt of news, the police rushed to the spot and shifted the body for post mortem. The accused was taken into custody. A case is being registered, said the official.

● **ACCORDING TO** Proddatur DSP Y. Prasada Rao, Sheikh Fayaz has been residing with his wife in Amritnagar in Proddatur for some time. The couple frequently quarreled over some issues. On Tuesday night, he was intoxicated and assaulted his wife.

Covid continues to hit towns, villages in AP

Covid spreads at a faster pace in small villages, towns than in big cities

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 16

The second wave of Covid-19 is receding. It is showing a declining trend in urban areas over the past few weeks, but a worrisome shift is evident — the virus spreading to semi-urban and rural areas.

District-level data shows that the pandemic continues to spread at a faster pace in small villages and small towns than in big cities of Andhra Pradesh. This is particularly so in the Chittoor district. The urban areas have borne the brunt of the first wave last year, but they now account for only a quarter of the new cases.

The surge in the num-

ber of positive cases in rural areas is reflected in the pandemic statistics from the district administration. The urban areas in Chittoor district have contributed a little over 26.5 per cent of new infections from June 10-16, as against 73.5 per cent by the rural and semi-urban areas.

In total, the district has reported nearly 7,075 new cases during the past seven days, of which 5,198 cases were recorded in rural and semi-urban areas and 1,877 in urban areas. Epidemiologists and health experts are concerned over the fact that

around 73.5 per cent of the Covid cases were registered between June 10 and 16 were from rural areas.

The data shows that the rural areas in the district contributed 804 cases out of the total 1,042 cases on June 10, followed by 988 of the 1396 cases on June 11; 840 of the 1,199 cases on June 12; some 713 of the 968 cases on June 13; 684 of the 860 cases on the 14th, 606 of the 830 cases on the 15th and 563 of the 780 cases on the 16th.

The urban areas recorded 238, 408, 359, 255, 176, 224 and 217 cases between

June 10 and 16.

District collector Hari Narayanan said the mandal-level task force will take special steps to ensure that fever survey, testing, quarantine, isolation etc are done at all the mandals that are contributing the highest number of Covid cases.

“Of the 4,52,710 tests conducted in the district from May to June 12, as many as 87,910 tested positive. At present, there are over 12,000 active cases in the district and the positivity rate is at a high of 14 per cent,” he said.

The authorities are taking steps to control the spread and special focus has been laid on mandals with more than 10 per cent test positivity rate.

SHARP SPIKE IN CORONAVIRUS CASES IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 16

The daily number of Covid-19 infections slightly increased in Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday with the registration of 6,617 new cases, compared to 5,741 cases the previous day.

As many as 1,01,544 samples were tested in the past 24 hours in which 6,617 were found Covid-positive. A total 2,07,36,435 Coronavirus tests were done in the 13 districts so far. The total Covid-19 infections in the 13 districts was 1,82,6751, of which the total recoveries were of 17,43,176. Some 57 new deaths were registered on the daily chart on Wednesday, increasing the state's Covid death toll so far to 12,109.

The East Godavari district was on top in the daily chart, with 1,397 new infections followed by West Godavari 829, Chittoor 780, Prakasam 526, Anantapur 427, Krishna 407, Srikakulam 405 and Kadapa 379. Nellore district reported 364 infections, Guntur 361, Visakhapatnam 303, Vizianagaram 222 and Kurnool the least number of 217 cases. Nine Covid-19 deaths each were registered in Chittoor and Guntur districts, five each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Krishna and Srikakulam districts, four each in Visakhapatnam and West Godavari districts three deaths in Kurnool district, and two each in Kadapa, Nellore, Prakasam and Vizianagaram districts. The East Godavari was on top in total Covid cases, with 2,50,694 infections.

Only certified gold sales in 19 districts in AP, TS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 16

The mandatory hall-marking of gold came into force in seven districts in Telangana and 12 districts in Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. The Centre earlier announced that the mandatory hall-marking of gold jewellery and artefacts would be implemented in phases from June 16. Initially, it is being implemented in 256 districts across the country, which have assaying marking centres.

The seven districts in Telangana include Mancherla, Peddapalli, Warangal (Rural), Warangal (Urban), Rangareddy, Hyderabad and Khammam. The 12 districts in AP are S r i k a k u l a m , V i z i a n a g a r a m , Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam, Nellore, Kadapa, Kurnool and Anantapur.

In November 2019, the Central government had announced that the hall-marking of gold jewellery and artefacts would be made mandatory across the country from January 15, 2021. But the deadline was extended for four

● **THE 12** districts in AP are Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam, Nellore, Kadapa, Kurnool and Anantapur.

months till June 1 and later till June 15 after the jewellers sought more time in view of the pandemic. Gold hall-marking is a purity certification of the precious metal and has been voluntary in nature so far.

“Continuing our government's endeavour for better protection & satisfaction of customers, mandatory hall-marking in 256 districts will be implemented from June 16, 2021. No penalty will be imposed till August 2021,” Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal tweeted after the meeting.

After extensive consultation with stakeholders, the government relaxed mandatory hall-marking of gold for certain players in the jewellery sector. For instance, the government exempted jewellers with annual turnover of up to ₹40 lakh from mandatory hall-marking, said an official statement issued after the meeting.

It has also been exempted on those who export and re-import

jewellery as per the government's trade policy, jewellery meant for international exhibitions as well as for government-approved B2B domestic exhibitions.

From June 16, jewellers in 256 districts will be allowed to sell only 14, 18 and 22 carats of gold jewellery. Gold of additional 20, 23 and 24 carats will also be allowed for hall-marking, it added.

That apart, the government said it has exempted mandatory hall-marking gold on watches, fountain pens and special types of jewellery like Kundan, Polki and Jadau. “Jewellers can continue to buy back old gold jewellery without a hall-mark from consumers,” it said adding that old jewellery can be hallmarked, if feasible by the jeweller after melting and making new jewellery.

India has around 4 lakh jewellers, of whom only 35,879 are BIS certified. According to the World Gold Council, India imports 700-800 tonnes of gold annually.

TEMPLES AND HISTORIC SITES RE-OPEN

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JUNE 16

Hampi, Lepakshi and Hemavathi temples re-opened on Wednesday. A large number of devotees and tourists started visiting the historic temples and the tourist spots of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) after a two-month lockdown. Executive officer Narasimha Murthy of Lepakshi temple said the devotees were allowed after the ASI announced relaxation for visitors to visit monuments and temples across the country.

Lepakshi Nandi is the world's biggest Nandi, while Lord Siddheswara Swamy (Lord Shiva in human form) at Hemavathi in Anantapur district is the only temple of its kind in South India.

The five-centuries-old historic Vijayanagar capital Hampi and the surrounding locations in Karnataka were also thrown open to visitors including foreigners.

● **EXECUTIVE OFFICER** of Lepakshi temple said the devotees were allowed after the ASI announced relaxation for visitors to visit monuments and temples across the country.



Contract nursing staff donning PPE kits hold aloft placards during a protest against the government apathy in regularising their services, at CSR ward at King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

—DC

Svims resident docs seek hike in stipend

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 16

The Resident Doctors Association (RDA), an association of house surgeons, post graduate students and super speciality residents of Tirupati's

Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS), has demanded the authorities to hike their stipend and review the fee structure. Over 150 members (doctors) of RDA-SVIMS wore black badges and staged a demonstration to mark their protest here on Wednesday.

The RDA's main demands are fair and comparable hike in their stipend at par with AIIMS/NIMS pay scale including arrears from Jan 2020, review in the fee structure at par with AIIMS/NIMS Institutes, and hike of 15 per cent in stipend every alternate year. They also demanded

a hike in the Senior Residents pay on par with senior residents of government medical colleges, as per G.O. MS. No.58, including arrears from September 2020. The representatives of RDA-SVIMS Dr Naveen Kumar Goda and Dr G.D. Sunay said that despite submitting several representations — regarding their demands, to the hospital management, no action has been taken so far, except oral assurances from the latter.

“Previous hike was done in 2017 after which no hike has been done so far. We have been requesting the management since January this year, but the issue of the stipend hike is still pending. Neither the TTD nor the government authorities are considering our plea, and we have been neglected and we feel our services are going unrecognised”, they said.

SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
Details of the Tender Notices
of S.C. Railway can be seen on our website : www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

Open e-Tender Notice No. DRM /Works/BZA/16/2021 dt.16-06-2021

For and on behalf of the President of India, the undersigned invites E-Tenders for the following works up to 15-00 hours and the date mentioned against each.

1. Tender No.: E-08-East-2021
Name of work : Vijayawada Division-Providing House Keeping and maintenance services for the DRM office, other service buildings and circulating area at DRM compound (for a period of 2 years).

Period of completion : 24 (Twenty four) months
Tender value : ₹. 1,23,35,625/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 07-07-2021

2. Tender No.: E-04-Bridges-2021
Name of work : Vijayawada Division-Vijayawada-Visakhapatnam section: Construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.466 at Km 706/31-33 between NRP-REG stations by open cut method (Size of RCC Box-1x5.00x4.00m + 1x5.00x3.00m).

Period of completion : 9 (Nine) months
Tender value : ₹. 4,43,25,875/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 07-07-2021

3. Tender No.: E-18-North-2021
Name of work : SW-I:Repairs to staff quarters, roof leakages at CCT and COA and drainage repairs at PAP in SSE/Works/SLO section under ADEN/SLO sub-division. SW-II: Repairs to roof leakages in staff quarters in West Colony, East colony and Gangayamuna quarters at RUY in SSE/Works/RUY section under ADEN/RUY sub-division.

Period of completion : 9 (Nine) months
Tender value : ₹. 1,95,78,324/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 07-07-2021

4. Tender No.: E-19-North-2021
Name of work : SW-I:Vijayawada Division- BZA-VSKP section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.476 at Km725/2-4 between YLM-NASP stations by open cut method(RCC Box size 1x6.0x4.50m).

SW-II: BZA Division- BZA-VSKP section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.448 at Km628/30-32 between HVM-TUNI stations by open cut method (RCC Box size 1x6.0x4.50m).

SW-III: BZA Division- BZA-VSKP section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.432 at Km 641/22-24 between PAP-GLP stations by open cut method.

Period of completion : 12(Twelve) months
Tender value : ₹. 15,37,67,902/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 09-07-2021

5. Tender No.: E-20-North-2021
Name of work : SW-I:Vijayawada Division- BZA-VSKP section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.377 at Km542/16-18 between TDD-NBM stations. SW-II: BZA Division- BZA-VSKP section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.368 at Km527/28-30 between CEL-BPY stations.

Period of completion : 12(Twelve) months
Tender value : ₹. 7,48,47,438/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 09-07-2021

6. Tender No.: E-21-North-2021
Name of work : SW-I: Proposed construction/extension of CCTV surveillance rooms at CCT, AKF, TUNI, NDD & TDD stations in Sr.DEN/North/BZA jurisdiction under Nirbaya fund. SW-II: Proposed construction/extension of CCTV surveillance rooms at CLX, BPP, TEL, K C C & E Stations in DEN/Central/BZA jurisdiction under Nirbaya fund. SW-III: Proposed construction/extension of CCTV surveillance rooms at BVRM & NS stations in DEN/East/BZA jurisdiction under Nirbaya fund. SW-IV: Proposed construction/extension of CCTV surveillance rooms at KVZ & GDR stations in DEN/South/BZA jurisdiction under Nirbaya fund.

Period of completion : 6 (Six) months

Tender value : ₹. 85,33,029/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 07-07-2021

7. Tender No.: E-18-South-2021
Name of work : SW-I:GDR-BZA section: Repairs to dilapidated Compound wall/Boundary wall in North eastern colony, North western colony and South western colony at Nellore and Venkatachalam stations in SSE/Works/NLR section. SW-II: GDR-BZA section: Nellore- Repairs to North western colony approach road drain, foot path and South western colony road at Nellore.

Period of completion : 6 (Six) months
Tender value : ₹. 1,27,43,605/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 15-07-2021

8. Tender No.: E-19-South-2021
Name of work : Vijayawada-Gudur section: Ongole Sub Division- Supply of Potable (soft) Drinking water to station and colonies at OGL & TNR stations in ADEN/OGL Sub division.

Period of completion : 12(Twelve) months
Tender value : ₹. 1,08,10,779/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 15-07-2021

9. Tender No.: E-20-South-2021
Name of work : SW-I:Vijayawada Division- GDR-BZA section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.127 at Km 183/24-26 between KJJ-PGU stations by open cut method.

Period of completion : 6 (Six) months
Tender value : ₹. 6,04,58,709/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 09-07-2021

10. Tender No.: E-21-South-2021
Name of work : SW-I:Vijayawada Division- GDR-BZA section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.177 at Km 249/8-10 between TTU-UPD stations by open cut method. SW-II: BZA Division- GDR-BZA section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.178 at Km 251/12-14 between TTU-UPD stations by open cut method.

Period of completion : 9 (Nine) months
Tender value : ₹. 11,63,30,961/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 09-07-2021

11. Tender No.: E-22-South-2021
Name of work : SW-I:Vijayawada Division- GDR-BZA section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.151 at Km 216/20-22 between KVZ-SVPM stations by open cut method. SW-II: BZA Division- GDR-BZA section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.174 at Km 245/4-6 between TTU-UPD stations by open cut method.

Period of completion : 9 (Nine) months
Tender value : ₹. 11,62,40,392/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 09-07-2021

12. Tender No.: E-23-South-2021
Name of work : SW-I:Vijayawada Division- GDR-BZA section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.191 at Km 271/22-24 between SKM-TNR stations by open cut method. SW-II: BZA Division- GDR-BZA section: Proposed construction of RUB in lieu of L.C. No.198 at Km 278/26-28 between TNR-SDM stations by open cut method.

Period of completion : 9 (Nine) months
Tender value : ₹. 10,64,54,774/-
E.M.D. : ₹. Nil
Date of closing : 09-07-2021

The prospective tenderers are advised to visit website "www.ireps.gov.in" before the date of tender closing to note any changes/corrigenda for any tender.

Divisional Railway Manager (Works), Vijayawada

Open e-Tender Notice No & Dt: C/E.221/ELS/LGDR/RC/337/ 21-22/03,

E- Tenders from the experienced Contractors are invited by the undersigned for the following works.

1. Tender No. : C/E.221/ELS/ LGDR/ RC/337, Dt.14.06.2021
Description of work : Reconditioning of pit wheel (at the followed by one year warranty.

Tender value : ₹. 24,17,242.27
EMD : ₹. Nil
Cost of tender form : Nil
Completion period : Six months
Date & time of closing & opening : 12.07.2021 15.00 hrs & 12.07.2021 15.15 hrs

2. Tender No. & Dt. : C/E.221/ELS/ LGDR/RC/307, Dt.14.06.2021
Description of work : Rewinding of Auxiliary motors of 3-Phase locomotives. Qty:137 nos for two years

Tender value : ₹. 29,22,756
EMD : ₹. Nil
Cost of tender form : Nil
Completion period : 24 months
Date & time of closing & opening : 12.07.2021 15.00 hrs & 12.07.2021 15.15 hrs

Validity of offer : 63 days from the date of opening of tender

Submission of tender document : Through IREPS website at "www.ireps.gov.in"

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer, A0591/21 ELS/Lallaguda, Secunderabad

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at http://www.ireps.gov.in or www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

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CHANGE OF NAME

I. SATRAM VENKATESWARA RAO (Old Name) S/o SESHAYYA, R/o D.No. 9-179/A, CHALLAVARIGUDEM Village, JANGAREDDYGUDEM Mandal, West Godavari Dist., A.P. My name has been changed to SATRAM VENKATA RAO (New Name). Hereafter my name known as SATRAM VENKATA RAO.

CHANGE OF NAME

I. K V SRINIVAS S/o V SUDARSANA VARMA, R/o. D.N.2-5-S5-52, KV Layout, Narasimha Theertham Road, Beside LIC Office, Tirupati, A.P. My Father name was wrongly shown as K P RAMACHANDRA RAJU instead of V SUDARSANA VARMA in my PNB Met Life Policy. Here after my father name known as V SUDARSANA VARMA for all purposes.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL
ASSAM RIFLES, SHILLONG - 793 010

ASSAM RIFLES MERITORIOUS SPORTSPERSON RECRUITMENT RALLY 2021

1. Online applications are invited from Indian Nationals Male & Female both as prescribed in detail advertisement to fill up 131 vacancies in Rifleman/Riflewomen General Duty posts in the Assam Rifles against Meritorious Sportspersons Recruitment Scheme.

2. Last date of receipt of applications for all candidates is 26 Jul 2021. Please login to official website of the Assam Rifles www.assamrifles.gov.in to access the online Application Form. The online SERVER will start functioning from 26 Jun 2021.

3. Eligibility Criteria. Age Limit, Education Qualification, Qualitative Requirements, Relaxation in Age, Physical Standards etc. and other instructions are furnished in detailed advertisement available at official website of the Assam Rifles www.assamrifles.gov.in and Employment News dated 26 Jun 2021.

4. How to apply. Applications will be accepted through online mode only. To apply, fill up the online application by clicking on "ONLINE APPLICATION" option and follows the instructions given on the Online Application portal of the website. The online applications portal will remain functional till last date of submission of online Application Form.

5. Candidates to undergo Physical Standard Test (PST), Field Trials in respective sports and Medical Examination at own risk and expense. Injuries including fatal due to the test during recruitment rally and transit will not be compensated in any matter by the Govt or Assam Rifles.

6. Vacancies are tentative & may increase or decrease. The Assam Rifles has right to make any change in the advertisement or cancel it without assigning any reasons.

SHORT TAKES

PM LAUDS MOTHER FOR ISOLATING FROM CHILD

New Delhi, June 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has hailed a mother of a six-year-old boy for her courage and positive thinking as she isolated herself from her son after contracting Covid-19.

Pooja Verma, who lives in Sector-6 of Ghaziabad, tested positive for the Coronavirus along with her husband, Gagan Kaushik. Verma, her husband and their six-year-old son live in a three-bedroom apartment and after contracting Covid-19 in April, the couple made a tough decision and decided that all three would be isolated in separate rooms.

This was not easy for the six-year-old who longed for his parent's love while unable to understand what the Coronavirus was or what Covid-related norms meant and what was the need for this isolation, Verma said.

He kept on wondering what wrong had he done that he had to stay in a room separate from his parents, she said. In a letter to the Prime Minister, she narrated her ordeal as a mother who had to stay away from her child, through a poem she had penned.

The Prime Minister wrote back to her and while asking about the wellbeing of her family, said, "I am happy that even in difficult circumstances, you and your family have fought this disease by adopting Covid-compliant behaviour with courage." Lauding the woman's poem, the PM said it expressed the worry and anxiety of a mother when she is away from her child.

ODISHA GOES FOR 'PARTIAL UNLOCK' FROM TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 16

With the state reporting a steady dip in Covid-19 cases, the Odisha government on Wednesday announced partial unlock plans to relax the restrictions imposed on May 1 this year. The partial lockdown will come into effect from June 17 morning and will continue till July 1 morning.

Addressing a press conference, chief secretary Suresh Mohapatra said the Covid-19 infection rate has drastically declined and the test positivity rate (TPR) dropped to six per cent this week. He attributed the drop in the infection rate to people's adherence to lockdown restrictions.

"The peak period in the state is already over and I hope if people continue to coordinate with the state government, the situation can be completely brought under control in a few days," Mohapatra added.

Under the new unlocking measures, the lockdown restrictions will be eased in 17 districts (Category A) out of the 30 in the state from tomorrow. Shops will remain open between 6 am and 5 pm in these 17 districts. The Category-A districts are in the southern and western parts of the state where test positivity rate is five per cent or less. However, in the remaining 13 districts (Category B), shops will remain open between 6 am and 1 pm.

MAOISTS INJURED IN ODISHA ENCOUNTER

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 16

A fierce gunbattle took place between a group of Maoists rebels and security forces in a forest near Kulabedha in Odisha's Malkangiri district on Wednesday morning. Some of the rebels reportedly sustained injuries in the encounter.

According to Malkangiri superintendent of police Hrushikesh Khilari, the exchange of fire occurred during a search operation carried out by the joint team of Special Operation Group and District Voluntary Force in the forest.

"The SOG and DVF of Odisha police had launched a search operation during which the Maoists cadres opened fire indiscriminately at the security forces. The jawan also retaliated in which some rebels sustained injuries," the SP said.

However, the injured ultras managed to flee into the dense forest, he added.

During subsequent search, the security forces recovered an INSAS rifle along with 34 rounds of bullets and magazines. A kit bag, digital camera, live magazines and other Maoist articles were also found during the search, the SP added.

FURTHER PROGRESS OF MONSOON STOPS

New Delhi, June 16: Atmospheric conditions are still not favourable for further advance of monsoon into Rajasthan, remaining parts of Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Delhi, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday.

It said a cyclonic circulation lies over east Uttar Pradesh and neighbourhood and there is also a western disturbance.

These conditions are not favourable for the advance of monsoon, IMD director general M. Mohapatra said.

"Large-scale atmospheric conditions are not favourable for further advance of monsoon into Rajasthan, remaining parts of Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Delhi," the IMD said.

However, there could be a slow progress of monsoon into some more parts of UP during the next five days in association with the existing cyclonic circulation over east Uttar Pradesh, the IMD added.

— PTI



A man takes a selfie with his family at Taj Mahal that reopened after authorities eased some restrictions in the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown, in Agra on Wednesday.

— PTI

Gap between jabs stirs row again

Centre says decision to increase gap was 'transparent and backed by scientific data'

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

India on Wednesday reported 62,224 new cases of Covid-19 and 2,542 deaths. Country's active caseload for the first time in 70 days came down below 9 lakh. The Recovery Rate has increased to 95.80 per cent while daily positivity rate stands at 3.22%. The positivity rate has been less than 5% for nine consecutive days. With the pace of vaccination picking up, the Centre hopes to check the daily cases and blunt the possible third wave.

However, a controversy has re-erupted over the gap between two doses of Covishield vaccine. The Centre had increased the gap between the two doses for Covishield from 8-12 weeks to 12-14 weeks in

May raising questions if that was done based on scientific evidence or due to shortage of the vaccines. The doses of the vaccines remain unchanged now even after the United Kingdom, which was quoted by Central government officials as an example, has decided to reduce the gap.

Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan on Wednesday clarified that the decision to increase the gap between the two doses was 'transparent and backed by scientific data'.

The clarification came after some members of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) said they had recommended only 8-12 weeks but the government on its own came out with a 12 to 16 weeks gap. It was initially

● **THE CLARIFICATION** came after some members of the NTAGI said they had recommended only 8-12 weeks but the government on its own came out with 12 to 16 weeks gap.

● **ON ANY fresh proposal to reduce Covishield dosage gap, Dr Arora said decision will be taken scientifically, giving paramount importance to the health.**

4-6 weeks.

Chairman of NTAGI Dr N.K. Arora explained that the decision to increase the gap between two Covishield doses from 4-6 weeks to 12-16 weeks lay in the fundamental scientific reason regarding behaviour of adenovector vaccines.

"In the last week of April 2021 the data released by Public Health England, United Kingdom's executive agency of the Department of Health, showed that vaccine efficacy varied between 65%

and 88% when interval is 12 weeks. This was the basis on which they overcame their epidemic outbreak due to the Alpha variant. The UK was able to come out of it because the interval they kept was 12 weeks. We also thought that this is a good idea, since there are fundamental scientific reasons to show that when interval is increased, adenovector vaccines give better response. Hence, the decision was taken on May 13, to increase the interval to 12-16 weeks. This also

gives flexibility to the community, since everyone cannot come at precisely 12 weeks or so," said Dr Arora.

Dr Arora said that the earlier decision of four weeks was based upon the bridging trial data available then. He referred to studies by PGI Chandigarh and CMC Vellore which compared effectiveness of partial versus full immunisation. "A PGI Chandigarh study very clearly shows that vaccine effectiveness was 75% for both partially immunised and fully immunised. So at least in the short run, effectiveness was similar whether you are partially or fully vaccinated. This was in relation to the Alpha variant which had swept Punjab, Northern India

and came to Delhi. This also meant that even if you received only one dose, still you are protected." Results from the CMC Vellore study were similar.

On any fresh proposal to reduce Covishield dosage gap, Dr Arora said the decision will be taken scientifically, giving paramount importance to the health and protection of the community. "Covid-19 and the vaccination are very dynamic. Tomorrow, if the vaccine platform tells us that a narrower interval is better for our people, even if the benefit is 5% - 10%, the Committee will take the decision on the basis of merit and its wisdom. On the other hand, if it turns out that the current decision is fine, we will continue with it," he added.

MP IAS officer gets show cause notice

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, JUNE 16

A young IAS officer of Madhya Pradesh has been served show cause notice by the state government following his posts in a private social media group of bureaucrats leveling corruption charges against some babus.

The posts later got leaked. In the leaked posts, the 2014 batch IAS officer of MP cadre, Lokesh Jangid, said he was frequently transferred because of his "intolerance to corruption in the administration".

The babu said he was transferred seven times in his four and half years of service.

In one of his posts, the IAS officer said, "In Bihar they do not make any one DM who mints money. In MP, the less said the

better".

"Stability of tenure in Madhya Pradesh and the joke of an institution called Civil Service Board", said another post by him.

"Interestingly, while those who mint money from all kinds of mafia get transferred from field to field and those with impeccable integrity get thrown to the Secretariat on transfer", read another post in the group by him.

He also indicated to write a memoir after his retirement to bring the facts before everyone since he was bound by service rules currently.

The IAS officer, in one of his posts, alleged corruption by Barwani district collector Shivraj Singh Verma and accused the latter of influencing the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to get him transferred.

2 die after consuming spirit stolen from Covid Care Centre in Kerala

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
JUNE 16

Two persons died in Kerala's Kollam district after consuming surgical spirit kept at a Covid First Line Treatment Centre (CFLTC). The deceased were identified as Prasad of Pattazhy and his friend Muruganandan. Two others — Rajeev and Gopi — who had also consumed the spirit are in a critical condition.

The surgical spirit was stolen from a private hospital in Pathanapuram which was functioning as a CFLTC.

In the statement recorded by police, Gopi said that Muruganandan who worked as a security guard at the private hospital had brought the spirit. The police said that Muruganandan is



A bartender arranges liquor bottles on the shelves at a bar ahead of its reopening after authorities eased restrictions of lockdown in Kolkata on Wednesday.

— PTI

believed to have taken the spirit from hospital and diluted it before consuming it along with others.

According to hospital authorities some quantity of surgical spirit which

was used for sanitising hospital equipment, was found missing.

The four consumed the spirit as liquor was not available in the state due to lockdown.

It may be noted that the

government had decided to reopen bars and liquor outlets in the state from Thursday.

Meanwhile, the police and excise officials conducted a search at the hospital.

Kerala reports 13,270 new cases of Covid 19 on Wednesday.

The active cases have come down to 1,09,794. During the last 24 hours, 1,21,521 samples were tested and the Test Positivity Rate was 11.79 per cent.

The state reported 147 deaths taking the death toll to 11,655.

At present 4.92 lakh people are under observation including 4.63 lakh under home or institutional quarantine.

The state government had announced lifting of lockdown restrictions in a graded manner from Thursday.

ASSAM EDU. DEPT TO TAKE CALL ON HOLDING EXAMS

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, JUNE 16

The Assam cabinet on Wednesday observed that the Covid situation in the state has not improved to conduct class 10 and 12 board examinations but the final decision will be taken by the education department in consultation with the stakeholders.

Informing that in zero-18 years group about 25,000 children were infected by Covid in the state, Assam health minister Keshab Mahanta told reporters that state health department gave a detailed presentation before the state cabinet about the prevailing rate of positivity besides the possible congregation of people in case of holding the board examinations.

After seeing the presentation, the cabinet concluded that it would not be wise to hold the board examinations, he said adding that the decision on whether the exam will be conducted or not will be taken on June 18 by the education department.

Pointing out that Covid situation has not yet improved in districts like Golaghat, Morigaon, Kamrup (M) etc, the minister said that the cabinet was of the view that all necessary steps should be taken to ensure that the spread of pandemic is brought under control. "We have decided not to allow home isolation to persons who don't have separate isolation facilities at home," he said adding that home isolation was responsible for the spread of the virus in many cases.

MAHA TOLD TO PROBE CONG. MLA, SONU SOOD

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, JUNE 16

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday asked the Maharashtra government to "seriously examine" the role of MLA Zeeshan Siddiqui and actor Sonu Sood regarding the alleged illegal distribution of crucial anti-viral drug Remdesivir, through social media, noting that it seemed like a case of a parallel unauthorised agency.

The bench comprising Justices S.P. Deshmukh and G.S. Kulkarni issued this direction while hearing a public interest litigation filed by Nilesh Navalakha through advocate Rajesh Inamdar on management of distribution of Remdesivir to all states by Centre.

On the last date of hearing, advocate Inamdar had pointed out to the court how Remdesivir was supplied to people following requests made on social media to Siddique and Sood within hours, while the state complained of a shortage and several people were dying.

On Wednesday, the court observed that the two seemed to have played a crucial role in facilitating the distribution of Remdesivir.

NEW LAWS

New IT rules are aimed at regulating content on social media, making it more accountable

Prasad slams Twitter for not complying with new IT rules

New Delhi, June 16: IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday slammed Twitter for deliberate defiance and failure to comply with the country's new IT rules, which has led to the US giant losing its intermediary status in India and becoming liable for users posting any unlawful content.

Twitter has allegedly not fully complied with the new rules, called Intermediary Guidelines that call for setting up grievance redressal mechanism and appointing officers to coordinate with law enforcement.

The rules became effective from May 26 and Twitter even after the expiry of the additional

time has not appointed the requisite officers, leading to it losing the 'safe harbour' immunity, sources in the government said.

Prasad said Twitter has "deliberately chosen the path of non-compliance." The minister also mentioned that if any foreign entity believes that it can portray itself as flag bearer of free speech in India to excuse itself from complying with the law of the land, "such attempts are misplaced".

"There are numerous queries arising as to whether Twitter is entitled to safe harbour provision. However, the simple fact of the matter is that Twitter has failed to comply with the Intermediary

Guidelines that came into effect from the 26th of May," he said in social media posts.

He posted a series of messages on Koo — Twitter's homegrown replica — and then on Twitter itself, saying the US social media giant "was given multiple opportunities to comply with the same, however, it has deliberately chosen the path of non-compliance."

Loss of intermediary status in India implies that in the event of any charge against the microblogging site for alleged unlawful content, it would be treated as a publisher and would be liable for punishment under penal laws.

The new IT rules, originally announced in February, are aimed at regulating content on social media firms and making likes of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter more accountable to legal requests for swift removal of posts and sharing details on the originators of messages.

Prasad's ministry on June 5 had written to Twitter warning it of "unintended consequences" if it did not comply with the rules. Twitter did not immediately comment on Prasad's tweets but it on Tuesday stated that it was keeping IT ministry apprised of progress of every step of the process.

"An interim Chief Compliance Officer has been retained and details will be shared with the Ministry directly soon," it had said.

"Twitter continues to make every effort to comply with the new guidelines."

The government's relationship with social media platforms has been tense for the past few months and with Twitter, it got enunciated when posts by BJP leaders on an alleged strategy document of the opposition Congress party to target the Modi government's handling of the second wave of Covid infections, was tagged as 'manipulated media'.

— PTI

UP POLICE BOOK TWITTER, 6 OTHERS FOR 'CREATING COMMUNAL UNREST'

Ghaziabad, June 16: The Uttar Pradesh Police have booked microblogging platform Twitter, a news portal and six persons in connection with the circulation of a video in which an elderly Muslim man narrates his ordeal after he was allegedly attacked by some people in Ghaziabad.

The FIR was lodged on Tuesday on the basis of a complaint by a policeman alleging that the video was shared with an intention to provoke communal unrest. In the video clip, which surfaced on social media on June 14, the elderly Muslim man, Abdul Shamad Saifi, alleges he was thrashed by some young men and asked to chant 'Jai Shri Ram'.

However, the Ghaziabad police, who have arrested three people for assaulting Saifi, have ruled out a communal angle. They said the accused were unhappy about a 'tabeez' (amulet) he sold to them.

FIR lodged against Twitter India, news website The Wire, journalists Mohammad Zubair and Rana Ayub, Congress leaders Salman Nizami, Masqoor Usmani and others. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

EXTEND BREXIT SAUSAGE WAR DEADLINE: UK

London, June 16: Britain has asked the EU to extend a grace period for some post-Brexit trade rules in Northern Ireland, Brexit minister David Frost said Wednesday, as a sausage-centred dispute between London and Brussels sizzles on. Frost confirmed the UK has asked the bloc to delay an end-of-month deadline to implement a new trading regime around chilled meats in the British province, which could see Northern Irish imports of products like sausages banned. “We have asked and suggested to the EU that the right way forward would be to agree to extend the grace period, at least for a bit,” Frost told a British parliamentary scrutiny panel.

RECORD-BUSTING HEAT SPREADS ACROSS S-W U.S.

Phoenix (US), June 16: Dangerous, record-busting heat spread across the US Southwest on Tuesday and into parts of Utah, Montana and Wyoming as a dome of high pressure hovered over a large swath of the region, pushing temperatures into the triple digits this week and intensifying the risk for wildfires amid a long-running drought. Some of the highest temperatures were seen in bone-dry Arizona, where the National Weather Service forecast a record high of 117 degrees (47 degrees Celsius) in Phoenix. The previous high for the date was 115 degrees (46 Celsius), set in 1974. “It is kind of early to see temperatures this high, that’s for sure,” said Marvin Percha, senior forecaster at the weather service’s Phoenix office.

THINNER KIM LEADS TO HEALTH SPECULATION

Seoul, June 16: The health of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has long been a source of morbid fascination in rival South Korea, which sits in the shadow of Kim’s 1.2-million-strong army and his growing arsenal of nuclear-armed missiles. Has he gained even more weight? Is he struggling for breath after relatively short walks? What about that cane? Why did he miss that important state anniversary? Now, the 37-year-old faces fresh speculation in the South about his health again. But this time, it’s because he’s noticeably slimmer. Kim’s health matters in Seoul, Washington, Tokyo and other world capitals because he hasn’t publicly anointed a successor who would control an advancing nuclear programme targeting the United States and its allies.

2 CANDIDATES PULL OUT OF IRAN PREZ RACE

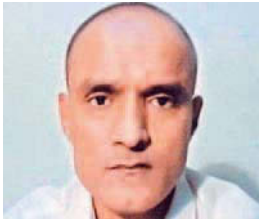
Tehran, June 16: Two days before Iran’s presidential election, which is expected to be won by an ultraconservative cleric, two of the seven men vying for the post pulled out of the race on Wednesday. Conservative lawmaker Alireza Zakani withdrew hours after reformist Mohsen Mehrizadeh had also thrown in the towel ahead of Friday’s vote, Iranian media reported. That leaves five hopefuls in the race, in which ultraconservative judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, 60, is seen as the clear favourite after other prominent politicians were barred from running. Zakani, 55, was quoted as saying of Raisi to a state television reporter: “I believe him to be qualified and will vote for him, and I hope that fundamental reforms take place in the country.”

PIO NOMINATED CONNECTICUT FEDERAL JUDGE

Washington, June 16: US President Joe Biden has nominated Indian-American civil rights attorney Sarala Vidya Nagala as a federal judge in the State of Connecticut. If confirmed by the Senate, federal prosecutor Nagala would become the first judge of South Asian descent to serve on the District Court for the District of Connecticut. Nagala is currently serving as the Deputy Chief of the Major Crimes Unit in the US Attorney’s Office in the District of Connecticut, a role she has held since 2017. She joined the US Attorney’s Office in 2012 and has served in a number of leadership roles, including as Hate Crimes Coordinator. Previously, Nagala was an associate at Munger, Tolles, & Olson in San Francisco, California from 2009 to 2012.

AUSTRALIA COURT REJECTS FOREIGN INTERFERENCE LAW CHALLENGE

Canberra, June 16: Australia’s highest court on Wednesday rejected a challenge to foreign interference laws in a case that involved a US conservative political organisation and free speech arguments. China has condemned the laws introduced in 2018 that are widely seen as a means of preventing covert Chinese interference in Australian politics, universities and other institutions. People working on behalf of a foreign powers have to be publicly registered with the Attorney-General’s Department in the interests of transparency. But LibertyWorks Inc, an Australian libertarian think tank, objected to having to register while working on communications for the American Conservative Union ahead of conferences held in Australia. LibertyWorks promotes the American group’s annual political conferences. LibertyWorks argued the so-called Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act was not valid because it burdened the implied right to free speech in Australia. LibertyWorks said the registration process was onerous and therefore deterred political communication. But six of the seven High Court judges found the law was valid and any burden was justified. Even when the purpose of the foreign interference is not to damage or destabilise Australia, if left undisclosed it can impede the ability of decision-makers in Australia, Justices Susan Kiefel, Patrick Keane and Jacqueline Gleeson wrote. Attorney-General Michaelia Cash welcomed the ruling. Foreign influence activities, when conducted in an open and transparent manner, can contribute positively to public debate and are welcome in Australia, her office said in a statement. The scheme is not there to prohibit people or entities from undertaking these activities. Rather, it acknowledges that it is in the public interest that these arrangements are transparent, the statement added. LibertyWorks president Andrew Cooper could not be immediately contacted for comment. —AP



Kulbhushan Jadhav

JADHAV’S CASE ADJOURNED TILL OCTOBER 5

Islamabad, June 16: A Pakistani court has adjourned till October 5 the hearing of a government’s plea to appoint a counsel for Indian death-row prisoner Kulbhushan Jadhav on request of the country’s top law officer, according to a media report. Jadhav, the 50-year-old retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017. India approached the International Court of Justice against Pakistan for denial of consular access to Jadhav and challenging the death sentence. The Hague-based ICJ ruled in July 2019 that Pakistan must undertake an “effective review and reconsideration” of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav and also to grant consular access to India without further delay. On Tuesday, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) adjourned the hearing of the government’s plea to appoint counsel for Jadhav till October 5 at the request of the Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Khalid Javed Khan. The Express Tribune reported. —PTI

Putin says summit ‘constructive’

Despite worst US-Russia tensions in recent years, both Presidents struck positive notes

Authorities shove off journalists

Geneva, June 16: A first summit between US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart was “constructive”, Vladimir Putin said Wednesday after the talks in Geneva ended. “The conversation was absolutely constructive”, Putin told reporters, adding that the sides had agreed for their ambassadors to return in a small gesture of healing in their strained relations. The ambassadors “will return to their place of work. When exactly is a purely technical question,” Putin told reporters after the summit, which lasted about three and a half hours. Diplomatic relations between Moscow and Washington had all but broken down since Biden took office in January. After Biden likened Putin to a “killer”, Russia in March took the rare step of recalling its ambassador Anatoly Antonov. The US envoy, John Sullivan, likewise returned to Washington.

Despite tensions, the summit at an elegant villa on the shore of Lake Geneva got off to a good start, with the two leaders shaking hands and striking cautiously positive notes. Biden, who was set to hold a separate press conference later, pressed Putin to replace the combustible US-Russian stand-off with a more “predictable” relationship between “two great powers” capable of agreeing to disagree. He stressed his desire to take US-Russian relations off their increasingly unstable trajectory, in which Washington accuses the Kremlin of everything from meddling in elections to cyberwarfare. “It’s always better to meet face to face,” he told Putin as they met in the villa’s library, with a globe placed between them. “We are trying to determine where we have a mutual interest, where we can cooperate, and where we don’t, establish a predictable and rational way in which we disagree -- two great powers,” Biden said. Putin noted at the start of the meeting that “a lot of issues” need addressing “at the highest level” and that he hoped the meeting would be “productive”. —AP

journalists for what’s normally a few minutes of news media filming and shouting questions before talks start. On Wednesday, however, Russian and United States security forces and officials initially blocked journalists as they tried to enter the site for the scheduled press meeting.

The scene then devolved into minutes of chaos inside the meeting room. American journalists described Russian security and news media grabbing them by the arms and clothes to try to hold them back. United States journalists tried to shoulder their way in, and a US reporter

was knocked to the ground. Before the scene calmed, some in the crowd shouted they were being crushed in the melee. Biden and Putin initially sat awkwardly in front of the press, but then watched and at times laughed at the tumult. —AP

After a meeting with Biden in Geneva, Putin said: “We believe that cybersecurity is important for the world in general, for the US in particular, and for Russia as well.” The Russian president said that the two countries “just need to abandon various insinuations, sit down at the expert level and start working in the interests of the US and Russia.” Putin charged that “most of the cyberattacks in the world are carried out from the cyber realm of the United States,” with Canada and Britain coming second and third. However, the most damaging cyberattacks on record have been attributed by the United States and the European Union to Russia’s GRU military intelligence agency, including the NotPetya virus. —AP

Masks requirements vary in Geneva, say authorities

Geneva, June 16: The acting chief of protocol for the Geneva region says staff members at the villa where United States President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin are meeting will keep masks on during the summit even if the two leaders don’t. Geneva authorities require the wearing of masks in public, though there are exceptions. The requirement holds particularly in places with a lot of pedestrian traffic, such as shopping areas. Marion Bordier Bueschi, who is managing the

grand lakeside mansion that will serve as the summit site, told *The Associated Press* that staffers inside Villa La Grange were already wearing masks. She said Putin and Biden would likely not wear masks during their talks on Wednesday. She noted that both leaders have been vaccinated against the coronavirus. Confirmed cases and deaths from Covid-19 have dropped across Switzerland, and authorities are planning steps to ease the mask requirement later this month.

Biden and his aides have made clear that he will not follow in the footsteps of his recent predecessors by aiming to radically alter the United States’ ties to Russia. Instead, the White House is looking to move toward a more predictable relationship and attempt to rein in Russia’s disruptive behaviour. Biden will push Putin on Wednesday to stop meddling in democratic elections, to ease tensions with Ukraine and to stop giving safe harbour to hackers carrying out cyber and ransomware attacks. —AP

Sun, sea and sand



People enjoy the sunshine on Brighton beach, south east England, on Wednesday.

—AP

Israeli airstrikes target Gaza sites

Jerusalem, June 16: Israeli aircraft carried out a series of airstrikes at militant sites in the Gaza Strip early Wednesday, the first such raids since a shaky cease-fire ended the war with Hamas last month. The airstrikes targeted facilities used by Hamas militants for meetings to plan attacks, the Israeli military said, blaming the group for any act of violence emanating from Gaza. There were no immediate reports of casualties. On Tuesday, hundreds of Israeli ultranationalists, some chanting “Death to Arabs,” paraded in east Jerusalem in a show of force that threatened to spark renewed violence.

Palestinians in Gaza responded by launching incendiary balloons that caused at least 10 fires in southern Israel. The march posed a test for Israel’s fragile new government as well as the tenuous truce that ended last month’s 11-day war between Israel and Hamas. Palestinians consider the march, meant to celebrate Israel’s capture of east Jerusalem in 1967, to be a provocation. Hamas called on Palestinians to “resist” the parade, a version of which helped ignite last month’s 11-day Gaza war. With music blaring, hundreds of Jewish nationalists gathered and moved in front of Damascus Gate. —AP

FATF to give Pak report next week

Islamabad, June 16: The global watchdog for money laundering and terror financing has prepared a preliminary report on Pakistan’s progress on the implementation of the 27-point action plan and will present it at FATF’s next plenary meeting from June 21, according to a media report. The report has been prepared by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF) International Cooperation Review Group (ICRG), which includes the US, the UK, France, China and India. Currently placed on the FATF’s ‘grey list’, Pakistan has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations by the global watchdog, a measure that officials

here fear could further hurt its economy. The *Express Tribune* quoted sources in the Ministry of Finance as saying that Pakistan’s progress was reviewed at a virtual meeting of the ICRG by international observers on Tuesday. According to the sources, Pakistan has implemented 26 of the 27-point FATF action plan. “There is partial progress on the point of conviction. Relevant laws have been amended. Therefore, it is hoped that there will be good news for Pakistan at the FATF’s Plenary Session starting from June 21 to 25,” the report said. Sources said that in view of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan is likely to remain on the grey list as it would require two to three more months to implement the remaining one point. —PTI

Russia orders mandatory vaccinations over case surge

Moscow, June 16: The mayor of Moscow on Wednesday ordered mandatory vaccinations for residents of the Russian capital working in the service industry, citing a “dramatic” rise in Coronavirus infections.

The announcement by Sergei Sobyenin — one of the first compulsory vaccination orders for a major world city — was a stark admission from a senior Russian official that authorities are struggling to bring the pandemic under control. Russia lifted most restrictions last year, and the country has pressed ahead with large in-person events, like a recent economic forum in Saint Petersburg and Euro 2020 hosting duties. President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly signalled Russia was moving be-

Two vax for kids show promise

New York, June 16: The Moderna Covid-19 vaccine and an experimental protein-based preventive proved to be safe and showed good antibody response against SARS-CoV-2 in a trial on baby rhesus macaques, scientists say. The research, published on Tuesday in the journal *Science Immunology*, suggests that vaccines for young children are likely important, safe tools to

curtail the pandemic. “Safe and effective vaccines for young children will help limit the spread of Covid-19 because we know children can transmit the virus to others, whether they get sick from SARS-CoV-2 infection or remain asymptomatic,” said Sallie Permar from New York-Presbyterian Komansky Children’s Hospital, US. —PTI

REGENERON THERAPY SAVES LIVES: STUDY

London, June 16: A new, experimental antiviral treatment used for some worst-affected Covid-19 patients has been found to save lives, according to the results of a UK trial on Wednesday. In the ongoing Randomised Evaluation of Covid-19 Therapy (RECOVERY) trial, Regeneron Pharmaceuticals’ combination of drugs was found to benefit patients with severe symptoms of the virus. It not only cut down the numbers requiring a ventilator but also reduced the duration of their hospital stay. —PTI

RARE | DISCOVERY

The Yuan dynasty existed in what is now China in 13th, 14th centuries

Centuries-old shipwrecks found off Singapore

Singapore, June 16: Two centuries-old shipwrecks packed with ceramics and other artefacts have been found off Singapore in a rare discovery that will shed light on the city-state’s maritime heritage, archaeologists said Wednesday. The prosperous island nation has long been a key trading hub on global shipping routes connecting the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

The wrecks were found off Pedra Branca, a rocky outcrop east of Singapore, according to the National Heritage Board and think tank the ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute, which worked together on the project. The first wreck, discovered after divers accidentally came across ceramic plates in 2015, was carrying Chinese ceramics that possibly date back to the 14th century, when Singapore

was known as Temasek. Some of the items were similar to artefacts found in archaeological digs on land, which showed that Singapore was a trading hub well before the arrival of British colonisers in 1819. Undersea excavations on the first wreck led to the discovery of the second, which is likely to be the Shah Munchah, a merchant vessel built in India that sank in 1796 while sail-

ling from China to India. Items recovered from the second wreck ranged from Chinese ceramics to glass and agate objects, as well as anchors and cannons, the heritage board and think tank said. The survey and recovery of artefacts from the two wrecks was completed this year. Such cannons were typically mounted on merchant ships used by the East India Company — the

trading behemoth through which the British empire expanded in Asia — in the 18th and 19th centuries, they added. The vessel discovered in 2015 was the first ancient shipwreck to be found in Singapore’s waters. It was carrying “more Yuan dynasty blue-and-white porcelain than any other documented shipwreck in the world,” said Michael Flecker, a visiting

fellow at the ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute’s archaeology unit. “Many of the pieces are rare, and one is believed to be unique.” The Yuan dynasty existed in what is now China in the 13th and 14th centuries. Much of the Chinese cargo in the second wreck was destined for eventual shipping to Britain, said Flecker. —AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

17 JUNE 2021

HC upholds right to protest, dissent; offers a ray of hope

The order of the Delhi high court granting bail to three research students incarcerated for their alleged role in the Delhi riots of 2020 comes as a ray of hope for those who have been anguished by the government's propensity to use legal means against political opponents and the judiciary's proclivity to shut its eyes to executive excesses. The students, two from Jawaharlal Nehru University and one from Jamia Milia Islamia University, were charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, (UAPA), 1967.

The court has made significant observations on two important points that needed judicial clarification. One, the line that demarcates legitimate protests and terrorist activities and two, the police's unmindful application of laws such as UAPA on people and the lower judiciary's failure to apply their judicial mind to it. On the first, the court was categorical in assailing the state for blurring the line between the constitutionally guaranteed right to protest and terrorist activity in an attempt to suppress dissent. Such a mindset gaining traction would harm democracy, the court

It defies the basic principles of the rule of law if the executive thinks that the process of law can be the punishment a citizen would face for defiance. There are far too many such people, including the 84-year-old priest Fr Stan Swamy, now languishing in jail under the very same law.

has observed. On the second, the court reminds the police that it was not the legislative intent of the UAPA that offences of the usual and ordinary kind, however grave, egregious or heinous in their nature and extent, to be covered by that law.

Referring to the constitutional scheme of things and the separation of powers under the Union, State and Concurrent Lists, the court pointed out that such laws are enacted for the defence of India, trashing the police act of booking students for shouting slogans. It has also found that the chargesheet reveals nothing to prove that the students were engaged in "terrorist activities" the definition of which was, according to the court, "vague". The court enjoined upon the courts to apply its mind when such laws are invoked on unsuspecting people instead of giving its assent to what the executive prescribes.

Governments may be uncomfortable with citizens asking questions, but that's the way democracy functions. It defies the basic principles of the rule of law if the executive thinks that the process of law can be the punishment a citizen would face for defiance. There are far too many such people, including the 84-year-old priest Fr Stan Swamy, now languishing in jail under the very same law.

Entries in the statute book cannot be allowed to be tools in the hands of a repressive government that has no compunction towards invoking the most stringent of laws against political opponents at the drop of a hat and muzzle dissent. The executive should be stopped from going beyond the legislative intent of the laws, and any transgression must be viewed from the point of view of the victim. It's the job of the judiciary to raise the protective covering of the Constitution when a vindictive government takes aims at a peacefully rebellious citizen. The Delhi high court has just done that. Every court must do it, should democracy survive and succeed; it should not be left to the individual judges to show the gumption.

BJP behind drama in LJP?

When the late Ram Vilas Paswan, once among the leading young Lohia socialist leaders of Bihar and the country along with Lalu Yadav and Nitish Kumar, figured that his best bet lay in emerging as a dalit leader, he created the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP). But he had a handicap. His base lay exclusively among the Dusadh community of dalits of Bihar. On that basis alone, it was not easy to be a long-distance runner.

But Mr Paswan survived with clever footwork, joining alliances which he changed with frequency to retain a position in the Union cabinet in a range of governments. He had a personal standing and was a well-liked politician. After the demise of the nine-term parliamentarian last October, the LJP has clearly lost its way.

The party had mostly become a family affair, with his son Chirag named its president, a brother and a nephew being bought to Parliament, and another nephew heading the party's Bihar unit. This lot is now busy fighting. The Lok Sabha Speaker promptly gave recognition to the breakaway group, which has five of the six party MPs, while only Chirag is out. So, the BJP's blessing to the move is a likely assumption.

Such parties usually do not last long. The split may have been brought about in the hope that one among the group may be made a Union minister in a Cabinet expansion. In the last Bihar Assembly election, Chirag had earned the enmity of chief minister Nitish Kumar by setting up candidates against his Janata Dal (United) nominees while remaining in the NDA at the Centre. It was the strangest of situations. Now, many think JD(U) may have exacted revenge by engineering the process of LJP's split or eventual vapourising. In any case, it is the BJP in Bihar to which the Dusadh community may gravitate. For socioeconomic reasons, this direction was manifesting itself in the late Ram Vilas Pawan's lifetime.

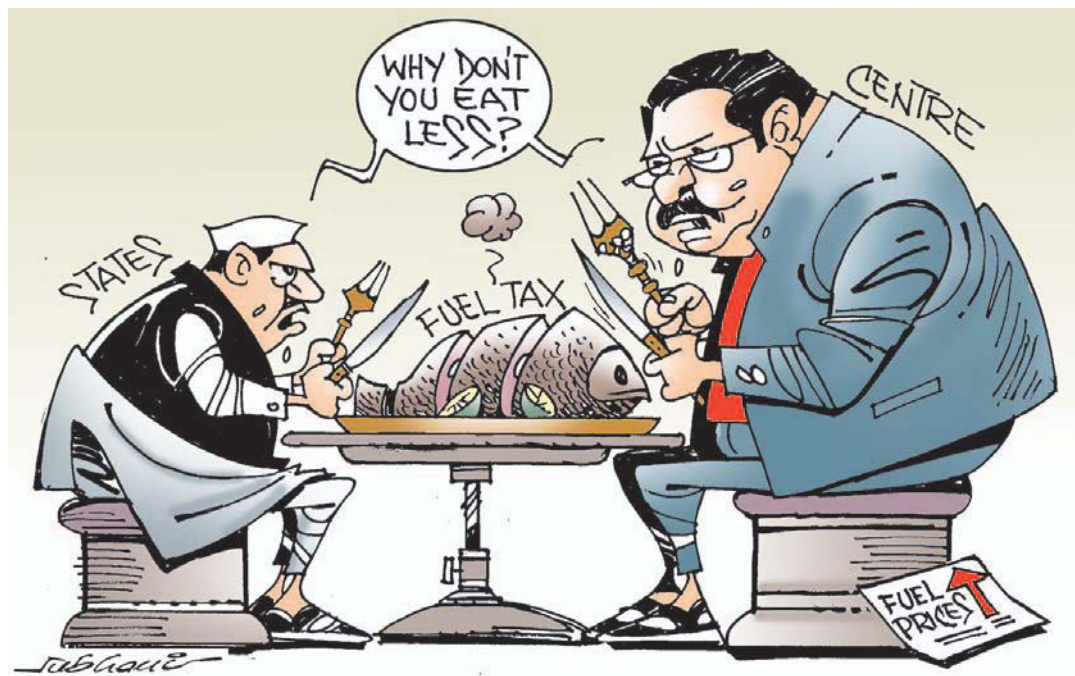
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Subhani



Covid-19 accountability: Making the dead count



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

In hyper-polarised India, it needs dollops of bravery for governments to admit that they got their Covid-19 death data wrong, that the magnitude of the problem they face in the time of the pandemic is more serious than they previously stated. Because political rivals are likely to pounce on such bursts of honesty as evidence of rank incompetence.

Nevertheless, some states are taking baby steps towards greater transparency of Covid-19 data. That is good news. Bihar is in the spotlight. Covid-19 death figures in the state shot up from 5,478 on June 8 to 9,429 on June 9 in the wake of data revision. The dramatic jump in the number of coronavirus casualties did not happen because the Bihar government suddenly woke up to the need for good data. It was because the judiciary stepped in. The Patna high court demanded an audit of the figures after widespread allegations that the state government was underplaying the scale of infections and deaths.

Arguably, Bihar is not the only state which has faced such accusations. Ground reports by the media from crematoriums in many places, along with images of dozens of bodies dumped in rivers or buried in shallow graves have only bolstered the widespread belief that the official Covid-19 death count in the country doesn't tell the real story. Many states like Maharashtra and Telangana are revising their official death toll in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Interestingly, Jharkhand, one of India's poorest states, is setting an inspiring example by initiating an Intensive Public Health Survey. This is the first such door-to-door counting of deaths by any state during the second wave of the pandemic. It has revealed that

25,490 people died in the state in April-May 2021 — that is 43 per cent higher than the 17,819 total deaths officially registered across all 24 districts in the state in April-May 2019.

What should one make of this sudden rush for data integrity in many states even as the pandemic rages on? Will other states follow suit? Will the Narendra Modi government stop denying that India's official Covid-19 death toll is a massive undercount?

It is too early to tell. The pandemic is indeed making many countries finally acknowledge that they have been undercounting Covid-19 deaths. Peru did it. Mexico did it. But truth-telling may not be as contagious as the mutating coronavirus. Here in India, even as state governments start to revise their Covid-19 data, the Centre insists all is well. It recently lashed out at an international news-magazine for pegging the country's excess deaths due to the pandemic at 5-7 times the official figure.

But better late than ever. Whatever be their motives, the states which are embracing greater data transparency deserve to be cheered even if by doing so, they push up India's official Covid-19 death count.

As health economist Rijo M. John puts it: "Those brave states that are indeed doing this must be appreciated and I hope it motivates the rest to do so too."

Dr John cites the example of Maharashtra, which he says "has been relatively honest with the data right from the beginning, compared to many others".

Now, more states are joining in.

In India, even in normal times, many deaths are not officially recorded. Globally two-thirds (38 million) of 56 million annual deaths are still not registered, according to the World Health

Organisation.

But the coronavirus pandemic may have set in motion a laudable trend; many governments are beginning to acknowledge that there has been a massive undercount of deaths. The science of death-counting is making headlines and the critical need for strong and developed death registries is a talking point.

Dr Hemant Shewade, a medical doctor specialising in community medicine and operational research, points to the uneven quality of even routine surveillance of deaths in the country. "The coverage of routine death surveillance (proportion of deaths registered along with medical certification of cause of death) is as high as 100 per cent in Goa and as low as 2.5 per cent in Jharkhand. One did not really expect 100 per cent accuracy in Covid-19 death reporting. We cannot improve routine death surveillance overnight. But in the time of the pandemic, the problem rose because the undercounting of deaths was way too high," he told me.

What is really unacceptable, says Dr Shevade, "is singling out certain states for contributing higher proportion of reported Covid-19 deaths. This creates an environment that encourages poor Covid-19 death reporting."

Why is accurate Covid 19 data so important?

Because poor data makes for poor planning. "The administration, as well as the public, become lax as the true picture is not presented. Then it takes a wave as large as the second wave to wake us up. By then any action is too little too late," says Dr Shevade.

What should be done? Public health experts

In India, even in normal times, many deaths are not officially recorded. Globally two-thirds (38 million) of 56 million annual deaths are still not registered, according to the World Health Organisation.

who have been tracking the Covid 19 numbers stress the importance of making an honest attempt to not "show less numbers" by reporting all Covid-19 deaths, captured by routine death surveillance. "Accepting that under-reporting is an inescapable reality in India, we need regular local estimates of under-reporting to guide us regarding the true estimate of mortality," says Dr Shevade. "This can be done through post-mortem surveillance of all Covid-19 deaths in sentinel sites. Every district should have one sentinel site (local data for local action). This should be explored. This is important because in a country like India it takes time for data on excess deaths to come out."

Alongside inaccurate data, there is the problem of inadequate data. Together, they create a fertile ground for the spread of misinformation which severely hampers the battle against Covid-19. Many public health experts say the Centre must proactively and regularly publish reliable all-cause mortality data in regular intervals at the national level so that studies using incomplete and unreliable data to measure the true extent of deaths become redundant.

Telling the truth may seem politically risky, but it's the only way out. Bad data causes reputational damage. India has already suffered heavily with its official Covid-19 data being widely questioned and public trust being dented. It's true that the Indian Council of Medical Research has issued a "Guidance for appropriate recording of Covid-19 related deaths in India", as the Centre likes to stress.

However, there are gaps. As Dr Rijo John tweeted last week: "Do you have data to show which states adhere to these guidelines & which do not? What actions have you taken against those who didn't?"

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

LETTERS

EXODUS FROM BJP

It's surprising to note that the West Bengal Governor rushed to New Delhi to implement anti-defection law in view of mass desertion from the BJP to TMC (WB Gov. in Delhi after 24 BJP MLAs skip meet, DC, June 17). Prior to the election when a large number of TMC leaders migrated to the BJP the pet governor did not utter a single word about anti-defection law.

Someswar Sharma
Visakhapatnam

USE OF UAPA

The Delhi High Court has rightly expressed concern over casual application of stringent UAPA law (Delhi HC says state blurred line between protest, terror, DC, June 16). The UAPA should be used sparingly and judiciously as it is very stringent and takes away personal liberty of accused immediately and for a long time. The sedition law and the UAPA should be with clear definitions and apt applications for being effective.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

UG ENGLISH MEDIUM

The AP government's decision to make English medium compulsory for all degree colleges from this academic year will lead to a comprehension problem (English medium must at UG level, DC, June 16). Those who studied in Telugu medium from the beginning and are now pursuing degree in Telugu medium will not understand anything. The government must first implement English medium till Class X, and then Intermediate before UG and PG.

D. Ravikumar
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

World must pressurise Pak

BRISBANE, June 16.

The expulsion of Bengalis from East Bengal was a "calculated move to throw India into chaos" the Indian High Commissioner to Australia, Mr. A. M. Thomas, said here today.

Mr. Thomas, who arrived in Queensland on a farewell visit after four years in Australia, said Pakistan was "driving out the Bengalis at the point of the bayonet".

He said the world was still not taking the requisite action over Bengal and described the situation there was chaotic and desperate.— Reuter

Mahir Ali



Bye bye Bibi: Netanyahu's exit may not spell change

Among the various heads of state and government who have seemed like permanent fixtures on the international political landscape in the past decade or so, no one's perch has looked as precarious as that of Benjamin Netanyahu. There's a degree of irony in the fact that Israel's longest-serving prime minister apparently ran out of steam midway through the presidential term of the most fervent White House admirer he could conceivably have attracted.

It's all relative, of course. Ever since its inception, Israel has never not had an ally in the White House, and occasional tensions have scarcely dampened US enthusiasm for — let alone hindered its munificence towards — what was identified early on as an invaluable satellite in a region once deemed broadly hostile to US interests.

The Obama administration, for instance, set a record in generosity, notwithstanding the toxic personal chemistry between Bibi and Barack. By then, it hardly looked like a case of

the tail wagging the dog. The transformation may not have been sudden, but Netanyahu had few qualms about treating America as the tail.

He was happy to do most of the barking until another top dog chimed in, determined, as the leader of the pack, to be louder than anyone else. And loyally tagging along behind Donald was Jared Kushner. Even Trump and Kushner apparently balked, however, when Netanyahu talked about fulfilling his dream of annexing much of the occupied West Bank. Had the US flashed the green light, enabling him to pursue this project, Netanyahu would probably still be Prime Minister, and Israel would almost certainly be embroiled in a military campaign far more vicious than its most recent assault on the Gaza Strip.

The latter did not suffice to keep him in power — not least because a substantial proportion of Israelis are under the impression that he chickened out. Unable to pull together a coalition after Israel's fourth election in two years, Netanyahu predictably

ranted against the alternative regime that was taking shape.

In the past couple of weeks he has ludicrously labelled his opponents as dangerous and far left. The new Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, is an extremist all right, but on the other end of the ideological spectrum. He has served Netanyahu as chief of staff and in various ministerial capacities, and throughout his political career has been described as even more right wing than his former master.

In the past he has not only enthusiastically hailed the idea of West Bank annexation but also proudly boasted about seeing "no problem" having "killed lots of Arabs in my life". Now, as a Prime Minister at the head of a disparate — and desperate — eight-party coalition, whose Yamina party boasts only six seats in the 120-member Knesset, he has indicated that there will be no movement on the Palestinian front. The idea that the status quo can indefinitely be maintained while the state-sponsored settlers (whom Bennett has been proud to represent)

keep gnawing away at what's left of the diminishing Palestinian territories is one of Netanyahu's proudest achievements. There's no need to bother with a deal, not even with an eagerly compliant Palestinian "authority" in place under Mahmoud Abbas, who put off his elections to ward off the likelihood of another triumph for Hamas.

That likelihood has only increased in recent months, but yet another Israeli election before the end of the year cannot be written off. After all, the Bennett-led coalition has the bare minimum parliamentary support necessary, and Netanyahu as Opposition leader will no doubt continue trying to topple his rivals. The 'Bye bye Bibi' placards displayed by jubilant demonstrators after his comeuppance may prove to have been premature. Does any of this matter very much? Not for the Palestin-ians. Sure, there is an Arab Islamist party on the fringes of the Bennett coalition, playing pretty much the sort of collaborationist role that the odd relatively unrepresentative black organisation did under South African

apartheid. It also includes the Meretz and Labour parties, which remain wedded, at least formally, to the fantasy of a two-state solution.

What's far more important is that the political centre has shifted sharply to the right — Netanyahu deserves some of the credit for that, but the narrowing of the political spectrum from the centre right to the far right is by no means an exclusively Israeli phenomenon. Hardly anywhere, though, is the political system more fractured: what once were factions have evolved into a plethora of parties, and one-party majorities are now a thing of the past.

Netanyahu has hitherto thrived on this dysfunction, but whether he can exploit it much longer remains to be seen. The criminal justice system may catch up with him. One thing that won't change, however, is what Joe Biden reiterated last week: "Israel has no better friend than the United States." Which in effect means nothing will really change.

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS%


Sensex	52,501.98	-0.51
Nifty 50	15,767.50	-0.64
S&P 500*	4,234.42	-0.29
Dollar (₹)	73.30	0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.48	-0.28
Euro (₹)	88.90	0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,814▼48	0.10
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	74.32	0.45
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.045	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.485	-0.014

* As of 8:30 PM IST

MF SIP asset base touches ₹4.67L cr in May

Assets under the systematic investment plan (SIP) touched an all-time high of Rs 4.67 lakh crore in May. Over the past five years, assets under management (AUM) of SIPs has grown 30 per cent annually, twice as fast as the growth in the overall mutual fund industry's AUM. According to Amfi data, SIP AUMs have seen a close to four-fold jump to Rs 4,67,366 crore as of May this year from Rs 1,25,394 crore as of August 2016.

Subsidies hiked for DAP, other fertilisers



The Union Cabinet raised the subsidies for DAP and some other non-urea fertilisers by Rs 14,775 crore to keep the prices low for farmers. After urea, diammonium phosphate is the most widely used fertiliser. Minister of state for chemicals and fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya "Farmers will continue to get DAP at the old rate of Rs 1,200 per bag." He said the subsidy for DAP has been raised to Rs 1,200 per bag from Rs 500.

Cost Inflation Index for LTCG notified

The income tax department has notified the Cost Inflation Index (CII) for the current fiscal beginning April 2021 for calculating long-term capital gains arising from sale of immovable property, securities and jewellery. The CII is used by taxpayer to compute gains arising out of sale of capital assets after adjusting for inflation. "The Cost Inflation Index for FY 2021-22 relevant to AY 2022-23 & subsequent years is 317," the CBDT said.

Video recordings must for stages of NH projects

The NHAI said it has made mandatory the use of drones for monthly video recording of national highway projects during all stages of development, construction, operation and maintenance. It said contractors and concessionaires shall carry out the drone video recording in the presence of team leader of the supervision consultant and upload comparative project videos on NHAI's portal 'Data Lake.'



■ Three firms hit daily limit for the third day

Adani stocks tumble more

NUPUR ACHARYA
JUNE 16

The slump in shares of companies controlled by Indian billionaire Gautam Adani deepened on Wednesday with three of them tumbling by the daily limit for a third straight day.

Adani Total Gas Ltd, Adani Power Ltd and Adani Transmission Ltd hit the lower circuit after dropping 5 per cent each even as the group denied a local report on Monday that said accounts of three Mauritius-based funds that own the group's stocks were frozen.

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone tumbled 7.17 per cent and flagship Adani Enterprises tanked 5.77 per cent on the BSE. Adani Green Energy declined 3.10 per cent.

The dramatic rout marks a halt to the dizzying rally in shares of some of the Adani Group of Companies that had added almost \$40 billion to the billionaire's wealth this year through Friday that made him the second-richest person in Asia. His net worth, based on Tuesday's closing share prices, is \$71.5 billion.

The conglomerate refuted the reports that said National Securities Depository Ltd froze the accounts of Albula Investment Fund, Cresta Fund and APMS Investment Fund. It called the report "blatantly erroneous" and followed up with another statement on

Tuesday citing communication from the national depository that the three funds' demat accounts are "suspended for debit."

The funds, registered at the same address in Port Louis, own more than Rs 43,500 crore (\$6 billion) in four Adani group firms, the report had said.

Most new loans are unsecured credit

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Unsecured credit has grown faster than secured products between 2017 and 2020. This could be a cause of worry for lenders in the aftermath of moratoriums.

Increasing consumerism and entry of large number of non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) in the segment have increased the share of unsecured credit among newly sanctioned loans to 85 per cent in 2020-21 till end February.

Overall, the share of unsecured credit in the loan book increased from 15 per cent in March 2017 to 24 per cent as of February 2021. During the first wave of the pandemic, the share went up from 22 per cent to 24 per cent, as per a report by Experian India and Invest India.

In terms of number of loans, the unsecured category has increased its share to 71 per cent by February 2021 from 62 per cent in March 2017, indicating that consumers are looking to fund small purchases, including consumer durables and holidays through credit, and the lending institutions have increased confidence in their borrowers' ability to repay and are thus willing to take more risk.

Unsecured products have seen an increase in loan book at a CAGR of 38 per cent compared to secured products that grew at a CAGR of 17 per cent over 2017-2020. An unsecured loan is supported only by the borrower's creditworthiness, rather than by any collateral, such as property or other assets.

Rising share of unsecured loans is a cause of worry, especially during the pandemic-induced financial crisis.

According to Icra, the delinquencies for the retail loan pools that had seen a gradual reduction in Q4 FY2021 are now again expected to reach elevated levels.

Emkay Global Financial Services says, "Given the two rounds of moratoriums, we believe that the visibility of the asset quality pain in NBFCs had largely remain suppressed until Q2FY21."

NEW RANGE ROVER VELAR SUV COMES AT ₹79.87L

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JUNE 16

Tata Motors-owned British luxury car maker Jaguar Land Rover on Wednesday drove in the new Range Rover Velar SUV in the country with prices starting at Rs 79.87 lakh. The Range Rover Velar comes in the R-Dynamic S trim on the Ingenium 2.0 l petrol and diesel powertrains. The new SUV will rival luxury SUVs like the Jaguar F-Pace, Mercedes GLE Coupe and the BMW X6.



INVESTORS FRET OVER LITTLE-KNOWN FUNDS

NUPUR ACHARYA & P. R. SANJAI
JUNE 16

Confusion over three Mauritius-based funds that whipsawed shares of Adani Group companies this week has underscored a deeper risk for investors in such stocks owned by opaque entities.

"It is important for investors and the regulator to be aware of the ownership in listed companies, especially when they originate from tax havens like Mauritius," said Hemindra Hazari, an independent research analyst in Mumbai. "The names of the funds are not very well known in the capital market and they have high concentration into a select number of stocks, which in itself is unusual."

Even as a massive share rally in the companies of the conglomerate has this year more than doubled the net worth of Adani to

Dollar bonds issued by Adani group firms have pared some of the losses from earlier this week. Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone's dollar bond due 2031 fell by a record 3.3 cents on the dollar on Monday to 94.1 cents and is now trading at 95.4 cents.

— Bloomberg

RBI: 2nd wave hits domestic demand

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, JUNE 16

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has hit domestic demand. Going forward, the speed and scale of vaccination will shape the path of recovery, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its monthly bulletin for June 2021 released on Friday. It observed that while vaccines will not end the pandemic by themselves, "the country will have to learn to live with the virus, complementing vaccines with ramping up investment in healthcare, logistics and research."

"The pandemic is a real shock with real consequences. Hence, there is a need to ensure that the recovery is built on a solid foundation of business investment and productivity growth. Life- and work-style transformation such as increased remote work and online shopping may likely endure. When patterns of demand shift, some firms may face closure. Some industries may become permanently smaller. At the same time, existing

Entire board can now meet via video, audio

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 16

Providing relief to companies, the government has omitted the rule pertaining to the conduct of meetings with physical presence of the board of directors for approval of several important matters.

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has omitted Rule 4 of the Companies (Meetings of Board and its Powers) Rules, 2014. Rule 4 pertained to matters which should not be dealt with in a meeting through video conferencing or other audiovisual means. As per this rule, directors can attend the board meeting through video conferencing if a quorum or a minimum number of members

SHYAM METALICS IPO SUBSCRIBED 121 TIMES, SONA 2.33 TIMES

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JUNE 16

Integrated metals manufacturer Shyam Metalics and Energy's Rs 909 crore initial public offering received huge subscription demand as it got subscribed 121.40 times shares offered in the public issue. But another issue that closed on Wednesday, that of Sona Comstar, got subscribed by a modest 2.33 times.

In the Shyam Metalics public offer, priced in the band of Rs 303 to Rs 306 per share, the portion reserved for retail investors was subscribed 11.64 times. The qualified institutional buyer category was subscribed 155.71 times, the non-institutional investor category was subscribed 339.98 times.

Shyam Metalics received over 21.13 lakh applications across investor categories as per last update made available by sources close to the merchant bankers.

Automotive technology company Sona BLW Precision Forgings (Sona Comstar) Rs 5,250 crore IPO was subscribed 2.33 as per last update from the stock exchanges.

The portion reserved for retail investors was subscribed 1.61 times.

The qualified institutional buyer category was subscribed 3.54 times, the non-institutional investor category was subscribed 0.40 times as per the last update made available by sources close to the merchant bankers.

Sona Comstar received over 4.46 lakh applications as per the last update.

Govt plans ₹50,000-cr loan guarantee for health infra

SIDDHARTHA SINGH
JUNE 16

The government is considering offering as much as Rs 50,000 crore (\$6.8 billion) of credit incentives to boost health care infrastructure in the nation hit by the coronavirus pandemic, according to people familiar with the matter.

The programme will allow companies to access funds for ramping up hospital capacity or medical supplies with the government acting as a guarantor, said the people, who asked not to be identified citing rules.

A finance ministry spokesperson could not be immediately reached for comment.

The government's loan guarantees will complement the central bank's efforts last month to boost credit for health care services and provide fresh lending to vaccine-makers.

The Reserve Bank of India had then announced an on-tap liquidity window for banks worth Rs 50,000 crore to extend credit to health services and vaccine manufacturers until March 2022.

The government also last month separately included airlines and hospitals in a \$41-billion emergency credit programme to cushion them from the impact of the pandemic.

— Bloomberg

NPPA ASKS DRUG FIRMS TO REDUCE PRICES IN WAKE OF GST RATE CUT

New Delhi, June 16: Drug pricing regulator NPPA has asked pharmaceutical companies and medical device makers to reduce prices on products on which the GST has been lowered in order to pass on the benefit to the consumers.

In a notification, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) noted that a change in tax rates has an impact on the fixation of maximum retail prices (MRP) of various drugs and formulations.

As per DPCO 2013, MRP of drugs and formulations are inclusive of taxes. Therefore, any downward change in tax or GST rates should be reflected in the MRP and benefit of the reduction should be passed on to the consumers, it noted. — PTI



ON THE BACK BURNER SSRC receives lukewarm staff response

RBI quietly buries specialised cadre plan

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JUNE 16

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is learnt to have quietly shelved the plan for raising a specialised supervisory and regulatory cadre (SSRC) to strengthen its supervisory wing to check bank frauds and other regulatory violations in the system.

About a year ago, the apex bank had assured the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance about the cadre, but the plan hasn't made any headway since.

After Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam, questions were raised over the RBI's supervision of scheduled commercial banks. In response, RBI had come up with a grandiose plan of creating an SSRC. Its Central Board had, in May 2019, approved the creation of such a cadre and the RBI had announced the creation of SSRC on November 1, 2019.

The RBI has silently buried the plan and even its latest annual report has no mention of the SSRC.

The RBI spokesperson is yet to respond to a mail sent in this regard.

Explaining the reasons for shelving the SSRC, the source, however, said the scheme drew a lukewarm response for several reasons. "Merely 5 per cent of its staff opted for the SSRC. The poor response

was mainly due to apprehension among the staff regarding the HR issues like lack of mobility, promotional avenues, etc. Besides, there was no proper communication or stakeholder consultation by top management. The unions also opposed the move," the source said.

Another reason is that "traditionally, the supervisory vertical is headed by a deputy governor, who comes from a commercial bank. This leads to obvious conflict of interest. He heads the department, which is supposed to examine his own performance as managing director of the commercial bank."

"There have been several instances in the past where serious concerns, regulatory violation and even vigilance cases had to be dropped from the (assessment) report. Further, in many cases it has led to vindictive action even to the extent of blocking the promotion of the entire supervisory team examining the particular bank," the source said.

"Incidentally, RBI is one of the very few public institutions in India, which does not have a whistleblower policy or effective grievance redressal system. Also, the RBI as a regulator, must display highest standards of corporate governance for financial institutions to emulate," the source said.

SHORT TAKES

Milkha is stable & out of Covid ICU

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is “stable” and he has been shifted out of Covid ICU to another section of the PGIMER hospital, a statement from his family said on Wednesday. The 91-year-old had contracted the dreaded virus last month. “Milkha is stable and is out of the Covid ICU, but is in the Medical ICU,” a spokesperson of the Milkha family said. “Thank you for your continued prayers and good wishes,” it added. PGIMER sources said that Milkha was “fine, stable and recovering”. “He has tested Covid negative after which he was shifted out of the Covid ICU,” the sources said. The sources further said that a medical team comprising senior doctors of the institute were closely monitoring his daily health progress. — PTI

Japan to set 10k spectator-cap

Tokyo: Japan is planning to set a cap of 10,000 fans at sports events ahead of the Olympics, a cabinet minister said on Wednesday, as organisers weigh how many domestic spectators can attend the Games. The proposed measure would come into force after a Covid-19 state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of the country ends on June 20, and would last until the end of August, said Yasutoshi Nishimura, the minister in charge of virus measures. It would limit spectators to 50 percent of a venue's capacity or 10,000 people, whichever is smaller, he said. The plan is expected to become official later this week. — AFP

Federer suffers defeat in Halle

Berlin: Roger Federer suffered a setback in his preparations for Wimbledon after crashing out of the second round of the ATP grass court tournament in Halle on Wednesday. Federer, who will bid to win a ninth title at Wimbledon which starts June 28, suffered a shock 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 defeat to 20-year-old Canadian Felix Auger Aliassime, who is almost half Federer's age. “It's amazing, for sure I didn't expect this,” Auger Aliassime said after beating one of his heroes at the first attempt on the ATP tour. “I wanted to win, but Roger Federer is my idol and it was a huge honour to play him.” Federer is exactly 19 years older than Auger Aliassime as the pair share the birthday on August 8. — AFP

IPL Aussie stars pull out of tours

Melbourne: Seven top Australian cricketers who recently played in the IPL have pulled out of the country's white-ball tour of West Indies and Bangladesh. The two tours are part of team's preparations for the T20 World Cup later this year. David Warner, Pat Cummins, Glenn Maxwell, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Marcus Stoinis and Daniel Sams have requested not to be considered for the tours for various reasons while Steve Smith has been rested to fully recover from an elbow complaint which flared during the IPL. Cricket Australia said in a statement. — AFP

Virat climbs to 4th spot in rankings

Dubai: India skipper Virat Kohli climbed to the fourth spot while Australia batsman Steve Smith reclaimed the top position in the ICC Test rankings released on Wednesday. Kohli has 814 points. Keeping Kohli company in the top 10 is wicket-keeper batsman Rishabh Pant (747 points) and star opener Rohit Sharma (747 points), who have retained their joint sixth position. — PTI

Live on TV

EURO

Group Stage: Ukraine vs North Macedonia from 6.30 pm; Denmark vs Belgium from 9.30 pm; Netherlands vs Austria from 12.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

COPA AMERICA

Group Stage: Colombia vs Venezuela from 2.30 am (Friday); Brazil vs Peru from 5.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1

Shot in the foot

Germany go down as Hummels kicks into own net

Munich, June 16: World champions France beat Germany in a blockbuster Euro 2020 clash on Tuesday.

In Munich, a 20th-minute Mats Hummels own goal proved enough for 2018 World Cup winners France to beat 2014 World Cup winners Germany in Group F. France deserved the win, with both Kylian Mbappe and Karim Benzema having second-half goals disallowed for tight offside calls while Adrien Rabiot also hit the post for Les Bleus.

“I knew my players would be ready and they were up for the fight,” France coach Didier Deschamps said.

“It's our first match, but this is a game that could have been a semi-final or a final and to take these three points in a group like this was important.”

The win was savoured by a small band of French fans among the crowd in the Allianz Arena, which was limited to just 20 percent of capacity because of Covid-19 restrictions.

It was also enjoyed by fans back home in France who packed into bars to see their team kick off their bid to add the European crown

POGBA PLAYS DOWN RUEDIGER 'BITE'

France midfielder Paul Pogba has played down Antonio Ruediger's apparent attempted bite on his back during their win over Germany.

Immediately after the incident, Pogba cried out and complained to Spanish referee Carlos del Cerro Grande, who did not punish the German, and the Manchester United star played it down after the game.

“I think he nibbled at me a little bit, but we've known each other for a long time. It was nothing big. We hugged after the game,” Pogba said.

— AFP



Germany's Matthias Ginter (left) vies for the ball with France's forward Kylian Mbappe (centre) during their Euro group match at the Allianz Arena in Munich. — AFP

Injury mars Russia win

St. Petersburg, June 16: A special goal by Aleksei Miranchuk allowed Russia to kickstart their Euro 2020 campaign with a 1-0 win over Finland in Saint Petersburg on Wednesday, but the game was marred by an injury to Mario Fernandes.

Miranchuk, of Serie A side Atalanta, produced a glorious finish in first-half stoppage time for the only goal of the game between the neighbours in Group B. It blows open the section after Russia,

Russia	1
(Aleksei Miranchuk 45+2)	
Finland	0

one of nine participating nations at the Euro playing matches at home, had lost 3-0 to Belgium in their opening game at the weekend.

Finland had beaten Denmark 1-0 on Saturday, a game completely overshadowed by Christian Eriksen's cardiac arrest.

Here it was Russia's Fernandes, the Brazilian-born CSKA Moscow right-back, who provided an injury scare.

The 30-year-old went up for a high ball in the first half and came down awkwardly, the back of his neck taking the full force of the landing. He needed to be stabilised and was stretchered off before being taken to hospital.

The Russian team's Twitter feed said he was undergoing tests. — AFP

EMOTIONAL DENMARK TO FACE BELGIUM

Copenhagen, June 16: Denmark can take heart that Christian Eriksen is recovering and will be cheering them on along with the rest of the country as they try to salvage their Euro 2020 campaign against fancied Belgium in Copenhagen on Thursday.

Kasper Hjulmand's talented side know that their qualification from Group B will be in jeopardy if they get the same treatment that leaders Belgium dished out to Russia on Saturday, and they need to bounce back from their traumatic 1-0 defeat by Finland.

UKRAINE, MACEDONIA DESPERATE FOR WIN

Both Ukraine and North Macedonia conceded late goals in their opening matches at the Euro, and both lost because of them.

The teams will next play each other at Euro on Thursday, knowing another loss just might end their chances of advancement. “We have two more games to go and we will still play with the same energy,” said Ukraine captain Andriy Yarmolenko.

DUTCH & AUSTRIA EYE MOMENTUM

Netherlands will meet Austria in the team's second Group C match at the Johan Cruyff Arena.

Both the Dutch and the Austrians won their opening matches at Euro 2020, so both can advance with another victory.

The top two teams in each of the six groups advance to the knockout stage, along with the four best third-place teams. — Agencies

Ronaldo breaks scoring record

Budapest, June 16: Cristiano Ronaldo netted a double to become the European Championship's all-time leading scorer as Portugal struck three times late on to beat a stubborn Hungary 3-0 in their Euro 2020 opener at a packed Puskas Arena on Tuesday.

The holders, who appear to have a much stronger squad than when they won their first major title five years ago, laboured for long periods in Budapest.

But Raphael Guerreiro made the vital breakthrough in the 84th minute and Ronaldo slammed in a penalty shortly afterwards before tapping home in injury time.

“We didn't deserve a 3-0 defeat, with a bit of luck it could have been a point each, but it was an experience of a lifetime,” said Hungary goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi.

SURPASSES LEGEND PLATINI

Ronaldo netted his 10th and 11th goals at Euro, surpassing the previous record of nine held by France legend Michel Platini. The 36-year-old has

Portugal	3
(Raphael Guerreiro 84, Cristiano Ronaldo 87, 92)	
Hungary	0

Milestone man

- All-time Euro top scorer with 11 goals and counting.
- All-time top scorer for Portugal with 106 goals.
- First player to appear in 5 Euro final tournaments.
- First player to score at 5 consecutive Euro final tournaments.

now scored at five different European Championship finals tournaments and has 106 goals for his country in total, leaving him just three away from matching Iranian Ali Daei's all-time international scoring record of 109.

“I am really grateful to the team for helping me to score twice and be named man of the match,” Ronaldo said.

— AFP



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring a goal against Hungary in Euro 2020 on Wednesday. — AFP

CR7 snub takes fizz out of Cola

Budapest, June 16: Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo removed Coca-Cola bottles placed in front of him at a European Championships press conference here, which reportedly cost the global beverage giant a staggering \$4 billion.

A well-known fitness enthusiast, Ronaldo set aside two Coca-Cola glass bottles which lay in front of him during a press conference ahead of Portugal's opening Euro match against Hungary here on Monday.

In a video that has since gone viral, the 36-year-old Juventus striker picked up a bottle of water instead saying “Agua!” in Portuguese, seemingly urging people to choose water over aerated drinks.

According to media reports, the share price of Coca-Cola, one of the official sponsors of Euro 2020, slipped from \$56.10 to \$55.22 almost immediately after Ronaldo's gesture.

The market valuation of

Coca-Cola went from USD 242 billion to USD 238 billion, a fall of USD 4 billion. Reacting to the incident, Coca-Cola in a statement said “everyone is entitled to their drink preferences” with different “tastes and needs”.

Ronaldo has spoken about his uneasiness with carbonated drinks earlier as well. In December last year, he had tweeted, “My son has potential. We'll see if he will become a great footballer.”

“Sometimes he drinks Coke and eats crisps and it irritates me.”

POGBA REMOVES BEER BOTTLE

On Tuesday, France midfielder Paul Pogba removed a bottle of Heineken beer that had been placed in front of him at a press conference.

Pogba, a practising Muslim, removed the bottle when he sat down to speak to the media after his side's 1-0 win over Germany. — PTI

INDIA DISMISS BEAUMONT BUT ENGLAND CONSOLIDATE

Bristol, June 16: India women picked up the crucial wicket of Tammy Beaumont (66) in the second session but England women consolidated their position by reaching 162 for two at tea on the opening day of the one-off Test here on Wednesday.

After getting rid of Lauren Winfield-Hill (35) in the first session of the day, India toiled hard for most part of the post-lunch period before debutant off-spinner Sneha Rana picked up her maiden Test wicket.

She got rid of in-form of Beaumont, who was brilliantly caught by Shafali Verma at short leg. Beaumont faced 166 balls and decorated her innings with six fours en route to her second Test fifty.

Skipper Heather Knight (47 not out) batted cautiously and remained unbeaten in the company of Natalie Sciver (11 not out) as England made 76 runs off 28 overs in the second session.

Earlier, the hosts made a solid 86 for one in the opening session. The Indian pace duo of veteran Jhulan Goswami and Shikha Pandey made a promising start, doing just enough to trouble the English batswoman on more than one occasion. — PTI

Brief scores: England 162/2 in 55 overs (Lauren Winfield-Hill 35, Tammy Beaumont 66, Heather Knight 47 (batting); Pooja Vastrakar 1/37, Sneha Rana 1/33) vs India.

ENVY OF WORLD

Gavaskar says India's batting depth is highly admirable

New Delhi, June 16: Former captain Sunil Gavaskar says India's batting depth helps them bounce back from tough situations, as they face an upbeat New Zealand in the World Test Championship final this week.

India have a host of batting stars in their line-up including skipper Virat Kohli, his deputy Ajinkya Rahane and dashing opener Rohit Sharma.

R. Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, both spinners who have six Test centuries between them while batting in the middle and lower-middle order, are also expected to take to the field in the title clash in Southampton starting Friday.

“With Ashwin and Jadeja playing so well, India's batting depth is the envy of the cricketing world,” Gavaskar, who is

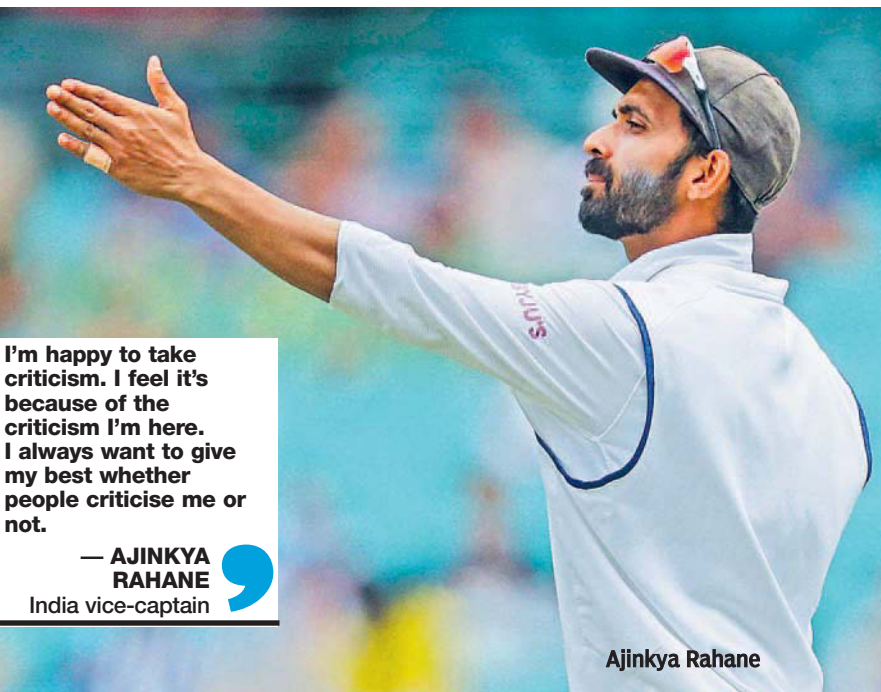
TAYLOR SAYS KOHLI & CO. HAVE SET BAR REALLY HIGH

Southampton, June 16: Senior New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor has said India have set the bar really high and considering their bench strength, it will be an extremely tough battle for his team during the World Test Championship final beginning June 18. “You go through the Indian line-up, all world-class players all through and whatever side they do decide to go with, they will leave out some world-class players as well. We know whatever XI we face will be very tough,” Taylor said.

“India have been a world no.1 side and they have kept the bar really high for a long period of time, everyone in the world had to catch up to and I don't see any difference, yes we had a couple of Tests here but playing India in home, away or neutral venue will be a tough opposition,” he said. — PTI

in England as a television pundit for the final said.

“Yes, there could be the odd bad-innings like Adelaide, Australia, but this team is like a wonderful rubber ball, always bouncing back and keep



I'm happy to take criticism. I feel it's because of the criticism I'm here. I always want to give my best whether people criticise me or not.

— AJINKYA RAHANE
India vice-captain

SOUTHEE BATS FOR CHANGE OF FORMAT

Southampton, June 16: New Zealand pacer Tim Southee on Wednesday said changes can be made to the format of the World Test Championship final going ahead, instead of it being a one-off match.

“At the start of the two-year cycle, we knew that it was going to be a one-off final. Maybe it's something they can look at going forward and then potentially make changes,” Southee said.

“It was made clear two years ago at the start of the cycle, what was required to win the championship. “It's been great to put context around the Test game, to have the two-year cycle. There have already been adjustments going forward to the next cycle. So, it'll be an evolving thing,” he added.

“It's been long time since we won the Champions Trophy in 2000. We've come very close in the last last couple,” added the premier fast bowler of New Zealand. — PTI