


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

NELLORE | TUESDAY | 11 AUGUST 2020



WEATHER
Max: 33.5°C
Min: 26.2°C
RH: 69%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: clear.
Max/Min temp. 33/26°C

COVID-19 CUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+51,570)	(+895)
22,64,054	45,352

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS


(+1,256)	(+10)
TS: 80,751	637
(+7,665)	(+80)
AP: 2,35,525	2,116

CASES AROUND THE WORLD



2,01,29,411

DEATHS



7,35,892

COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES



213

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Dakshinayana
Tithi: Shravana Bahula Saptami till 9.05 am
Star: Bharani till 12.54 am (Wednesday)
Varjyam: 8.48 am to 10.35 am
Durmuhurtam: 8.33 am to 9.24 am; 11.13 pm to 11.59 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm

HJRI CALENDAR
Zulhijja 20, 1441 AH
PRAYERS (SHAHI MASJID)
Fajar: 4.40 am
Zohar: 12.15 pm
Asar: 4.41 pm
Maghrib: 6.36 pm
Isha: 7.52 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.34 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.55 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.46 PM
MOONSET TODAY 12.42 PM

COUNTER POINT

Don't worry about me... I used to face this since my childhood!

IN BRIEF

Chicago bleeds after unrest

Chicago: More than 100 people were arrested Monday following a night of looting and unrest that left 13 officers injured and caused damage in the city's upscale Magnificent Mile shopping district and other parts of the city, authorities said. Police Superintendent David Brown said it "was not an organised protest" but instead "an incident of pure criminality" that began following the shooting of a person by police. At one point early Monday, shots were fired at police and officers returned fire.

■ Full report on Page 5

Ease Covid rules in rescue ops: PM

New Delhi: With natural calamities badly hitting states like Kerala, Assam, Bihar, UP, Maharashtra and Karnataka amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed concern over the adherence to physical distancing rules during rescue efforts. In a virtual meeting with the representatives of these states, Mr Modi said they must ensure people follow health protocols like wearing masks and maintaining adequate physical distancing during rescue efforts.


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HK media mogul held under Xi's security law



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Centre plans land bank and social MFI for MSMEs



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Ramdev's Patanjali in fray to sponsor IPL



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AP hikes market value of property

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

The state government has revised the basic market values of lands, buildings and farm lands in municipal corporations, municipalities and in areas covered by urban development authorities by an average ranging from 10 to 50 per cent in the state with effect from Monday. Though the government is having a budget target of generating revenue of ₹6,336 crore in the current fiscal, it could only manage ₹1,167 crore from April 1 to August 10. However, in the last fiscal, the state earned revenue of ₹2,113 crore in the corresponding period. This means, the state earned ₹946 crore less in the current fiscal as registration of properties was stopped due to Covid-19.

In the last fiscal, when the government targeted a revenue of ₹6,600 crore, it earned nearly ₹5,000 crore. The upper revision of basic market values of lands, buildings and farm lands is expected to help the state earn additional revenue of ₹800 crore. Though the basic market values vary from place to place, Vijayawada has got an average revision of 10 per cent while Visakhapatnam 30 per cent and in some districts, it is up to 50 per cent. However, registration charges of properties remain unchanged at 7.5 per cent with five per cent as stamp duty, 1.5 per cent as transfer charge and one per cent as registration charge. Though the state government initially wanted to revise of market values from August 1, it deferred the decision after feedback from the stakeholders.

Pilot makes peace with Congress ahead of vote

Gehlot wants party to 'post' his former deputy in Delhi

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, AUG. 10

Ahead of the August 14 Assembly session, a breakthrough seemed to be in sight for the Congress government in Rajasthan with former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot meeting both Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi in Delhi and discussing a possible formula for rapprochement. In a statement after the meeting, which lasted for more than two hours, Congress general secretary (organisation), said: "Sachin Pilot has met with former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and expressed his grievances in detail. They have had a frank, open and conclusive discussion. Sachin Pilot has committed to working in the interest of the Congress and the government in Rajasthan." "Following this meeting, Congress president Sonia Gandhi has decided that the AICC will constitute a three-member committee to address the issues raised by Sachin Pilot and the aggrieved MLAs and

sive discussion. Sachin Pilot has committed to working in the interest of the Congress and the government in Rajasthan." "Following this meeting, Congress president Sonia Gandhi has decided that the AICC will constitute a three-member committee to address the issues raised by Sachin Pilot and the aggrieved MLAs and

arrive at an appropriate resolution thereof," the statement said. Sources said most of the 18 MLAs loyal to Mr Pilot were set to return to Jaipur tonight to meet Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. Party sources add that some of the rebel MLAs have also been in touch with the Congress leadership in the last few days. However, it was yet unclear as to whether the party's Central leadership had accepted the demands of either Mr Pilot or Mr Gehlot. Sources said that Mr Pilot has demanded that he be reinstated as the state Congress chief and be made chief minister for the last year of the term of

the government in Rajasthan. The Central leadership was in no mood to agree to these demands. Mr Gehlot on the other hand wanted that his former deputy be adjusted in Delhi and kept away from state politics, according to sources. It was clear that the committee will look into these demands and take a call, the sources added. During the meeting among the many things discussed was favourable voting by Mr Pilot and MLAs loyal to him in case of a trust vote during the upcoming Rajasthan Assembly session. Mr Pilot and other rebel MLAs would face disqualification in case they defy the Congress whip on the floor of the House.

PRANAB POSITIVE, ON VENTILATOR AFTER SURGERY

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, AUG. 10

Former president Pranab Mukherjee on Monday tested positive for coronavirus before he underwent a surgery to remove a clot in his brain. "On a visit to hospital for a separate procedure, I tested positive for Covid-19 today. I request people who came into contact with me in the last week to please self-isolate and get tested," Mukherjee said in a tweet. While his surgery was successful, the former president is being treated for Coronavirus infection at the Army's R&R Hospital in Delhi. According to news agency PTI, former president is currently on a ventilator support at the hospital.

COVID PATIENT JUMPS TO DEATH FROM HOSPITAL

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC NELLORE, AUG. 10

In a tragic incident, a Coronavirus patient jumped to death from the government general hospital building at Ongole after midnight on Sunday. The 35-year-old belonged to Darimadugu village in Markapuram mandal. He was married and has two children. Depressed after testing positive at the government hospital in Markapuram, he was shifted to the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences in Ongole on August 8 and was kept in the casualty ward as beds were not available in the other wards at the time.

■ Page 2: Youth's mother says her son was sick

COPS ARREST 3 OFFICIALS OF RAMESH HOSP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

Police arrested three officials from Ramesh Hospitals on Monday, following the death of 10 Covid-19 patients in a fire mishap at a private Covid care centre set up by the hospital in Swarna Palace Hotel. Earlier, three special teams inspected Ramesh Hospitals and seized key documents and hard disks.

■ Full report on Page 2

Fire and police department officials visit Swarna Palace Hotel, the Covid-19 care facility which caught fire killing 10 patients in Vijayawada on Monday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Analysts question TD's silence on fire accident

MD ILYAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

Opposition leader N. Chandrababu Naidu and leaders of allied parties are exposing their double standards during tragedies in the state, reflecting their political interests. After creating ruckus over the gas leakage incident at Visakhapatnam, they are silent on the fire mishap at Swarna Palace Hotel and YSRC leaders are questioning the silence of Naidu when such a tragedy had struck. Naidu had held the YSRC government responsible for the deaths of 12 people in Vizag gas leak-

age, while his party leaders staged protests and gheraoed officials demanding arrest of LG Polymers management. But those fiery protests are now absent in the latest fire incident that killed 10 Covid patients. Naidu's silence is raising doubts about caste politics. He tweeted, "In deep anguish after learning about the fire accident at the Vijayawada Covid center this morning, I extend my deepest condolences to the families who have lost their loved ones and pray for the speedy recovery of the injured." Senior political analysts stated that Naidu had con-

veniently avoided mentioning Swarna Palace Hotel and Ramesh Hospitals. They recalled that he had sought the BJP government to give permission to go to Vizag to console gas victims and had alleged links between YSRC leaders and LG Polymers management. They said that other political parties, including BJP, followed Naidu's path. "The analysts alleged that Vijayawada was a Kamma 'bastion' and a majority of businesses and trades were headed by people from the community." ■ Page 2: YSRC says silence exposes Naidu

CM launches application monitoring units in state

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launched a pursuance and monitoring unit (PMU) call centre to oversee the functioning of village and ward secretariats and released the guidelines for social audit besides launching internet services to village secretariats in remote areas. The call centre will closely oversee the functioning of village and ward secretariats and keep a vigil on the whether or not deadlines are met in providing services and will alert the government if any application is pending at any point. The initiative was launched at a review meeting here on Monday.

● ALL APPLICATIONS for rice card, pension, AarogyaSri card, house site pattas will be tracked by the Pursuance and Monitoring Unit, with a constant follow-up, said Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Keeping the official machinery on alert, the call centre will see that applications are cleared and disposed of within the stipulated time and send alerts. Starting with four services, the scope of the PMU will be widened to 543 services and will have 200 employees. All applications for rice card, pension, AarogyaSri card, house site pattas will

be tracked by the PMU, with a constant follow-up, said Reddy. He stated that this will track the work of the employees of the village secretariat and upwards to MRO, MPDO and secretary to see that the services are rendered within the prescribed timeline: ten days for rice card and pensions, 20 days for aarogyaSri and 90 days for house site pattas. "Feedback on why an application was not cleared in the stipulated time should come to the CMO and the officials here should be talking to the concerned district collectors or joint collectors," said the CM.

■ Page 2: Power comes with responsibility: CM

KCR: AP did not respond to talks

S.A. ISHAQUI | DC HYDERABAD, AUG. 10

Telangana CM K. Chandrashekhar Rao took severe exception to the Centre making "fau-lty" claims on the state using Krishna river water, and the AP government "making meaningless, baseless and unnecessary fuss" over the projects being constructed in the state. "I took the initiative and invited the AP state elders in the government, offered them lunch and dis-

cussed the matter (of sharing waters). I extended a friendly hand so that both the states could construct projects based on the needs of the people," he said. "The AP government has unnecessarily poked us and is picking up a fight. It has lodged baseless allegations and complaints without any truth. Let us give a befitting answer in the apex council meeting," the Chief Minister told a meeting with senior officials.

ACADEMIC YEAR WON'T BE ZERO YEAR: CENTRE

New Delhi, Aug. 10: The current academic year will not be a "zero year" for colleges and higher education institutions, education ministry officials told a parliamentary panel on Monday, indicating that they hoped to conduct exams by the end of the session, sources said. They also told the panel that online classes are only meant for school children above Class 3 and only limited number of online classes are allowed for those up to Class 8. However, panel members raised questions on the viability of online classes for poor families who cannot afford phones or laptop computers, the sources said. How would their kids get access to online education, the MPs asked the officials. Panel chairman Vinay Sahasrabudde suggested children can be taught via community radio and transistor, which is cost-effective compared to mobile phones, can be provided to poor students, the sources. The senior BJP leader also suggested creation of a "big question bank" of all subjects for students on the basis of which questions should be asked whenever the exams are held for this academic session. The education ministry officials told the panel that this academic year will not be a "zero year", the sources said. — PTI

Students say they are unable to cope up with online tuitions and classes

Online classes stressing out children: Study

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 10

Online classes being conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic has led to various kinds of physical and psychological stress and anxiety among children especially those in the lower classes. This was found out in a study conducted by Dr Jayaprakash R., child psychiatrist and behavioural paediatrics unit chief of the Government Medical College Thiruvananthapuram. The response of a cross-section of students from various classes and parents was elicited through in-depth telephonic inter-

views. Many students disclosed that they could remain totally attentive only for the first 30 minutes of the class and sat idly for the rest of the period. "As part of the study we sought the opinion of parents of the students studying in government-aided-unaided CBSE/ICSE schools and Kendriya Vidyalayas of various districts in Kerala. The exercise was carried out in the wake of widespread complaints against online classes aired in the public domain including social media," said Dr Jayaprakash. Many students complained that online classes caused mental strain, anxi-

● **MANY STUDENTS** disclosed during a survey that they could remain totally attentive only for the first 30 minutes of the class and sat idly for the rest of the period. ● **THEY COMPLAINED** that online classes caused mental strain, anxiety, irritability, sleeplessness, learning stress and loss of self-esteem besides behavioural problems like hyperactivity, impulsivity and attention issues. ● **PSYCHIATRISTS AND** psychologists say each session of online class should not exceed 30 minutes at a stretch after which there should be compulsory break of a maximum duration of 1 hour. Total time for online classes in a day should be fixed as 2-3 hours.

ety, irritability, sleeplessness, learning stress and loss of self-esteem besides behavioural problems like hyperactivity, impulsivity and attention issues. Physical problems like eye strain, blurring of vision which may necessitate repeated ophthalmic consultation, neck pain, headache, back pain etc were also pointed out by students. A section of students, especially those preparing for competitive exams, said they were not able to

cope with online tuitions along with online classes. Psychiatrists and psychologists say each session of online class should not exceed 30 minutes at a stretch after which there should be compulsory break of a maximum duration of 1 hour. Total time for online classes in a day should be fixed as 2-3 hours. "We were flooded with complaints from parents over phone and Whatsapp against online classes running into hours. Most parents said their children were under huge stress and sought immediate remedy," said Dr Jayaprakash. It was found that the majority of the students were using mobile as the

gadget for online class. Only a small number of students used tabs or laptops which have bigger screens. The other recommendations of the study included; All classes should be set as live online interactive classes, online class should be spread over the forenoon and afternoon and crowding all sessions in the forenoon should be avoided. There should be limited home work and assignments, teaching and learning pedagogy should be modified to meet the new challenges, teachers should be given crash courses and training and school curriculum should be revised.

IN BRIEF

Veerraju to take oath as BJP chief

Vijayawada: Somu Veerraju to take charge as the Andhra Pradesh BJP state president at a programme scheduled to be held in Vijayawada on Tuesday. According to the party sources, the BJP national general secretary Ram Madhav and the BJP national secretary and the AP BJP in-charge Sunil Deodhar will attend. BJP senior leader Ram Madhav to administer the oath of office to Mr Veerraju. Following the Covid-19 threat, only a select leaders including BJP vice presidents, secretaries and general secretaries, have been invited to attend the oath-taking ceremony at the Convocation Hall in the city. BJP leaders, activists and supporters across the state will be provided with a web link to watch the programme online. Born in 1957 at Katheru village, in East Godavari, Mr Veerraju had his schooling at DMH School in Rajahmundry. He completed his intermediate at VT College in Rajahmundry and graduation at DNR College, Bhimavaram in West Godavari. He was associated with RSS from his school days onwards and worked in its student wing ABVP during his college days. He held several key posts in BJP at the state level and also at the national level. Currently, he is a BJP national executive member. He was elected as MLC for the AP Legislative Council in 2015.

Bankers praise YSRC schemes

Vijayawada: Major scheduled banks have appreciated the state government for the YSR Cheyutha and YSR Aasara schemes which are aimed at empowering women. During a video conference with CMO officials on Monday, bankers assured complete support for the schemes and said that recent pacts with ITC, Amul, HUL and Procter and Gamble will bring in a revolution. Elaborating on the schemes, CMO officials said that the state government is determined to empower women financially and asked the bankers to extend their support for the government initiatives. Bankers have come forward to provide farm loans to dairy farmers along with insurance facilities as the state government has made a pact with Amul for boosting the dairy sector in the state.

Asst professors protest for MTS

Vijayawada: Assistant professors on contract staged a protest at nine universities with an appeal to the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to provide them 'Minimum Time Scale' and job security in the state on Monday. The contract assistant professors, holding printed copies bearing the portraits of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and his late father and former CM Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, staged a silent protest demanding the intervention of the Chief Minister to fulfil his assurances on their service conditions. They also asked for a renewal of the annual contract of their colleagues.

YSRC SAYS SILENCE EXPOSES NAIDU

FROM PAGE 1

They stated that Ramesh Hospital belonged to Dr Pothineni Ramesh Babu who was a strong supporter of the TD and had recently joined Naidu in an online conference on Covid-19 situation. They wondered why the TD was not seeking prosecution of hospital and hotel owners for their criminal neglect.

They said only two TD leaders — Bonda Umamaheswara Rao and Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rammohan — had visited the Covid care centre but did not demand any action against the culprits.

Government Chief Whip Gadikota Srikanth Reddy said that TD leaders have remained silent over the accident only because Ramesh Hospitals belong to their party supporter. He said that Naidu appointed a fact-finding committee with TD leaders to probe Vizag gas leakage incident but there was nothing with regard to the latest tragedy.

He said that the YSRC never indulges in caste politics, particularly during tragedies but they only wished to expose the double standards of Naidu.

New industrial policy aims to achieve balanced growth

The policy includes steps being taken up by the state govt to boost industrial growth**MD ILYAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10**

The Andhra Pradesh government launched its industrial development policy 2020-23, focused on driving sustainable industrialisation and balanced growth across regions in view of the three capitals decision.

The YSRC Congress government which decided to establish three capitals had formulated a new industrial development policy targeted balancing growth across regions and communities.

Minister for industries, Mekapati Goutam Reddy, unveiled the policy at the APIIC office in Mangalagiri on Monday. Speaking to the media, Mr Reddy said that this policy envisages setting up of YSR AP One, a multi-faceted business enablement centre to assist investors throughout the investment lifecycle.

YSR AP One provides services such as investor facilitation, market research, marketing and branding, sales support, incentive management and a special category cell. Mr Reddy said that de-risking investments with

FAPCCI welcomes new industrial policy**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10**

The president of the federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of commerce and Industry (FAPCCI), C.V. Atchut Rao, welcomed the new industrial policy of the government of Andhra Pradesh for 2020-23.

Lauding the policy for its emphasis on the creation of a better ecosystem for attracting industries so as to generate more employ-

ment opportunities, Rao hoped that with this new policy, industrial activity will pick up the momentum in the state.

He further hoped that the policy has been framed so as to encourage industrialists to make Andhra Pradesh their destination.

The government intends to provide the needed infrastructure, skilled labour availability and handholding support to the industrial units by cre-

ating YSR AP One, said Mr Rao, welcoming the fact that the policy focused mainly on providing readymade pre-cleared facilities and skill development centres which can serve as a base for growth of the state.

Thanking the government for addressing the basic issues of MSMEs through the policy, Mr Rao said it also aims to create a competitive ecosystem for new industries and start-ups.

end-to-end support for investors is the cornerstone of the policy and it has outlined interventions to support units with end-to-end hand-holding.

The policy aims at the holistic development of all areas, including industrial, commercial and economic activities. The policy includes steps being taken up by the state government to boost industrial growth after the impact of Covid-19.

The new industrial policy would help to create jobs in the state, claimed Mr Reddy, pointing out

that the new policy encapsulates Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's, vision and ideas. He said that this new industrial policy involves people and entrepreneurs and aims at the holistic development of all regions. Mr Reddy claimed that this new policy will ensure that none of the investors incurs losses in their businesses.

Special subsidies will be provided to SC, ST, BC and minority women entrepreneurs through this policy. Besides, the new policy will be of great help to

micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) and special focus will be laid on transparency and infrastructural design.

Priority will be given to investments in key sectors including pharma, textile, automobile, electronics and petrochemicals, said Mr Reddy. He even said that there would be additional subsidies in line with investment proposals for mega projects.

APIIC chairperson, MLA Roja said, "Jagan has also given priority to women in industrial policy. We are giving land price, GST,

YSRC bent on ruining AP: Naidu

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday advised Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's government to stop implementing its lopsided policies as they would cripple agriculture, irrigation, industry and all sectors in the state economy.

Naidu appealed to the people to think carefully whether they would like to have 'true development' brought by the previous Telugu Desam Party regime or 'true destruction' being caused by the present YSRC government.

Addressing the fourth, in a series of press conferences, to create awareness against the government's 3-Capitals plan, Mr Naidu said that the ruling party leaders had only focused on Amaravati demolition and suppression of different sections of people in the past 15 months and consequently, all the developmental projects launched by the TD came under stress.

He asserted that TD completed 72 per cent works on the State's lifeline Polavaram project but the YSRC's bad policies had led to obstruction and non-completion of this project till now.

He alleged that the YSRC was not spending a single paisa while the TD spent ₹64,000 cr by beginning 62 irrigation projects of which 23 projects were completed.

The TD chief listed out projects implemented by him in different districts, saying that balanced growth was planned with projects ushered in Rayalaseema, Coastal Andhra and North Andhra districts.

Follow Covid protocol: Galla

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

Guntur MP, Galla Jayadev, alleged that ruling party MLAs and ministers were violating lockdown restrictions, including not wearing masks, organising large gatherings and moving across the state with no regard for the protocols in place.

Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, continues to ignore wearing a mask during meetings which is not a good sign to people, said Mr Jayadev, and asked the YSRC Congress government take strict measures to contain swift spread of Covid-19 in AP.

Lamenting that Andhra Pradesh is now the global epicentre of the Covid-19 pandemic as, after Maharashtra, it is reporting the highest number of positive cases in India, with around 10,000 new cases daily for several days over the last two weeks, Mr Jayadev stated

that since the start of the pandemic, Maharashtra has always been recording the most number of cases in India, but now the numbers from Andhra Pradesh are rivalling them.

Arguing that people cannot be blamed for not following social distancing and mask norms when the leaders and public representatives who are supposed to set an example themselves have continued to flout the rules since the start of the pandemic, Mr Jayadev demanded that Mr Jagan, ministers, legislators and party leaders strictly follow Covid-19 protocols.

Demanding that the YSRC government take corrective action to avoid any future disruptions to the state economy and the lives of the people due to the pandemic, Mr Jayadev asked the YSRC to shun negligence to follow corona protocols for the safety, security and good health of the public.

backward regions.

Employment will bring in money and improve the lifestyle of the people, he pointed out.

He claimed that the TD regime focused on the development of ports all along the long coastline and faulted the YSRC Congress government for not doing anything to develop ports in the state.

A lot of trading can be done and this will add to the revenue of the state, he said.

● YSR AP One provides services such as investor facilitation, market research, marketing and branding, sales support, incentive management and a special category cell.

● Mr Reddy said that de-risking investments with end-to-end support for investors is the cornerstone of the policy and it has outlined interventions to support units with end-to-end hand-holding.

● The policy aims at the holistic development of all areas, including industrial, commercial and economic activities.

electricity and interest concessions to women to set up industries and incentives were provided to SC, ST, BC and minorities." She said the credit for giving priority to minorities for the first time goes to Jagan. She said 47,000 acres of land would be allotted to APIIC in the coming days to set up industries.

A separate IT policy would be released soon.

TD URGES CBI PROBE IN LOCAL POLL VIOLATIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

The Telugu Desam (TD) has sought a CBI probe into the alleged 2,500 violations by the ruling party registered during local body elections in AP.

TD MLC, G. Deepak Reddy, appealed to State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar to order a CBI probe into 2,500 violations committed by YSRC during the local body polls.

Recalling that YSRC leaders had not only targeted and attacked opposition contestants but also threatened, blackmailed and illegally removed Kumar himself from the SEC post, Mr Reddy claimed that the YSRC committed these illegalities only out of fear that a free and fair election would lead to a total rout of their party in local body elections.

He asserted that the 5.5 crore people of AP were now looking up to Kumar to firmly deal with the injustices and unconstitutional practices of the YSRC.

Stating that the election should be held under the supervision of central observers with security provided by central forces, Mr Reddy added that if suitable punishment was not given to the ruling party leaders, then the SEC should not conduct the polls at all.

Mr Reddy further sought a CBI enquiry would unearth YSRC's election offences.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launching PMU call centre at the camp office on Monday.

Power comes with responsibility: CM

From Page 1

"The officials should remember that power comes out of responsibility. The data from the call centre should be processed automatically and an analytical text should come out which should be followed up," declared the CM.

Apart from releasing the guidelines for the social audit in village and ward secretariats, Reddy also launched functional broadband internet services in remote area village secretariats. These services will be available in 512 secretariats where internet services are currently not available. They will be linked to other secretariats within two months.

"The secretariats will have digital boards displaying the welfare schemes the government has been implementing and the information should be available to people. All village secretariats should have toilets. The focus should be on construction work of ward secretariats and urban health clinics," the Chief Minister said.

Finally, "vacancies in village secretariats should be filled up by September and employees should be given proper training on the various schemes being implemented by the government and there should be self-assessment," he said.

Panchayat raj minister, Peddireddy Ramchandra Reddy, chief secretary, Nilam Sawhney, principal secretary, Ajaya Kalam, and others participated in the meeting.

Three arrested for fire mishap

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

Police arrested three officials from Ramesh Hospitals here on Monday, following the death of 10 Covid-19 patients in a fire mishap at a private Covid care centre set up by the hospital in Swarna Palace Hotel.

The three accused were Dr Kodali Rajagopala Rao, chief operating officer, Dr Kurapathi Sud-arsan, general manager and Pallabothu Venk-atesh, co-originating manager for the Covid care centre.

Earlier, three special teams inspected Ramesh Hospitals and seized key documents and hard disks. Assistant commissioner of police N. Surya-chandra Rao said that the special teams were carrying out inspection on all three branches of the hospital and added that based on a preliminary inquiry, the hospital was admitting more patients in violation of the norms and even charging them heavily.

Among three special teams, one team is carrying out inspection at Hotel Swarna Heights and Swarna Palace attached to Ramesh Hospitals and finding out about the treatment provided while another team is inquiring about the reasons for the short-circuit and the third team is

● The three accused were Dr Kodali Rajagopala Rao, chief operating officer, Dr Kurapathi Sud-arsan, general manager and Pallabothu Venk-atesh, co-originating manager for the Covid care centre.

● Police also carried out searches at the residence of Swarna Palace owner M. Srinivas and reportedly seized documents.

finding out compliance with fire safety norms.

The police also carried out searches at the residence of Swarna Palace owner M. Srinivas and reportedly seized documents pertaining to the agreement with Ramesh Hospitals on setting up Covid care centres.

Meanwhile, a team of officials led by Krishna district joint collector Siva Sankar inspected Swarna Palace.

Later, the JC told that they were inquiring on three issues with one being whether Swarna Palace had all safety norms, whether Covid-19 protocols were followed while providing treatment and the cause of the fire mishap and whether the guidelines issued by the government were being followed.

He said that after taking up a thorough inquiry, they would submit a report to the District Collector.

WORKING | CONDITIONS Oppn leaders slam CM for focusing on shifting the capital more than on the pandemic

JUDAs on strike seeking basic facilities, better pay

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC TIRUPATI, AUG. 10

Members of the Andhra Pradesh Junior Doctors' Association (AP JUDA) on Monday boycotted elective services such as general out-patient departments and wards at government hospitals across the state, to protest against the government not responding to their demands.

The JUDA members said they would attend to Covid-19 related duties and emergency services like casualty, labour room and ICUs, but will wear black badges while on duty until the government responds.

The JUDA took this decision to mount pressure on the government to fulfil th-

VADREVV SRINIVAS | DC KAKINADA, AUG. 10

Junior doctors in the state numbering more than 7,000 are planning to intensify their agitation from Tuesday by staying away from out-patient and elective duties. Junior doctors in Guntur and Andhra Medical College started their protest on Monday.

Those in three medical

air demands like provision of proper personal protection kits, N95 masks, basic security, better amenities, increase in staff strength at Covid hospitals, enhance-

ment of stipend and insurance to junior doctors.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, JUDA president Dr Venkata Saiteja Dudi said, "despite many repre-

sentations to the state health department, we have received only oral assurances but nothing has been resolved till date."

"We don't want to end up as either Covid-19 carriers or victims by using the faulty N95 and PPE kits being provided to us. If we are provided with proper protective gear, we will be

able to treat more Covid-19 patients without any worry," he added.

Members of the JUDA said that there is a shortage of manpower in hospitals.

that was not the case with junior doctor on Covid-19 duty.

Dr Bhaskar said the government should insure their lives. He said junior doctors were being paid only ₹35,000 against ₹45,000 in Telangana state and ₹60,000 in other states. He said that the association wanted the government to pay them ₹45,000.

FULFIL DOCTORS' DEMANDS: CPI

NAGESWARA RAO BALLEDA | DC KADAPA, AUG. 10

CPI district secretary Gujjala Eshwariah asked the government to respond immediately and fulfil the junior doctors' demands as the people were worried that their strike would be disastrous during the Coronavirus pandemic. Speaking to the media at the party office on Monday, Eashwariah alleged that the state and Central governments and thrown up their hands in dealing with the pandemic.

SHORT TAKES

Mystery shrouds death of couple

Nellore: Mystery shrouds the death of a couple whose bodies were found floating in the Atmakur tank located close to Atmakur town in SPSR Nellore district on Monday morning. The couple identified as Vangavadugu Narayana Reddy, 60, and Swarna, 55, belong to Revuru village in Ananthasagaram mandal. While the police suspect suicide going by the circumstantial evidence, locals believe that they drowned after an accidental fall from the vehicle into the tank. The scooter was found lying close to the tank, but the police ruled out accident stressing that the vehicle was intact and it appears to have fallen after it was parked because the ground was uneven. Atmakur SI C. Santosh Kumar Reddy said that Narayana Reddy was doing contract works in Telangana and he has been reportedly facing financial problems due to pending bills while hinting that it could be a suicide. The couple left home around 4.30 am to attend a function in Nellore and some morning walkers alerted police when they noticed the bodies.

Youth's mom says her son was sick

From Page 1

Though she tested negative, his mother also came to the hospital worried about the health of her son. He jumped from the third floor of RIMS Hospital when the staff were taking him on a stretcher to the ward after a bed was available around 12.30 am on Monday. The shocked staff told the police that he suddenly stepped off the stretcher and jumped before they realised what was happening. They immediately alerted the higher officials and the police. The staff had a tough time in consoling the mother of the deceased who was outside the hospital when the incident took place. Referring to the mother's version, circle inspector of Ongole one town, M. Bheema Nayak, said that the youth is an alcoholic and his health condition was bad, apart from the coronavirus. The victim was married but was not taking care of the family because of his addiction to liquor. "One of the reasons for his depression was unavailability of liquor in the vicinity of his village," Nayak added.

Man ends life after cop son booked

Nellore: A man committed suicide at Chirala on Monday allegedly after his son working as an Armed Reserve constable was booked for transporting liquor from Telangana illegally on Sunday. The deceased has been identified G. Visweswar Prasad, 58, a former SI of CISF and native of Eppurapalem near Chirala. Police held his son G. Kiran Kumar after they found 40 liquor bottles of Telangana in his motor-bike after he met with an accident and suffered injuries near Maddipadu in Prakasam district on Sunday. His brother Mahesh Babu was also travelling with him but he had minor injuries.

Couple found dead in separate rooms

Kakinada: A couple, Vallabhapurapu Durga Prasad, 53, and his wife Venkata Padmavathi, 45, were found dead under suspicious circumstances. They were found hanging in separate rooms. According to Sarpavaram CI R. Govinda Rajulu, the couple are residing in Rajeshwari Nagar at Kakinada.

Ex-minister passes away

Visakhapatnam: Senior leader of YSR Congress Party Penmetta Sambasiva Raju, 87, passed away at a corporate hospital in the early hours of Monday here. Raju belonged to M. Vijayaramapuram of Nellimarla mandal in Vizianagaram district and was an eight-time MLA in the combined AP Legislative Assembly. He was a minister in the Congress government from 1989 to 1994. Minister for Urban Development Botsa Satyanarayana is among several of his political followers. Raju, who maintained an impeccably clean record all through his career, represented Gajapatinagar and Sativada Assembly constituencies.

Disregard for Covid protocol



People in a large number stand outside a doctors' chamber without maintaining physical distance inside the King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

State records 7,665 new Covid cases, 80 deaths

Recovery of patients is high in EG followed by Kurnool

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 10

Giving much awaited relief to the state government, the number of Coronavirus infections have witnessed slight dip when compared with previous days, as 7,665 new Covid-19 cases have been reported rising tally to 2,35,525 in the last 24 hours in the state.

According to the Covid-19 bulletin released here on Monday, out of 46,999 samples tested, 7,665 individuals have been tested Covid-19 positive.

Out of total number of 25,34,304 samples tested so far, 1,45, 636 infected patients have been discharged after recovery while 87,773 individuals infected with the virus are taking treatment at various hospitals.

Among the new infections, East Godavari continues to lead with 1,235

CORONA TESTS AT DOORSTEPS FOR ELDERLY

Nellore: Joint Collector Dr V. Vinod Kumar appealed the people above 60 years to register their names in the website: http://covid19.ap.gov.in/Covid19_Admin/RequestForTest.html for Corona tests at their door step.

The medical teams will also carry out medical tests before conducting the Covid test.

Dr Vinod Kumar said 7

cases followed by 883 in Kurnool, 722 in West Godavari, 631 in Anantapur, 621 in Guntur, 620 in Visakhapatnam, 574 in Vizianagaram, 511 in Nellore, 479 in Chittoor, 450 in Prakasam, 439 in Kadapa, 354 in Srikakulam and 146 in Krishna.

With regard to cumulative positive cases, East Godavari has been badly affected with 32,938 fol-

lowed by 28,314 in Kurnool, 24,738 in Anantapur, 22,339 in Guntur, 20,113 in Visakhapatnam, 18,869 in West Godavari, 17,576 in Chittoor, 13,876 in Kadapa, 13,731 in Nellore, 11,333 in Srikakulam, 10,438 in Krishna, 9,380 in Vizianagaram, 8,985 in Prakasam, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

Recovery rate among

the Covid-19 infected patients while undergoing treatment has been good in East Godavari with 18,471 followed by 18,322 in Kurnool, 17,597 in Anantapur, 14,603 in West Godavari, 14,592 in Guntur, 11,864 in Visakhapatnam, 10,367 in Chittoor, 7,407 in Kadapa, 6,930 in Nellore, 6,656 in Srikakulam, 6,575 in Krishna, 5,541 in Prakasam, 3,816 in Vizianagaram, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

The state has witnessed death of 80 Covid-19 infected patients with Prakasam leading with 11 followed by 10 in Guntur, nine in West Godavari, seven each in Kadapa and Srikakulam, six each in Chittoor and Kurnool, five each in Anantapur, Nellore, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram and four in East Godavari. The new death cases have scaled up toll to 2,116.

GVMC to be in contact with residents on video call

V.K.L. GAYATRI | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 10

Though an official mechanism is working 24/7 to control Covid-19 cases, in Visakhapatnam city, the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) is gearing up to involve all sections of people as a part of high-end preparedness.

The GVMC will conduct video and teleconferences with the residential associations in colonies, gated communities and the public in general and register the voices of the people to check the Covid-19 at the ground-level.

The commissioner and other senior GVMC officials are gearing up to conduct periodical conferences with the associations to advise them and

● **THIS MECHANISM** is not only for the preparedness of the Covid-19, it would also be helpful to the administration in the future. Once the pandemic is under control, the practice would continue to render better services

to learn about the ground-level situation.

Minister for tourism M. Srinivasa Rao, directed the commissioner, GVMC, G. Srujana, to prepare an action plan to conduct video and teleconferences with people on a weekly basis. Following Rao's directions, the GVMC is gearing up to make the arrangements to conduct the conferences from the ward secretariats. The officials would enquire about the

spot-level situation and also issue suggestions to control the Covid-19 positive cases in residential areas. The officials would also maintain records and telephone numbers of the representatives of the respected associations and monitor the situation in their localities. The staff of the ward secretariats would also follow up on information provided by the residents during the conferences.

This mechanism is not only for the preparedness of the Covid-19, it would also be helpful to the administration in the future. Once the pandemic has been controlled, the practice would continue to render better services in general and ensure effective administration, said Rao.

Pandemic makes burglaries easy in Anantapur town

NAGA BHUSHANAM HOSKOTEI DC ANANTAPUR, AUG. 10

The pandemic appears to have made it easy for burglars to loot the locked houses of those who have temporarily migrated to relatives' houses and native villages due to cases either in their apartments or streets.

At least five locked houses were looted and a woman was also brutally killed by robbers in Anantapur in the past 15 days.

Khaja Hussain's family, from Tapovanam in Anantapur, had shifted to a relative's residence following a Covid-19 case in the area three weeks ago and left all their valuables in the house. Burglars broke in and looted 12 tolas of gold jewellery and ₹25 lakh from the house on Saturday.

At least three other houses were looted by robbers in Kovurnagar area in Anantapur.

● **AT LEAST** five locked houses were looted and a woman was also brutally killed by robbers in Anantapur in the last 15 days

● **KHAJA HUSSAIN'S** family, from Tapovanam in Anantapur, had shifted to a relative's residence following a Covid-19 case in the area three weeks ago and left all their valuables in the house

Robbers murdered an old woman on outskirts one week ago after she noticed and shouted out while they were robbing a neighbour's house in last month.

In all the incidents, burglars targeted locked houses. Police teams assess that the locked houses are being targeted by burglars are in areas in panic over the virus. Previously, containment zones were closed with fencing to curb public in the street, but Covid-19

positive patients are being permitted to stay at home quarantine with mild symptoms of virus for the past one month.

IV Town circle inspector, Kathi Srinivasulu, observed the people were not utilising burglar alarm police systems to avoid robberies. "Even as the department is providing service round the clock, the residents have not been using the system. People should make use of police services providing security for locked houses," he said.

The pandemic had severe impact on rented houses and apartments. At least 15 flats are vacant in a 25 flat apartment complex in the new town area after six Covid-19 positive cases were reported in it ten days ago. M.L. Narayana, owner of a flat in the complex, said they temporarily vacated the flat and are staying at relative's house due to the increasing number of cases.

96 sovereigns gold recovered, 4 held

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, AUG. 16

The West Godavari police recovered 96 sovereigns of gold ornaments and arrested four including a child in conflict with the law in two separate theft incidents in the district.

Superintendent of Police K. Narayana Naick said that on August 3, miscreants broke into a house Motheaithota under Eluru II police station lim-

its and stole 60 sovereigns of gold ornaments and ₹25,000 cash.

The police arrested Bangaru Durga Rao and a child and Pothavarapu Naga Durga Vara Prasad and recovered ₹9 lakhs worth of 60 sovereigns of gold ornaments.

In Bhimavaram town, 40 sovereigns of gold ornaments were stolen from a house in Chinaranganipalem village on July 26.

HNSS-II: KRISHNA WATER RELEASED INTO GOLLAPALLI RESERVOIR

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, AUG. 10

Krishna water was released to Gollapalli reservoir and other tanks under Phase-II of Handri Neeva Sujala Shrayanthi (HNSS) project at Jeediapalli in Belaguppa mandal in the district on Monday in view of heavy inflow into Srisaalam reservoir.

Minister M.Shankar Narayana offered puja at Jeediapalli reservoir, Phase-I of HNSS project and released water towards Gollapalli reservoir and other parts of phase-II of the project.

The irrigation authorities released water at least 20 days in advance than in previous years. The minister said tanks will be filled

under HNSS project area of Southern parts of Anantapur district with the released water.

The Jeediapalli reservoir is key location for the HNSS project in Anantapur district which could fill PABR (Penna Ahoobulum Balancing Reservoir) along with big irrigation tanks through Kadiri, Dharmavaram and Madakasira branch canals in the district.

Collector Gandham Chandrudu inspected Jeediapalli village following water seepage into their houses during monsoon season.

People lamented they were being ignored without providing proper rehabilitation packages. The collector assured to take necessary steps.

EX-MP FOR BETTER MEDICARE TO TRIBALS

Visakhapatnam: Former MP V. Pradeep Kumar Dev urged the district health coordinator of Vizianagaram for improvement of the health aid at Kurupam Government Hospital as many living in its are tribals and from poor communities and facing difficulties, particularly during pandemic.

3 ARRESTED, 134 LT OF NDP LIQUOR SEIZED

Tirupati: The Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) arrested three persons, including a scribe, in connection with the illegal transportation of 134.28 litres of non-duty paid liquor into the state, here in Tirupati during the early hours on Monday.

According to the

Assistant excise superintendent M. Sudheer Babu, the SEB officials during their routine vehicular checks on the Cherlopalli - Alipiri road, has intercepted a car in which they found 572 Admial VSOP brandy tetra packs (180ml), which are being transported illegally from Karnataka to Tirupati.

Save groundwater, suggests collector

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, AUG. 10

At the Jal Shakti Abhiyan(JSA) district coordinating committee meeting held at his chamber in the collectorate on Monday, district collector, Ch. Harikiran, directed the concerned authorities to work for the conservation of groundwater in the district through the JSA and for the augmentation of water reserves. The government of India has launched a nationwide water conservation programme, called the JSA, said Harikiran, with the aim of resolving the water crisis across the country.

In 2019, Kadapa district was ranked first among the 250 districts selected across the country for its effective efforts toward water resource augmentation and received the award.

The relevant initiatives taken under the auspices of the district water management authority (DWMA) have yielded good results. In the same vein, the JSA is

currently working to augment water resources in the district, conserve groundwater and curb the misuse of water resources, said Harikiran.

The government should work towards achieving the target of five points as directed by the central government.

He said the district JSA committee should focus on water conservation and rainwater harvesting, restoration of traditional water resources/tanks, water re-use, construction of check dams, watershed development and intensive forest conservation. In addition to these elements, greenery afforestation should be promoted in the hilly areas of the district.

It should also focus on activities such as wastewater treatment and re-use. Extensive publicity should be given through pamphlets and wallpapers on related activities.

DWMA PD Yadubhushan Reddy and other officials were present.

MISHAP | PRONE

Hostels of educational institutions, used as CCCs, don't have NOCs

State hospitals too lack fire NOCs

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC NELLORE, AUG. 10

Only two of the 16 Covid care centres in SPSR Nellore district have an NOC (No Objection Certificate) from the Fire Department. Hostels of some popular educational institutes such as Narayana and Chaitanya and some hotels are being used as CCCs.

In a surprise finding, 12 of them simply ignored getting an NOC, and two failed to renew the certificate they had. Ironically, even the Government General Hospital and State-run Haritha Hotel, which has been converted as a Covid facility, do not have the mandated NOC. It is a similar story with houses built by TIDCO at

● **REFERRING TO** engineering college hostels being used as Covid centres near Ongole, district fire officer S. Srinivasa Rao said they had found 250 fire extinguishers in Rise Engineering College dumped in a room but not installed.

● **NO engineering college, including IIIT has fire safety**

Nellore, Naidupeta, Gudur and Atmakurs.

District fire officer K. Srikanth said that they had served a notice to GGH one month back but there has been no response. He also hinted that none of the government hospitals treating corona patients possessed NOCs.

Incidentally, the situation is no different in Prakasam district where government hospitals at Kandukur, Markapuram, Chirala and Ongole, have no NOC.

Even the minimum fire safety equipment is not available in any of the 13 Covid Hospitals and Care Centres in Ongole.

Referring to engineering college hostels being used as Covid centres near Ongole, District Fire Officer S. Srinivasa Rao said they had found 250 fire extinguishers in Rise Engineering College dumped in a room but not installed. No engineering college, including the IIIT, has fire extinguishers, Srinivasa Rao said adding that they are submitting a report on the situation to higher authorities.

No fire safety measures arranged at FIMS

NAGESWARA RAO BALLEDA | DC KADAPA, AUG. 10

Not only are hospitals in the district getting overcrowded with Covid patients, but most of them do not even have an NOC from the fire department.

This includes Fatima Institute of Medical Sciences (FIMS) and Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS).

Hundreds of patients and suspects are quarantined there. Following the Swarna Palace Hotel tragedy, fire department officials asked all hospi-

tals to set up fire control equipment and obtain an NOC from them. Also in the errant list are Covid hospitals run by Srinivasa and Global Engineering Colleges. Patients are concerned and are asking about the situation if a tragedy befell them.

Kadapa fire officer Palagiri Basivi Reddy speaking to *Deccan Chronicle* said that all government-run and privately managed Covid hospitals must be equipped with fire control equipment. He said the Fatima management promised to install fire equipment soon.

SHORT TAKES

SANJAY DUTT
DISCHARGED
FROM HOSPITALDC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 10

Actor Sanjay Dutt on Monday was discharged from the hospital, two days after he was admitted for breathlessness.

The 61-year-old actor was taken to Lilavati Hospital on Saturday evening for full check-up, where he was also tested for Covid-19, which turned out to be negative.

An official from Lilavati Hospital said that Sanjay Dutt was discharged around 3pm on Monday. He was later clicked outside his Bandra residence, where he waved to the waiting photographers and well-wishers.

“He is doing well and there were no serious symptoms noted. Some necessary treatment for his medical evaluation was done,” said hospital’s Chief Operating Officer Dr V. Ravishanker.

Reports claim that the star had fluctuating oxygen saturation levels and complained of chest discomfort.

ASSAM DGP
TESTS POSITIVE
FOR COVID

Guwahati, Aug. 10: Director General of Assam Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta tested positive for Covid-19 on Monday, officials said.

The top police officer has opted for home isolation, an official source said.

“Healthcare professionals will act as per protocols and test the samples of his immediate contacts,” a senior official said.

Since March, around 30 people at the Assam Police Headquarters have tested positive, including the IGP (Law and Order) and DIG (Administration).

Assam Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) G P Singh on Sunday tweeted that a total of 2,259 personnel from the force have contracted the virus so far, out of whom 1,734 have recovered.

“Unfortunately, we have lost six colleagues till date,” he had said.

Assam has reported a total of 58,837 coronavirus cases, while 42,325 people have recovered from the disease.

Altogether 145 people have died due to Covid-19 in the state.

‘LEADERS WHO
JOINED BJP MAY
RETURN TO NCP’DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 10

Maharashtra Cabinet minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Nawab Malik has rubbished reports that 12 MLAs of his party are joining the BJP. Instead, those legislators who went to the BJP before 2019 Assembly polls are eager to return to the party, he said on Monday.

There is a buzz in the political circles that 12 NCP MLAs are on their way to the BJP, which is likely to bring the MVA government, consisting of Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress, into trouble.

The NCP broke its silence on the issue calling these reports ‘baseless’. “Some people are spreading rumours of 12 NCP MLAs joining BJP, this is baseless and fabricated news. The legislators who went to the BJP before the election are eager to return to the NCP. Soon, a decision will be made and the details will be made public (sic),” Mr Malik tweeted.

The reports of NCP legislators joining the BJP have come on the backdrop of saffron party leaders’ assertions that the MVA government will not last long due to its internal conflicts.

In Assembly polls, BJP emerged as the single largest party in the state with 105 seats followed by the Shiv Sena with 56 seats, NCP bagged 54 seats while Congress got 44 seats in 288-member Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha. However, Sena broke its alliance with the BJP on the issue of sharing of the Chief Minister’s post and formed the MVA government with NCP and Congress.

● **THE REPORTS** of NCP legislators joining the BJP have come on the backdrop of saffron party leaders’ assertions that the MVA government will not last long due to its internal conflicts.

● **THE NCP** broke its silence on the issue calling these reports ‘baseless’.

Open air classes gain pace in Valley

The trendsetter of this exercise is Muneer Aalam, an engineer-turned-teacher from Srinagar

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, AUG. 10

As Kashmir continues to reel under lockdown necessitated by the alarming increase in the number of Covid-19 deaths and cases, the holding of open-air classes for students forcibly kept away from schools for more than a year now is gaining momentum.

Private teachers and tutors are organizing such lessons for students from primary to higher secondary classes, at least, at a couple of dozen places in various districts of the Valley. In most cases, the education in the time of pandemic is being imparted to these students free of cost.

In remaining instances, mohalla (locality) or village welfare committees or

charitable organizations are funding the pursuit, however.

The trendsetter of this unique exercise is Muneer Aalam, an engineer-turned-teacher from Srinagar. He had in view of the slow 2G internet speed debilitating the online classes launched for students by their respective institutions in earlier, started free open-air coaching classes at Srinagar’s Idgah grounds in June “to ensure the students don’t fall behind their school or college syllabi.

His “Minaz Zulumaat-illan Noor” - from darkness (of ignorance) to the brightest light (of knowledge) - endeavour not only continues but it has also inspired many people here and elsewhere in the Valley and is being widely

appreciated. 40-year old Aalam reaches spacious Idgah grounds at the break of dawn to start his classes for 80 boys and girls.

These students pour in from different parts of Srinagar and neighbouring townships, carrying their foldable chairs or mats to attend the classes.

“We adhere to the Covid-19 SOPs and guidelines and take all precautions which include students sitting at distances and wearing masks.”

Last week, when Srinagar received rains after a long time, these classes were held on the porch of Aali Masjid, which is part of the historical Idgah where Muslims offer special Id prayers twice in a year, instead.

“For the first time in the last 50 day, we took the classes a few metres away

from our open-air classroom on the veranda of Aali Masjid. The management of the mosque, the second largest in Kashmir, readily agreed to it,” he said. He added, “It was raining but I decided to look for an alternative place to hold the classes so that the students who come from near and far off places are not disappointed. My first class on that rainy day went for about three hours, the longest in nearly two months.”

Mr. Aalam said, “I’m an engineer from the IIT but teaching is not only my profession but also my passion for the past two decades. I felt the pain of our students who were suffering due to being away from their schools and colleges for so long and the online classes not being any helpful to them

because of the low speed internet. Believe me, thinking about the future of our children and the society I couldn’t sleep.”

He lamented that even the Supreme Court has failed to come to the rescue of students as the petitions seeking restoration of 4G internet services are pending before the top court.

“When you look into the eyes of these young boys and girls you see helplessness. I just want to ask one question, isn’t education a priority before the government,” he said.

He added, “It appears they are telling us let education suffer but there should be no law and order problem. For God’s sake, don’t spoil the future of our new generation. We won’t be able to face them tomorrow”, he added.

While Mr. Aalam teaches maths, he has been joined by a couple of more people lately to teach other subjects.

Mudassir Ahmed, a student said, “These classes have been very helpful to us. We’re face to face with our teachers here. After the lessons are over, we interact with them, seek clarifications from them and give them feedback. Zoom classes have not been any beneficial because of the poor connectivity”

G.N.Var, chairman of chairman of Private Schools Association of Jammu and Kashmir which has 2,200 schools associated with it, said, “Our students are worried and confused and many of them even suffering from psychological distress because educational insti-

tutions are shut for more one year now and the online classes have been a practical joke. Their main worry is - they might not be able to compete with students from other states in all-India level examinations.”

However, Asgar Hassan Samoon, Principal Secretary to the Government, School Education and Skill Development said, “We’re making an all out effort to ensure our students don’t suffer any academic loss.

No doubt, we have only a 2G internet facility available to us which also gets disrupted occasionally due to law and order issues but our 1.35 lakh teachers are helping our 1.5 million students to complete the remaining sixty percent syllabus through community classes.

Rich haul



The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence personnel inspect after seizure of 191 kgs of heroin worth ₹1,000 crore from containers at Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust in Navi Mumbai on Monday.

- PTI

J&K L-G condemns killing
of another BJP activistDC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
SRINAGAR, AUG. 10

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, has strongly condemned the killing of BJP activist Abdul Hamid Najar by suspected militants in the central district of Budgam.

38-year-old Najar was shot at and critically wounded by militants while on a morning walk in Budgam’s Ompora area on Sunday, the police said adding that he died in Srinagar’s government-run SMHS hospital early Monday.

While expressing anguish over the killing, Mr. Sinha said “the heinous act is an attempt to spread fear and there can be no justification for such attacks”.

He added, “The society does not have any space for perpetrators of violence and those involved in this cowardly act shall be brought to justice.”

Mr. Najar is the second BJP worker killed by suspected militants in the

past one week.

On August 6, Sajad Ahmed Khanday, a sarpanch associated with the party, was killed by gunmen in Vesoo village of Qazigun area in southern Kulgam district.

On the August 4 evening, a BJP Panch Arif Ahmad was critically wounded after militants fired upon him in Akhran village of the same district.

Earlier on August 2, a Territorial Army jawan Shakir Manzoor was abducted by gunmen while he was travelling through Damhal Hanjipora, a militancy-infected area of Kulgam.

Before taking him along forcibly, the suspected militants reportedly torched his car, the police sources here had said. His fate is still not known.

The killing and attacks on BJP men by suspected militants have triggered a new wave of resignations by party activists in restive Kashmir Valley.

Admitting that several party workers, most of them lower-rung activists,

have resigned over the last few days following the recent attacks on BJP panchayat members and sarpanches, a BJP leader said some were from Budgam district in central Kashmir.

Letters and videos of several BJP workers announcing their resignations or disassociation with the party have been posted on social media platforms.

The BJP leader said three party workers, including two panchayat members and a sarpanch from Kulgam district of south Kashmir, have resigned from the party.

There is one from Handwara, one from Kupwara and one from Sopore as well, he added.

BJP media in-charge Manzoor Bhat dismissed the resignations as of no consequence.

A similar situation had emerged after the militants killed a local BJP leader Sheikh Waseem Bari along with his father and brother in northern Bandipora district on July 8.

BMC STARTS
2ND PHASE OF
SERO-SURVEY
IN MUMBAIVRUSHALI PURANDARE
| DC
MUMBAI, AUG. 10

The Mumbai civic body has started the second phase of the sero-surveillance study in the city from Monday to assess the spread of Covid-19 and how many people have developed antibodies against the disease.

The survey will cover F-North (Dadar, Matunga and Dharavi), M-West (Deonar and Govandi) and R-North (Dahisar) wards, where a similar study was conducted last month.

The study will provide information about the spread of the infection and also throw light on herd immunity, an official said.

“The sero-surveillance study will give an insight into the spread of Covid-19 and development of antibodies. The paper work for the survey has begun from today,” Additional Municipal Commissioner Suresh Kakani said.

If everything goes as per the plan, the survey is expected to be completed in 12 days, he said.

A serological survey involves testing of blood serum of individuals to check for the prevalence of antibodies against an infection.

The sero survey conducted in the first half of July revealed that 57 per cent of slum population and 16 per cent of non-slum residents in the three civic wards had developed antibodies. It showed a high proportion of asymptomatic Covid-19 infection in the city.

No new circular
on train servicesSHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, AUG. 10

After a fake circular on suspension of trains went viral on social media, the Railways on Monday clarified that no new circular has been issued in this regard. However, as per the earlier order, train services will remain suspended and it will not have an effect on special trains that are being run by the railways.

“Some sections of the media are reporting that Railways has cancelled all regular trains till September 30. This is not true. No new circular has been issued by the Ministry of Railways. Special Mail Express trains shall continue to run,” tweeted Ministry of railways on Monday.

The fake notification that went viral on social media read that suspen-

sion of all local, suburban and express trains have been extended till September 30, in view of Coronavirus pandemic. However a notification issued by the railway board in May had announced commencement of special trains categorised as ‘Shramik Trains’ on selected-routes to facilitate the movement of stranded labourers.

The same notification had said that, “Regular passenger services including all mail, express, passenger and suburban services shall remain cancelled until further advice”. The limited local services being run for essential services will also continue to run.

Suburban services in Mumbai are considered as the backbone of the city, as it ferries lakhs of people every day.

Centre says Naveen’s home district
among those with high case loadAKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, AUG. 10

Opposition political parties in Odisha on Monday came down heavily on the state government citing reports released by the Centre which stated that chief minister Naveen Patnaik’s home district Ganjam was among 13 districts in eight states/UTs with a high case load and Case Fatality Rate (CFR) higher than the national average.

BJP state spokesperson Golak Mohapatra and Congress leader Tara Prasad Bahinipati said the poor management of Covid-19 crisis in the state was well exposed in Ganjam district which has so far reported the highest number of cases and fatalities.

“While the Ganjam district administration says

the active case load in the region has come down along with the report of new cases over the past few days, the Union health ministry report stated that 13 districts including the one from southern Odisha have 9 per cent of India’s Covid-19 active cases and 14 percent of the fatality, which is higher than the national CFR average,” said the BJP spokesperson.

“So far while the entire state has recorded a total of 335 deaths, Ganjam district alone accounts for 145 of them. Likewise, the district is also the worst hit in the state in terms of total number of cases which stands at 13,088. These figures expose how the state administration has failed to handle the Covid crisis,” said Congress leader Tara Prasad Bahinipati.

Both the opposition lead-

YEDIYURAPPA RECOVERS FROM
COVID, DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL

Bengaluru, Aug. 10: Karnataka Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa has recovered “completely” from Covid-19 and was on Monday discharged from a private hospital here nine days after being admitted, the state government said.

The 77-year old leader was admitted to the Manipal Hospital on August 2 after he tested positive for coronavirus.

“After recovering from

attacks on the ruling BJD on less number of tests, delay in report of cases and setbacks in admission of patients to Covid hospitals.

There was no reaction to the Opposition’s allega-

Covid-19 completely, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa has been discharged from the Manipal Hospital,” an official statement said here.

Later, the chief minister himself tweeted about his discharge.

“Thank you everyone for your wishes and prayers. I have been discharged from the hospital and will be in self-quarantine,” he said.

tions from the ruling BJD.

The government, however, claimed that Odisha was well ahead of other states in containing the spread of the pandemic and registered the lowest level of fatality rate which stood at 0.71 percent.

NO | RELIEF India reports 1,007 deaths in a day, overall infections reach 22,15,074

Vaccine price to be known in 2 months: SII

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, AUG. 10

Former President Pranab Mukherjee was among those testing positive for coronavirus Monday as India’s overall infections reached 22,15,074, with 62,064 fresh cases. India also reported 1,007 deaths in a day, taking its fatality count to 44,386, the health ministry said.

According to Covid19India.org figures, the country’s total cases were about 22.5 lakhs, with nearly 45,000 deaths.

In a tweet, Pranab Mukherjee, India’s

President from 2012 to 2017, said: “On a visit to hospital for a separate procedure, I tested positive for Covid-19. I request people who came into contact with me in the last week to please self-isolate and get tested.”

He has been admitted to the Army’s R&R Hospital in Delhi.

This comes on a day World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus predicted the number of people infected by the coronavirus will hit 20 million this week, including around 750,000 deaths. In a briefing on Monday,

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus acknowledged that behind these statistics there is a great deal of pain and suffering but said there were still green shoots of hope no matter what stage in an outbreak a country or region might be.

India’s Covid recoveries crossed 1.5 million on Monday after 15,35,743 patients were recorded to be fully cured. With the highest ever single day recoveries of 54,859 in the last 24 hours, the Recovery Rate amongst the patients has scaled another high of almost 70 per cent, the health ministry officials

said. “The record high recoveries have ensured that the actual caseload of the country viz. the active cases has reduced and currently comprises only 28.66 per cent of the total positive cases. India has posted more than 9 lakh recoveries than the active cases (6,34,945),” officials added.

They further said that early detection through aggressive testing and efficient clinical management of hospitalised cases have shown results with continuously regressing Case Fatality Rate which is 2 per cent now and steadily declining.

Meanwhile, Serum Institute of India (SII), which along with Oxford University and AstraZeneca is conducting phase 2 and 3 of human trials of trials of the vaccine candidate, said the vaccine may be available by the year end and the final price of the vaccine will be announced in two months.

Meanwhile, Kerala on Monday recorded 1,184 cases while 784 recovered from the infection.

Of the new cases, 956 contracted the infection through contact, source of infection among 114 persons is yet to be known,

106 came from abroad, 73 from other states and 41 health workers.

Seven deaths were reported in the state on Monday.

The maximum number of cases were reported from Malappuram district 255, Thiruvananthapuram 200, Palakkad 147, Kasargod 146 and Ernakulam 101 respectively. So far 22,616 persons have recovered from the infection while 12,740 patients are still under treatment in various hospitals across the state, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan told media persons on Monday.

IN BRIEF

11 drown in Panama flood

Panama City: Eleven people from one family died Sunday in Panama when their home was swept away in a flash flood as they slept, officials said. Nine of them were minors, said Carlos Rumbo, head of the national civil protection service. Two other people are missing in the sudden rise of the Bejuco River in Veraguas province west of Panama City. President Laurentino Cortizo expressed his condolences on Twitter. The civil protection service had warned Sunday of heavy storms with lightning and gusting winds in much of the Central American country.

Niger: French aid workers killed

Koure, Niger: Gunmen on motorcycles killed eight people, including a group of French aid workers, as they visited a part of Niger popular with tourists for its wildlife, officials said. "There are eight dead: two Nigeriens including a guide and a driver, while the other six are French," the governor of the Tillaberi region said on Sunday. France confirmed its nationals were among the dead, without giving a figure. French aid group ACTED said several of its workers were among those killed during a tourist outing. "Among the eight people killed in Niger, several were Acted employees," said the NGO's lawyer Joseph Braham. It is believed to be the first such attack on Westerners in the area, a popular tourist attraction in the former French colony thanks to its unique population of West African or Niger giraffes.

Bomb kills six in Balochistan

Quetta: An improvised bomb planted on a motorbike killed six people in Pakistan's Balochistan province on Monday, police said. A vehicle carrying personnel from the country's anti-narcotic force was believed to be the target of the blast in Chaman town, which borders Afghanistan, senior police official Razzaq Cheema said. "The explosion killed six passersby and wounded 10 others, two of them critically," he said. Local police official Masood Khan confirmed the attack and casualties. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack but Baluch separatists demanding greater autonomy have been waging an insurgency for years while the province is also riven by sectarian strife and Islamist violence. Interior minister Ejaz Shah said in a statement that "such attacks are aimed at spreading fear among the people". Mineral-rich Balochistan, bordering Afghanistan and Iran, is the largest of Pakistan's four provinces, but its roughly seven million inhabitants have long complained they do not receive a fair share of its gas and mineral wealth. China is investing in the area under a \$54 billion project known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

BASHIR'S TRIAL DELAYED

Khartoum, Aug. 10: The trial of Sudan's ousted ex-president Omar al-Bashir was delayed Monday at the request of his defence, a prosecution lawyer said. The trial of Bashir over the military coup that brought him to power more than three decades ago, as well as of 27 other defendants, opened with a brief hearing in July. The second hearing had been set for August 11. But defence lawyers requested a delay for three of the defendants — Bashir as well as two former senior leaders of the once powerful but now defunct National Congress Party. "Lawyers for three defendants petitioned the Court of Appeal to release three defendants on bail, after the court refused to grant their request at the trial's first hearing on July 21," Moaz Hadra, one of the prosecution lawyers, said. "The Court of Appeal must rule, and then a new date for the trial will be set," Bashir, 76, and his co-accused could face the death penalty if convicted over the 1989 Islamist-backed overthrow of the democratically elected government of prime minister Sadek al-Mahdi. It is the first time in the Arab world's modern history that the architect of a coup is tried for plotting a putsch, although the man dubbed the true brain behind it, Hassan Turabi of the National Islamic Front, died in 2016. Bashir stayed in power for 30 years before being overthrown on April 11, 2019.

US polls: Why running mate pick matters more this year

Joe Biden has committed to selecting a woman and is considering Blacks

New York, Aug. 10: For all the secrecy and speculation that typically surrounds the search for a vice presidential candidate, the decision rarely sways an election. But ahead of Joe Biden's imminent announcement, this year could be different. At a minimum, the decision will shift the force of the campaign — at least temporarily — away from Donald Trump's turbulent presidency onto Biden himself.

That's not a place many Democrats are comfortable given Biden's proclivi-

ty for gaffes and the persistent lack of excitement behind his candidacy.

More fundamentally, the choice offers Biden an unusual opportunity to unify a party still reeling from Trump's 2016 win and solidify its future. He's already committed to selecting a woman and is considering several Black women. And since the 77-year-old Biden has not committed to seeking a second term, his running mate could be strongly positioned to become the Democratic Party's presid-

ential nominee in 2024 and shape national politics for the next decade.

Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, who served as Hillary Clinton's vice presidential nominee in 2016, said Biden's decision "may be the most closely held and personally driven vice presidential pick ever".

"Nobody knows this job better than Joe Biden and nobody did the job better than Biden, so he's gonna really control this one on his own," Kaine said in an interview. He pushed back against those who dis-

count the impact of running mates, estimating he added about 2 percentage points to Clinton's winning margin of 5 percentage points in Virginia.

While Biden has said a top priority is selecting someone who could step into the presidency on Day One, the politics of the moment have pushed the silver-haired white man to the brink of making history. He could become the first presidential nominee of a major party to select a woman of colour. Last weekend, he met

privately with Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who's white.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who also is white, has been a leading contender. Biden's campaign team has been in recent contact with a small group of finalists that includes at least four women of colour: California Sen. Kamala Harris, former national security adviser Susan Rice, California Rep. Karen Bass and Illinois Sen. Tammy Duckworth. — AP



Volunteers, clad in masks due to the Covid-19 pandemic, distribute meals to people who have been affected by the Beirut port explosion in the Ashrafieh neighbourhood of Lebanon's capital Beirut on Monday. — AFP

World pledges 250 mn euros for Lebanon Govt to resign over blast fallout

Paris, Aug. 10: World leaders on Sunday pledged more than 250 million euros for disaster-struck Lebanon, conference host France said, with the emergency aid to be delivered "directly" to a population reeling from the deadly port blast in Beirut. Fifteen government leaders, including US President Donald Trump, took part in the virtual conference hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and the UN, pledging solidarity with the Lebanese people and promising to muster "major resources" in the coming days and weeks.

A joint statement issued after the meeting in which representatives of nearly 30 countries as well as the EU and Arab League participated, did not mention a global amount. But Macron's office said the total figure of "emergency aid pledged or that can be mobilised quickly" amounts to 252.7 million euros (\$298 million), including 30 million euros from France. Macron was the first world leader to visit the former French colony after Tuesday's devastating explosion of a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate which killed more than 150 people, wounded some 6,000 and left an estimated 300,000 homeless.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that "more than 200 million euros of emergency aid

Beirut, Aug. 10: Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab was expected to announce his government's resignation Monday amid popular outrage over the deadly Beirut port explosion that has reignited angry street protests.

The under-fire cabinet, struggling to weather the political storm, met amid widespread demands for an end to an entrenched political system widely seen as inept, corrupt and dominated by sectarian interests and family dynasties. During the session, "most of the ministers called on the government to step down", Sport and

Youth Minister Vartine Ohanian said, saying she backed such calls.

Diab, who was set to address the nation on television at 1630 GMT, "is heading towards resignation", said another minister who asked not to be named after four of his colleagues had already stepped down.

According to the health ministry, at least 160 people were killed in Lebanon's worst peacetime disaster, 6,000 were wounded and about 20 remained missing. Six days after the enormous chemical blast which wreaked destruction across swathes of the

capital and was felt as far away as the island of Cyprus, residents and volunteers were still clearing the debris off the streets.

International rescue teams with sniffer dogs and specialised equipment remained at work at the disaster's charred "ground zero", where the search was now for bodies and not survivors.

The Lebanese want heads to roll over the tragedy and are asking how a massive stockpile of volatile ammonium nitrate, a compound used primarily as a fertiliser, was left unsecured at the port for years. The country's top offi-

cials have promised a swift and thorough investigation — but they have stopped short of agreeing to an independent probe led by foreign experts as demanded by the protesters.

Four ministers had already decided they could no longer stand with a government that has shown little willingness to take the blame or to put state resources at the service of the victims.

The contagion looked set to spread, leaving Diab, who only accepted the top job in December last year, no option but to follow suit and agree to a full cabinet resignation. — AFP

have been collected," including 20 million euros from Germany.

The joint statement from the world leaders and their representatives underscored concerns about Lebanese government corruption. "The participants agreed that their assistance should be timely, sufficient and consistent with the needs of the Lebanese people, well-coordinated under the leadership of the United Nations, and directly delivered to the Lebanese population, with utmost efficiency and transparency," it said.

USAID acting administrator John Barsa also said in a conference call Sunday that American help, some \$15 million announced so far, "is absolutely not going to the government". The donor nations urged Lebanon's authorities to "fully commit themselves to timely measures and reforms" in order to unlock longer-term support for the country's economic and financial recovery. And they said assistance for "an impartial, credible and independent inquiry" into Tuesday's explosion "is immediately needed and available, upon request of Lebanon".

The UN said some \$117 million will be needed for an emergency response over the next three months, for health services, emergency shelter, food distribution and programmes to prevent further spread of Covid-19, among other interventions. Lebanese President Michel Aoun, who was also on Sunday's group call, thanked Macron for the initiative.

"Much is needed to rebuild what has been destroyed and to restore Beirut's lustre," the Lebanese presidency quoted him on Twitter as saying. "The needs are many and we

need to address them quickly, especially before the arrival of winter, which will accentuate the suffering of homeless citizens."

At least 21 people are still missing from the blast, and the Lebanese army said Sunday hopes of finding survivors are dwindling. Lebanese people enraged by official negligence blamed for the explosion have taken to the streets in anti-government protests that have resulted in clashes with the army. Macron said it was now up to the authorities of Lebanon "to act so that the country does not sink". — AFP

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US cabinet member meets Taiwan leader

Taipei, Aug. 10: A US cabinet member met Taiwan's leader Monday during the highest level visit from the United States since it switched diplomatic recognition from the island to China in 1979, a trip that Beijing has condemned.

Health Secretary Alex Azar is in Taipei for a three-day visit to promote shared democratic values and the island's success in taming the Coronavirus. His trip comes as relations between the United States and China are in tumult, with the two sides clashing over a wide range of trade, military and security issues, as well as the pandemic.

China, which insists Taiwan is its own territory and vows to one day reclaim it, has described Azar's visit as a threat to "peace and stability". On Monday morning, Azar met President Tsai Ing-wen, who advocates the island being recognised as a sovereign nation and is loathed by China's leaders. "Taiwan's response to Covid-19 has been am-

ong the most successful in the world, and that is a tribute to the open, transparent, democratic nature of Taiwan's society and culture," Azar told Tsai. Tsai thanked the US for supporting its bid to be part of the World Health Organisation (WHO), a body Beijing keeps the island frozen out of.

"Political considerations should never take precedence over the rights to health," Tsai said, calling Beijing's refusal to let Taiwan join "highly regrettable". Azar brushed off China's criticism when asked about Beijing's anger over his visit.

"The message that I bring from the US government is one of reaffirming the deep partnership the United States has with Taiwan in terms of security, commerce, health care and shared common values of democracy, economic freedom and liberty," he told reporters before his meeting with Tsai.

Azar has previously been critical of Beijing's response to the Coronavirus. — AFP

HK media mogul Jimmy Lai nabbed

Hong Kong, Aug. 10: Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai was arrested Monday and led in handcuffs through his newspaper office as police raided the building, part of a sweeping crackdown on dissent since China imposed a security law on the city.

Lai, 71, was among nine people detained on charges, including colluding with foreign forces — one of the new national security offences — and fraud, in an operation targeting his Next Digital publishing group. It was the latest police operation against dissidents under the sweeping new law introduced at the end of June.

Two of Lai's sons were among those detained, a police source said as well as Wilson Li, a former pro-democracy activist who describes himself as a freelance videographer working for Britain's *ITV News*. The most serious national security crimes carry up to life in jail.

Journalists working at Lai's Apple Daily broadcasted dramatic footage on Facebook of some 200 police officers conducting the raid, and the newspaper's chief editor Law Wai-kong demanding a warrant from officers. Apple's staff were ordered to leave their seats and line up so police could check their identities as officers conducted searches across the newsroom.

At one point Lai was present, in handcuffs and surrounded by officers. Police said the search was conducted with a court warrant which was shown to staff.

Chris Yeung, president of the Hong Kong Journalists Association, described the police action as "shocking and terrifying". "This is unprecedented, and would be unimaginable only one or two months ago," he said. — AFP

Beijing, Aug. 10: China on Monday sanctioned 11 Americans, including senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, in retaliation for similar US moves prompted by Beijing's crackdown in Hong Kong.

Washington last week accused 11 officials of suppressing "freedom and democratic processes" in Hong Kong, including city leader Carrie Lam, and announced plans to freeze their US assets.

It was the toughest US action yet in response to Beijing's introduction of a sweeping and controversial new national security law for the former British territory.

Beijing said the measure was a violation of international law and "grossly interferes in China's internal affairs". — AFP

Police said the search was conducted with a court warrant which was shown to staff.

Chris Yeung, president of the Hong Kong Journalists Association, described the police action as "shocking and terrifying". "This is unprecedented, and would be unimaginable only one or two months ago," he said. — AFP

HK police could face torture case

London, Aug. 10: Senior British officers in the Hong Kong police force could face legal action in the UK on torture charges after activists said Monday they planned to proceed with a private prosecution. The expatriate officers are accused of directly engaging in torture against pro-democracy demonstrators, or directing others within the force

to carry out the crimes. Torture has allegedly been carried out in police stations and on the streets, with an incident cited at Hong Kong's Citic Tower during protests in June 2019. The prosecution is being brought by prominent activists and lawyers, who are using a JustGiving page to raise \$260,000 to employ a full-time legal team. — AFP

CITY UNREST

Mayor Lori Lightfoot says a neighbourhood protection programme has been activated

Chicago looting: More than 100 arrested, 13 officers hurt

Chicago, Aug. 10: Hundreds of people smashed windows, stole from stores and clashed with police early Monday in Chicago's upscale Magnificent Mile shopping district and other parts of the city.

At one point, shots were fired at police and officers returned fire, police spokesman Tom Ahern said on Twitter. No officers were injured in the shooting. Many of the businesses that were ransacked had recently opened after Chicago protests of George Floyd's May 25 death in Minneapolis devolved into chaos. It wasn't immedi-

ately clear what led to the unrest, which began shortly after midnight, but anti-police graffiti was seen in the area of the Magnificent Mile, which is one of Chicago's most-visited tourist attractions.

Hours earlier, dozens of people had faced off with police after officers shot and wounded a person Sunday in the city's Englewood neighbourhood, located about 10 miles (16 kilometres) away.

Asked for updates on the situation, Ahern said that police planned to hold a news conference Monday morning. Police Superin-

tendent David Brown and Mayor Lori Lightfoot were expected to attend.

Along the Magnificent Mile, people were seen going in and out of stores carrying shopping bags full of merchandise as well as at a bank, the *Chicago Tribune* reported, and as the crowd grew vehicles dropped off more people in the area. On streets throughout the downtown area, empty cash drawers from stores were strewn about and ATMs were ripped open.

Stores miles from downtown were also ransacked, with parking lots littered

● **ON STREETS** throughout the downtown area, empty cash drawers from stores were strewn about and ATMs were ripped open. Stores miles from downtown were also ransacked, with parking lots littered with glass and items from inside the stores.

with glass and items from inside the stores. Clothes hangers and boxes that once contained television sets and other electronics were seen — evidence that

thieves had taken racks of clothes and removed them from the hangers.

"This was obviously very orchestrated," the Rev. Michael Pfleger, a prominent Roman Catholic priest and activist on the city's South Side, told *WBBM-TV* as cameras panned the downtown area.

One officer was seen slumped against a building, several arrests were made and a rock was thrown at a police vehicle, the newspaper said. Police worked early Monday to disperse the crowds.

There was a large police presence Monday morning

outside an Apple store located north of Chicago's downtown area. Blocks away, debris was strewn in parking lots in front of a Best Buy and a large liquor store.

Train and bus service into downtown was temporarily suspended at the request of public safety officials, the Chicago Transit Authority said on Twitter. Bridges over the Chicago River were lifted, preventing travel to and from the downtown area, and Illinois State Police blocked some expressway ramps into downtown.

Chicago and its suburbs,

like many other cities, saw unrest following the death of Floyd. Chicago's central business district and its commercial areas were shut down for several days after violence erupted and stores were damaged in the wake of marches protesting Floyd's death.

In the Sunday shooting in Englewood, police said in a statement that they responded about 2:30 p.m. Sunday to a call about a person with a gun and tried to confront someone matching his description in an alley. He fled from officers on foot and shot at officers, police said. — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

11 AUGUST 2020

Covid-19 facility fires offer safety lesson

Back-to-back early morning blazes in private Covid-19 facilities, claiming eight and 10 lives respectively, should be seen as a much-required wake-up call for state governments. Fire services are under the 12th Schedule of the Constitution and fall in the domain of urban local bodies. These have an abysmal performance record when it comes to enforcing fire safety guidelines.

After the tragedy, however, a fire safety check has been ordered on all hospitals in Andhra Pradesh. Several states and municipal corporations all over India have followed suit. It is likely to open a can of worms.

Already, the fire service department has reported that over 250 hospitals under the jurisdiction of the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation have not obtained no-objection certificates. In Hyderabad, in neighbouring Telangana state, 90 per cent of its 1,700 hospitals are not following fire safety guidelines.

The National Building Code of India, 2016, stipulates regulations required for fire prevention and life safety for buildings. These regulations relate to design and construction; building materials; occupancy features necessary to minimise danger to life; smoke; equipment and installations and guidelines for fire drills and evacuations. Also, according to the Model Building Bylaws, 2003, building plans have to be referred to the chief fire officer.

However, like road safety, fire safety continues to stay on paper. Unplanned construction in densely-populated areas remains the biggest threat. Only 30 per cent of cities have a fire master plan, which in most cases is outdated.

Those who lost their lives in the fire at Vijayawada's six-storey Swarna Palace Hotel, taken on lease by Ramesh Hospital, are more than mere statistics. Among them was Sabbithi Abraham, a pastor who had recently recovered from the disease but who stayed back to be with his wife, Raja Kumari. Raja Kumari, too, died in the disaster. Another patient, C. Pawan Sai Kisan, was the one to call up the police upon discovering the fire. The hotel's fire alarm had not been working.

In both cases, a short-circuit was the event that led to the blaze. In the Swarna Palace Hotel blaze, the hotel as well as the hospital knew of the presence of defects in the air-conditioning system and wiring but had not bothered to carry out repairs. The hotel did not have a fire safety certificate. As was the case with Ahmedabad's Shrey Hospital, which is owned by Bharat Mahant, who defected to the BJP last year.

A common refrain is that private hospitals are capitalising on people's reluctance to avail care at government hospitals during this crisis and are charging exorbitant fees. Ramesh Hospital, for instance, was charging its Swarna Palace patients a daily package of ₹5,000 in addition to treatment and other charges. However, governments are reluctant to rein them in as yet.

Language of alienation

Reading the tweet of DMK MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi that she was asked if she was an Indian just for not knowing Hindi gave a sense of déjà vu to many people in Tamil Nadu who had travelled up North. Students from the state being subjected to such savage humiliation for not speaking in Hindi in colleges and universities in places like Delhi is old hat. But the insult to Kanimozhi was striking as it happened at the Chennai airport.

Whatever be the real reason for the officer of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) refusing to communicate in a language that all air passengers could understand — it could be her lack of fluency in English or her fondness for Hindi — her questioning a passenger's nationality was uncalled for. Even if she was oblivious to India being a multi-linguistic nation, she had no right, as a CISF officer or otherwise, to take upon herself the authority to pronounce who can be an Indian.

While these personal drawbacks can hamper the officer from discharging her duties impartially, the present political situation allows her and many others like her to go about displaying Hindi chauvinism at airports and other public spaces without worrying about their prejudice and bigotry alienating non-Hindi speakers from the Indian mainstream.

It is of course intriguing that the particular officer, who should be living in Chennai, did not acknowledge that Tamil is never thrust upon the people who come to the state from outside. None of the lakhs of guest workers who walked their way back home from Tamil Nadu due to the sudden lockdown recently had to learn Tamil. For, the people of Tamil Nadu are not language chauvinists. They only resent forceful imposition of another language, be it through maltreatments at airports and universities or the implementation of a new National Education Policy.

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Subhani



Will Kashmir turn into 'heaven on earth' again?



Vishnu Prakash

Upon setting foot in Kashmir, Mughal Emperor Jehangir spontaneously recited an evocative couplet "*Gar firdaus bar-rue zamin ast, hami ast, hamin asto, hamin ast* (If there is a paradise on earth, it's here, it's here, it's here)" — which continues to resonate with millions of visitors every year.

The spell of mother nature's craftsmanship — inlaid with snow-capped mountains, golden sun rays, fabled valleys, lush meadows, glistening water bodies, manicured gardens, captivating flora and fauna — endures a lifetime. The region, traditionally home to Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, had been an abode of multiculturalism, tranquility and harmony, thanks to its culture of "Kashmiriyat".

Alas, that idyllic way of life was rudely disturbed by external inimical elements in October 1947 itself, within weeks of India's Independence. The UN commission hammered out a cease-fire agreement in August 1948, but without restoring the status quo ante.

At the behest of Sheikh Abdullah, Article 370 was introduced in the Constitution, temporarily according a special status to Jammu and Kashmir. In retrospect, this act of appeasement, that too on religious and political considerations, widened the emotional chasm between Kashmiris and other citizens, besides preventing a seamless integration of J&K with India.

To compound the folly, Article 35A was inserted by a presidential order in May 1954, barring Indians living outside J&K, from buying immovable property, applying for state government jobs or seeking permanent residency in the state. Such privileges were reserved only for

J&K's so-called permanent residents, otherwise called "state subjects".

In the process a short shrift was given to the foundational and fundamental right to equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The state was also exempted from all the laws of the land, unless specifically adopted by its own Legislative Assembly.

Before long it became evident that these special provisions were damaging the national fabric. Kashmiri Muslims, in particular, began shunning their Indian identity. Vested interest groups gradually sprung up across the spectrum, to accentuate the divide for political and monetary gains. They unabashedly played the religious card to further their purpose, thereby also tempting external forces to fish in troubled waters.

Articles 370 and 35A started acquiring a façade of permanence. Though elections were held regularly and the electorate spoke its mind; peace, progress and stability eluded the state due to the machinations of disruptive forces, corruption and nepotism. While the minuscule elite lined its pockets, the ordinary people of J&K, especially women and the under-privileged, faced discrimination and suffering. They lost out on socio-economic empowerment initiatives becoming available to the rest of their countrymen.

Ending almost seven decades of injustice due to political dithering, on August 5, 2019, the Modi government made bold to accord similar rights, benefits and duties on the residents of J&K, as available to all other citizens in India. The offending "temporary" provisions under Articles 370 and 35A were removed. The separatists and the state's political elite were stunned. To deter them

from creating any kind of mischief, some short-term restrictions were imposed, most of which have since been lifted.

Barring the usual suspects, the global community recognised that the full integration of J&K with the Indian Union, in consonance with its Constitution, was an internal matter of India. Ahmad Al Banna, the UAE's ambassador to India, voiced the expectation that "the changes will improve social justice and security and confidence of the people in local governance and will encourage further stability and peace".

The historical move ushered in "a new dawn in the region". It was decided to create two Union territories — namely J&K and Ladakh. J&K would have its full statehood restored at the earliest. A blueprint to provide gainful employment, promote tourism and establish quality infrastructure, centres of educational excellence like IITs and IIITs, as well as top grade medical and sports facilities was unveiled. Ladakh is to become a solar powerhouse and play a crucial role in the International Solar Alliance.

"Promises are never kept" ... did you say? Why not examine the actual implementation during the preceding 12 months. For the first time, the J&K government has launched an accelerated recruitment drive.

Some 10,000 vacancies are being filled and 25,000 more are in the pipeline. Thousands of additional employment opportunities are being generated through power and infrastructure projects, especially under the Prime Minister's Development Program-me. Of the 6,000 jobs earmarked for Kashmiri migrants, nearly 4,000 have already been filled.

Under the PMDP, 54 and nine projects have been allocated to J&K and Ladakh respectively. The pace of work has picked up dramatically. Seventeen projects have already been fully or substantially completed. The rest — including the con-

struction of highways, bridges and flyovers, transmission lines, hospitals and educational institutions, and hydro power generation projects — are being fast-tracked. Kashmir is to be connected with the rest of India, by rail, by December 2022.

Every effort is being made to strengthen grassroots democracy to empower panchayats, in particular. Implementation of the Centre's welfare schemes like MGN-REGA, Swachh Bharat Mission and the mid-day meals have been entrusted to them. A commendable "Back to Village" programme has been initiated, under which a gazetted officer actually stays for two days in every village, to take stock of implementation, review constraints and receive feedback.

Particular attention is being given to empower the underprivileged. Welfare schemes like Ujjwala, Ujala (100 per cent electrification achieved), income support to poor farmers, placement linked vocational training, scholarships, etc are being provided.

Since becoming an UT, Ladakh's socio-economic, educational and development needs are getting utmost priority. Steps have been initiated to prepare a vision document titled "Ladakh 2050".

In sum, the government's farsighted decision in August 2019, has heralded a new era of hope, equity and empowerment. Kashmiris are witnessing purposeful efforts by the state and Union governments to instil greater dignity, development and democracy in the region. Consequently, the green shoots of peace and aspiration are beginning to sprout. With the government and people determined to stay the course, Kashmir is certain of reclaiming its crown as "heaven on earth" once again.

The writer is a foreign affairs analyst and a former Indian ambassador to South Korea and high commissioner to Canada.

LETTERS

FIRE MISHAP

It's heart-rending to know that 10 Covid-19 patients lost their lives in a fire accident. It happened in a luxury hotel supposed to be having all safety measures. The makeshift centre without permission from fire safety department is the height of negligence by officials concerned. There must be an immediate probe into this. Wrongdoers must be dealt with an iron hand.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

Carelessness of all officials caused the death of 10 Covid-19 patients. Health department, hospital management, hotel management, fire department, municipal corporation, including government failure clearly comes to light. Government should take action against offenders so that remaining hospitals follow safety protocol.

D. Ravikumar
Yendada, Visakhapatnam

Covid-19 has exposed the fragile infrastructure in hospitals (*Over 250 hosps have no NOC from fire dept, DC, Aug. 10*). These hospitals need to be equipped with fire safety systems. Lessons must be learnt by regulators after the fire mishap.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

SONIA IN CONGRESS

The Congress seems to be heading for a big shake-up. Unfortunately the Congress' prince is not ready for coronation for reasons best known to himself. The old guard also seems to be losing grip over the party with the majority seeking young leadership.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

Land grab stir gets indirect support

NEW DELHI, AUG. 10

The current "land grab" agitation in several parts of the country continued to get indirect support in the Congress (R) Parliamentary Party today despite its strong disapproval by the Party President Jagjiwan Ram.

Many of those who participated in the resumed debate on land reforms on the third day felt that land reforms had not been implemented in several States because the Chief Ministers did not honestly believe in them.

It was also because the Congress Party itself was dominated by big landlords who opposed any progressive agrarian measure.



Aakar Patel

India losing its 'Mahabharat' against Covid?

The "Mahabharat" against Covid-19 has been lost. India had registered more cases last week, about three lakhs, than any other nation including the United States. We are clocking over 60,000 cases a day and there is nothing to stop the number from going to one lakh a day and higher.

The only places in India that have registered a drop are the cities where the levels of infection are so widespread that half the city has already been touched, and the scope for increase is limited. Nothing is stopping the spread of Covid-19.

It may interest readers to know that India is the only nation to show a consistently exponential trend of growth. Our graph from the beginning of March till today is one that goes straight up and steeply. This is not how other nations have responded. Europe saw peaks in March and then Italy, Spain, Britain and others have declined since then. America saw a peak in April, led mostly by the spread in New York, then a fall and now is seeing another rise in other parts of the country.

Bangladesh saw a peak in June and has since been in decline.

Pakistan was clocking half the number of cases as India but peaked in June and has been dropping since, averaging less than 1,000 cases a day now. Sri Lanka has been in total control of the epidemic and has only 300 active cases now, and a total of only 11 deaths since its first cases in March.

India is the only nation, to repeat, that has consistently been going up in terms of number of cases from the start till now. This was not the result expected when the Centre took charge of the problem on March 24, when we had 500 cases. We have 30 times more cases each day today after various lockdowns, from total bans on all activity to a series of unlocks that nobody really understands any longer and almost nobody follows. Even the police, initially enthusiastic about stopping movement, has lost interest across the country in trying to combat the plague. The question is not whether we have lost the Covid "Mahabharat" because the numbers are clear. The question is why. The answer is that we never had a strategy to counter the pandemic. The first lockdown was the biggest mistake

The lockdown in India, along with that in Mauritius, New Zealand and South Africa, was rated 100, meaning individuals had no freedom. New Zealand peaked in March, Mauritius in April and South Africa in July.

we made. What Prime Minister Narendra Modi should have told the country was that this was a highly infectious disease but with a very low fatality rate. People should be extremely cautious about not touching their face, washing their hands regularly and wearing a mask to protect others. They could go about their work and business otherwise.

What he did instead was to create panic across the entire country. By calling it a "Mahabharat" and saying specifically we would win it in 21 days, he took the seriousness out of the fight against Covid-19. It would end after the lockdown is what he told us, and this was wrong. This was not a short and sharp battle that would be won or lost over three weeks, but a long one of vigilance

rather than extreme measures.

The three-week strict lockdown was described by an Oxford University study as the harshest in the world. The lockdown in India, along with that in Mauritius, New Zealand and South Africa, was rated 100, meaning individuals had no freedom. New Zealand peaked in March, Mauritius in April and South Africa in July. In India, it made no meaningful difference to the rate of spread. Not only that, it has comprehensively gutted the economy in a way that all of us can palpably feel at the level of each individual. All of us are suffering in a way that we have not before in our lives. Those who are not yet, will soon do so. This is a recession, a word whose meaning none of us is familiar with.

The mismanagement of the lockdown has made India pay a real price, that it is still continuing to pay four months later. A report in the Hindu Frontline headlined "Surat: Silence of the looms" said 35 lakh migrants in the Surat area had gone back home after suffering great deprivation. There was nobody to operate the machines and even mar-

kets that were open would be shut down when one positive case was discovered. There was no plan to move forward and things were happening by default. If the workers return, and if the demand for fabrics returns, then the great manufacturing city of Surat would try to stand again on its feet. Till then, things will continue the way they were. This level of incompetence is not to be found in any other nation that has been hit by Covid-19.

The truth is that Narendra Modi is attracted to the grand announcement. He likes the spotlight and the energy of the moment. Covid-19 was a struggle not of brief violence, an 18-day war like the Mahabharat, but a long one of carefulness and patience. Other nations knew it and their leaders communicated it in that fashion. Mr Modi's style has left us with 20 lakh cases and over 40,000 deaths, and who knows how many more to come. The peak is nowhere in sight. And it has absolutely ruined an economy that was already tottering last year.

The writer is a senior journalist and columnist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,182.08	0.37
Nifty 50	11,270.15	0.50
S&P 500*	3,349.35	-0.06
Dollar (₹)	74.89	0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.77	0.35
Euro (₹)	88.12	0.59
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	56,122.238	0.42
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	45.03	0.63
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.893	0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.558	-0.004

BoP to be very strong this year: Piyush Goyal

India expects its balance of payments to be “very, very strong” this fiscal, aided by stronger than expected exports and a fall in imports, commerce minister Piyush Goyal said. “Exports have shown a good turnaround. We are in July at about 91 per cent export level of the previous year, July 2019, figures,” Goyal said at an industry event. “So broadly, our balance of payments this year is going to be very, very strong.”

₹10,000 cr Fund of Funds to be operational soon



To provide Rs 50,000 crore equity support to stressed MSME units, a Fund of Funds announced as part of the Rs 20.97 lakh crore Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package is expected to get operation soon, SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar said. The objective of the Rs 10,000 crore Fund of Funds is to help MSMEs with growth potential when they are facing severe shortage of equity and low revenues.

Honda begins pre-launch bookings of Jazz

Honda Cars India Ltd (HCIL) said it has started pre-launch bookings of its refreshed premium hatchback, Jazz. The new Jazz can be pre-booked with an amount of Rs 21,000 at HCIL dealerships or online through 'Honda from Home' platform on the HCIL website with Rs 5,000, the company said. HCIL senior vice president and director, marketing & sales Rajesh Goel said the vehicle is slated for launch later this month.

LIC launches policy revival campaign

To encourage continuation of risk cover in this difficult period, LIC said it has provided an opportunity for policyholders to revive their lapsed policies. It has launched a special policy revival campaign from August 10 till October 9. “No concessions are being offered in medical requirements and the same are limited to late fee only; under plans other than term assurance and other high risk plans,” LIC said.



No clear indications of temp jobs from sectors Festival hiring yet to pick up

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 10

Despite the festive season kicking off, hiring of temp staff to meet the seasonal demand in various sectors has not picked up. Even e-commerce, which has started its seasonal sales, is still cautious about hiring.

The temporary staff hiring for the festive season usually starts before August and goes on till December. However, by August the industry gets a clearer picture about the hiring trends.

As per the data from Indian Staffing Federation, in the second half of 2018, different sectors had hired around two lakh people for temp jobs. In 2019, despite the general gloom in the economy, hiring witnessed a 10 to 15 per cent growth over the previous year. However, this year ISF has not seen clear indications of hiring from across sectors yet.

“Usually, e-commerce, retail, consumer durables and BFSI are the major sectors which hire people to meet the festive season demand for additional hands,” said Lohit Bhatia, president, ISF.

This time, almost all the sectors are cautious about hiring more people as the existing staff is not fully engaged.

E-commerce, which has been the forerunner in terms of hiring in the past few years, has already started its festive season sales.



STILL GAUGING MARKET MOOD

- Temp staff hiring for the festive season usually starts by August and goes on till December
- In the second half of 2018, different sectors had hired around two lakh people for temp jobs
- This time, all sectors are cautious about hiring

However, when *Financial Chronicle* asked about this year's hiring, Amazon said, “currently, we do not have any information to share with regards to hiring ahead of the 2020 festive season.”

Last year, Amazon itself had created more than 90,000 seasonal employment opportunities across its fulfilment centres, sorting centres, delivery stations, partner fulfilment network and customer service sites.

This year, even during the lockdown in May, Amazon announced that it has opened close to 50,000 seasonal roles to meet the surge in demand for online products.

However, delivery services continued to be disrupted even after the lockdown.

“E-commerce may probably see a surge in sales due to the pent-up demand of the past few months. This would require more hands to deliver things to the customer. However, the social distancing norms will force them to limit the number of people who can be deployed at warehouses and other centres,” said Bhatia.

“As far as other sectors are concerned, businesses are still evaluating and waiting to see how the festive season shapes up. For them, it is still early days,” he added.

LAND BANK TO HELP MSMEs IN THE WORKS: GADKARI

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, AUG. 10

In a bid to promote small shops and business houses, the Centre is mulling a land bank and social micro finance institute (SMFI) to assist the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

“We are working on the idea of a land bank and social micro finance institution which will be very helpful for entrepreneurs and persons who want to run small shops and businesses,” Nitin Gadkari, minister for MSMEs, said on Monday at a webinar.

Besides, the government is also planning to promote the manufacturing of selected products, especially agro-based and khadi products in the rural belts. The efforts are part of the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan initiative to reduce the dependence of imports and push exports.

“Handloom, handicrafts, khadi industries and agro-based industries should be encouraged, especially in 115 aspirational districts in the country. We will have to plan special policies for agricultural, rural and tribal sector because they have huge potential of creating employment,” he said.

On the issue of delayed payments to MSME vendors, Gadkari said instructions have been given to all ministries and PSUs to clear pending bills within 45 days.

Tata Motors moves ahead of M&M in July retail sales

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, AUG 10

Tata Motors, India's biggest automaker by revenues, overtook Mahindra, as the third largest in terms of total vehicles retailed in July, the latest Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (Fada) data showed on Monday.

It also revealed that Maruti Suzuki, India's top car maker and Hero MotorCorp, India's largest motorcycle maker, strengthened their pole positions in the pandemic-hit market.

However, the passenger vehicle (PV) retail sales last month declined 25.19 per cent year-on-year to 1,57,373 units, as the pandemic continued to impact vehicle off-takes.

This is the first time the auto dealers' body has released market share data based on vehicle registration. The Society of Indian Auto-mobile Manufacturers (SIAM) releases data based on wholesale numbers (dispatches to dealers).

Tata Motors' retails increased to 12,753 units



in July, rising its market share up to 8.10 per cent from 6.07 per cent in the year-ago period. But registration of Mahindra vehicles dropped to 7,811 units last month, bringing down its market share to 5 per cent, down from 8.47 per cent in the same month last year.

The top two car makers, Maruti and Hyundai, strengthened their lead in the market in terms of market share even as volumes saw a year-on-year drop owing to the pandemic. Maruti's share jumped from 47.24 per cent to 50.40 per cent. Hyundai's share inched up to 18.69 per cent from 18.33 per cent in the year ago period.

Kia Motors India, one of

the latest entrants in the PV market cornered 4.45 per cent in July. French carmaker Renault India too showed a smart recovery during the month, gaining share—it went up to 3.18 per cent from 2.04 per cent in the same month last year.

Most of the other PV makers saw a year-on-year drop in their share of the market, according to Fada data.

Among the two-wheeler makers, with the exception of market leader, Hero MotoCorp which saw its share go up to 40.66 per cent in July against 35.61 per cent last year, most of the other two-wheeler makers saw their share declined.

Commercial vehicle sales, a barometer of economic activity, declined 72.18 per cent year-on-year to 19,293 units, while total sales across categories declined 36.27 per cent to 11,42,633 units last month.

Two-wheeler sales declined 37.47 per cent to 8,74,638 units last month, while total sales across categories declined 36.27 per cent to 11,42,633 units last month.

IndiGo to raise up to ₹4,000 crore via QIP

New Delhi, Aug. 10: IndiGo's parent company InterGlobe Aviation on Monday said it will raise up to Rs 4,000 crore through a qualified institutional placement (QIP).

The aviation sector has been hit hard due to travel restrictions amid the coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, IndiGo has

cut salaries of senior employees and fired 10 per cent of its workforce during the last few weeks.

InterGlobe Aviation informed the BSE that its board of directors has approved “the raising of funds for an aggregate amount of not exceeding Rs 4,000 crores through an issue of equity shares by

way of qualified institutional placement.”

InterGlobe had on July 29 announced a massive loss of Rs 2,844 crore for the quarter ended June 30. In the corresponding period a year ago, it had posted a net profit of Rs 1,203 crore.

Domestic flights resumed in India after a gap of two months on May 25. —PTI

GMR, Saint Mary's ink pact to set up global school

Hyderabad, Aug. 10: GMR Hyderabad Aeropolis limited (GHAL) said on Monday that it has partnered with the city-based Saint Mary's Educational Society to set up an international school at the 'Hyderabad Airport City'.

The Sancta Maria International School, a K12 (kindergarten to 12th grade) institution, would come up on 15 acres at the Hyderabad Airport City and the residential academic facility is slated to be unveiled by 2022, a press release from the GMR group said.

The 'Edu Port' at the GMR Hyderabad Airport City today hosts the Schulich School of Business, Chinmaya Vidya-laya, GMR Aviation Aca-demy, Flight Simulation Technique Centre, CFM South Asia Training Centre and Pratt & Whitney India Training Centre, the release said.

Sancta Maria International School envisions to provide the highest standards of education, offering a great learning opportunity for students, the release said. —PTI

JSW Steel uses Covid to overhaul US biz

SWANSY AFONSO MUMBAI, AUG. 10

The coronavirus pandemic is accelerating India's most valuable steelmaker's plans to overhaul its loss-making US operations.

JSW Steel outlined plans two years ago to invest \$1 billion in the US to expand its global footprint. That plan was curtailed by an economic downturn and import tariffs imposed by President Trump, with the situation worsening with the virus outbreak.

The company will spend this year “in structurally fixing” its facilities as the pandemic has resulted in the “lowest spread US steel prices have seen in the last decade,” according to Parth Jindal, director of the US operations.

The steelmaker has idled its Ohio plant to begin upgrading its electric arc furnace and plans to restart production at the 1.5 million tonnes facility in March. It has also shut its pipe mill in Baytown to fix equipment and plans to automate and optimise operations to cut costs.

“Our plan is to reduce the



losses and be extremely frugal and focus on completing these projects,” Jindal said in an interview. “From next year onward, we truly believe the US operations will be well-positioned to be earnings-accretive to JSW Steel.”

As part of a shakeup, JSW last week brought in Mark Bush as the new chief executive officer for its US operations, replacing John Hritz, who will now focus on strategy and legal affairs.

The company has changed its focus from coils to slabs at its Ohio plant as “it is no secret that the US is extremely slab deficient,” Jindal said. —Bloomberg

Investors book profit, equity MFs see ₹2,500 cr outflow

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, AUG. 10

Investors are opting for debt mutual funds, gold and overseas funds and booking profit in equity and hybrid mutual fund categories after a sharp rally in the equity market, latest July month data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India showed.

The mutual fund industry's total asset under management (AUM) rose to Rs 27.11 lakh crore as on July 31 as against Rs 25.48 lakh crore in June, aided by Rs 91,391.73 crore inflow in various debt fund categories.

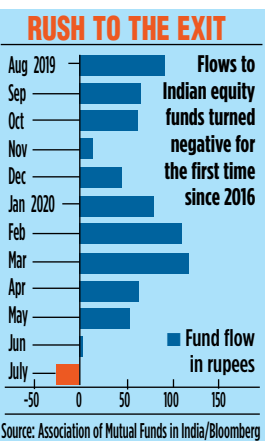
All equity oriented schemes barring tax-saving equity-linked savings scheme (ELSS) saw combined outflow of Rs 2,480.35 crore and all hybrid schemes like balanced and aggressive hybrid funds saw combined outflow of Rs 7,301.29 crore.

G Pradeepkumar, CEO, Union AMC, said, “For the first time in as many as four years, equity funds as a category has witnessed negative net flows to the

tune of Rs 2,480 crore. This is partly because of profit booking after a strong rally since the end of March 2020.”

“It appears that a good chunk of this money has moved to short-term debt funds. These investors could be waiting for a correction to re-enter the market,” Pradeepkumar said.

Other exchange traded funds (ETFs) saw inflows of Rs 13,125.61 crore largely on account of Bharat Bond NFO Tranche II receiving applications amounting to Rs 10,992 crore.



Source: Association of Mutual Funds in India/Bloomberg

Gold ETF AUMs make a new high

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 10

Assets managed by Indian gold ETFs touched a new high of Rs 12,940 crore in July, surpassing the previous high set in January 2013.

Cumulative AUMs of 11 gold ETFs grew 19 per cent in July to Rs 12,940 crore against Rs 10,857 crore in June.

This is the highest level AUMs have touched since these funds were launched in the market. The previous high was recorded in January 2013 when gold ETF assets stood at Rs 12,057 crore. As gold prices kept falling from their highs, AUMs had dipped to Rs 4,300 crore levels in the subsequent years due to continuous outflow.

China seeks to scrap ratings for bond issuers

Aug. 10: China's securities regulator has proposed removing a requirement for bond issuers on the stock exchanges to seek credit ratings, in the latest move to make it easier for firms to sell debt.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission didn't keep the clause on ratings in a new draft of guidelines on issuance and trading of exchange-listed corporate notes that it published late Friday seeking public feedback.

China has taken steps in recent months to streamline the process, or lower thresholds for companies to raise debt, as part of a broader effort to ease financial stress and arrest a dramatic economic slowdown following the pandemic. —Bloomberg

Ferrero family scion takes side bets in cookies

BEN STUPPLES AUG. 10

Michele Ferrero helped introduce Nutella and Kinder chocolate to the world, turning his family's Italian confectionary business into a global giant with annual sales of about \$10 billion. Now his son, Giovanni, is charting his own path.

Net assets of Giovanni's investment firm, CTH, surged 40 per cent last year to 2.8 billion euros (\$3.3 billion), filings show. The increase was boosted by its \$300 million purchase of Danish cookie baker Kelsen Group, an acquisition designed to help preserve Italy's biggest fortune by investing beyond the confectionary industry. Giovanni has “established his presence in the wider sweet packaged-food market” with CTH, said Guido Giannotta, a director of the Brussels-based firm, who helps manage the Ferrero family's fortune. Such a move will “represent an important de-risking solution,



both in terms of product categories and geographical reach,” he added.

Like the Ferreros, many of the world's richest individuals are diversifying their fortunes as they seek to grow wealth across generations. Zara founder Amancio Ortega-Spain's richest person—invested the proceeds from his clothing business Inditex SA into real estate worldwide, while Microsoft Corp co-founder Bill Gates' holdings range from rail-

roads to agricultural businesses to construction firms.

The Ferreros' business began as a family pastry shop in northern Italy that used hazelnuts as a way to stretch limited cocoa supplies. After World War II, it grew into a confectionary firm, opening production facilities and offices abroad. It launched the Nutella and Kinder Chocolate and Tic Tac mints brands in the 1960s and then expanded with products, including Ferrero Rocher.

CTH was created in 2016 and owns Belgian cookie maker Delacre and US candy company Ferrara in addition to Kelsen Group. Ferrero Group—the family's confectionary business—has also invested beyond candy, completing a \$1.3 billion deal last year for Kellogg Co's cookies and fruit snack brands.

Giovanni, 55, is executive chairman of Ferrero Group and owns a controlling stake in the Alba, Italy-based company, which is now valued at \$23 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. It makes up the bulk of the Ferrero family's \$32.9 billion fortune.

Investing in cookies “makes sense as chocolate and biscuits fight for the same space in our stomachs,” said Duncan Fox, a consumer products analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence. “If you can get the right innovation, you get far greater distribution if you have exposure to both.” —Bloomberg

Defence stocks rally up to 9% on import ban

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, AUG. 10

Defence stocks rallied as much as 9 per cent as investors rushed to buy them post-defence ministry issuing a statement on Sunday, banning import of 101 items.

The top gainers on the BSE included Hindustan Aeronautics (8.74 per cent), Bharat Electronics (9.17 per cent), Bharat Dynamics (4.16 per cent), Bharat Forge (3.62 per cent), Walchandnagar Industries (4.92 per cent), Larsen & Toubro (4.81 per cent) and Cochin Shipyard (3.27 per cent).

Other gainers included Astra Microwave Products (5.48 per cent), Reliance Naval & Engineering (4.87 per cent), Garden Reach Ship Builders & Engineers (7.24 per cent), Mishra Dhatu Nigam (4.15 per cent), BHEL (2.84 per cent) and BEML (3.95 per cent).

Analysts from Edelweiss Securities said, “What is noteworthy here is a clear time-bound & specific item-wise imports embargo to help the manufacturers (especially private sector) prepare better and commit more investments across the value chain (Tier I, II, III, components manufacturer etc). We would like to believe that Tier-I integrators will reap greater benefits over next two to three years as their supply-chain (MSMEs, private sector) will further strengthen augmenting their systems delivery capabilities, with respect to timeline as well as complexity.”

“We are positively surprised with the pace of policy announcement, which is far more specific and includes clear timelines,” Edelweiss Securities said.

SHORT TAKES

France's Fiona is victorious in Italy

Palermo: Fiona Ferro of France upset fourth-seeded Anett Kontaveit of Estonia in the Palermo Ladies Open final to win the first four-level tennis title in five months.

Ferro, who is ranked 53rd in the world, won 6-2, 7-5 on Sunday. She had lost just one set on her way to the final. It was Ferro's second WTA title and the 23-year-old sealed it on her second championship point when Kontaveit hit a return long.

Kontaveit has lost five of the six finals she has contested. It was the first official tennis event — for men or women — since March when the coronavirus pandemic shut down sports across the globe. There were strict health protocols, including fewer ball kids, a limited number of fans and no post-match handshakes between opponents. Players and officials for the tournament were tested every four days for Covid-19 and one player who tested positive withdrew over the weekend. — AP

Deepa sees 10+ Para medals

New Delhi: India's first-ever woman Paralympic medalist, shot-putter Deepa Malik believes the country's medal count will be in double digits at the Tokyo Games next year. "At Rio we had doubled the medals, we were a squad of 19. We had two gold, a silver and a bronze. In 2018 (Asian Para Games), we were a squad of 194 and won 72 medals. It has already set the benchmark," Malik told paddler Muditi Dani during his chat show, *In The Spotlight*.

"The sensational thing about Tokyo next year will be India bagging Paralympics medals in double digits," she added. Malik has never let her disability come in the way of her passion. She had taken inspiration from the injured soldiers of the Kargil war when, in 1999, she was told that she would need a surgery to remove a spinal tumour. "The hospital to which I was taken for my surgery was full of war casualties. I think that immediately became my inspiration. If these healthy young men were losing a limb in their line of duty, then I have no reason to crib just because I have a disease," she said. — PTI

Players stabbed at Oz rugby game

Sydney: One man has been charged and another remains under police guard in a hospital after a low-tier rugby league game in Sydney ended with one player allegedly stabbed another competitor and two spectators. *Australian Associated Press* reported on Monday that New South Wales state police had arrested and charged a 20-year-old man with affray and assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

Police and emergency services were called to Old Saleyards Reserve in North Parramatta on Sunday following reports of an assault after an under-20s community game between Wentworthville Magpies and Penrith Brothers.

A 19-year-old player and two spectators, aged 16 and 22, were injured during the incident and the injured men remain in Westmead Hospital.

New South Wales Rugby League chief executive David Trodden described the incident as "sickening criminal behavior." — AP

ALEX KEEPS POINT SCORING RUN AT BRNO

Brno, Czech Republic: The Repsol Honda Team took steps forward on a demanding Sunday as a difficult Brno weekend came to a close, Alex Marquez and Stefan Bradl ready to come back stronger in Austria next week.

Blue skies welcomed the MotoGP World Championship to the third race of the 2020 MotoGP World Championship at the Automotodrom Brno. After sweltering conditions in Spain, the 46°C track temperature seemed pleasant in comparison. A focused Alex Marquez put a disappointing qualifying result behind him.

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TWIST IN THE TALE

Yoga guru Ramdev's Patanjali eyes IPL sponsorship

New Delhi, Aug. 10: The new IPL title sponsor to replace Chinese mobile phone company Vivo will hold the rights for only a four-and-a-half-month period and the highest bid may not necessarily end up being the winning one, the BCCI stated on Monday.

Vivo, which had a ₹440 crore per year deal for five seasons, has suspended its partnership with the Board due to the Sino-India border stand-off.

Baba Ramdev's Patanjali has shown interest in becoming the new title sponsor. "We are considering the IPL title sponsorship for this year since we want to give the Patanjali

brand a global marketing platform," Patanjali spokesperson S. K. Tijarawala was quoted as saying.

BCCI floated the tender invite for a new sponsor on Monday. Secretary Jay Shah announced a 13-point clause for submission of the bids from interested "third parties" and the winner will be announced on August 18. The last date for submission of bids is August 14.

"The Rights are available for the period from August 18, 2020 to December 31, 2020," the BCCI press release stated.

"Details regarding the Rights and product categories in which the Rights

● **The BCCI has invited tenders for IPL sponsorship for a four-month period. However, the highest bidder is not a guaranteed winner, who will be announced on August 18.**

are available will be provided only to parties who submit the EOI and are found eligible," it stated.

The BCCI also stated that bidding the highest amount may not fetch the rights for a company if the board is not satisfied with its plans on commer-

cialising its most precious property. "...it is clarified that BCCI shall not be obliged to award the Rights to the third party which indicates willingness to pay the highest fees in the course of discussions/ negotiations with BCCI after submitting an EOI," the BCCI stated.

"BCCI's decision in this regard will also depend on a number of other relevant factors, including but not limited to, the manner in which the third party intends to exploit the Rights and the potential impact of the same on brand IPL..." the BCCI release stated. "...it will be exam-

ined/evaluated by BCCI in the course of discussions/negotiations with interested third parties who submit an EOI," it added.

It can now be safely assumed that BCCI will get a lesser valuation for a four-month period compared to Vivo which had the rights for a bigger duration.

According to the BCCI's norms for accepting the 'Expression of Interest' (EOI), "...turnover of the interested third party must be over ₹300 crore (Indian Rupees Three Hundred Crores only) as per the last audited accounts."

— PTI

ICC MEETING ENDS IN A DEADLOCK

New Delhi, Aug. 10: The ICC Board of Directors meeting on Monday ended up being a damp squib after they failed to reach consensus over Shashank Manohar's replacement as the next chairman of cricket's global governing body.

The sole agenda of Monday's meeting was to finalise the nomination process for the election but no breakthrough could be made over a unanimous choice to lead the International Cricket Council (ICC).

"Yes, there was no unanimity on a number of issues. Firstly, there is a divided house on whether there should be simple majority or the existing 2/3rd majority in a house of 17," an ICC Board member said.

However, the bigger issue is lack of an acceptable face and there is no clarity yet over BCCI president Sourav Ganguly throwing his hat in the ring.

There are multiple candidates who are harbouring ambitions of leading the ICC. "Colin Graves (England) is a strong candidate but it can't be said that he is favourite anymore. There are countries which won't support Graves. Similarly, someone like Dave Cameron (former Cricket West Indies president) may enter the fray with support of two independent directors but may not get enough numbers. Ditto for Chris Nenzani (South Africa)," a former ICC Director, who is abreast of the latest developments, said.

The veteran administrator made it clear that at this point, no potential candidate has numbers to go the distance and that's the precise reason that the board is not able to come up with a uniform election process.

"The best solution is to have a candidate acceptable to all and avoid an election which creates a tense atmosphere between member nations. But yes, I agree that by now, we should have been able to finalise the nomination process," the official said. — PTI

Sixth player from hockey team +ve

New Delhi, Aug. 10: Indian hockey team forward Mandeep Singh has tested positive for Covid-19, becoming the sixth national player to contract the dreaded infection, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Monday.

The 25-year-old from Jalandhar is asymptomatic and is being treated along with the other five players by doctors in Bengaluru, where the national camp is due to start on August 20 at the SAI centre.

"Mandeep Singh, a member of the Indian Men's Hockey team, who was given the Covid test (RT PCR) along with 20 other players at the National Camp at SAI's National Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, has tested Covid positive, but is asymptomatic," the SAI said in a statement.

"He is being administered treatment by doctors, along with the other five players who have tested positive."

Indian captain Manpreet Singh and four other players had tested positive for Covid-19 last week after returning to the SAI Centre following a month-long break.

— PTI

LAKRA LOOKS UP TO SENIOR RUPI FOR TIPS

New Delhi, Aug. 10: When playing hockey, Indian junior team defender Pratap Lakra watches, learns and takes inspiration from seniors Rupinder Pal Singh's dragflicking abilities and Birendra Lakra's game, but is right now busy doing duty as ticket collector in the railways.

Since his entry into the junior national camp in 2017, Pratap knew only hard work would help him don the senior team jersey.

"Since the senior team also trains in Bengaluru where we have our national camp, whenever we have a rest day or when the senior team is playing an internal match, we go and watch them," he was quoted as saying in a Hockey India press release.

"I particularly follow Rupinder Pal Singh for his dragflick execution and in terms of defence and game I follow Birendra Lakra," he said.

— PTI

EX-BANGLA CRICKETER CATCHES CORONAVIRUS

Dhaka, Aug. 10: Former Bangladesh left-arm spinner Mosharraf Hossain, who has represented the national team in five ODIs, has tested positive for Covid-19.

The 38-year-old, who had undergone four months of intense treatment including a surgery for brain tumour, contracted the infection after his father also tested positive for the contagious disease.

He was diagnosed with a brain tumour last year. Mosharraf is doing fine and has self-isolated himself at home after receiving the result of his Covid test on Sunday. "My wife and my child however tested negative and they are living with her parents," Mosharraf was quoted as saying by *The Daily Star*.

— PTI



Damian Lillard of the Portland Trail Blazers goes up for a shot against the Philadelphia 76ers during their NBA match in Lake Buena Vista, Florida.

— AFP

Lillard's half-ton powers Portland

Miami, Aug. 10: Portland's Damian Lillard poured in 51 points against a Philadelphia team missing injured stars Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons, powering the Trail Blazers to a 124-121 victory in their NBA match on Sunday.

Lillard, taunted on social media after two key missed free throws in a Saturday loss to the Los Angeles Clippers, unleashed the 10th 50-point performance of his career and fifth of the season to pull Portland within a half-game of Memphis for eighth in the Western Conference playoff fight.

"This was different because our season was on the line. We drop this one and we don't control our destiny. I thought we answered the call down the stretch," Lillard said.

Lillard hit 16-of-28 shot from the floor, 4-of-12 from 3-point range, and 15-of-16 from the free throw line and dished out a game-high seven assists.

The Blazers (33-39) and Memphis (33-38) are trying to hold off San Antonio (31-38) and Phoenix (31-39) for

spots in next weekend's play-in series for the last West playoff berth. Portland's win eliminated New Orleans and Sacramento.

In another match, Cameroon playmaker Pascal Siakam scored a game-high 26 points to spark Toronto over Memphis 108-99, clinching the second seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs for the defending champion Raptors (50-19).

Memphis, led by 25 points from Dillon Brooks, missed a chance to clinch a play-in series berth. The Grizzlies are 1-5 in bubble games.

San Antonio, trying to reach the playoffs for a 23rd consecutive season, pulled within a game of Memphis by beating New Orleans 122-113. DeMar DeRozan scored 15 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter to ignite the Spurs' attack and subdue rivals.

Jayson Tatum scored 29 points, five in the final minute of regulation time and five more in overtime, to spark the Boston Celtics over Orlando 122-119.

— AFP



England batsman Jos Buttler plays a shot during the fourth day of the first Test against Pakistan at Old Trafford in Manchester on Saturday.

— AP

Angry old Anderson is still hungry for more

Manchester, Aug. 10: James Anderson insisted Monday he was still "hungry" to play Test cricket after speculation the England great was considering retirement.

Anderson, recently turned 38, an age where many previous pace bowlers would have long since retired. Given his age, Anderson's meagre match haul of 1-97 during England's three-wicket win in the first Test against Pakistan inevitably led to speculation about his future.

By his own admission, Anderson, England's all-time leading wicket-taker, "didn't bowl very well" at his Old Trafford home ground, where one of the ends is named after him, as England went 1-0 up in a three-match series.

I want to play as long as I possibly can. If I keep bowling the way I did this week, the opportunity to retire will be taken out of my hands. It will be a selection issue.

— JAMES ANDERSON
England pacer

But the swing specialist, whose 590 wickets are the most taken by any pacer in Test history, said he should not be written off after one poor game. "I want to play as long as I possibly can," Anderson told reporters during a conference call on Monday.

"If I keep bowling the way I did this week, the opportunity to retire will

be taken out of my hands. It will be a selection issue," he added ahead of Thursday's second Test at Southampton.

"I'm still hungry to play the game. I think the frustration for me this week was that, after one bad game... the sort of whispers (about retirement) that go around, I don't think that's really fair," Anderson said.

Reflecting on his own performance in the first Test, Anderson said: "It's one of those things, everyone has a bad game, every now and then. I've not bowled very well and felt out of rhythm. For the first time in probably 10 years I got a little bit emotional on the field, got a bit frustrated, let it get to me a little bit."

— AFP

Hami up for duel with 'mad' Max

Silverstone, Aug. 10: Lewis Hamilton welcomes the prospect of a Formula One title battle with Max Verstappen following the Dutchman's dramatic victory in Sunday's torrid 70th Anniversary Grand Prix at Silverstone.

Defending champion and current leader Hamilton, who has a 30-point advantage at the top of the drivers' standings, praised Verstappen and his Red Bull team for inflicting a first defeat on Mercedes in five races this year.

"It's great that Max won," said Hamilton, speaking in the aftermath of his record-equalling 155th podium finish, in second place.

"As I've said before I want to have races and a challenge. Obviously, the Red Bull seems to be quite close to us in race condi-

tions, but that's a good thing and it will be interesting to see their progression through the rest of the year.

"I definitely will not overlook them. We will keep a close eye on them. It's not going to be easy by any means," he added.

Hamilton, who shares the podiums record with seven-time world champion Michael Schumacher, is in pursuit of his own seventh drivers' title this year and also has the German's unrivalled haul of 91 GP wins in his sights.

However in sweltering conditions on Sunday, Red Bull had not only a superior strategy — by choosing to start Verstappen on hard-compound tyres — but also a superior level of management of tyre wear, which appears to have become a weakness of



Max Verstappen jubilates after winning the Formula One race at the Silverstone circuit on Sunday.

— AP

Mercedes' otherwise flawless car this year.

Hamilton had only won the British GP at the same track a week earlier after surviving a last-lap puncture as Verstappen closed in.

Mercedes chief Toto Wolff conceded his team had failed to deliver after starting with Valtteri Bottas on pole and Hamilton second in their 67th front row lockout.

Verstappen started

fourth and won by 11 seconds, a luxury that afforded him several light-hearted quips on his way to victory and a poor sign for Mercedes heading into the weekend's Spanish GP in Barcelona.

"It was a difficult day in the office," admitted Wolff, adding, "We have a handful of days to find out what exactly caused our issues today, come up with solutions, test them in Barcelona and then hopefully have a better race on Sunday."

The somewhat haunted looks on the Mercedes pit wall as their Pirelli tyres blistered over and again told its own story and Red Bull team chief Christian Horner, suggested their car, with its phenomenal levels of downforce, was almost too strong and too fast for the softer tyres introduced. — AFP