

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

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<div>WEATHER</div> <div>  Max: 31°C Min: 22°C Rainfall: Nil </div> <div> Forecast: The air has reached a high level of pollution and is unhealthy for sensitive groups </div>	<div>NATION 3</div> <div>Yechury says verdict weakens democracy</div>	<div>WORLD 5</div> <div>Don stokes false birther theory about Harris</div>	<div>SPORT 8</div> <div>Hamilton sets pace at Barcelona</div>
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Prashant guilty of contempt: SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 14

The Supreme Court on Friday held activist lawyer Prashant Bhusan guilty of “criminal contempt” for lowering its dignity and authority by questioning, via his tweets, the functioning of the top court in the last six years under the present Chief Justice, Sharad A. Bobde, and his predecessors. The court fixed August 20 for his sentencing.

Holding that the tweet in question was “malicious” and based on “distorted facts”, a bench comprising Justice Arun Mishra, Justice B.R.

OVER TWEETS AGAINST CJI, JUDICIARY



Gavai and Justice Krishna Murari said that the tweet had the “effect of destabilising the very foundation” of the judiciary.

The country’s top court has taken exception of that part of Mr Bhusan’s June 27 tweet

in which he said that the Supreme Court has played a substantial role in allowing the destruction of democracy in the past six years, since 2014, and questioned the role of the last four Chief Justices in particular in allowing it. The court said that in its “considered view” the tweet “undermines the dignity and authority of the institution of the Supreme Court of India and the CJI and directly affronts the majesty of law.”

“There is no matter of doubt that the tweet tends to shake the public confidence in the institution of judiciary,” the judgment said. The “scurrilous/malicious attacks” by Mr Bhusan are not only “against one or two judges but the entire Supreme Court in its functioning of the last six years.” The court said that the scurrilous allegations, which are malicious in nature and have the tendency to scandalise the court are not expected from a person, who is a lawyer of 30 years standing.”

Saying that the tweet is not “fair criticism of the functioning of the judiciary, made bona fide in the public interest,” the court said while rejecting Mr Bhusan’s contention that his criticism was bona fide and in public interest.

E-pass for all: TN eases intra-state travel curbs

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG 14

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami has ordered the immediate issue of e-pass to all applicants for travel within the state from Monday, August 17.

However, the old system of issuing e-passes only for emergencies would continue in the case of those travelling into the state from outside, an official press release said.

Applicants for the e-pass to travel to other districts in

● **Chief Minister K. Palaniswami on Friday unveiled the Amma Covid home care kit for people who have tested positive for the virus and been advised home isolation.**

● **Several key flyovers and subways in Chennai will soon sport dynamic lighting, displaying splashes of different hues to suit specific occasions.**

■ **Details: P2**

the state would have to provide details of Aadhaar card or ration card, along with telephone and mobile numbers, the release said. However, the Chief

Minister urged people to use the facility, provided with the interest of the people in mind, with responsibility and do not undertake unnecessary travel.

India capable of giving befitting response: Prez

New Delhi, Aug. 14: President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday said while India believes in peace it is also capable of giving a befitting response to any attempt of aggression as shown by its troops in Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh after “some in our neighbourhood”, a veiled reference to China, tried to carry out their “misadventure of expansion”. In his address to the nation on the eve of the 74th Independence Day, —PTI

Fought Chinese army for 17-20 hours: ITBP

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG 14:

Indian and Chinese troops clashed brutally at multiple times in May and June at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh, a fact that emerged on Friday after the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) recommended 21 names of its men for gallantry medals. They faced the Chinese during face offs and skirmishes in May-June 2020, some of which lasted for 17-20 hours.

The ITBP director general S.S. Deswal said in a statement that the force has recommended 21 Gallantry medals and 294 DG Gallantry Commendations for ITBP personnel “for displaying raw courage and bravery” during the face-off with Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh in May-June. “The ITBP troops not only

● **The force has recommended 21 Gallantry medals and 294 DG Gallantry Commendations for ITBP personnel "for displaying raw courage and bravery" during the face-off with Chinese troops**

used shields to protect themselves but also responded fiercely to PLA advancing troops and brought the situation under control. With the highest order of professional skills, ITBP troops fought shoulder to shoulder and brought the injured Indian Army troops to the rear,” the statement said. Even when the ITBP troops fought the whole night, they received minimum casualties by giving befitting reply to stone pelters.

Covid spread in state hits a plateau

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG 14:

Spread of coronavirus in the state has seemingly hit a plateau going by the official figures, which put the new infections at 5,890 and deaths at 117 on Friday.

With 1187 fresh cases and 25 fatalities, the numbers have stabilized in Chennai too with most of the spread now happening in other districts.

Districts around Chennai continued to report high numbers – Chengalpattu 437, Kanchipuram 315 and Thiruvallur 495. Other districts with high numbers were Coimbatore 385, Cuddalore 221 and Theni 367.

Food and civil supplies minister R. Kamaraj, attributed the low numbers in Chennai to the various efforts taken by the government in combating the pandemic.

● **Veteran playback singer S.P. Balasubrahmanyam, undergoing treatment for Covid is in a 'critical' condition**

● **Union home minister Amit Shah on Friday said he has tested negative**

● **Governor Banwarilal Purohit on Friday tested negative**

After a review meeting with officials in Chennai, Kamaraj said that 31,702 medical camps were held between May 8 and Aug 12 and 17,86,970 persons got tested in the camps.

He urged people living in containment zones and in quarantine not to step out of their homes and even other people not to move out needlessly.

HM tries to put up Vinayaka pandal, triggers tension

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG 14

Tension gripped Tiruvateeswaranpet area in Triplicane on Friday after members of the Hindu Munnani began the Vinay-akar Chaturthi celebrations, defying the ban imposed by the state government due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Hindu Munnani members, led by A.T. Elangovan, Chennai city president, gathered at Tiruvateeswaranpet to kickstart the Vinayaka Chaturthi celebrations by organising a pandal kaal and sacred thread tying ceremony. ■ **More on P2**

Mortal remains of 4 TN students who drowned in Russia to reach India next week

New Delhi, Aug. 14: The mortal remains of four Indian students who drowned in the Volga river in Russia's Volgograd are expected to reach India early next week, Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said on Friday. Four students from Tamil Nadu who were studying at the Volgograd State Medical University drowned in the Volga river on Saturday. Muraleedharan said he has spoken to the Indian Mission in Russia on the matter. —PTI

Rajesh Pilot says he is Cong's strongest warrior

Jaipur, Aug. 14: Hitting out at the Opposition over its criticism of the recent political developments in Rajasthan, former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot on Friday described himself as the strongest warrior of the Congress and said he would protect his party at all costs.

Pilot, who has returned to the Congress fold after a month-long rebellion against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, made the remarks during the debate on a motion of confidence moved by the ruling party in the Rajasthan Assembly.

During the debate, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Rajendra Rathore mentioned Pilot's name in various matters, including the recent political developments in the state and a Special Operations Group (SOG) notice issued to him. The notice was sent to Pilot after the Rajasthan Police claimed to have stumbled upon a plot to topple the Congress government. “They are taking my name repeatedly. Prior to my seat being changed, I was safe and part of the government. Then I thought why our Speaker and chief whip have given me a seat here? I thought for two minutes and then saw that this is a border. On one side is the ruling party and on the other is the Opposition. Who is sent to the border? The strongest warrior is sent,” Pilot said, interrupting Rathore. —PTI

Ashok Gehlot govt wins trust vote in Rajasthan

Jaipur, Aug 14: The Ashok Gehlot government won a confidence vote in the Rajasthan Assembly on Friday, ending the threat triggered by a rebellion within the Congress ranks in the state.

The motion of confidence moved by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shanti Dhariwal was passed by voice vote, an expected win after the return of the 19 dissident Congress MLAs led by Sachin Pilot to the party-fold.

Replying to the debate on the motion, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot criticised the BJP, accusing it again of trying to bring down his government.

“I will not let the government topple at any cost even if you make all attempts,” he said. Gehlot said the crisis had come to an end in a “beautiful manner” and this had hurt the Bharatiya Janata Party.

“What was done in Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, Madhya Pradesh? Elected governments are being toppled and democracy is under danger,” he said, accusing the BJP of targeting Congress governments. Without taking names, he alleged that a Union min-



ister was involved in the “conspiracy” to topple his government, saying this had become clear after some audio clips surfaced. The indirect reference was to Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, who has earlier rejected the Congress allegation.

The opposition BJP accused the Gehlot camp of blaming it for the infighting within the Congress. Targeting the chief minister for his comments against his now sacked deputy, Leader of Opposition Gulab Chand Kataria questioned how Pilot became “useless” after the formation of the government when he had strengthened the party while in opposition.

Mocking Gehlot for keeping his loyalists holed up in hotels for a month, he said if the government had a majority it could have

proven it earlier.

He also questioned the Congress government over the deployment of the state police at hotels where the MLAs were staying.

The rebellion by Sachin Pilot ended earlier this week after the intervention of the party's top leadership in Delhi, which assured that his grievances will be heard. On Thursday, Gehlot and Pilot shook hands. Pilot intervened in the debate, reacting to remarks by Kataria and Deputy Leader of Opposition Rajendra Rathore. Referring to his seat being changed – earlier he sat next to Gehlot as the deputy chief minister – Pilot said he is now placed at the “border” between his party and the opposition in the House. “Who is sent to the border? The strongest warrior is sent,” he said. Indirectly, he also referred to his meeting with the party high command. “But I want to tell that whatever I or my companions had to say, we have told the doctor about our complaints,” he said, adding that the MLAs were now all together in the assembly after receiving the “treatment”. —PTI

We will give befitting reply if enemy attacks us: Rajnath

New Delhi, Aug 14: PTI India will give a befitting reply if an enemy country attacks it, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday, sending a clear message to China in the midst of the border row in eastern Ladakh.

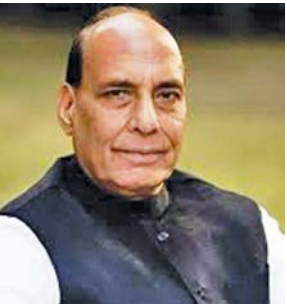
Without naming any country, the defence minister, in a message to armed forces on the eve of the Independence Day, said anyone daring to occupy India's land has to suffer heavy consequences.

He said India believes in winning hearts and not land, but it does not mean the country will let hurt its self-esteem.

“Today the country is confident that no force can occupy even one inch of land while you are deployed. If anyone dares to do it, then he has to suffer heavy consequences and will continue to suffer,” Singh said.

He said whatever India does in the realm of national security is always for self-defence and not to attack other countries.

“If enemy country attacks us, then we will give a befit-



ting reply like every time,” he said.

“History is a witness to the fact that India never attacked anyone or tried to capture land of another country,” Singh added. He assured the armed forces that government is doing all that is required to maintain their operational requirement.

Singh also paid “special tributes” to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the Galwan Valley clashes on June 15. “This country can never forget their bravery and their supreme sacrifice. I want to assure their families that they are not alone, the whole country stands with them,” he said. —PTI

PIL to conduct utsavas in Ranganatha Swamy temple

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG 14

A Public Interest Litigation has been filed in the Madras high court to direct 10 Vaishnava sampradaya acharyas of Ranganatha Swamy temple, Srirangam, to form a religious committee to decide on the modus operandi to perform required prayaschitas and conduct the utsavas stopped due to the pandemic as prescribed by agama sastras and Vaishnava sampradaya with inputs from eminent Vaishnavites including but not limited to Jeeyar swamis, adhyapakas, Vaishnava sampradaya devotees and with HR & CE officials playing an administrative role and conduct the utsava as prescribed by the religious committee.

A division bench comprising Justices M.M.Sundresh and R.Hemalatha before whom the PIL filed by idol of Ranganatha Swamy Ranganatha Swamy Temple, Srirangam, represented by Rangarajan Narasimhan came up for hearing, ordered notice, returnable by three weeks, to the commissioner, HR & CE, joint commissioner/ executive officer Ranganatha Swamy Temple, 10 Vaishnava sampradaya acharyas and four non-hereditary trustees including Venu Srinivasan and K.N.Srinivasan.

According to petitioner, the government of India and the state governments have taken sincere steps to contain the spread of the disease

● **The petitioner said the places of religious worship were opened up for public by the government of India as on June 8, 2020, with certain precautionary guidelines**

Covid-19 caused by the unknown virus by name Sars- CoV-2. The government of India had on March 25, 2020, announced a nationwide lockdown of the country, when all places including the Hindu Temples and other religious places of worship were shut down for general public. However, there were no restrictions imposed on conducting of religious rituals/ ceremonies by either the Central or the state government in Hindu temples and other religious places and there were no interference whatsoever or any restrictions imposed to the conducting of the religious ceremonies inside the Hindu temples by the Hindu archakas, he added.

He said the places of religious worship were opened up for public by the government of India as on June 8, 2020, with certain precautionary guidelines. However, the government of Tamil Nadu had extended such ban of entry to public in religious places up to July 31, 2020, as on the date of filing this PIL but had allowed entry into religious institutions whose annual income was less than ₹10,000 with certain restrictions as prescribed by it.

Chennai nurse elated over getting CM award

N. SAMPATH | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

N. Ramuthai, a 30-year-old nurse from Chennai, has bagged the Chief Minister's special award for serving on the frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic. She is one among the 27 frontline workers who will receive a gold-plated medal and an appreciation certificate on Independence Day.

When contacted by DC, Ramuthai sounded happy over her achievement. Ramuthai had been working in the Corona ward of the Omanthoorar government hospital for over five months without taking off and was taking care of patients with kindness and patience. She thanked the state government for the award and the doctors and seniors for their encouragement.

The CN's special award was announced for 27 frontline workers. The awardees are from departments like health and family welfare, police, revenue and disaster management, fire and rescue, municipal administration, water supply, food and consumer protection.



Omandurar government hospital dean Dr Jayanthi lauds nurse N. Ramuthai. — DC

65 singers to raise funds for struggling musicians

DEBJEET DEY | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

On the occasion of 74th Independence Day, 65 singers from South India have united in aid of United Singers Charitable Trust to raise funds for struggling musicians whose livelihood has been affected due to the pandemic. Many illustrious singers have collaborated with the theme 'Together As One' to create an acapella version of the iconic A.R. Rahman song

Thamizha Thamizha from *Roja* released on Aug. 15, 1992. Noted musicians like composer Shankar Mahadevan, playback singer Srinivas, singers K.S Chithra and Sujatha Mohan and others have come together with the vision of one nation united to support the South Indian musician community.

In a phone conversation, Shankar Mahadevan says, "This song is an act of showing solidarity towards the country dur-

ing this pandemic and also brotherhood towards musicians. Musicians are suffering a lot and many of them who are daily wage earners and perform during group gatherings have lost their jobs. Their livelihood is at stake. We have to raise funds for them." Founder trustee of United Singers Charitable Trust playback singer Srinivas says, "The song is about love for the country and the money raised will be given to needy musicians."

Tension in Triplicane after HM defies Ganesh fest ban

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

Tension gripped Tiruvateeswaranpet area in Triplicane on Friday after members of the Hindu Munnani began the Vinayakar Chaturthi celebrations, defying the ban imposed by the state government due to the Covid-19.

The Hindu Munnani members, led by A.T. Elangovan, Chennai city president, gathered at Tiruvateeswaranpet to kickstart the Vinayaka Chaturthi celebrations by organising a pandal kaal and sacred thread tying ceremony. Police rushed to the spot based on the information that Hindu Munnani members are planning to defy ban on Vinayaka Chaturthi celebration. The police held talks with the members of the right-wing outfit.

Elangovan told DC: "We had planned this ceremony days before the government announced the ban on the festival and we are the first in Tamil Nadu to kickstart Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations."

Another member of the outfit said that they have been celebrating Vinayaka Chaturthi as a Hindu unity festival every year. This year they have been planning to celebrate based on safety norms mandated by the health and family welfare department. However, the ban on a Hindu festival by the government is unexpected and it is an anti-Hindu move, he said.

After the talks with the police, the munnani members agreed to remove the pandal kaal. They dis-

Hindu Munnani members, led by A.T. Elangovan, Chennai city president, gathered at Tiruvateeswaranpet to kickstart the Vinayaka Chaturthi celebrations by organising a pandal kaal and sacred thread tying ceremony



Cops and Hindu Munnani members hold talks over the latter trying to launch Vinayaka Chaturthi celebrations in Triplicane on Friday. — DC

Permit Vinayaka idols to be installed in public places: BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

BJP state president L. Murugan urged the government to remove the ban on installation of Vinayaka idols in public places as part of Vijayaka Chaturthi celebrations and allow people to worship them as it has been happening for the past 40 years.

After the talks with the police, the munnani members agreed to remove the pandal kaal. They dis-

Hindu organisations had agreed to give up the processions that would be normally take out before immersing the idols in the sea or lakes or ponds in view of the coronavirus crisis but had already started the preparations for installing the idols and worshipping them, Murugan said in a statement on Friday.

Stating that it was a case of putting obstacles for the God who was seen as a 'remover of obstacles' by Hindus, for whom worshipping Him was of paramount importance whenever something was done, he said, assuring that the devotees would follow social distancing and other Covid-19 prevention norms.

perched after the sacred thread ceremony, police sources said. The Tamil Nadu govern-

ment on Thursday prohibited celebrating Vinayagar Chaturthi in public spaces across the state due

to the lockdown. Instead, the government requested people to celebrate the festival in their homes.

Gated communities prefer a quiet I-Day

B. VIJAYALAKSHMI | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

With no cultural programmes by children or patriotic songs rendered by women, Independence Day celebrations will be low-key in several apartments and gated communities this year because of spurt in corona cases in the state.

Since Independence Day is considered to be a unifying factor for residents of multi-storied apartments and gated communities who hail from various parts of the country and practise different religions, it is celebrated in a grand and colourful manner. Preparations begin 10 days before I-Day for cul-

Residents will be honouring 11 doctors residing in their gated community on Pallavaram-Thoraipakkam road today

tural events. An interesting line-up of programmes by children and adults woos other residents who take part in the celebrations with gusto.

But this year several residents welfare associations (RWAs) have opted for a

quiet and unostentatious Independence Day.

Residents welfare associations have been actively following the evolving coronavirus situation and ensuring that safety measures are stepped up on a regular basis. "This year, our national flag will be hoisted in our apartment. No other celebrations," say RWA office-bearers of Jones Sigraya and Tranquil Acres, gates communities, near Pallikaranai.

However, S&S Sarvam, another gated community on Pallavaram-Thoraipakkam road, has decided to honour frontline corona warriors on the occasion. "On I-Day we will be honouring 11 doctors residing in our apartment

with mementos. Besides, we will express our gratitude to our house-keeping staff and security personnel for their untiring efforts during this crisis by giving them a box of sweets. We will be planting saplings too," says P. Chandramohan, a managing committee member of Sarvam Apartment Owners Welfare Association. The RWA has made social distancing and wearing masks mandatory during the celebrations which will start with the customary hoisting of the tricolor. As the country gears up for 74th Independence Day, people fervently await 'freedom' from the deadly grip of coronavirus.

SHORT TAKES

Bhavani Sagar dam opened for irrigation

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC
ERODE, AUG. 14

Minister for School Education K A Senkottaiyan and Minister for Environment K C Karuppannan on Friday opened the sluices of the Keezh Bavani canal and released water for irrigation from the Bhavani Sagar dam.

The dam is the main source of water for the district, and it irrigates 2,47,000 acres of land in districts including Erode, Tiruppur and Karur.

Due to continuous rains in the Nilgiris, water level in the Bhavani Sagar dam has touched 102 feet.

Following Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami's announcement that water would be released from Bhavani Sagar dam on August 14 for irrigation, the dam was opened.

According to PWD officials, water level in the Lower Bhavani canal will gradually increase to 2,300 cusecs per second for 120 days.

City flyovers to glitter under dynamic lighting project

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

Several key flyovers and subways in Chennai would soon sport dynamic lighting, displaying splashes of different hues to suit specific occasions with the Chief Minister on Friday inaugurating a ₹33 crore beautification project.

The dynamic lighting system would illuminate flyovers and subways at 37 places with a variety of colours, which will change seamlessly, setting a new ambience and mood to suit occasions such as Independence Day.

Marking the project launch at the secretariat in the Fort St George premises, he turned on the lighting system at the iconic Napier Bridge and the busy Dr Radhakrishnan Salai flyover.

It was taken up to



Chief Minister K. Palaniswami on Friday flags off LED screen mounted vehicles to broadcast short films and launches a drive to distribute pamphlets, to create awareness on coronavirus among people. — DC

"enhance the appearance, look and feel of the bridges, flyovers and the city", the Greater Chennai Corporation said.

Fifteen flyovers/grade separators, one ROB, 16 vehicular subways and five pedestrian subways will have the dynamic lighting, it said.

The GCC, in a statement,

said on special occasions like Independence Day the bridges can be lit up showcasing the tricolor.

"On important occasions such as Autism Day, Breast Cancer Awareness Day, Glaucoma, Down Syndrome, the bridges can be lit according to the colours that signify the causes and could create

awareness among the general public," it said.

The work of illuminating all the bridges has already started and will be completed soon.

Once these locations are illuminated with dynamic lighting, it will enhance the beauty of the bridges and its surroundings, the civic body said.

VALUABLES STOLEN FROM PARKED CAR

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, AUG. 14

Miscraents broke the wind screen of a locked car and made away with 15 sovereigns of gold ornaments, 20 numbers of diamonds, three mobile phones and cash of ₹20,000 at suburb Murugapettai near here, on Wednesday.

Police said, three purohiths, Venkatasubramanian, Vaithyanathan and Venkatesan, hailing from Keelkattalai, Chennai, were on their way to Rameswaram to submerge the ashes of their guru Vikraman Swamy, who was passed away a few days back.

As they were crossing the Cauvery bridge on the Tiruchy — Chennai highway, the purohiths saw Cauvery river with plenty of water and changing their Rameswaram schedule, decided to submerge the guru's ashes in Cauvery itself.

Stir seeking to defer tax, EMIs

DC CORRESPONDENT
PUDUKOTTAI, AUG. 14

Members of the district unit of the CITU here staged a protest in different parts of the district on Friday, urging the Centre and state governments to postpone the collection of road tax, insurance premium, and EMIs for vehicle loans for private vehicles, at least for one year, as they have lost their livelihood. They staged a demonstration in front of the collectorate here, led by CPM district secretary, affiliated to the Tamil Nadu Anaithu

Pokkuvarathu Thozilalar Sangam, K Sivakumar. A memorandum to the chief minister will be sent through the collector, in this regard, said Sivakumar.

Simultaneously, a few members of the Students Federation of India, also staged a demonstration in front of the collectorate her urging the government to extend the time for filing application for admission into the first year degree course, and also sought time to commence online education only after all students gets net connectivity.

New weapon launched

Tiruchy: The Chairman & DGOF, OFB, Kolkata, Hari Mohan, inaugurated the launching of UBGL 40 X 46 mm for AK-47/TAR through video-conferencing held at the Ordnance Factory, Tiruchirappalli (OFT) on Friday, as part of Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-Reliant India Mission). In a release, OFT's Works Manager /Public Relation Officer, Dr C Ariya

Sakthi, said the UBGL is an additional facility fitted to in-service AK-47 & Trichy Assault Rifle (TAR), for the purpose of launching high explosive grenades at enemy targets. The range is 400 mts, and weighs about 1.6 kg. It is a single shot, breech-loaded launcher, intended to increase fire power drastically according to the variety of grenade types.

Stir for PDS cost-free essentials

DCC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, AUG. 14

Members of the Vivasaya Thozhilalargal Sangam (farm labourers association) affiliated to the CPI(M) staged demonstrations before fair price shops at 90 places in the district on Friday, demanding supply of provisions like rice, dal and palm oil free of cost to ration card holders, till the end of the pandemic. They said that TN supplied provisions free of cost from March to July. From Aug. 1, it said that people have to pay for their provisions. At a time when people in rural areas, particularly farm labourers, are left without any revenue, they may not be still able to pay for the provisions.

Follow home quarantine norms: Collector

DCC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, AUG. 14

Corona infected persons, who opt for home quarantine, should necessarily possess pulse oxymeter to test their oxygen level, and a thermal scanner to check their temperature, said Collector M Govinda Rao, here on Friday.

In a press release, the collec-

tor said that patients who have a separate room, toilet and bath facilities at home can opt for home quarantine. But they should have the above mentioned two instruments and check their oxygen levels and temperature regularly. He also warned drug stores not to sell pulse oxymeters beyond the prescribed cost.



Cooperatives minister Sellur K. Raju being checked with a thermal scanner when he came to the Vellore collectorate to take part in the meet on Friday for an inspection of cooperative societies. — K. Senthil Nanthan

COUNTER POINT



Are you sure he is our minister?

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Aadi 31
Tithi: Ekadashi/ Dwadashi
Star: Thiruvathirai
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 pm
Yamagandam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

SHORT TAKES

MUKHERJEE REMAINS CRITICAL, SAYS DAUGHTER

New Delhi, Aug. 14: The condition of former president Pranab Mukherjee remains critical but has not worsened, his daughter Sharmistha Mukherjee said on Friday.

Doctors attending on the 84-year-old former president at the hospital said his condition remained unchanged on Friday morning. Mukherjee was admitted to the Army's Research and Referral Hospital in Delhi cantonment on Monday and was operated for the removal of a clot in the brain.

He had also tested positive for Covid-19. "The condition of Pranab Mukherjee remains unchanged this morning (August 14, 2020). He is under intensive care and continues to be on ventilatory support. His vital parameters are presently stable," the hospital said in a statement.

The former President's daughter took to Twitter after the medical bulletin, saying his condition has not worsened. "Without getting into medical jargons, whatever I could understand from the last two days is that though my dad's condition continues to remain very critical, it hasn't worsened. There's little improvement in his eyes' reaction to light," she said.

Pranab Mukherjee served as the 13th President of India from 2012 to 2017.

U.P. LEGISLATOR ARRESTED IN MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, AUG. 14

MLA from Gyanpur in Uttar Pradesh Vijay Mishra who had earlier feared his encounter death at the hands of UP police, was on Friday arrested in Agar district of Madhya Pradesh. The lawmaker who was reportedly on his way to Rajasthan after paying a visit to Mahakal temple in Ujjain was arrested at Tanodia in Agar district, police said.

"Tip off by UP police led to the MLA's arrest", Indore range inspector general of police Rakesh Gupta said. A team of UP police reportedly reached Agar late in the night to take custody of the MLA, police sources said.

The lawmaker was scheduled to be produced in a local court in Bhadohi district in UP on Saturday, sources said. The MLA who was wanted by UP police in several cases including the one related to a property dispute in UP, had earlier circulated a video in social media accusing UP police of conspiring to kill him in encounter.

ELEPHANT KILLS FOREST RANGER IN MP

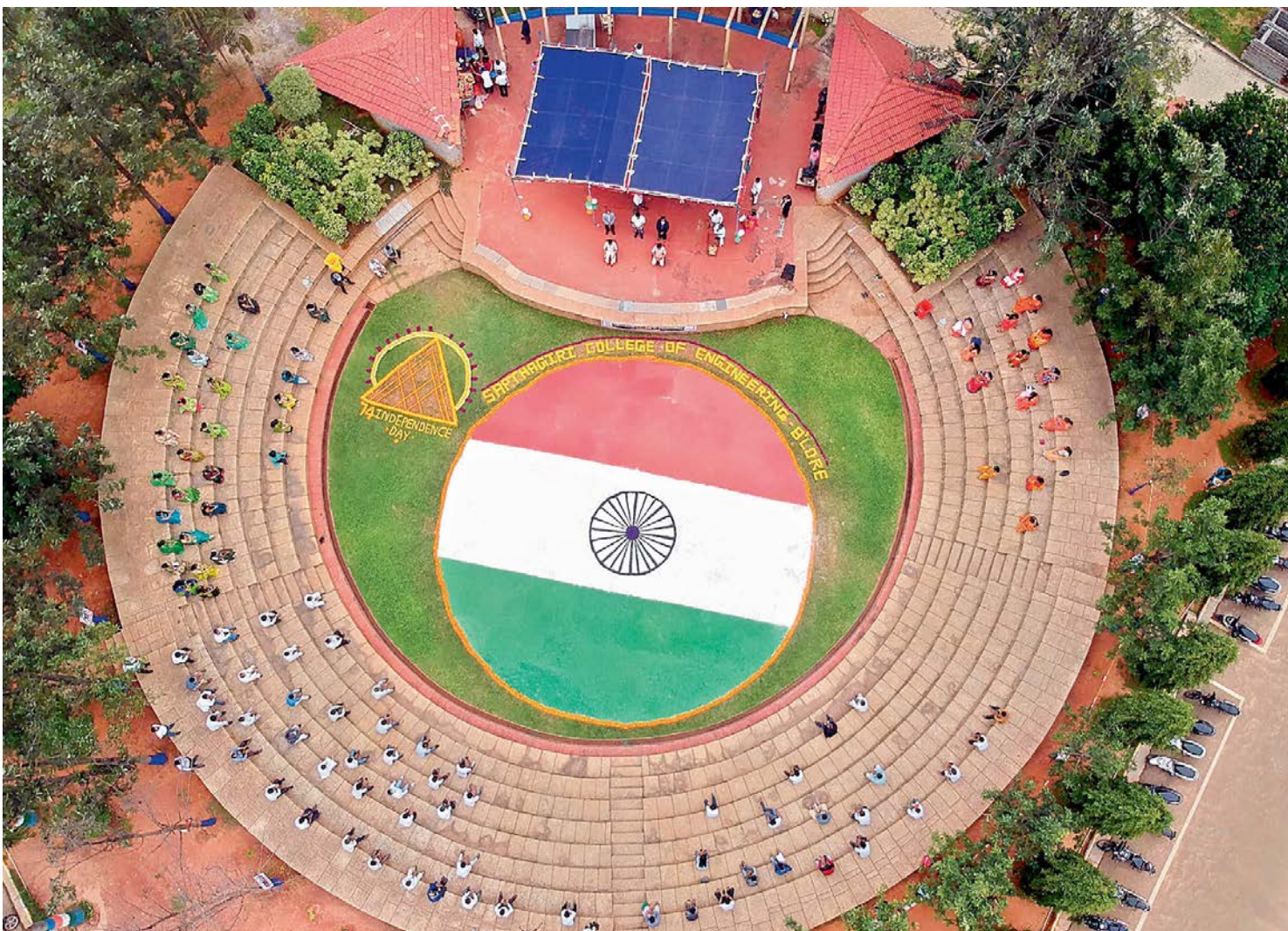
DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, AUG 14

An elephant deployed in tiger tracking in Panna tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh on Friday attacked the local forest ranger B.R. Bhagat, leading to his death.

The pachyderm which had been deployed in tiger tracking in Hinouti range of Panna tiger reserve for the past one week suddenly became aggressive and killed the forest officer with his tusks, official reports reaching here said.

Chief Minister Shivrang Singh Chouhan expressed shock and grief over the death of the forest officer. Territorial fight between the two tigers in the area last week had led to death of one and injury to the other.

The Panna tiger reserve authorities had launched an exercise to track the wounded tiger for its treatment.



A 4,000 sqft Tricolor rangoli made by students and teachers of a private engineering college in Bengaluru on Friday as part of the 74th Independence Day celebrations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will deliver his seventh straight Independence Day speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Saturday - an address that comes amid the Coronavirus pandemic, a border standoff with China and a slew of reforms by the government under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

— PTI

Shaurya Chakra for 3 Army officers for J&K operations

Officers who fought Chinese troops may get gallantry awards on R-Day

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, AUG. 14

Three Indian Army personnel — Lt Colonel Krishan Singh Rawat, Major Anil Urs and Havildar Alok Kumar Dubey — have been conferred with the prestigious Shaurya Chakra for counter terrorist operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

Indian Army personnel who have courageously fought Chinese troops in Eastern Ladakh, particularly in Galwan Valley are likely to be given gallantry awards during Republic Day in January.

They don't figure in the gallantry awards list for

Independence Day.

Wing Commander Vishak Nair, from the Indian Air Force, has also been conferred with the Shaurya Chakra on the eve of Independence Day.

President Ram Nath Kovind has approved 84 awards and decorations to the Armed Forces personnel and members of the Paramilitary Forces.

The awards include one Kirti Chakra, nine Shaurya Chakras, five Bar to Sena Medals (Gallantry), 60 Sena Medals (Gallantry), four Nao Sena Medals (Gallantry) and five Vayu Sena Medals (Gallantry). Major Anil, from

Maratha Light Infantry laid an ambush on receiving intelligence that terrorists were planning to infiltrate from across the line of control (LoC).

On spotting the group of terrorists Major Anil brought down effective fire killing three terrorists. Being in close proximity to LoC, his action drew violent fire from the Pakistan army.

However, Maj Anil chose to remain at the location awaiting an opportunity to engage the rest of the terrorists.

After a life threatening wait of 15 minutes, the team sighted and brought down fire on two more ter-

rorists leading to neutralisation of a total five terrorists in the ambush.

Lt Colonel Rawat, Sena Medal, from the elite Special Forces was team leader of a mission oriented team, deployed along the LoC in J&K for conduct of counter infiltration and counter terrorist operations.

On receiving inputs about infiltration attempts by terrorists, he led his team to a 36 hours search and kill ambush, in a tough terrain and under difficult weather conditions near LoC.

He and his team killed four terrorists during the operation.

Havildar Alok, from Rajput Regiment 44 battalion of the Rashtriya Rifles, was deployed as a stop in the inner cordon during an operation last year in June in a village in J&K.

He challenged a group of terrorists who were trying to break the cordon and killed one category A++ terrorist despite coming under indiscriminate fire from them.

He further prevented other terrorists from escaping and facilitated his team to tighten the cordon.

His courageous action led to elimination of all four terrorists.

INDIA: PULLBACK PROCESS IS COMPLEX

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, AUG. 14

India on Friday termed the process of disengagement between Indian and Chinese troops at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) as a "complex" one that requires "re-deployment of troops by each side towards their regular posts on their respective sides of the LAC" but added significantly that this can be "one only through mutually agreed reciprocal actions".

While reiterating its expectation that China would "sincerely work" with India towards the objective of complete disengagement and de-escalation, New Delhi — in a clear message to Beijing — also reaffirmed that "the state of the border and the future of our ties cannot be separated".

Congress, BJP spar over Kamal Nath's I-Day speech

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, AUG. 14

The ruling BJP here on Friday took a jibe at former chief minister and Congress veteran Kamal Nath for addressing people on the eve of Independence Day, reminding him that August 14 is Pakistan's Independence Day.

The remark by BJP spokesman Hitesh Vajpayee has invited sharp reactions from the Congress which described

the observation as 'mischievous and unfortunate'.

Congress spokesman Narendra Singh Saluja cited the customary address to the nation on the eve of Independence Day by President of India and said he was surprised that the BJP leaders have no knowledge about Independence Day eve addresses by public figures. In his twitter post, Vajpayee wondered if Nath was going to wish Pakistan on its Independence Day by addressing people of MP on

the day.

Nath, in his address, recounted the achievements of his government during its short tenure of 15 months, saying he endeavoured to change the profile of Madhya Pradesh to turn the state into an investment destination.

Nath said his government that fell in March had initiated steps to establish 'gaushalas' or cowsheds in every panchayat, besides undertaking various social welfare measures.

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, AUG. 14

In what Assam police claimed its pursuit to make Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area free from illegal arms, security forces on Friday, a day before the Independence day, recovered huge cache of arms and ammunitions from Udalguri district of Bodoland Territorial Council.

Informing that the operation was conducted jointly by Udalguri and Guwahati police, security sources said that the cache of sophisticated weapons belonged to NDFB.

Guwahati Police Commissioner Munna Prasad Gupta, who is also the ADGP of the Special Branch of Assam Police, told reporters that based on source information, Guwahati police conducted a search operation

● **GUWAHATI POLICE** conducted a search operation along with Udalguri police at several places in Udalguri district and recovered the arms, ammunition and explosives.

● **NO ARRESTS** have been made so far in this connection and investigation is on.

along with Udalguri police at several places in Udalguri district and recovered the arms, ammunition and explosives on Thursday night.

The arms were recovered from multiple locations of Udalguri district where the police found them kept hidden underground.

However, no arrests have been made so far in this connection and investigation is on.

Earlier, police had also recovered a huge cache of

arms and ammunition in Kokrajhar, Baksa and Chirang district.

All these weapons belong to various faction of NDFB which recently surrendered in mass, security sources said, adding that NDFB factions were suspected to have not surrendered their entire inventory.

Meanwhile Assam is already on alert ahead of Independence Day. Several militant outfits of the region have given a call to boycott the Independence Day celebrations.

The Intelligence agencies have warned that these outfits may try to carry out subversive activities to make their presence felt.

The Army, Police and the paramilitary forces are intensifying their operations and carrying out frisking and checking at various parts of the state.

SOUR | TIES

Accused browsed internet to find out methods to execute plan

Kerala youth poisons family for property

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 14

A 22-year-old youth was arrested in Kasargod district of Kerala on the charges of poisoning his 16-year-old sister to death by feeding her ice cream laced with poison and also attempting to kill his parents using the same method.

The police said that the accused Albin Benny had allegedly planned to wipe

out the entire family for inheritance and lead a lavish life with his girlfriend.

While his sister Anne Mary Maria died on August 5, their parents Olikkal Benny and Bessy were also admitted to a hospital after they consumed the ice cream. However, both recovered.

The accused had earlier planned to mix rat poison with chicken curry to kill his sister. However, with the plan not working, the accused browsed the inter-

net to find out other methods for executing his plan and subsequently got the idea of mixing poison with ice cream.

Albin prepared the ice cream at home for carrying out his plan. After having ice cream, Anne Mary started vomiting and also had diarrhoea. She died in a local hospital and everyone suspected it to be death due to food poisoning.

However, the incident took a new turn when

Bhushan verdict unfortunate, say legal experts

New Delhi, Aug. 14: The Supreme Court's Friday verdict holding Prashant Bhushan guilty of contempt for his two derogatory tweets against the judiciary was termed as "unfortunate" by legal experts who said the activist-lawyer was only exercising his freedom of expression.

Senior advocates Vikas Singh and Arvind Datar said those tweets could have been inappropriate but does not attract the charge of contempt of court.

However, taking a different stand, senior advocate Ajit Sinha, said it was for the court to decide and there's no point making any comment on the verdict.

It was Supreme Court's domain, he said.

Singh, former President of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), said what the apex court ruled was not right.

"I do not approve what he said. It may be inappropriate, but it was a part of his free speech. It was not right what the court held today," he said.

Singh's view was shared by Datar, who termed the verdict as unfortunate, and did not agree with the finding that what Bhushan had said amounted to contempt of court.

It is unfortunate what the apex court decided today. Whatever he said was his freedom of expression and I do not think it amounts to contempt to court, Datar said.

— PTI

Yechury says verdict weakens democracy

New Delhi, Aug. 14: The Supreme Court judgement on Friday holding activist-lawyer Prashant Bhushan guilty of criminal contempt for his tweets has weakened India's Constitutional democracy, alleged CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury.

The SC held Bhushan guilty of criminal contempt for his two derogatory tweets against the judiciary saying they cannot be said to be a fair criticism of the functioning of the judiciary made in the public interest.

Holding that Bhushan attempted to scandalise the entire institution of the SC, the top court said, "If such an attack is not dealt with, with requisite degree of firmness, it may affect the national honour and prestige in the comity of nations."

"Whether one agrees with the precise formulation of Prashant Bhushan's tweets or not, the SC judgement convicting him of contempt is alarm-

ing. It brings into the ambit of contempt, bona-fide criticism of the role played by SC as a Constitutional authority," Yechury said.

"The judgement will prevent open and free discussion on the role of the Supreme Court in India's democracy. This weakens India's Constitutional democracy," he said in a series of tweets.

He also said that the judgement also brings within its scope, genuine criticism of its present day functioning and approach.

"Hitherto, such statements were protected speech under Article 19 (1)(a) under the Constitution and were not considered contemptuous," he said.

A bench of Justices Arun Mishra, B.R. Gawai and Krishna Murari said: "The tweets which are based on the distorted facts, in our considered view, amount to committing criminal contempt."

— PTI

Gehlot govt wins confidence vote

Jaipur, Aug. 14: The Ashok Gehlot government won a confidence vote in the Rajasthan Assembly on Friday, ending for now the threat triggered by a rebellion within the Congress ranks in the state.

The motion of confidence moved by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shanti Dhariwal was passed by voice vote, an expected win after the return of the 19 dissident Congress MLAs led by Sachin Pilot to the party-fold. During the discussion, Pilot said he will fight for the Congress as its "strongest warrior".

Replying to the debate on the motion, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot criticised the BJP, accusing it again of trying to bring down his government. "I will not let the government topple at any cost even if you make all attempts," he said.

Gehlot said the crisis had come to an end in a beautiful manner and this had hurt the Bharatiya Janata Party.

What was done in Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, Madhya Pradesh? Elected governments are being toppled and democracy is under danger," he said.

Without taking names, he alleged that a Union minister was involved in the conspiracy to topple his government, saying this had become clear after some audio clips surfaced. The indirect reference was to Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, who has earlier rejected the Congress allegation.

The BJP had earlier said it will move a no trust motion against the government, but called off the move after the Congress itself announced that it will seek a floor test.

Referring to his seat being changed - earlier he sat next to Gehlot as the deputy CM - Pilot said he is now placed at the 'border' between his party and the opposition in the House. "Who is sent to the border? The strongest warrior is sent," he said.

IN BRIEF
Powerful landslide kills 11 in Nepal

Kathmandu: Eleven bodies were recovered Friday after a landslide tore down a village in north-central Nepal, police said, as rescuers dug through mud to find another 27 missing. Mud and stone came hurtling down on the remote hillside village in Sindhupalchowk district in early Friday morning. At least 37 houses have been damaged by the disaster, local police official Madhav Kafle said. "Search and rescue is under way in coordination between the army, police and armed police force," Kafle said.

Ex-spy endangers Saudi royal secrets

Riyadh: A former Saudi intelligence czar's lawsuit in the US courts makes a host of incendiary claims, including that the powerful crown prince tried to have him killed, and threatens to spill more royal secrets. A source close to the Saudi royal court has shrugged off Saad Aljabri's 107-page lawsuit filed last week, insisting that the former spy chief himself faced serious allegations of corruption. But the case, lodged after Riyadh detained two of Aljabri's adult children without charge, threatens to become a public slanging match that could pull aside the curtain on the kingdom's Shakespearean power plays.

Virus delays SA circumcision rites

Port Elizabeth: South African 17-year-old Sinoyolo was looking forward to becoming a "man" this year. His uncle had made arrangements for him to travel to the mountains overlooking the South African city of Port Elizabeth in December for his initiation. Known in the local Xhosa language as "Ukwaluko", the secretive rite of passage marks a boy's transition into adulthood.

Don stokes false birther theory about Harris

Washington, Aug. 14: US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he had heard Democratic vice-presidential running mate Kamala Harris was not eligible to serve, stoking a false claim echoing the baseless "birther" theory he promoted about Barack Obama.

At a White House news conference, Trump was asked about "claims circulating on social media" that Harris was not eligible and whether he could say she met the legal requirements for vice-president.

"I heard it today that she doesn't meet the requirements. And, by the way, the lawyer that wrote that piece is a very highly qualified, very talented lawyer. I have no idea if that's right," Trump said.

"I would have assumed the Democrats would have checked that out before she gets chosen to run for vice-president," he said.

"But that's a very serious — you're saying that — they're saying that she doesn't qualify because she wasn't born in this country," but in Kenya. Even after Obama submitted a copy of his birth certificate that showed his birthplace as Hawaii, Trump alleged it was a fake. During his 2016 election campaign, Trump finally dropped his claims.

The reporter replied that Harris was born in the United States but her parents might not have been permanent residents at the time.

Trump appeared to be referring to a Newsweek op-ed by a conservative law professor wrongly claiming the California senator was not eligible to serve as vice-president



Donald Trump

TRUMP SAYS U.S. WILL COLLAPSE IF BIDEN IS ELECTED

Washington, Aug. 14: President Donald Trump has said that the US would collapse and become the world's laughing stock if the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee Joe Biden wins the November 3 presidential elections.

Trump said Biden's proposed policies were not good for the country.

"Today, we saw Joe Biden continue to politicise a pandemic and to show his appalling lack of respect for the American people. That's what it is. At every turn, Biden has been wrong about the virus, ignoring the scientific evidence and putting left-wing politics before facts and evidence," Trump told reporters on Thursday at the White House.

"The world will be laughing and taking full advantage of the United States if Joe Biden ever became President. Our country would collapse!" Trump said in a tweet.

or president because of the immigration status of her parents when she was born. —AFP

World leaders hail Israel-UAE pact as Palestinians cry foul**Israel pledges to suspend its planned annexation of Palestinian lands****Iran, Turkey lash out at UAE over deal with Israel**

Jerusalem, Aug. 14: World leaders voiced hope Friday that a historic deal between the UAE and Israel could kickstart moribund Middle East peace talks, even as the Palestinians and some of their allies denounced the move to normalise ties as a betrayal of their cause.

Announced by US President Donald Trump on Thursday, it is only the third such accord Israel has struck with an Arab country, and raised the prospect of similar deals with other pro-Western Gulf states.

The deal sees Israel pledge to suspend its planned annexation of Palestinian lands, a concession welcomed by European and some pro-Western Arab governments as a boost for hopes of peace.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed Israel was not abandoning its plans to one day annex the Jordan Valley and Jewish settlements across the occupied West Bank.

News of the agreement was broken by Trump, in a tweet hailing a "Huge breakthrough".

He said leaders from the two countries would sign the deal at the White House in around three

Tehran, Aug. 14: Iran and Turkey lashed out at their regional rival the United Arab Emirates on Friday over its decision to normalise diplomatic relations with Israel in a US-brokered deal, accusing it of betraying the Palestinian cause.

Iran's Foreign Ministry called the deal a "dagger that was unjustly struck by the UAE in the backs of the Palestinian people and all Muslims." Turkey said the peoples of the region "will never forget and will never forgive this hypocritical behaviour" by the UAE. The UAE, which has never fought Israel and has quietly been improving ties for years, said the

agreement put a hold on Israel's plans to unilaterally annex parts of the occupied West Bank, which the Palestinians view as the heartland of their future state.

But the Turkish Foreign Ministry said the UAE had no authority to negotiate with Israel on behalf of the Palestinians or "to make concessions on matters vital to Palestine." The agreement would make the UAE the first Gulf Arab state — and the third Arab country, after Egypt and Jordan — to have full diplomatic ties with Israel.

The Palestinians say the deal amounts to "treason" and have called on Arab

and Muslim countries to oppose it. The historic deal delivered a key foreign policy victory for US President Donald Trump as he seeks re-election and reflected a changing Middle East in which shared concerns about arch-enemy Iran have largely overtaken traditional Arab support for the Palestinians.

Trump has predicted that other countries in the region will follow the UAE's lead. Israel, the UAE and other Gulf countries that view Iran as a regional menace have been cultivating closer ties in recent years. Turkey has had diplomatic relations with Israel for decades. —PTI

Establishing diplomatic ties between Israel and Washington's Middle East allies, including the oil-rich Gulf monarchies, has been central to Trump's regional strategy to contain Iran, also an arch-foe of Israel.

Under the deal, Israel and the UAE "agreed to the full normalisation of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates", according to a joint statement on Thursday evening by Trump, Netanyahu and Sheikh Mohamed.

They added that Israel would "suspend declaring sovereignty" over occupied Palestinian West Bank areas — an idea proposed in Trump's controversial peace plan unveiled earlier this year.

Sheikh Mohamed stressed in a tweet that an agreement has been "reached to stop further Israeli annexation of Palestinian territories".

But Netanyahu insisted afterwards that he had only agreed to delay, not cancel, the annexations. The plans remained "on the table", he said.

On Friday the prime minister appointed his national security advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat to lead the negotiations with the Emiratis. —AFP

RESOLUTION ON CHINESE AGGRESSION AGAINST INDIA INTRODUCED IN US

Washington, Aug. 14: A bipartisan group of two influential US senators has introduced a resolution in the Senate, condemning Chinese military aggression to change the status quo at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India and calling for a diplomatic solution.

Indian and Chinese troops have been locked in a bitter standoff in several areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh since May 5. The situation deteriorated after the June 15 Galwan Valley clashes in which 20 Indian Army personnel were killed and an

unconfirmed number of Chinese soldiers died.

The resolution was introduced by Senator John Cornyn, Republican Senate Majority Whip, and Senator Mark Warner, ranking member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, on Thursday. Cornyn and Warner are

co-chairs of the Senate India Caucus. The Senate resolution follows the passage of a similar resolution by the House of Representatives as part of the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) last month. "As a cofounder of the Senate India Caucus, I know firsthand the importance of

a strong relationship between the US and India. I commend India's commitment to standing up to China and maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific. It is more important than ever that we support our Indian partners as they defend against Chinese aggression," Cornyn said. —PTI

COFFEE-BREAK**Your day today** By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam

Aries: Expect an altercation with your partner regarding his/her temperament. You'll be financially sound. Investments in secure schemes bring monetary profits.



Taurus: Your organisational skills help you at work. Professional obstacles won't deter you from your path. Change your lifestyle; make exercising a daily routine.



Gemini: Realise success depends on teamwork. Stay in touch with those you rarely meet. Motivate colleagues for training by leading from the front.



Cancer: Missing your partner's company makes you realise your love is deep-rooted. Resolving past differences with colleagues might be difficult.



Leo: Your guiding lamp in succeeding in business should be the desire to learn and excel. Avoid unproductive work. Stay off selfish friends and relatives.



Virgo: Recurring burning sensation with pain in the upper abdomen could cause anxious moments. Everything moves in right direction, and you shall find everything you've been seeking.

You share your b'day with

Jennifer Lawrence, American actress. She is best known for her roles in X-Men film series, Passengers, Red Sparrow and The Hunger Games series amongst others.



Libra: Be assured of profits. Routine assignments complete before deadline, bringing you mental peace. Expect to travel a lot this week for business. You might contract a seasonal disease; be careful.



Scorpio: Influential people help you complete long-pending assignments. Promote teamwork to inculcate a work culture that brings desired success.



Sagittarius: You'll try hard to work out romantic plans. Selfless service brings immense joy today. Success in love depends on how you value each other.



Capricorn: It's a good day to enjoy sound health, seek real-estate investments and sign new contracts. You'll automatically get everyone's support.



Aquarius: You may feel low about things that aren't aligned with your dreams. Don't assume your dreams are out of reach — work methodically and strive for greatness.



Pisces: Your colleagues envy your ability for perfection. You'll be in a strong, commanding position. Expectations are high from you. Some people's patience will be short; don't lose their goodwill. Friends use up much of your time today.

**WHEN THE TELEPHONE RINGS TOO EARLY**

You are enjoying your breakfast and reading the bridge column in paper. Suddenly the phone rings. You jump, then reach for the receiver. "Good morning." "Hi..." You recognize the voice of your uncle. He knows you have had some success at the game but secretly thinks that he plays better than you. He calls only when he has a tough problem. You write down the North-South cards in

today's diagram. Before you can protest about the bidding, your uncle tells you that West leads with the heart ace. You ruff and cash two top trumps, East discarding the club jack on the second. "How would you continue, nephew?" At least you have a chance to return to your breakfast while you think. Clearly East has the club ace; otherwise, West would

Word Mine

B
C
O
E
M
Y
H
O
N

TODAY'S RATINGS: 9 AVERAGE; 10 GOOD; 12 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used only once. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

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Print your answer here:

Saturday's Jumbles: WAIVE ODDLY WHINNY SMOGGY
Answer: The kids wanted to play baseball. Luckily, there were plenty of — GLOVES ON HAND

jumble

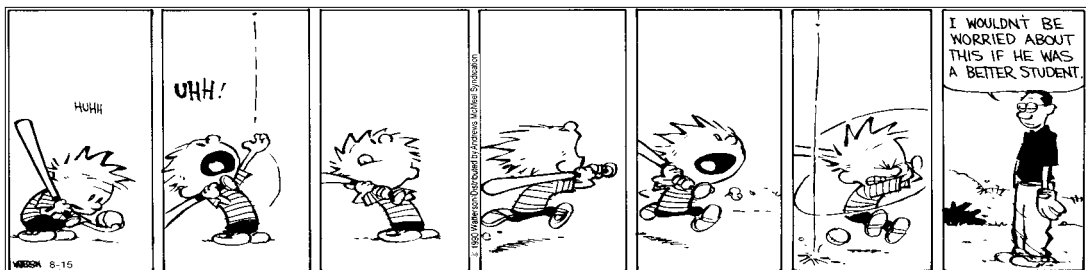
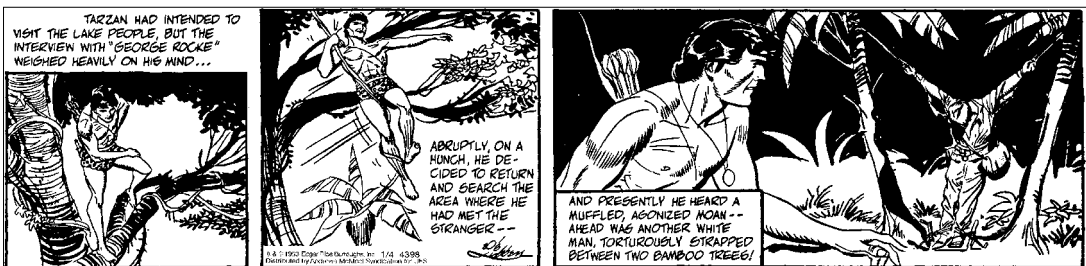
EUNOC
VGLAE
YOKEND
DLEAPD

The city is in your left-hand corner. I just wanted to say the great thing about you. When she signed her property over to become a park, they thanked her for her —

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson**THE WIZARD OF ID** | Parker and Hartsd**ARCHIE** | Bill Henry Scarpelli & Craig Boldman**BLONDIE** | Dean Young and John Marshall**ANDY CAPP** | Reg Smythe**TARZAN** | Edgar Rice Burroughs

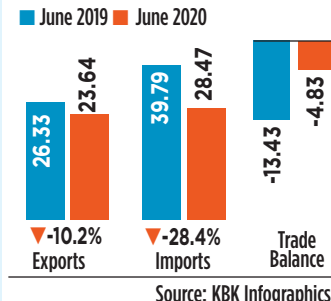
quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	37,877.34	-1.13
Nifty 50	11,178.40	-1.08
S&P 500*	3,376.01	0.08
Dollar (₹)	74.90	-0.07
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.87	0.00
Euro (₹)	88.43	0.09
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	53,691,730	1.35
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	44.71	-0.25
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.965	0.070
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.701	-0.015

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Merchandise trade

India's exports declined by 10.2% during July 2020 while imports registered a fall of 28.40% over the same month of the previous year



WPI inflation at -0.58% in July, food prices spike



The wholesale price-based inflation stood at (-) 0.58 per cent in July, even as food items turned costlier. WPI inflation in June was at (-) 1.81 per cent, while for the month of May and April it was (-) 3.37 per cent and (-) 1.57 per cent, respectively. Inflation was at 1.17 per cent in July 2019. Inflation in food articles in July stood at 4.08 per cent, as against 2.04 per cent in June. But fuel and power basket inflation fell 9.84 per cent.

Forex reserves climb \$3.62 bn to record \$538.19 bn

The country's foreign exchange reserves swelled by \$3.623 billion to a record high of \$538.19 billion in the week ended August 7, RBI data showed. In the previous week ended July 31, the reserves had increased by \$11.938 billion to reach \$534.568 billion. Foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, rose by \$1.464 billion to \$492.293 billion. Gold reserves were up by \$2.160 billion to \$39.785 billion.

Fortis plans to change name to Parkway

Fortis Healthcare said its board has given an in-principle nod to change the name of the company and its subsidiaries to 'Parkway' in relation to the hospital business, to disassociate itself from the erstwhile promoters. The Parkway brand belongs to the IHH Group, the parent of Northern TK Venture Pte Ltd, which is the promoter of the company with 31 per cent shareholding, Fortis said in an exchange filing.



Dividend in tune with Budget estimate of ₹60K cr Govt to get ₹57K cr from RBI

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, AUG. 14

The central board of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday approved a dividend transfer of Rs 57,128 crore to the central government for the accounting year 2019-20. The board has also decided to maintain the contingency risk buffer at 5.5 per cent as mandated by the Bimal Jalan Committee. The transfer of 2019-20 is sharply lower than last year's. Last August, the central bank had announced the highest ever dividend transfer of Rs 1.76 lakh crore to the government. The dividend then comprised Rs 1.23 lakh crore of annual dividend for the year 2018-19 and Rs 52,637 crore from its



surplus capital identified by a revised economic capital framework. The Jalan panel had also recommended that the interim dividend should be paid only under exceptional circumstances. The high-level panel, under the leadership of former RBI governor Bimal Jalan, was formed to recommend

ways to utilise RBI's excess cash reserves. The RBI usually transfers surplus to the government in August after closing its books in June. RBI and the government follow different fiscal years. RBI is in the process of aligning its fiscal year with the government's from April 1, 2021. The RBI earns its profits

primarily from the interest it gets from the purchase and sale of government securities, the interest earned from lending to banks and interest earned on bond holdings. The dividend was lower this year as the RBI earned less from bond holdings and did not have one-time gains to transfer as it did in the previous year. The transfer while lower than last year is in line with the amount that the government had budgeted for. The Union government had pegged Rs 60,000 crore as dividend from RBI in the Union Budget 2020-21. The government had budgeted a fiscal deficit at Rs 7.96 lakh crore for FY21. The fiscal deficit stood at 83.2 per cent of the FY21 budget target.

Bond yields rise to three-month high as market rules out more rate cuts

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, AUG. 14

Government bond yields rose on Friday after retail inflation spiked in July, ruling out expectations of more accommodation from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Traders expect the RBI to announce an open market operation (OMO) or a special OMO to address the nervousness in the bond market.

The yield on the 5.79 per cent bond due in 2030 rose five basis points to 5.95 per cent on Friday. The 10-year bond yield has risen

to the highest since May this year as the July Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation climbed to 6.93 per cent against the expectations of 6.25 per cent. Economists feel that we may be nearing an end to the RBI rate cut cycle. Yields and bond prices move in opposite direction. The yields have already been on the rise since the RBI kept rates on hold at a policy review last week amidst inflationary pressures against wider expectations of a rate cut. However, the higher retail inflation print was

primarily on account of higher food prices and some believe that a normal monsoon and a good kharif harvest could help the inflation cool off in the September-March period. "Retail inflation breaching MPC's upper band of 6 per cent in seven out of last eight months makes the task of MPC difficult. We believe the MPC will watch the inflation trajectory very carefully before taking the decision of further rate cuts," said Devendra Kumar Pant, chief economist at India Ratings.

"We maintain further scope for upto 50 bps cut in the current cycle but with the MPC's desire for statistical reflection of durably low inflation, near-term cuts may be ruled out. Irrespective of the policy stance, the RBI's yield curve management in the form of outright OMOs and operation twist will continue," said Madhavi Arora, economist at Edelweiss. Retail inflation has breached the RBI's upper tolerance limit of six per cent for four consecutive months and seven out of eight months.

PE/VC FUNDS STRIKE \$1.7 BN BUYOUT DEALS IN JULY

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

Private equity and venture capital funds are finding the current economic slump as an opportunity to buy controlling stakes in quality businesses at attractive valuations. July saw the highest value and number of buyout deals in 11 months.

In July, six buyout deals valued \$1.7 billion were inked and across different deal types, buyouts recorded the highest value of investments. July recorded the highest value and number of buyouts in 11 months, says a monthly report by IVCA-EY.

Between January and June this year, only 14 buyouts had happened and that too for a total transaction value of \$794 million. Buyout deals in the month of July were almost \$1 billion more than the entire value of H1 2020.

Among the major deals, Majesco was fully bought over by Thoma Bravo for \$594 million. KKR Asian Fund III picked up 65 per cent in J B Chemicals.

Smartphone use up 50% in small cities

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

Smartphone usage in cities and towns beyond tier-I increased 50 per cent during lockdown and the usage for productive work saw a growth of 100 per cent, finds a study.

During the lockdown period between March 25 and May 31, users in tier-II and beyond depended on their smartphones more for professional and personal purposes, says a study conducted by CyberMedia Research (CMR) with Tecno Mobile. As many employees were working from home, there was 100 per cent more usage of smartphones for work-related purposes compared to pre-Covid times.

Further, 84 per cent of consumers who responded to the survey depended on their smartphones for accessing information on government schemes, weather patterns, and market linkage information for farm produce.

Among them, 83 per cent used their phones for content consumption, includ-

ing creating and consuming short-form videos, music and videos. A similar share of respondents used phones for online banking, shopping and utility bill payments.

Beyond work, consumers spent increased time on their phone for consuming content, including video OTT, audio OTT and gaming.

Around three in every seven users started some new activities and hobbies during the lockdown period. For instance, 21 per cent of the users learnt new skills, 19 per cent listened to music, while 18 per cent took up new hobbies on their phones.

One in three parents depended on their smartphone for facilitating their kid's online education.

"The smartphone is a key daily driver for consumers living in cities and towns beyond tier-I. We call this the 'Aspirational Bharat'. What the survey highlights is how smartphone usage is changing, during lockdown, said Prabhu Ram, head, Industry Intelligence Group, CMR.

When investors back media and democracy

STEPHEN ENGLE & KARI LINDBERG
AUG. 14

Jimmy Lai, the media mogul who owns the pro-democracy *Apple Daily* newspaper, warned investors not to buy his Next Digital Ltd media empire's stock because the company's fundamentals don't justify its recent rally. Moments later, the shares resumed their climb in Hong Kong.

"People with very little money just want to express their anger and express their support for our company," Lai said in an interview with Bloomberg Television on Friday. "Everybody bought a little bit. That became a lot of it and jacked up the price. I was telling people 'don't do it, don't do it, because you're going to lose money'."

The warning from Lai, who was released on bail Wednesday after becoming the most prominent pro-democracy activist to be arrested under Hong Kong's new national secu-



Jimmy Lai

city law, fell on deaf ears. Next Digital shares climbed as much as 42 per cent Friday morning, resuming the roller-coaster ride the holding company's been on this week. Lai denies he broke the law.

The shares are still up almost 400 per cent for the week and last traded at 44 H.K. cents, although that's far below their intraday high of HK\$1.96.

Hong Kong's Securities and Futures Commission has requested brokers to submit client information and recent transaction records related to Next

Digital's shares, the Hong Kong Economic Journal reported, citing unidentified brokers. On Tuesday, the regulator warned investors to exercise "extreme caution" with the stock and that it would closely monitor trading activity in Next Digital.

In response to the report, Lai said he doesn't know what the SFC might be trying to do but said the people who recently bought the shares were just expressing support for the company, which owns Apple Daily. The paper's offices were searched this week by the police.

Separately, Lai ruled out taking advantage of Next Digital's share surge by issuing new stock at inflated prices, saying that would be a "very dishonest way" for the company to raise money. Lai also said he has no plans to divest his shares in his media empire, whose business "will go on without me" should he be convicted.

—Bloomberg

Mutual funds offloading large-caps for mid-caps

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, AUG. 14

Mutual funds were net sellers of equity assets worth Rs 9,195 crore in July as the stock market peaked to a five-month high from the March lows, as per data provided by the Securities and Exchange Board of India.

A portfolio analysis of top mutual funds like SBI and HDFC Mutual Fund show they sold part of their large-cap stockholdings in their portfolios in July and redeploying the money in the mid-cap and other promising large stocks.

Even smaller mutual funds said they reduced holdings in some stocks due to higher valuations, superlative returns obtained and on view that the business had changed.

This month too mutual funds have been net sellers of equity assets worth Rs 3,857.87 crore, as on August 14.

Debt mutual funds saw a net investment of Rs 31,897.85 crore in July and Rs 5,946.51 crore in August so far.

Since many large-cap stocks' prices peaked due to abundant liquidity despite their weak fundamentals due to the Covid-19 impact, fund managers have started to shift their allocation to potential underperforming mid-caps, leading to a rally in the broader market of late.

Atul Kumar, head-equity, Quantum Mutual Fund, said, "July turned



out to be another good month for Indian equities. S&P BSE Sensex performed significantly better than developed market indices such as Dow Jones and S&P 500 in July.

"Position in a healthcare stock was trimmed during the month owing to higher valuations and the stock giving superlative returns. The scheme is also selling its position in a power utility stock as its view of business has changed."

Mid-cap stocks are still looking attractive to fund managers and they still see many winners in the broader market compared to their large-cap holdings.

"S&P BSE Sensex performance was slightly better than emerging markets overall. It gained 9.05 per cent as compared to 9.01 per cent return by MSCI Emerging Market Index in US dollar terms. Small and mid-cap indices' gains lagged that of the narrower benchmark S&P BSE Sensex. S&P BSE Mid-cap Index made a gain of 5.5 per cent during the month. Return on

BSE Small-cap Index was 5.3 per cent," Kumar said.

According to reports SBI Mutual Fund has reduced holdings in SBI, Reliance Industries, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, HDFC Life and raised holdings in mid-caps like Union Bank, Federal Bank, SJVN, Indian Hotel and NHPC.

Navneet Munot, chief investment officer, SBI Mutual Fund, in a letter to SBI Mutual Fund investors says his funds are sticking to a bottom-up approach for stock picking as there are real risks because of a retail frenzy, plateauing economic activity, a potential fiscal cliff in the US and uncertainty around the US presidential elections.

HDFC Mutual Fund, the Second largest fund house in the country also sold shares of Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ITC, Axis Bank, Vodafone Idea and Aurobindo Pharma among others while the fund house picked up shares of Wipro, Infosys, Sun Pharma, Tata Steel and CDSL, among others.

Shriram City Union cuts loans to small biz by 99%



Yalamati Srinivasa Chakravarti

GANESH NAGARAJAN
AUG. 14

Shriram City Union Finance Ltd, a shadow lender backed by Apax Partners, is turning cautious on its key customers as the coronavirus pandemic rolls businesses.

Loans to small businesses, including grain merchants, which make up a little over half of the company's borrowers, plunged 99 per cent to Rs 20 crore in the June quarter from a year ago. While there's demand for small-ticket loans, the financier prefers to wait for more clarity on their recovery, according to CEO Yalamati Srinivasa Chakravarti.

"Most of the businesses have not come back to their normal level of sales," Chakravarti said by phone. "I have to look at their cash flows much more closely than earlier."

The bulk of Shriram City's customers seek loans of less than Rs 15 lakh, and are probably among the most vulnerable in an economy forecast to shrink for the first time in decades.

The government's massive stimulus package announced in May was aimed at helping small businesses, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi prepared to restart the economy. Earlier this month, the RBI allowed financiers to restructure certain loans by granting extensions of as long as two years with or without a freeze on repayments.

Chakravarti said he is against recasting loans as the practice leads to problems down the road. He predicts people will resume borrowing as states start lifting lockdowns.

—Bloomberg

New app helps millions in villages find city jobs

SARITHA RAI
AUG. 14

When India went into lockdown in March, millions of migrant labourers found themselves out of work, penniless, and far from home. In the following weeks, these people hit the road en masse to return to their villages. Now, as the country starts to reopen, those millions are reluctant to go back to cities until they can be certain there's work. Nirmith Parikh says he can help.

Parikh, a 32-year-old with an MBA from Stanford, has created Apna, which he envisions as a sort of LinkedIn for non-English-speaking, non-affluent Indians. When these people move to the cities, they typically find work via small-time employment agencies or on street corners for some-

one to hire them on daily wages. With Apna, job seekers enter their name, age, and skills to generate a virtual "business card" that's passed out to employers in Bengaluru, Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune, with more cities on the way. "A digital business card is a confidence booster for many who've only seen their super bosses carry business cards," Parikh says. "We want to give millions of bottom-of-pyramid workers a career path."

Apna says 1.25 million people have signed up since its launch in February, and companies such as Amazon.com, BigBasket, and HDFC Bank have hired workers via the app. It's divided into dozens of sections, from low-skilled jobs such as carpentry, tailoring, and cooking, to higher-level



Nirmith Parikh: His Apna app is giving job-seekers a virtual business card

positions in accounting, lab work, call centres, and nursing. The app is available in Hindi and Kannada, since English isn't needed. So far, the company has no revenue, but Parikh envisions job seekers paying the equivalent of a few pennies for skills courses or English lessons, and he plans to charge companies for arranging interviews. Apna (ours in Hindi)



Sonu Sood: The actor is backing Pravasi Rojgar, used by more than 500 companies

faces a growing number of rivals. The Delhi city government set up an online marketplace for job seekers, who can call prospective employers via its app. Bollywood actor Sonu Sood is backing Pravasi Rojgar (migrant employment), used by more than 500 companies in construction, health care, logistics, and a dozen other fields to recruit workers from villages. And ad firm Lowe

Lintas in July introduced Kaam Wapasi (return to work) to connect rural candidates with urban jobs. "Migrant workers aren't ready to return to cities without a sense of clarity and control," says Prateek Bhardwaj, the ad agency's chief creative officer.

The idea for Apna grew out of Parikh's experience hiring a welder a decade ago, when he got hundreds of résumés in response to an ad on a job portal. He invited about 20 people in for interviews, but only five showed up and most of those knew little about welding. "The system was broken," he says. As he began developing the idea in earnest last year, he took a job as an electrician in a factory in Ahmedabad, 300 miles north of Mumbai, where he chatted with workers on chai breaks and spent evenings

talking with people in nearby slums. "I tried to look at it from the candidate's point of view," he says. A key takeaway: Low-skilled workers don't need résumés, an off-putting requirement on many job portals. Last summer he raised \$3 mn from Lightspeed Venture Partners and Sequoia Capital. "Job startups need to cater to the deep underbelly of the economy, about 250 million Indians doing non-farming," says Lightspeed partner Vaibhav Agarwal.

Parikh spent the next six months with five coders, and by December Apna was ready. Soon after the app went live, the pandemic hit and Parikh sensed that his idea was more relevant than ever. In July, he says, Apna facilitated 800,000 job interviews, and August is on track to double that.

—Bloomberg

DECCAN Chronicle

15 AUGUST 2020

Green shoots of peace in Israel-UAE accord

A landmark accord between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, brokered by Washington, comes on the back of an Israeli assurance that it would suspend annexing more areas of the occupied West Bank. Israel and UAE are to soon establish full-scale diplomatic relations but the Palestinians, who have been seeking a homeland in an elusive two-State solution to a long running feud, are miffed as there is very little in it for their greater cause. Iran, predictably enough, is upset at what clearly is the formalisation of the building of an axis of powers in the region against a Muslim country in which there is place even for the Jewish nation. The primary gainer in the deal would be Israel, which gives up only further annexation — viewed as unnecessary by a majority of its people — as it gets recognition in the contentious Middle East cauldron where religion was a clear divide in which Israel was the traditional outcast even amid Sunni-Shia tensions.

The other gainer from a historic deal that would have been unthinkable when Yasser Arafat's Palestine was facing its existential crisis is the US President Donald Trump who scores a rare foreign policy success after fruit-

Iran and Turkey's diatribe that all Muslims have been betrayed in the deal may be a tad exaggerated because Middle East countries have been reshaping their approach to Israel for years

lessly cavoring with North Korea and then grappling with China on a trade deal whose chances were totally undermined by the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. Seen as an election gift served up by his son-in-law and plenipotentiary Jared Kushner, the world will be hoping that a sincerity of purpose may have dawned at last for a region of many conflicts to experience real peace. The deal is, however, founded on assurances from a beleaguered Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who seems to be trading his territorial ambitions at least temporarily for friendship. The deal may, however, bolster his survival in a shaky coalition in the face of severe opposition

in which his own people have been referring to him sardonically as "Crime Minister" in demonstrations every day outside his home.

Iran and Turkey's diatribe that all Muslims have been betrayed in the deal may be a tad exaggerated because Middle East countries have been reshaping their approach to Israel for years. Iran and many of its proxies in the region, including Hezbollah and Hamas, besides Syria and Yemen are the losers now. The Palestinian cause has lain on the backburner even as petroleum-rich countries have been dealing secretly with Israel for its cybertech, agricultural and health care expertise. It is moot whether Israel abandoning its "land for peace" policy would facilitate a grand entente in which the Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, would return to the negotiating table. There has been no clear road map for this in recent times and the fear is the optics that looks so good in a US election year may fade in months. It would be in the interest of durable peace in the Middle East were UAE's recognition of Israel to lead to other Arab states following suit though a more just two-State solution seems as far away as ever. What has happened is at best the sighting of green shoots of peace.

Argue, decorously

The death of Congress spokesperson Rajiv Tyagi due to a heart attack after attending a TV discussion on Wednesday has triggered a debate on the necessity of bringing in some civility to what has been happening in TV studios of late. People who have watched Indian television debates now would hardly vouch that they became better informed after watching them. Instead, they would hear what they loved to hear, and not the other side of the argument. This cacophony with little clarity offers an antithesis to journalistic principles, and is hence unfortunate.

Democracy demands that the people, the ultimate arbiters, have access to the right information so that they can take informed decisions on issues concerning them and the nation. Mass media is one of the sources through which they get such information. Discourses, whether on television or in other platforms, help this process, and hence are extremely important.

Freedom of the media is not expressly mentioned in our Constitution, but Article 19(1)(a) which deals with the right to speech and expression of citizens stands guarantee to it. This article identifies the right of the media with that of the citizens, and hence inseparable, making it one of the strongest safeguards for media freedom. Hence it is incumbent on the media to be responsible while enjoying this freedom. Independent media has a role only in a democracy, and it is for the survival of its own self-interest that the media must strengthen the democratic processes by being democratic in its conduct of business. The Indian media has traditionally opposed governmental intervention, and rightly so. It has opted for self-regulation instead. It is time the organisations which have a moral authority on the channels exert themselves and help discussion rooms return to their basics, instead of making them gas chambers for participants and the idea of democratic disagreement.

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Subhani



India's mood is sombre: Is Modi govt out of sync?



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

As the years pass on, Independence Day will be more of a day of gaiety than one of solemnity that it had been in earlier years. But there is no reason to complain that people have forgotten the great freedom struggle, its heroes and heroines and the enormous sacrifices they had made. Independence Day has also been a grim occasion for many of those who had to leave behind everything they had and cross over from Pakistan (or what is now Bangladesh) to India, and from India in the other direction. The wounds have healed to a great extent and those affected by Partition are now picking up the courage to look back with a certain equanimity the mad rage of riots and inter-communal strife that came with Partition and independence. This year's Independence Day will be without its customary celebratory spirit. It is going to be a rather grim Independence Day because of the coronavirus pandemic, that has affected nearly a quarter million Indians, of whom nearly 50,000 died, and more than 20 million people across the world, of whom three-quarters of a million died.

The nationwide lockdown that had to be imposed in late March this year to contain the pandemic caused much havoc in the lives of the poor, especially the migrant workers who live in shanties in our big cities and eke out a living far from their impoverished hearths in the villages. The lockdown has brought the economic wheels to a halt and took away the livelihoods of hundreds

of thousands. The economy will take a while to pick up and it will mean hard times for the poor as well as the middle classes.

The country had at the same time to confront the Chinese military threat in eastern Ladakh, in the Galwan Valley along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and 20 of our soldiers had to lay down their lives in a violent faceoff with China's People's Liberation Army on June 15. The Indian Army has stood its ground and talks between India and China at the military and diplomatic levels are taking place, and as Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat has indicated, the dialogue would be a long drawn-out one because of the complexity of the situation at the LAC.

All that we can say of the response of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to the unfolding of these stressful and sometimes traumatic turn of events is that they tried to cope with it as best as they could, though there have been acute shortcomings in policy and administrative responses. The relief packages provided by the government in terms of the supply of free foodgrains through the public distribution system and the cash, what little of it that there was of it, that was deposited in the bank accounts of many of the poor, the elderly and women, and the farmers, and the medical facilities for quarantine and treatment that the administrations tried to provide were a great help. People are indeed grateful to the government though they are acutely aware that they will have a tough time in picking up the threads of their pre-

The BJP is possibly yet to learn that a sweeping parliamentary majority may not be sufficient to do what is right for the country

Covid life and that they must do it on their own.

It is the governments that are less than clear-eyed, less than tough, and less than honest compared to ordinary people. And this Independence Day, it is the immature swagger of the governments, especially that of Prime Minister Modi and his colleagues, that will strike the wrong note in these troubling days. But neither the Prime Minister nor his colleagues are willing to respect the sombre mood of the Indian public with the constant public banter of their tenuous achievements, displaying utter insensitivity which is a sign of the arrogance of those in power. The Modi government seem to believe that the help they offered to people during the Covid-19 crisis is largesse doled out by generous rulers. And they expect the people to be grateful to the government.

Mr Modi and his colleagues are only too willing to use the Covid-19 crisis and the Chinese threat in Ladakh as a cover to divert attention from their mishandling of major issues like Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, and the economy in general. In the flush of last year's electoral victory, the Modi government had assumed that it can indulge in its favourite game of strongarm tactics, and brush aside public opinion in Jammu and Kashmir. It is now learning that the abrogation of Article 370 did not solve the Kashmir problem, and that humiliating the people of the state by bifurcating it and reducing it to a Union Territory was

not a sound idea, and that there is no alternative to the political process. The further abrogation of Article 35A with the dishonest intent of changing the demography of the Kashmir Valley has angered the people of Jammu as well because they do not want to be swamped by the intended demographic change. Similarly, the CAA was flaunted as the whim of a "Hindu state" which will protect Hindus in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, while the Assamese are totally opposed to the settling of Hindu refugees from Bangladesh in the state. And the BJP was playing to the Assamese Hindu identity to win the Assembly elections.

The Narendra Modi government has been flailing its hands for the past six years to make the economy hum, but it found itself committing all the unforced errors possible, including the November 2016 demonetisation, and alienating one Reserve Bank of India governor after another. Even the incumbent, Shaktikanta Das, who wanted to be accommodative to the government's demands, including the transfer of the RBI's huge reserves to the treasury, finds himself in a tight spot. Mr Modi does not seem to get the message that he has not set the economy free from government interference and that the ideal of "ease of business" is yet to be realised fully.

It is a hard lesson that Mr Modi is not willing to learn - that you could win a parliamentary majority but it does not ensure that the whims and fancies of a popular government do not strengthen the country in any way, including Mr Modi associating himself with the construction of the Ram Mandir at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

SMART CHOICE

Apropos your editorial *Kamala Harris; A smart choice by US Democrats* (Aug. 14). The Indian origin Senator is acceptable to a large section of the population and it is believed that she brings strength in a difficult situation like Covid-19 pandemic. She will be seen as a champion to fight forces in conflicted times. For official India, her views are strong like CAA and home policies but on the whole it brings cheer to the people of our country that US Vice President candidate is an Indian.

V.V. Suresh
Vellore

TAX REFORMS

IN THIS PART of the world, direct tax is defined as a fine for doing well. There is no gainsaying the need for simpler procedures in filing tax returns. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has rightly recognised it and unveiled measures such as faceless tax scrutiny, honouring the honest and so on. But at the same time, one feels, the tax rates should be low to put more disposable income in the hands of the tax payer. The middle class citizens, in fact, pay income tax through the nose, thanks to huge deductions from their salaries in January, February and March. Lowering the rates of taxes will help enhance the savings and capital formation and thereby economic development of the country. Even if people spend a huge portion of their income on various goods and services, the aggregate demand will get a push leading to employment, income and growth. The long and the short of it, the government need not bank on tax proceeds for economic development.

S. Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

APROPOS THE ARTICLE (*Why Ayodhya was not like battle for freedom, Aug.14*). It exposes how Modi Sarkar has come out victorious in constructing Ram Temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya by playing the trump card called 'Ram bhakti', with the top court scripting the verdict. As said, his 'liberation theology' this is a grand deception in the name of his projecting himself as a devout Hindu.

E.S. Chandrasekaran
Chennai

Viswanath Jandhyala



Don't celebrate India's surprise trade surplus

The Covid-19 pandemic is set to leave around 170 countries with lower GDP per capita by the end of the year. The IMF forecasts a sharp contraction of almost five percent in global economy during the year, as compared to a growth of 2.9 per cent in 2019. The downward revision of 8.2 percentage points from its January 2020 projection (of a growth of 3.3 per cent) is a major revision over a very short period by any standards. This only goes to show the enormity of the threat that the world is facing today from coronavirus, which could significantly alter the way business is conducted, trade across borders takes place and people engage with each other. In line with global trends, the IMF has slashed India's growth projection to -4.5 per cent for 2020 which is a substantial 10.3 percentage points lower than the January 2020 outlook of 5.8 per cent.

Subdued growth prospects, as a result of the global pandemic, have had adverse effects on demand, both global and domestic, thereby also leading to a slump in trade. UNCTAD, in its recent report, esti-

mated that India's trade impact due to the Covid-19 outbreak could be around US \$348 million. India is among the top 15 most affected countries on account of manufacturing slowdown in China that is disrupting world trade. As per the estimates, exports across global value chains could decrease by around US \$50 billion during the year in case there is a two per cent reduction in China's exports of intermediate inputs.

India's exports and imports saw a positive growth in February 2020, but plummeted in the last four months, recording steep contraction. With the average rate of contraction in imports of 53.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2020-21 being much larger than the average rate of contraction in exports, which was 36.3 per cent, India incidentally recorded a surprise trade surplus in June 2020.

The trade surplus of US \$800 million witnessed in June 2020, based on the provisional estimates of the ministry of commerce and industry, though subject to revision, is important on several counts. It represents a trade surplus for India after a gap of 18 long years, with the

last surplus recorded in January 2002, with a modest surplus of US \$10 million. A year prior to that, in February 2001, India had accounted for its largest trade surplus, of US \$238 million, in the last 30-year period prior to May 2020.

For a country that has been traditionally dependent on imports to meet its domestic demand, and has not witnessed an annual trade surplus for the last several decades, to have recorded a trade surplus of value close to a billion US dollars, is a matter to cheer though not an occasion to celebrate, given the circumstances under which it was achieved. One must also recognise the fact that the country has witnessed its largest trade deficit to the tune of US \$190 billion in 2012-13, and more recently in 2018-19 recorded a deficit of US \$184 billion.

The surplus in trade witnessed last month, could be attributed to several factors. While major commodity groups such as gems and jewellery, readymade garments of all textiles, petroleum products, electronic goods, engineering goods, and plastic, among others, recorded negative growth during June 2020 vis-à-vis June 2019, major

commodity groups including iron ore, rice, organic and inorganic chemicals, drugs and pharmaceuticals, have in fact recorded positive growth during the same period, with partial resumption of domestic industrial activity and opening up and relaxations in many countries.

Major import commodities including gold, coal, coke and briquettes, petroleum crude and products; electrical and non-electrical machinery, and electronic goods, have shown negative growth in June 2020 over the corresponding month of last year. The global Brent price for crude (\$/bbl) has decreased by almost 37 per cent in June 2020 vis-a-vis June 2019.

Partially reflecting a slump in domestic demand, while non-oil imports witnessed a contraction of 45 per cent, non-oil and non-gold imports recorded a negative growth of 41 per cent in June 2020 as compared to June 2019, contributing to the trade surplus. Gold imports during the first quarter of FY 21, witnessed an astonishing contraction of almost 94 per cent.

The circumstances under which India recorded its trade surplus

last month leave no room for complacency. To be able to continue to witness surplus in external trade, along with a pickup in domestic demand and industrial activity, several concerted efforts and reforms would be needed. Addressing supply and demand disruptions would necessitate ensuring an enabling environment and kickstarting domestic manufacturing activity, especially through MSMEs on a large scale. The clamor call by the Prime Minister to reduce import dependency and to strive towards an *Atma Nirbhar Bharat* is an effort in this direction. A change in mindset possibly leading to large scale local production, sourcing and acceptance of non-essential discretionary items, which are otherwise imported, only due to their intrinsic brand value, could also perhaps be a game changer in the medium to long run, with countless spillover benefits for the domestic economy.

The author is an economist with India Exim Bank. The views expressed here are personal.

SHORT TAKES

UK opens stadia to fans gradually

London: British sports fans will be allowed in to some pilot events from this weekend to test the safe return of spectators, with the government hoping bigger crowds can start attending venues from the start of October.

Around 300 spectators will attend the final two days of the World Snooker Championship at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre this weekend, the British government said on Thursday.

It added that more pilot events will follow with a view to reopening competition venues for sports fans, with social distancing measures in place from October 1.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson called off previously planned pilot events with some fans in attendance during the first two weeks of August. However, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said, "we can now make further careful progress on recovery with allowing audiences back for indoor performances, fans back at sports events and the reopening of more Covid-19 secure leisure businesses." — AP

Lahiri one under, Atwal yet to finish

Greensboro: Returning to action after more than five months, Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri shot a one-under 69 at the Wyndham Championship while Arjun Atwal was two-under in his unfinished first round, halted by inclement weather.

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RIZWAN GUIDES PAK PAST 200 ON DAY 2

Southampton, Aug. 14: Mohammad Rizwan scored a gritty, unbeaten half-century to guide Pakistan past 200 against an increasingly frustrated England before the teams were forced off because of bad light before Tea on the second day of the second Test on Friday.

Pakistan were 215-8 at the enforced end of the session, with Rizwan on 53 and Mohammad Abbas on 2. England looked like wrapping up the Pakistan innings after star batsman Babar Azam (47) edged behind a brilliant ball from Stuart Broad that seamed and squared up Babar.

That made the score 158-6 and two more wickets fell for 18 runs, with Yasir Shah (5) flashing at a delivery from Jimmy Anderson and edging to give wicket-keeper Jos Buttler another catch before Shaheen Afridi (0) was run out by Dom Sibley at the non-striker's end after a mix-up.

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Brief Scores: Pakistan 215/8 in 84.3 overs (Babar Azam 47, Mohammad Rizwan 53, Mohammad Abbas 2, James Anderson 3/48) vs England.

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London, Aug. 14: Manchester City finally have a marquee victory in the knockout stages of the Champions League after seeing off Real Madrid to reach the last eight, but they want much more in Lisbon over the next week with Pep Guardiola insisting they cannot be satisfied by beating the 13-time winners.

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LIVE ON TV

Champions League quarterfinal: Manchester City vs Lyon from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD.



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SHORT TAKES

UK opens stadia to fans gradually

London: British sports fans will be allowed in to some pilot events from this weekend to test the safe return of spectators, with the government hoping bigger crowds can start attending venues from the start of October.

Around 300 spectators will attend the final two days of the World Snooker Championship at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre this weekend, the British government said on Thursday.

It added that more pilot events will follow with a view to reopening competition venues for sports fans, with social distancing measures in place from October 1.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson called off previously planned pilot events with some fans in attendance during the first two weeks of August. However, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said, "we can now make further careful progress on recovery with allowing audiences back for indoor performances, fans back at sports events and the reopening of more Covid-19 secure leisure businesses." — AP

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CITY TAKE ON LYON FOR A SPOT IN SEMIS

London, Aug. 14: Manchester City finally have a marquee victory in the knockout stages of the Champions League after seeing off Real Madrid to reach the last eight, but they want much more in Lisbon over the next week with Pep Guardiola insisting they cannot be satisfied by beating the 13-time winners.

It took City eight seasons in the Champions League to beat a former winner over two legs, but disposing of Madrid both home and away, pre and post football's shutdown showed a maturity and ability to handle pressure situations that Pep's men have lacked in previous Champions League campaigns.

— AFP

LIVE ON TV
Champions League quarterfinal: Manchester City vs Lyon from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD.