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Elderly man crushed between 2 RTC buses

Driver reversed bus into passenger at Rathifile terminus

NAVEEN KUMAR I DC
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27

A 73-year-old man, Durga Prasad, was crushed to death as he was caught between two TSRTC buses at Rathifile in Secunderabad on Sunday afternoon.

"He was crossing the road from the front side of the bus after he got down from it. Another RTC bus that was ahead of this bus took a reverse, and the man was crushed between the two vehicles," police said.

Durga Prasad had alighted from a bus at Rathifile at around 1.15 pm and was crossing the parked bus from the front, Gopalapuram inspector Sai Eshwar said.

"Another bus, bearing the number AP 11 Z 7412, driven by Md Salem, 53, a permanent TSRTC driver, took a reverse. This bus came so close to Durga Prasad that he was crushed between the vehicles. He died on the spot," the inspector said.

Prasad had got down from a 20P route number bus (AP28 Z 4873) that plied between Nampally and Secunderabad. The one that took the reverse and crushed him was on route 107 Y/R, scheduled for a trip from Secunderabad to Dilukhnagar. The Rathifile is a busy TSRTC terminus. It had onsite RTC staff to guide passengers and ensure their safety. But, no one was around when this mishap took place, police said.

Durga Prasad's wife passed away a few years ago and the couple did not have children. He was now living with his brother at Kavadiiguda. "He got down at the terminus to change buses to head out in the city," the inspector said.

Based on a complaint from the deceased's brother, a case was booked under section 304-A of the IPC (death by negligence) and the errant driver was placed under arrest. The body was shifted to Gandhi Hospital for post-mortem.

The driver was not

RTC finding out where was conductor during accident

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27

The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) said it will take action against those responsible for the accident at Rathifile bus station on Sunday in which a 73-year-old man was crushed to death between two buses.

A senior official from the Secunderabad RTC depot told *Deccan Chronicle* that an investigation was on. "RTC takes such accidents very seriously," he claimed.

The official said they were also inquiring as to where the conductor of the bus was during the mishap.

The official said the vic-

SHORT TAKES NEW PUBLIC HALL IN AMEERPET

Hyderabad: Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav on Sunday inaugurated a community hall in Greater Leelanagar, Ameerpet, located alongside the wall of Begumpet railway station. Yadav said the residents should use the new facility for community activities, sports and games. He planted a sapling and asked GHMC to provide water so that plants and trees in the colony can be watered regularly.

Present were P. Venkat Rajam, president of the resident's welfare association, GHMC officials Pravinya and Vamsi Krishna, among others.

ACCOUNTANCY BODY GETS NEW CHAIRMAN

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27**

Chandra Sekhara Reddy Punugoti was elected chairman of the managing committee of the Institute of Cost Accountants of India-Hyderabad for 2021-22. He was elected at the annual general meeting on June 26 along with P. Kalyani as vice-chairperson, K. Someswara Babu as secretary, C. Sirisha as treasurer, M. Venkateswarulu, Lavanya K.V.N., Khaja Jalal Uddin, Hima Vidya S., and Lavanya Kanduri as managing committee members.

DISTRICT ADMIN STEPS UP AFFORESTATION

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27**

Forest and district administration officials said at a meeting in Aranya Bhavan on Sunday that restoration should take place in all the blocks registered as forest areas. For this purpose, the forest protection committee under the collectors should prepare an action plan. Work on about half the 109 urban forest parks have been completed and the rest should be completed as soon as possible, special chief secretary Shanti Kumari said. Officials also decided to intensify the speeds of plantation.

BIKER DIES IN MISHAP ON TANK BUND

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 25**

A two-wheeler rider died after ramming his bike into a concrete ready mix container on Tank Bund road on Sunday morning.

According to the police, the deceased, identified as Srikanth, was heading towards Koti when the accident occurred. Srikanth fell on the road after hitting the container.

"He sustained serious injuries and was rushed to a hospital in an ambulance by other commuters, where the duty doctors pronounced him dead," a police press release said, adding that a case was registered and the body was shifted to Osmania General Hospital mortuary for the postmortem examination.

Rains inundate many areas, lakes overflow

More rain forecast for state; low-lying areas affected

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27**

Heavy rains lashed Hyderabad and other parts of the state on Sunday, bringing forth complaints of inundation of some areas around lakes.

In Indiranagar Community Hall, Tarnaka, recorded 91.8 mm of rainfall till 8.30 pm, followed by Madhusudan Nagar Community Hall at 83 mm. Statewide, the highest rainfall was recorded at Habshipur in Siddipet district which received 160 mm of rainfall.

A warning for the next 24 hours issued by the Indian Meteorological Department-Hyderabad said thunderstorms accompanied by lightning were very likely to occur at isolated places all over the state.

"There is a low-pressure zone over south coastal Andhra Pradesh. Under its influence the state has been receiving rains. Many districts in the state have reported rainfall. We predict that the weather would continue for the next 24 to 48 hours," said IMD-H director Dr K. Nagarathna.

So far this season, the state has received overall rainfall of 172.7 mm as against the normal of 114.3 mm. This means that the state has on average received 51 per cent more rainfall. Following Sunday's sudden rains, people too to social media platforms to both comment on the weather as well as complain about the civic conditions. On Sunday Twitter was abuzz with pictures of water-logged roads.

"The roads are in a pretty bad shape due to which water from all the surrounding areas flows into this area. Request you to resolve this ASAP as this is the need of hour for us. With a small rain this is the case (sic)," said one user, Sourabh N. The rains did not lead to any power disruption. "There might have been heavy rainfall in parts of the city but since there were no wind



A passer-by helps push a two-wheeler that was stuck in rainwater at Habsiguda, Hyderabad, during heavy rain on Sunday. — **GANDHI**

City nalas left unsilted as GHMC delays payments

**MADDY DEEKSHITH | DC
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27**

Just about 40 per cent of the city's nalas have been desilted this year, even as the monsoon is upon us, down from about 56 per cent in the last two years. This could result in inundated roads and low-lying colonies.

This is the outcome of the GHMC delaying payments to contractors, who are keeping away from the desilting work.

Earlier, desilting was a pre-monsoon affair that began in April and ended in May. On grounds that silt has been choking free flow of water in the nalas even when there are no rains, the civic body decided to conduct desilting of nalas throughout the year.

Surprisingly, the GHMC, which managed to carry out 55.87 per cent nala desilting during the two pre-monsoon months during 2017, has removed

only 39.18 per cent of silt after introducing annual nala desilting. The change, apparently, has not served any purpose.

Unlike removal of encroachments, desilting works face no resistance from either citizens or public representatives. But it is the civic body apathy which is delaying the desilting.

A senior GHMC official, on condition of anonymity, admitted that contractors and engineers were deliberately shying away from nala desilting work. He claimed that the contractors have been resorting to this for seeking specific relaxations in desilting works, which would benefit them.

Admitting that there has been a certain delay, the official said desilting has picked up pace only in the month of May. They have managed to desilt 2.23 lakh cubic metres of sludge in a record time, against 2.45

lakh cubic metres sludge removed last year.

The official maintained that desilting works on 256 drains with an estimated cost of ₹44.45 crore have been completed. "Till date, 221.04 km of storm water drains have been desilted using machinery. Silt from 663.11 km of drains has been removed manually, totalling 884.15 km of desilted drains in the city," he said.

However, he pointed out that silt removed is very less when compared to the previous year. This could increase the intensity of inundation with the onset of the monsoon. The civic body official also admitted that there has been a delay in payments due to various factors. The same has been brought to the notice of state government, which has assured that a permanent solution will be found at the earliest.

we did not have to cut power," said an electricity official.

Areas around some water bodies were inundated. A report said areas adjoining the

Kapra lake, colonies of DLR Enclave and Rajarajeshwari witnessed flooding as the irrigation department failed to complete works on the lake in time.

There was silt oozing out from drains on to the roads in some areas, making travel a scary ordeal as there was a chance that cars and bikes could skid.

Cases below 1K after 3 months

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27**

For the first time in three months, new Covid-19 cases fell below the 1,000 mark on Sunday with the health department confirming that 748 fresh cases were reported from across the state. Sunday's number represents a single day's fall by 280 cases, against 1,028 cases reported on Saturday.

The department reported that it had conducted 37,022 fewer tests compared to Saturday.

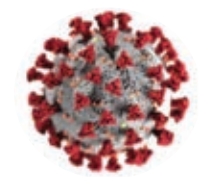
Even though cases are falling, Director of Public Health Dr G.

● **THE DEPARTMENT** reported that it had conducted fewer tests.

Srinivasa Rao reiterated in the Covid bulletin that everyone must continue to wear face masks while in public spaces. "Not wearing a mask is punishable," he reminded

The statement assumes significance because after reopening all services to pre-Covid normal levels, people, including politicians, bureaucrats, and even health department officials, have not been following the rule. So are many people all over the state.

DAILY COVID BULLETIN DATA



Update: Cases | Deaths

Fresh Cases	748
Deaths	8
Tests Done	81,405
Active Cases	14,302
Total Cases	6,20,613
Total Deaths	3,635

Highest New Cases

GHMC (Hyderabad)	121
Khammam	61
Karimnagar	50
Ranga Reddy	49
Suryapet	44

Lowest New Cases

Adilabad, Kamareddy, Asifabad	0
Nirmal	1
Medak	4
Narayanpet, Jogulamba	
Gadwal, Gangaon	6
Nizamabad	7



Chief guests Dr Nageshwar Reddy, chairman of the Asian Institute of Gastroenterology, (left) and Dr G.S. Rao of Yashoda Hospitals (right) at a function where Dr Shantha Kumari (centre) took over as president of the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Society of India (FOGSI), at HICC in the presence of a select group in Hyderabad on Sunday. — **DC**

Dr Shantha Kumari takes charge as FOGSI chief

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27**

Dr Shantha Kumari on Sunday took charge as the 60th president of the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Society of India (FOGSI), thus becoming the first-ever president of the organisation from both Telugu states.

On the occasion, Dr Kumari recalled her journey to becoming the president of the organisation and thanked her supporters and mentors for their guidance throughout. She explained the mission and vision of FOGSI under her presidency through the upcoming projects, 'FOGSI for all, always' and 'Dheera: Stop violence against women'.

Under the Dheera project,

an initiative undertaken by Dr Kumari and her team aim at sensitising obstetrician-gynaecologists, the police and the public, while partnering with men in society to say no to violence against women.

In her presidential speech, Dr Kumari said during her presidency, FOGSI would aim at achieving reduction of maternal morbidity rates during childbirth and also allow all gynaecology practitioners to practice with dignity under protocols.

Dr Kumari will be accompanied by her team consisting of vice-presidents Dr Alpina Verma, Dr Basab Mukherjee, Dr Bipin Pandit, and Dr Kabita Bapat. Dr Madhuri Patel will become the first woman secretary-general of

FOGSI in its 70-year-long history and Dr Swarna Khadilkar as the deputy secretary-general. Dr Parikshit Tank will take over as the treasurer for FOGSI 2021-22. Dr Niranjan Chavan as the joint treasurer and Dr Aruna Samant will be the joint secretary.

During the event, the outgoing president Dr Alpesh Gandhi also enlisted the work done under the FOGSI team for 2020-21 during the tough pandemic year, paying tribute to at least 18 members who lost their lives to Covid-19 in the line of duty. He congratulated the FOGSI members on the government's decision to allow Covid-19 vaccines for pregnant women on the recommendation of the organisation.

TRAFFIC CURBS FOR PV STATUE UNVEILING

**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27**

The traffic police will be diverting traffic from 8.30 am to 1.30 pm on Monday to facilitate the unveiling of the statue of P.V. Narasimha Rao on his birth anniversary at the Necklace Rotary and paying of floral tribute at PV Gyan Bhoomi.

Traffic from Panjagutta and Raj Bhavan Road towards Khairatabad flyover will be diverted towards Shadan and Nirankari Junction.

Traffic from Minister Road towards Sanjeevaiah Park will be diverted towards Buddha Bhavan at Nallagutta bridge.

Traffic from Tank Bund towards Sanjeevaiah Park will be diverted towards Karbala Maidan at Sona Bai Mosque. Traffic from Mint Compound towards Necklace Rotary will be diverted towards Khairatabad. Traffic from Telugu Talli to Necklace Rotary will be diverted towards Iqbal Minar.

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Mahaveer Marg, Masab Tank, Hyderabad-500 028
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REIMANN | HYPOTHESIS

One million dollar as reward upon providing a solution

Prof. solves 160-year-old math problem

**HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27**

It was a chance discovery, says Dr Kumar Eswaran, a mathematical physicist in the city, who claims to have found the solution to the Riemann Hypothesis, a millennium problem in mathematics. It was waiting for proof for 161 years, Dr Eswaran told this newspaper.

The Riemann Hypothesis, touted to be number one out of the top 10 unsolved mathematical problems, was designated as a millennium problem in 2000, with a reward of \$1 million from Clay Mathematics Institute, Oxford, England, for anyone who could solve it. "It was, in fact, back in 2016, that I first gave proof for the formula improved by the great mathematician Georg Friedrich Bernhard Riemann in the 1800s. I had put it on the web for open review and downloads after

working on it for about six weeks. During 2018-19, I gave several lectures on the proof," Dr Eswaran, 74, who is with the Sreenidhi Institute of Science and Technology, Hyderabad, said.

The Riemann Hypothesis, in the simplest possible explanation, relates to how prime numbers are distributed. This has been a problem that has challenged mathematicians for generations. According to mathematicians who have grappled with the hypothesis, proof of the Riemann Hypothesis would have far-reaching consequences for number theory and for the use of primes in cryptography, and would automatically lead to the proof of numerous theorems which are dependent on the truth of this hypothesis.

In Dr Eswaran's methodology, the 'factorisation sequence of numbers' is shown to be like a 'random



Dr Kumar Eswaran

walk', he said. "This method used was actually not just number theories. I had to use techniques from random variables and probability as well," Dr Eswaran added. An expert committee of scientists including Dr T. Ramasami, former secretary, Union ministry of science and technology, Prof. P. Narasimha Reddy, executive director, Sreenidhi Institute of Science and Technology, Prof. M. Seetharaman, former professor and Chair, department of theoretical

physics, University of Madras, Prof. V. Srinivasan, former professor and dean, School of Physics, UoH, Prof. K. Srinivasa Rao, former senior professor, Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, Prof. M. D. Srinivas, senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Studies, Prof. Vinayak Eswaran, department of mechanical and aerospace engineering, IIT Hyderabad, and Dr Adindla Suma, associate professor, department of computer science, Sreenidhi Institute of Science and Technology conducted an open review of the proof for a year from February 2020 to conclude that Dr Eswaran had indeed proved the Riemann Hypothesis.

The committee invited more than 1,200 mathematicians to participate in an open review of the present proof. The review was open in the sense that the referees had to be willing to

have their names and institutional affiliations openly revealed, so that nothing is done anonymously, and nothing can be said that would not be openly available for all other experts to see. Dr Eswaran said in his experience this had been the most fair and robust way to get the proposed proof assessed. The expert committee then examined the comments of the reviewers and the responses of the author. In their final meeting held on May 16, the committee concluded that Dr Eswaran's proof of the Riemann Hypothesis is correct.

The committee also ruled that the proof, the referees' comments, and the author's responses in their entirety, without any redactions, should be published in the form of an e-book and made available to the public at large and then followed, a few months later, by a hard copy.



TURN STORY

CADRE CRAZY
ON REVANTH:
KOMARAIAH

FROM PAGE 1

The appointment created euphoria among the party cadre in several places. "Party workers instantaneously celebrated his appointment by bursting crackers and distributing sweets without any leaders' involvement," said Kaushik Reddy, a Congress leader and arch rival of former minister Etala Rajendar.

Echoing his views, but with caution, Peddapalli DCC president Komaraiah said party cadre developed an emotional connect with Revanth Reddy and were crazy about him for his fight against the Chandrashekar Rao family but his success would depend on his ability to take the genuine Congress workers along with him. "If he restricts himself to leaders who like him migrated to the Congress from other parties, mainly the Telugu Desam, he would end up as a disaster," said Komaraiah.

CM SEEKS OPPN
SUGGESTIONS
ON DALITS

FROM PAGE 1

"The government is ready to implement phased wise action plan to remove social and economic problems of Dalits," the CM said and urged the all-party meeting to give suggestions, above party politics, to make Dalits move forward in society with confidence.

He said, "7,79,902 SC farmers have 13,58,000 acres of agricultural land. We have to find out of this how much is assigned land. How much is still there and how much lost? We have to get the statistics and identify lands, which have no water facility, and lands having no other facility. If need be, the state machinery should spend 10 to 15 days to compile statistics on SC lands. They should keep ready the economic action plan. The government is ready to spend ₹35,000 crore to ₹40,000 crore for the next to three to four years on this."

He said with projects like Kaleshwaram, there was an increase in agriculture-based employment. In urban areas, Dalit youth explored possibilities in industrial and technology sectors. Solutions should be found separately for the problems of Dalits living in rural and urban areas separately.

He said sanitation workers would be given a salary model like the PRC as was requested by the all-party meeting. He said the possibility of reservations to Dalits in the private sector would be examined.

Through the Dalit Empowerment Programme, beneficiaries would be given assistance without bank guarantees. Plans would be prepared following the policy of Centre for Dalit Studies for the their welfare and development.

SC welfare minister Koppula Eswar, Rythu Bandhu Samithi chairman Palla Rajeshwar Reddy, MPs Venkatesh Netha, P. Ramulu, P. Dayakar, MLCs M.S. Prabhakar Rao, D. Rajeshwar Rao, Goreti Venkanna, MLAs Balka Suman, D. Chinnaiah, Hanmanth Shinde, S. Ravishankar, Rasamayi Balkishan, Kranthi Kiran Chanti, K. Manik Rao, K. Yadaiah, M. Anand, G. Sayanna, G. Balraju, V.M. Abraham, Ch Lingaiah, G. Kishore Kumar, T. Rajaiah, A. Ramesh, Congress Legislature Party chairman Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, S. Venkata Veeraiah, Syed Ahmed Pasha Quadri, CPM state secretary T. Veerabhadram, CPI state secretary Ch Venkat Reddy, former ministers Kadiam Srihari participated in the meeting.

Cleansing Musi



As part of Musi beautification and revival project, workers remove hyacinth and other weeds from the water at Nagole, Hyderabad, on Saturday.

— P. SURENDRA

A new JAC to expose
CM's 'betrayal' in offing

Panel yet to be named, inspired by Prof. Jayashankar

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27

Leaders from across the political spectrum are understood to be slowly gravitating towards creating a Joint Action Committee (JAC) to work in Telangana state with the sole aim of "exposing the great betrayal of the spirit of statehood agitation" by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao.

Claiming to be inspired by the philosophy of Telangana ideology the late Prof. A. Jayashankar, several leaders had their first formal meeting to create the JAC, "comprising members from the RSS to the RSU, who

solely wish to make people of Telangana aware how their struggle and sacrifices for statehood have not led to the fulfilment of their truest aspirations".

The first meeting of the as-yet unnamed panel, going presently by the name of Udyama Akanshalu Committee (committee for aspirations of struggle), was attended by former minister Dr A. Chandrashekar, former MLA Yennam Srinivas Reddy, former JAC convener and MLC K. Swami Goud, former minister Dr G. Vijaya Rama Rao, one of the founding members of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) Gade

Innaiah, former MLC Dilip Kumar, former minister and ex-MP D. Ravindra Naik, former student leader and journalist T.A. Vittal and Jagadish Yadav among others.

"We are going to bring together all leaders and intellectuals who fought for Telangana on a platform and reach out to people. After achieving statehood, we were betrayed. The promise of development of Telangana was not met and only a handful of people benefitted. We fought for true democracy, and instead, a dynastic rule was thrust on us. An emergency like situation has been created, where

individual and civil liberties have been robbed and we have a government which is neither accountable nor answerable. The atrocities against Dalits are unabated. Not just common people, even their representatives, MLAs and ministers are treated as secondary citizens by those in power," the committee members said.

"We will democratically oppose this oppression. We will involve all people across the state in the new movement till we free Telangana of un-democratic forces," they said, adding, "We will soon come out with our programmes and schedule of events."

Political strategy seen
in CM-Congress meetDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 26

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao meeting Congress MLAs at Pragathi Bhavan on Friday does not seem to have struck the right chord with many Opposition leaders — of both the Congress and the BJP.

The Pragathi Bhavan meeting has not just raised political heat in the state but also led to differences of opinion among Congress leaders with some reportedly expressing their views in support of the meeting while some others opposing it saying such meetings would send wrong signals to people and confuse voters especially at a time when the crucial Huzurabad Assembly bypoll is round the corner.

Congress leaders on Saturday held a demonstration at Gandhi Bhavan to protest against increasing attacks on Dalits under the TRS regime. After the programme, the issue of Congress MLAs meeting the Chief Minister report-

edly came up for discussion.

It was learnt that Congress leader N. Uttam Kumar Reddy expressed his displeasure over party MLAs meeting the Chief Minister. But CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka and MLA D. Sridhar Babu strongly defended the meeting arguing that there was nothing wrong in meeting the Chief Minister on people's issues.

A few Congress leaders reportedly argued that party MLAs walked into the trap laid by Chandrashekar Rao ahead of the bypoll to send a message that the TRS and the Congress stood united to defeat the BJP. They reminded the party leadership of the BJP leaders falling into the trap of Chandrashekar Rao by meeting TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao at Pragathi Bhavan in April seeking the TRS not to contest bypoll for the Lingojiguda division in the GHMC. The BJP lost the seat to the Congress even after the TRS abstained from

contesting as per the BJP's request. They expressed fears that the same would be repeated in Huzurabad.

This meeting created fissures in the BJP then forcing party high command to order an inquiry and take action against errant leaders.

The BJP which accused the TRS and the Congress of striking a "political deal" to defeat BJP's Etala Rajendar in Huzurabad.

BJP insiders say the meeting clearly proved that the Congress was the B-team of the TRS and both had joined hands to defeat the BJP. They said attacks on Dalits were nothing new under the TRS regime over the past seven years and Chandrashekar Rao was unwilling to meet Opposition leaders on these issues despite several requests, but giving appointment all of a sudden to Congress MLAs within minutes on Friday showed "well-planned political strategy" of the Chief Minister.

Another 'note for vote' scam
in Revanth case: KomatireddyDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27

Bhongir MP Komatireddy Venkata Reddy has alleged that the Congress central leadership has sold out the Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee's president post.

The veteran Congress leader's comments came on Sunday after his relentless efforts to become PCC president turned futile and A. Revanth Reddy, his colleague in the Lok Sabha from Malkajgiri, was named for the post.

"This is another note-for-vote scam," he said, referring to the infamous case against Revanth Reddy.

Revanth Reddy, when he was in the Telugu Desam,

had been caught red-handed while bribing a nominated Anglo-Indian legislator to get his vote in the Legislative Council polls in 2015.

However, the Bhongir MP said he has no plan to quit the Congress and would instead focus his energy on strengthening the party in Nalgonda and Bhongir Lok Sabha segments. He would undertake a "padayatra" from Ibrahimpatnam to Bhongir and meet the grass-root Congress workers.

Speaking to the media after returning from Delhi, Venkata Reddy accused the party state incharge Manickam Tagore of recommending Revanth Reddy's name after taking a "huge bribe".

He saw Telugu Desam president Chandrababu Naidu's hand at Revanth Reddy's elevation. "I have all the proofs and will expose them during the next session of Parliament," he said.

The MP said he was disappointed to see a political turncoat at the helm of the PCC. "The real Congress worker is defeated," he said, adding that he had taken a vow to not visit Gandhi Bhavan, the state Congress headquarters.

The Congress leader said he would not meet any leader coming to him for a patch-up. In a sarcastic way, he wished that the new team would succeed in securing the deposit for the party candidate in the upcoming Huzurabad bypoll.

POLICE REACH
OUT TO MAOISTS
OVER REHABDURGA PRASAD SUNKU
| DC
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27

Telangana police are trying every trick in the book to persuade extremists who have gone underground to shed violence and join the mainstream of society. As part of this, officials are also approaching families of Maoists and urging them to counsel those who had strayed into extremism to return.

Earlier, police appealed to Maoists, who were infected with Covid-19 to surrender so that they could get better medical facilities. It is yielding some fruitful results as quite a few Maoists have surrendered.

The Covid death of Telangana state committee secretary Hariubhan alias Yapa Narayana has created panic in the cadre, a development which police is using to persuade extremists to join the mainstream.

On Saturday, DCP of Malkajgiri, Rakshitha K. Murthy visited the families of both Alwal Chandrahass and Palapati Radha.

Speaking on the occasion Murthy said, "Nothing can be gained through violence. Leave the forest and join public life. We will provide all care and medical treatment in case of any ailments. Do not lose lives unnecessarily in the pandemic period. Rehabilitation will be provided on surrender."

On June 26 Rama-gundam police commissioner V. Satyanarayana visited the residence of Mallojala Venugopal Rao, Maoist central committee member, and met his mother Madhuraamma. After enquiring about her health and well-being, he urged her to appeal to Venugopal Rao to give up arms and join the mainstream.

Police officials visited families of Maoist central committee members Kankanala Raji Reddy and Mula Devender Reddy apart from others, requesting them to release a statement urging their children to quit the party and start life afresh.

BJP HITS OUT AT
KCR, SAYS HE'S
ANTI-DALIT KCRDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27

The state BJP has alleged that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao was once again trying to cheat Dalits in the name of Dalit empowerment.

The party's SC Morcha and Dalit leaders, including former MP Vivek Venkataswamy, Morcha state president Bhasha and others met in the party office after boycotting the all-party meeting convened by Rao on Sunday.

BJP leaders discussed about the number of times the state government had gone back on its promises to the Dalit people, and to other communities, as well.

Venkataswamy told the media later that Rao remembers Dalits only at election time and later leaves them totally in the lurch.

3rd Death Anniversary

P. NEAL VICTOR
Administrative Officer RTA
DOB: 13-09-1967 DOD: 28-06-2018
Those we love don't go away, they walk beside us every day. Unseen, unheard, but always near; still loved, still missed and very dear.
Inserted by: Family and Friends

16th Death Anniversary

SMT. KAMALADEVI VANDEMATHARAM
(Ex-Principal : Agarwal Girls Junior College)
Inserted by : VANDEMATHARAM FAMILY
VANDEMATHARAM BAL VATIKA
Begum Bazar, Hyderabad.
Ph: 9849045914

11th ANNIVERSARY

DEVARSHI MAHADEV
D.O.B: 28-06-2011
"DAD, wherever you are, you are gone but you will never be forgotten."
"WE MISS YOU DAD"
Inserted by: D. Manitha, D. Barmanand, D. Meena, D. Jayanthi, D. Santosh.

SAD DEMISE
With profound grief and sorrow we regret to inform about sad demise of our beloved

Dr. ATMAKUR. VASUDEV SINGH
Left for his heavenly abode on 29th May 2021.
Fondly remembered by Family Members

8th ANNIVERSARY

GOLLAPALLI ANURADHA
D.O.B.: 20-10-1982 D.O.D.: 28-06-2013
"You are far from us, but still your presence & memories are always with us as they will never fade"
ANU We Love you & Miss you
Inserted by: FAMILY MEMBERS

1st DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR DAD
The memory of the righteous is blessed Prov 10:7

DANAM HENRY BHASKARAM
D.O.B: 11-05-1934 D.O.D: 28-06-2020
H/o, Late Lima Sulochana
Your Life was a Blessing
Your Memory a Treasure
You are Loved Beyond Words
Missed Beyond Measure.
Inserted by: Daughters, Son, Grand Children & Family members.

1st Death Anniversary
"The memory of righteous will be a blessing" - Prov. 10:7

Mr. D.H. Bhaskaram
DOB: 11.05.1934 DOD: 28.06.2020
(Retd Teacher from SVES High School, Vidyanagar)
S/o Late : Danam Malis.
We love you and miss you dearly
Inserted by: Children & Grand Children

10th Death Anniversary

JAKKULA ARUNA SREE
D.O.B: 11-08-1971 D.O.D: 28-06-2011
Ten years have passed but not a single day goes without thinking about you. The absence of your love and warmth is always felt and greatly missed. We miss you a lot Mom and love you very much. You live in our hearts forever.
Inserted by: Dr. J. Vijaya Rao (Husband), Daughters: Dr. J.L. Pravalika, J.L. Ravali & Family Members

1st Death Anniversary
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Timothy 4:7

Patakula Jaya Prasanna Rao
S/o Late - P. SIMON
Senior Member of C.S.I. Wesley Church, Mushenabad.
DOB: 14.12.1940 DOD: 28.06.2020
Your life was a blessing, your memory a treasure, you are loved beyond words and missed beyond measure.
Inserted by: FAMILY MEMBERS

God said to solomon "there was none like before you, neither ... shall arise like unto you" 1 King 3:11, 12

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Dr. PERUMALLA. E. SOLOMON
(Rtd. D.E.O.)
DOB: 07-12-1934 DOD: 28-06-2013
Inserted by: Wife: P. Marina Solomon
Son: Rev. Dr. P. Svaraj Kumar (U.S.A.)
Daughter-in-law: Rev. Vidya Ranjani (U.S.A.)
Grand Sons: P.S. Shane Israel Shastri P.S. Schwartz Mc Darrell & Family Members
Phone: 7842529185, 9177539798

BIRTHDAY REMEMBRANCE

SHRI. K.B. NARAHARI RAO
DOB: 28-06-1978 DOD: 18-10-2010
"Loving Parents: Smt.K.Bhuvaneshwari K. Bala Krishna (Bansilalpet)
Inserted by: Sisters - Brother-in-Laws N.Anuradha - Late N.Ravi Kumar A.Sukadha - Ashwin Chandra M.Kalpana - M.Raj Kumar Narun and Sandesh (Sister's, Sons)
Ph.No.9290458835

SECOND DEATH ANNIVERSARY
Those who are righteous will be long remembered - Psalm 112:6

IN FOND REMEMBRANCE

KAVOORI SUKH DARSHAN
RETD. DEPUTY D.E.O.
DOB: 14-11-1946 DOD: 28-06-2019
Inserted by: Mrs.K.MADHURAJ (WIFE)
SON: Mr.K.VIJAY ANAND
DAUGHTERS: Mrs.K.VENNA DEVI & Mrs.K.MARADHAN (GRAND CHILDREN KEVIN, KETHAN, LEAH, RIO, ROY, RAIDEN

PODU | CULTIVATION

Sheer political pressure trumps protection of forests

State vacillates on land rights issue of tribals

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27

The fate of 'Podu' or shifting cultivation in land belonging to the forest department continues to be on the boil in Telangana state, particularly with repeated promises by the state government that it would solve the issue, once and for all. At last count, in the middle of 2020, as many as 15,558 claims on 53,566 acres of forest land under Podu by tribals were pending with the state government.

That apart, another 3.27 lakh acres of forest land are under illegal occupation, thanks to those who filed 91,942 claims for Podu rights never being

informed that their applications were rejected.

This takes nearly four lakh acres, the forest land that is currently under illegal occupation in the state. Technically, forest land occupied by people can no longer be transferred to private individuals following the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Dwellers (Record of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. But communities that have occupied forest land in anticipation of becoming owners of the land are being slowly legitimised by local administrations that are providing roads, power and water supplies, making it impossible to

remove such illegal occupations.

Meanwhile, repeated promises by several ruling TRS leaders that Podu land rights issues will be 'solved', and demands from leaders from other parties that those lands be given to the tribals, has reportedly resulted in further encroachments on forest land in several districts.

The start of the monsoon season has led to a fresh bout of encroachments in several districts, it is learnt.

Field-level officials of the forest department say they are under enormous pressure from local politicians, including MLAs and ministers, not to evict

such illegal occupants.

It also learnt that the one foolproof method of protecting forest land, digging of trenches by the forest department along forest land boundaries, has come to a halt following off-the-record oral instructions to stop the activity. The trenches are primarily designed to prevent tractors, bullock carts or cattle from crossing the forest boundaries.

Reportedly a lot of frustration prevails among officials, and field level staff tasked with protecting the forests. Several admit in private that they are being asked to turn a blind eye to forest encroachments and instead focus on planting

saplings under Haritha Haram. This tree plantation drive by the state government while adding to the number of trees in the state, does precious little for forest cover as general tree cover is distinctly different from forest cover, the latter capable of sustaining entire ecosystems including wild animals.

Officials say that while Haritha Haram is good, the sad part was that they are tasked to protect one or one-and-year-old saplings that are mostly planted outside of forest areas, while having to watch silently when trees that are 20 years or older are cut with impunity by timber smugglers in forests.



IN BRIEF

Kashmiri found dead in Chandigarh

Srinagar: A 22-year-old Kashmiri student was found dead in a hostel room of a government-run medical college in Chandigarh, triggering protests by his family members and a large number of mourners attending his funeral back home on Sunday. The family of the deceased Aamir Hassan Mir said that he was found dead in mysterious circumstances in his hostel room by a fellow student during the intervening night of June 25 and 26. It claimed that the local police has after registering a case said that the death of the BSc Nursing student who was doing internship in Government Medical College and Hospital, a medical school and a tertiary care hospital, at Chandigarh is 'unnatural'.

Rave party busted in Maha, 22 held

Mumbai: The Nashik Rural police on Sunday raided two private bungalows in Igatpuri and detained 22 persons including 12 women, a former tv reality show, few small time models and actresses among them, from an alleged rave party. According to Nashik Rural police sources, the bungalows where raids were conducted are situated around 50km from Nashik. During the raids the police found people present there allegedly consuming drugs, liquor and hookah in a birthday party. Amongst detained women, at least five are small-time actresses and one had taken part in a TV reality show.

TMC men extort blind woman

Berhampore: A visually impaired tribal widow has become the victim of extortion by two Trinamul Congress workers who allegedly took ₹80,000 from her as cut-money from the amount she had received to build her house under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) in Murshidabad of WB. Parbati Hembram, the woman of Belsanda village in Bokhara gram panchayat II, was given ₹1.20 lakh in two installments under the PMAY recently. She claimed, "Two local TMC workers, Kausar Sheikh and Mujibur Sheikh, accompanied me to the bank. I withdrew the money with their help since I can not see. Later the duo extorted the amount from me."

Another BJP leader joins TMC

Kolkata: Close on the heels of West Bengal BJP Alipurdia district chief Gangadhar Prasad Sharma's defection to the Trinamul Congress, another key district level functionary Madan Mohan Choubey of the saffron party in union minister Babul Supriyo's Lok Sabha constituency: Asansol changed his colour along with more than three dozen other leaders and a record number of rank and file on Sunday. Choubey, who was the general secretary of BJP Asansol district joined the TMC along with 38 other leaders in presence of state law minister Moloy Ghatak at Rabindra Bhavan auditorium.



Defence minister Rajnath Singh interacts with veterans in Leh on Sunday.

— PTI

Rajnath meets leaders from Ladakh to hear admin views

Majority of outfits in Kargil want reunification with J&K, statehood restored

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, JUNE 27

Ahead of a planned meeting between leaders of a group of political parties and groups of Kargil and the Centre in New Delhi early next month, defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday met the elected representatives of both Kargil and Leh districts, which comprise the Union Territory of Ladakh to ascertain their views on the demand for more legislative, executive and financial powers and administrative issues related to the landlocked region.

While a Leh-based group of political and socio-religious entities and political parties have along with BJP MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal sought a separate legislature for the Ladakh UT, a vast majority of similar outfits in Kargil want reunification of Jammu and Kashmir and restoration of its statehood as existed on August 4, 2019.

● WHILE A Leh-based group of political and socio-religious entities sought a separate legislature for the Ladakh UT, a vast majority of similar outfits in Kargil want reunification of Jammu and Kashmir and restoration of its statehood as existed on August 4, 2019.

ty of similar outfits in Kargil want reunification of Jammu and Kashmir and restoration of its statehood as existed on August 4, 2019. The Centre has invited leaders of Kargil's key political and social groups which formed an alliance called Kargil Democratic Alliance after J&K was stripped of its special status and bifurcated nearly two years ago for holding talks with Union minister of state for home G.

Kishan Reddy in New Delhi on July 1.

Reports from Leh said the defence minister, who began a three-day tour of Ladakh earlier Sunday, had discussions with elected representatives of Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils of Leh and Kargil in Leh. The meeting was also attended by senior UT government officials. It is learnt the representatives of the two councils apprised Mr Singh of the "demands, aspirations and various issues" of their respective regions.

Earlier, the defence minister, while addressing about 300 Army veterans at Rinchen Auditorium Hall in Leh, said the Prime Minister has fulfilled the commitment given to armed forces veterans by granting "one rank one pension". He assured

them his ministry's resolve was to take care of all defence personnel "the way they take care of or have taken care of the country".

Mr Singh is due to inaugurate infrastructure projects constructed by the Border Roads Organisation and interact with troops deployed along the borders with China and Pakistan during his visit.

Accompanied by Army Chief Gen. M.M. Naravane, the defence minister will on Monday dedicate to the nation the "Kyungam Bridge" built by the BRO deep inside Ladakh. "The bridge is quite vital for road connectivity in the strategically important region," an official said.

He will have a comprehensive review of India's operational readiness in

the backdrop of last year's faceoff with China along the Ladakh-Tibet border and will also visit various key formations and high-altitude bases in eastern Ladakh "to assess the ground situation as well as to boost the morale of the troops guarding the Line of Actual Control in a hostile environment".

Later, he will be given a detailed briefing about the overall situation in eastern Ladakh at the Leh-based headquarters of 14 Corps of the Army, which is responsible for guarding the LAC in Ladakh. This is the defence minister's first visit to Ladakh after the Indian and Chinese militaries pulled back troops, tanks, infantry and other equipment from the Pangong Lake areas in February as part of a bilateral agreement.

WB Bar Council urges CJI to remove Calcutta acting CJ, accuse him of bias

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, JUNE 27

In a rare move, the Bar Council of West Bengal has urged Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana to remove Justice Rajesh Bindal as acting Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court immediately.

It has branded Justice Bindal as a "BJP's man through and through" in hearing the CBI's plea against bail for four heavyweight Narada sting bribery accused on May 17, and assigning Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's election peti-

tion to another judge, Justice Kausik Chanda, which the party has linked to the BJP.

On Saturday, the state level lawyers' forum chairman Ashok Kumar Deb in a letter to the CJI accused Justice Bindal of "being unfair, partial and biased" and alleged the way the CBI petition was dealt with, "sets serious doubts over the conduct and character of Justice Bindal. Justice Bindal by an order dated 17.05.2021 had stayed an interim order of bail passed by the Special CBI Court in favour of members of a certain political

dispensation without giving the aggrieved parties an opportunity of being heard." According to advocate Deb, "Justice Bindal does not have any regard for judicial propriety and has committed a mockery of the judicial conscience."

He also pointed out the "absurdity and insanity" of Justice Bindal in assigning cases and petitions to judges like Justice Chanda who "is an erstwhile member of BJP and is someone who takes great pride in such an association." Deb also stated that Justice Chanda, yet to be

made a permanent judge, "is known to have a deep and profound association with the BJP and it's leaders" which hints that he would not be able to deliver "impartial justice."

On the CM's election petition, Deb argued that though it was scheduled to be heard by Justice Sabyasachi Bhattacharya as civil matters are heard by a single judge on the original side of the HC, "Justice Bindal snatched away the matter from Justice Bhattacharya's determination and assigned the same to his favourite judge" Justice Chanda.

UP BJP leader criticises own govt's Covid-19 management

Ballia (UP), June 27: Criticising the handling of the Covid-19 crisis in Uttar Pradesh, a ruling party leader has claimed that at least 10 people died in every village during the second wave as no lessons were learnt from the first one.

State BJP working committee member Ram Iqbal Singh, who made the remarks on Saturday, is the latest among the party's own leaders who have questioned the management of the novel coronavirus infection in the state.

Speaking to reporters here, Singh rued that the

health department did not learn any lessons from the first wave of Covid-19 which led to a large number of deaths due to the disease in the second wave.

At least 10 people from every village in the state died in the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic, he alleged.

The BJP leader also demanded that ₹10 lakh be given to the kin of those who have succumbed to the infection.

He lamented that after 75 years of freedom, this district with a population of 34 lakh, has no doctors or medicines.

Asked that UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during his visit to Ballia had expressed satisfaction with the arrangements made by the health department, Singh said the officials had misled the Chief Minister; and the truth was not shown.

He also urged the BJP government to give diesel subsidy to farmers.

Meanwhile, Ballia BJP MP Virendra Singh Mast claimed that BKU leader Rakesh Tikait was derailing the farmers protest against the Centre's three new agri-marketing laws. — PTI

SPECIAL | STATUS

Modi sought help from state leaders to complete delimitation process

Centre may restore J&K statehood before polls

RAJNISH SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, JUNE 27

The Centre may consider restoring full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir immediately after the delimitation process is over and perhaps even before the Assembly polls are held, top government sources have indicated. J&K was converted into a Union territory along with Ladakh in August 2019 when the Centre revoked its special status under Article 370 of the Constitution.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had chaired a high-level meeting with 14 top leaders from eight political parties in J&K when he had said he was committed to removing "Dilli ki doori" and "Dil ki doori", reiterating he was committed to restoring J&K's full statehood an "appropriate time".

The sources said most Kashmiri leaders at the meeting had demanded that full statehood be restored to J&K before the elections are held.

● PRIME MINISTER had chaired a high-level meeting with 14 top leaders from eight political parties in J&K when he had said he was committed to removing "Dilli ki doori", reiterating he was committed to restoring J&K's full statehood an "appropriate time".

The Kashmiri political elders had agreed to support the Centre on the issue of delimitation, but the local leadership gave the "timeline of delimitation-statehood-elections", they said. It is now believed that the Centre, seeing the positive response from the local leadership, might offer give a major concession — of granting full statehood to J&K before the Assembly polls are held.

At Thursday's meeting, Modi sought "cooperation and assistance" from senior state leaders urging them to help in the delimitation process to help redraw the new Assembly constituencies to hold elections. The sources said most leaders

at the meeting expressed willingness to assist the Election Commission and the local administration to help complete the delimitation process at the earliest, emphasising that immediately after than full statehood should be restored.

Home ministry sources said more rounds of negotiations are expected in the next few months with the J&K leadership on the complex issue of restoring the democratic process, but the Centre was "favourably inclined" towards restoring statehood once the delimitation process was completed in J&K.

"The meeting on Thursday was held on a very positive note and some more talks are likely in the coming weeks. Seeing the state leadership's response, the Centre too is willing to concede some of their demands like giving full statehood if the local leadership cooperates in the delimitation exercise," a senior home ministry official added.

MUFTI SAYS 'ERA OF SUPPRESSION' MUST END, VOICING DISSENT NOT CRIMINAL ACT

New Delhi, June 27: PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti said on Sunday said the dialogue process initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Jammu and Kashmir's mainstream leadership can gain credibility by ending what she called an "era of oppression and suppression" in the Union Territory and understanding that a dissenting voice is not a criminal act.

"Give the people right to breathe and rest will follow later," the former chief minister said, as she termed the Prime Minister's meeting with a 14-member delegation from J&K on Thursday as a way forward to end the "sufferings" of people in the erstwhile state now under central rule.

Mehbooba, who was part of the delegation, made it clear that the onus was on the

Centre to make the dialogue process credible, and said it should initiate confidence building measures and allow "people to breathe" and also ensure protection of jobs and land for the people.

"When I say allow people to breathe, I mean that today any dissenting note from any side has to cool his or her heels in the prison. Recently, a man was jailed for expressing his sentiments that he had lots of hope from a Kashmiri advisor. The concerned Deputy Commissioner ensured that he was in jail for a few days despite being granted bail by the court," Mehbooba said.

So, when the Prime Minister says that he wants to eradicate "Dil ki doori", such kind of suppression has to come to an end immediately, she added.

— PTI

India administers 64.25L vaccine doses in 24 hours

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 27

The Centre on Sunday said India's Covid-19 vaccination coverage has crossed 32 crore as 64.25 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the last 24 hours. The Union health ministry said more than 1.15 crore doses are still available with the states/UTs to be administered and 20.49 lakh more doses are in the pipeline and will be received by the states/UTs in the next three days.

"The vaccination drive has been ramped up through the availability of more vaccines, advance visibility of vaccine availability to states and UTs for enabling better planning by them and streamlining the vaccine supply chain," the health ministry said. So far only 5.6 per cent of India's adult population has received two doses of the anti-Covid vaccines.

India reported 50,040 new cases and 1,258 deaths in the last 24 hours. Dr N.K. Arora, chairman of the Covid-19 working group, said that the government plans to administer one crore doses every day. "The Indian Council of Medical Research has come up with a study which says a third wave is likely to come late. We have a window of around 6-8 months to immunise everybody in the country... the trial for Zyklus Cadila vaccine is almost complete. By the end of July or in August, we might be able to start administering this vaccine to children of the 12-18 age group," Dr Arora said. Health experts feel the vaccination of children will pave the way for the reopening of schools.

The Centre in an affidavit to the Supreme Court Saturday, said it expects to get around 188 crore vaccine doses from at least five manufacturers to be able to vaccinate the entire adult population of India by December. "The total population above 18 is

MODI URGES ALL TO SHED VACCINE HESITANCY

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 27

Urging people to shed vaccine hesitancy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asked them not to believe in rumours and trust science and scientists. Citing his own example and that of his nearly 100-year-old mother, both of whom have been vaccinated against Covid-19, the PM in his monthly "Mann ki Baat" radio show also warned that the threat of Covid-19 was still strong, and everyone should get vaccinated and follow all Covid-19 protocols. The PM also hailed the feat of most vaccination doses being administered in a single day on June 21, when the new phase of inoculations started under which all adults are being given free jabs.

Encouraged after a chat with the PM during the radio show, a villager from Madhya Pradesh, Rajesh Hirave, got inoculated along with his family members. Modi counselled them to take the vaccine despite their doubts about the exercise.

In his broadcast, Modi also paid tribute and remembered India's sprint legend Milkha Singh, who died earlier this month, and asked people to cheer for the Indian contingent in the Tokyo Olympics.

approximately 93-94 crores. As such, administering two doses to these beneficiaries will require an estimated 186 to 188 crore vaccine doses. Out of this requirement, 51.6 crore doses will be made available for administration by July 31, leaving a requirement of approximately 135 crore vaccine doses for complete vaccination to the eligible population," the Centre said in its affidavit.

KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES COMMISSION
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Expression of Interest for Empanelment of Manufacturers for Supply of Electric Potter Wheels

Khadi and Village Industries Commission, invites Expression of Interest (EOI) for empanelment from eligible Manufacturers for supply of AC Energy Efficient Electric Potter Wheels for implementation of SPIN (Strengthening the Potential of India) Programme under pottery development activities.

The maximum price for the Electric Potter Wheel is set at Rs.17000/- (Rupees Seventeen Thousand Only) including GST and FOR. KVIC invites EOI from manufacturers for the supply of Electric Potter Wheels. For EOI details and other Terms & Conditions, please visit KVIC Website: <https://www.kvic.gov.in>

IMPORTANT DATES	
Particulars	Date
Date of EOI issue	28.06.2021
Last Date of Bid Submission	19.07.2021 at 12:00 Noon

Director (Mineral Based Industries)

DECCAN Chronicle

28 JUNE 2021

Don't shift goalposts, meet jab deadlines

Reports of the Delta plus variant of SARS-CoV-2 virus, declared a variant of concern by the Union government, have become a new threat here in India and the world over at a time when it looked like the worst is over for this country caught in the second wave of Covid-19. The government has cautioned eight states about the urgent need to take precautionary measures against the spread of the variant, which is stated to have increased transmissibility, stronger binding to receptors of lung cells and potential reduction in monoclonal antibody response. As of now, there are 50-odd cases and four deaths that have been attributed to the variant. Given its potential to spread at a faster rate, no amount of caution looks excessive.

A disturbing feature of the mutant virus that experts fear it possesses is its ability to resist medical intervention such as vaccination and treatment. With only 19.2 per cent of the population receiving at least one dose and only four per cent fully vaccinated, and with a proven inadequacy of medical infrastructure to withstand a major surge, India has reasons to remain alert. The government has asked states to implement the Covid-appropriate protocol more vigorously and be careful when it comes to allowing more relaxations.

All experts are in agreement saying that the way out of the mess is to speed up the vaccination programme before more mutants appear. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who reviewed the drive the other day, has directed officials to maintain the momentum it has got of late. India had vaccinated a record 89 lakh people last Monday but the numbers slipped in the following days. As per the affidavit the Union government filed in the Supreme Court, a total of 35.6 crore doses of the Covid vaccines have been made available by now. It has also estimated that the country will require 186 crore doses to fully vaccinate all eligible people above 18. The government, which launched the "world's largest vaccination drive" in January, has, for the first time, given the apex court a sneak peek into its procurement plan for the vaccines — 51.6 crore doses will be made available by July 31. As for the remaining 135 crore doses, the two Indian manufacturers together will offer 90 crore doses and the imported Russian vaccine will chip in with another 10 crore. The vaccines in the pipeline by Biological E. (30 crore) and Zydzus Cadila (5 crore) will make up the rest.

The government has been able to cobble up a procurement plan but how far the people can rely on it depends on the determination with which it pursues its targets. The government, which had told the Supreme Court that domestic manufacturing of the vaccines would be substantially increased by July, has, in a subsequent note, said it will happen only by October. This wavering is unacceptable. The government needs to pull up its socks and ensure that the milestones it has marked will be covered in time. Excuses hardly offer immunity against the deadly virus.

Fears over Tokyo Games

Japan's Olympic Committee and the government of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga seem equally determined to go ahead with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics from July 23 despite adverse opinions expressed by the Emperor of Japan and millions of citizens. Having invited the investment of huge sums into the Games, which were postponed by a year due to the pandemic, the core decision-makers may wish to avoid losses by going ahead with the Games that are, however, unlikely to be a hit with the athletes, fans and Japanese people.

The money committed may be to the tune of \$30 billion, all but \$6.7 billion of which is public money. With less than seven per cent of the Japanese population having been vaccinated as of now, there are genuine fears of the Games becoming an incubator for the coronavirus despite an inhibiting number of restrictions that will be imposed on participants, coaches, officials and spectators, of whom 10,000 locals may be allowed into each venue.

Indian athletes have even more reason to feel hyper-anxious about the Games as they are lumped with the participants of 10 other countries who will have special restrictions imposed on them. They would have to keep away from mingling with fellow athletes for three days after landing at the Olympic Village. Their special diets could be compromised as the Japanese would have to make arrangements to get their food to their rooms where they will virtually self-isolate. How they can prepare for what is invariably once in a lifetime opportunity to shine on one of the world's biggest stages in Olympic arenas is anybody's guess.

Indians have also to take RT-PCR tests every day for seven days before they leave for Tokyo where, of course, everyone will have to take the test every day and go to a fever clinic if they fail it. The movement of all visitors could be tracked by GPS making the Games unique though it is being held in difficult circumstances clouded by succeeding Covid waves around the world. The Games may go on in ritualistic fashion but the spirit of competition and camaraderie may be compromised.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

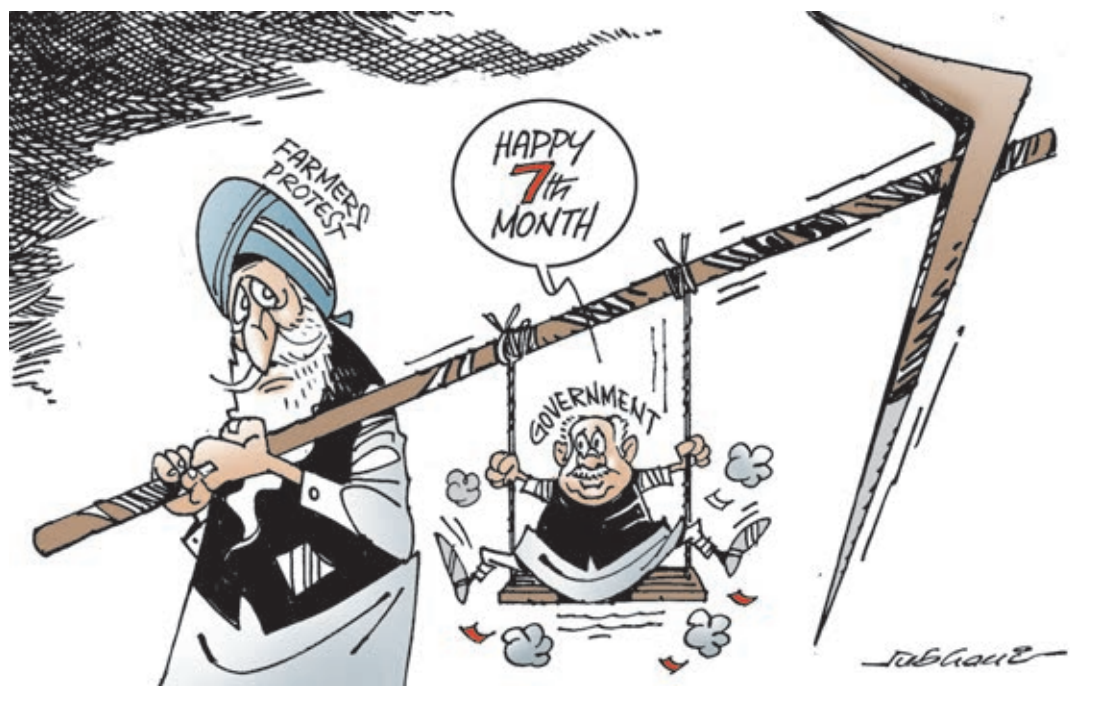
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Subhani



A step forward after two steps back: Twist in J&K



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Our democracy's biggest strength, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted hours after his meeting with 14 senior political leaders from Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday, "is the ability to sit across a table and exchange views". Regrettably, that thought had not occurred to the leadership of the BJP when they chose to boycott the three all-party roundtables on Kashmir that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had convened during 2006-07. The need to sit across a table and exchange views had also not been felt when the Union government took momentous decisions with respect to Kashmir in August 2019.

Far too much pain has been inflicted on the Kashmiri people over these past two years before the dawning of this new wisdom that both "Dilli ki doori" and "Dil ki doori" have to be bridged. While a total of 14 leaders attended Mr Modi's meeting last week, close to 30 had attended Dr Singh's roundtables. The 2006-07 process reached out to a wider cross-section of Kashmiri public opinion than last week's meeting which was dominated by what Prime Minister Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah have pejoratively dubbed the "Gupkar gang". The Abdullah and Mufti families and the likes of Ghulam Nabi Azad have been discredited by decades of misgovernance. It remains to be seen if the new process restores public faith in the electoral process given that it is being initiated with their imprimatur.

In his opening remarks at the 2006 meeting Dr Singh had called the roundtable "a dialogue of equals" that would achieve historical impor-

tance provided "we are able to unleash a process by which we can arrive at a workable blueprint that can help create a new chapter in Kashmir's history. Not by compromising on one's ideals, but in a spirit of mutual tolerance, understanding and accommodation". That sentiment did not come through clearly in Mr Modi's recent initiative.

An important difference between the 2006-07 meetings and last week's is that Article 370 of the Constitution, granting a special status to the erstwhile state of J&K, stands repealed and J&K reduced to the status of a Union territory, minus Ladakh.

The repeal of Article 370 was in accordance with the BJP's long-standing electoral commitment and has since become a non-issue. While many non-BJP parties did not support that decision in August 2019, most have reconciled to the change. The question of J&K's statehood remains on the table and none less than the Union home minister, Amit Shah, gave an assurance to Parliament that statehood would be restored at some point. A new round of elections to local bodies and a UT government will not, however, address the real challenge facing New Delhi in J&K. Neither the repeal of Article 370 nor the question of statehood are really at the centre of what may be called the Kashmir conundrum. The core issue remains the status of Kashmir and the equation with Pakistan.

Even if Kashmir is denied its own flag and nomenclature for the head of the government, some elements of its special status will have to be preserved. In theory this is not a problem since there are other border states with special status.

Continental nations with far-flung regions have to extend some form of special status to border areas in the interests of national unity and integrity. India is still a 70-year-old republic and extending benefits to certain regions to facilitate their fuller integration is not a big price to pay.

The question remains if New Delhi is any closer to a resolution of the Kashmir conundrum as a result of all the steps taken by the Modi-Shah team or whether the delimitation exercise and election process that is to follow will continue to feed dissension in the Kashmir Valley. Over the past three decades state Assembly elections and delimitation exercises have been held several times and their validity internationally endorsed.

This new round of delimitation must inspire the confidence of all if the elections following it have to acquire legitimacy. Even after all that the Kashmir problem would not have been resolved if all stakeholders are not party to the final solution. Dr Manmohan Singh and Gen. Pervez Musharraf worked towards a final solution that the BJP has repeatedly rejected. Yet, given its U-turn on so many issues, it remains to be seen if on this issue too the BJP will take a different view in future if the current process does not yield results. Dr Manmohan Singh summed up his approach pithily when he said that "borders can't be changed but can be made irrelevant"; if there was trust between India and Pakistan and the assurance of peace and security.

Dr Singh and Gen. Musharraf came to an understanding on resolv-

Many analysts have suggested that last week's meeting was part of an elaborate exercise orchestrated by the United States to facilitate its peaceful retreat from Afghanistan

ing the Kashmir issue but the matter was never clinched. Early resumption of cross-LoC trade and traffic can help in building confidence.

How things evolve will also depend on the response of regional and global actors. Many analysts have suggested that last week's meeting was part of an elaborate exercise orchestrated by the United States to facilitate its peaceful retreat from Afghanistan. It may be recalled that in his first term in office President Barack Obama had named Richard Holbrooke as the US special envoy for Afghanistan and Kashmir, linking the American exit from the former to a resolution of the latter. The Manmohan Singh government flatly refused to allow Mr Holbrooke to land in New Delhi till President Obama delinked the two.

President Joe Biden, who comes from the same stable, has been cleverer. Without making any explicit link between the two he is seen as having pushed India and Pakistan into addressing both issues together. This would explain much toing and froing by the external affairs minister and the national security adviser to countries that are obviously involved in facilitating the transition in Afghanistan.

That the United States, China, Russia and Pakistan would have an interest in stabilising Kashmir as part of the transition in Afghanistan is entirely understandable. But the question that still remains is if half-hearted and self-serving initiatives pursued through some discredited leaders will be welcomed in the Valley. The challenge of winning the hearts and minds of the Kashmiri people and finding a final solution acceptable to all concerned remains.

The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and a former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.

LETTERS

PCC CHIEF REVANTH

It is good to see A. Revanth Reddy, a young leader, as the new PCC chief. Continuous defections had raised questions about the survival of the Congress. The change of guard, especially when the old cadre failed to make a dent, is expected to make a real difference. Besides, there is a big vacuum in TS politics with a clear opportunity for the Congress to emerge as an alternative to the TRS.

Prof S. Sudarshan Rao
Hyderabad

Finally, the Congress has chosen a dynamic leader. After the formation of Telangana state, the credit should have gone to the Congress but it could not make an impact on voters. Chief Minister K. Chandra-shekar Rao got aggressive after achieving statehood and gained the confidence of voters to come to power. There seems to be a void in the Congress that was felt by the voters. We hope new PCC chief A. Revanth Reddy gives a tough fight to the TRS.

K.S. Prasad
Hyderabad

HASTY DECISIONS

Telangana state seems to have revised its decision on reopening schools; its original decision ignored the health problems a third wave would have caused. If the Cabinet could fail to take the right decision on an important issue concerning the welfare of a large number of children, one wonders how many such decisions that are detrimental to the growth of the state were taken in the past.

Suriseti Pankaj Kumar
Secunderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

US not withholding further aid to Pak

WASHINGTON, JUNE 27.

Officials here said yesterday the United States was not withholding further economic aid to Pakistan for political reasons.

The officials also denied that major aid giving countries had agreed to postpone indefinitely any new economic assistance to Pakistan, but said consideration of new aid had been put off for several months.

Observers said one reason for this appeared to be belief that Pakistan could not use foreign aid effectively at this point.

Stuart Ritchie



How Lancet lost world's trust over its China praise

Right from its first issue in 1823, *Lancet* was more than just an ordinary medical journal. Its founding editor, dyspeptic surgeon and coroner Thomas Wakley, purposefully gave the journal the name of a sharp scalpel that could cut away useless, diseased tissue: he used it as a campaigning organ, to push back against injustice, bad ideas and bad practice.

What bothered Wakley most was the establishment. Not only did the Royal College of Surgeons care little about quacks and snake-oil salesmen, its members were also engaged in corruption and nepotism, ensuring that their cronies got the best positions and filling their pockets with lecture fees. Wakley wrote in 1838 of the "mercenary, goose-brained monopolists and charlatans" who won privileges that should have been due to merit. This system was "the canker-worm which eats into the heart of the medical body".

Different times, different canker-worms. *Lancet* is still going strong, but it exists in a very different system of academic journals than that of the 19th century. It certainly has a strong radical stance as regards politics, with reg-

ular editorials railing against the government of the day's handling of healthcare and other matters. But on medical science, things are quite different: the journal is now very much a part of the system, with all the problems that entails. *L'establishment, c'est la Lancette*. And because *Lancet* has such remarkable reach and such strong cultural cachet, when it makes a mistake, it really matters.

The journal's role as a mouthpiece of the medical establishment couldn't have been clearer in February 2020, when it published a group letter organised by zoologist Peter Daszak on the origins of the Sars-CoV-2 coronavirus. As well as "strongly condemn[ing] conspiracy theories" that the virus did not have a natural origin, the letter expressed "solidarity" with all scientists and health workers in China, ending with some oddly Soviet-era phrasing: "Stand with our colleagues on the front line! We speak in one voice."

The letter didn't reveal that Daszak was himself involved with virological research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the lab at the centre of the "lab leak" speculation. Medical journals are usually hyper-aware of poten-

tial conflicts of interest—for instance, if a clinical trial was funded by a pharmaceutical company—but in this case *Lancet* let it slide. In retrospect, now that the lab leak theory is taken far more seriously, this looks at best mis-conceived and at worst rather suspect. None of it makes the theory any more plausible of course (we should be sceptical but open-minded, and await the results of the continuing investigation). But it was an unforced error.

It's not just scientists and health workers of China that *Lancet* praised. In May last year, its editor-in-chief Richard Horton appeared on the state-owned broadcaster China Central Television to praise how "tremendously decisively" the Communist Party of China had handled the pandemic. He also penned multiple editorials on China, including one entitled "Covid-19 and the Dangers of Sinophobia". This did mention "the case against China", including "the repression of the Uighur people" and "belligerence towards Taiwan". But it went on to write these off as mere "perceived encroachments on liberties", concluding that, essentially, we should all just get along: "a pandemic is a moment for conciliation,

respect, and honesty between friends".

If the modern *Lancet* has a patchy record in holding the establishment—or, at least, certain establishments—to account, how is it doing in the fight against Wakley's other bugbear, the quacks and frauds? For that, we have to look beyond the editorial and correspondence pages and into the scientific research published in the journal. Alas, some of the most famous stories of scientific fraud have originated at the *Lancet* during Horton's tenure as editor. The best-known is, of course, that of Andrew Wakefield, the disgraced doctor who managed to get an almost entirely faked paper on autism and the MMR vaccine published in *Lancet* in 1998. It wasn't retracted for 12 years, all the while allowing the worst anti-vaxxers to claim their ideas had been taken seriously by a prestigious journal.

No less disturbing is the case of Paolo Macchiarini, the flamboyant surgeon who was apparently able to transplant artificial tracheas into human patients. Many of those patients ended up dead, but Macchiarini claimed in *Lancet* (and elsewhere) that the surgery had been a success.

And though *Lancet* has carried some

of the most important research on Covid-19, it blotted its copybook by publishing, in May 2020, a paper by Harvard researchers claiming that the drug hydroxy-chloroquine led to a higher death rate in Covid patients. Although it was catnip to those who wanted to get another one over on Donald Trump—an on-the-record fan of the ultimately useless drug—publishing the paper turned out to have been a terrible decision. The Harvard researchers had been given all the results from a dodgy company called Surgisphere, and when they asked Surgisphere for the raw data to check some anomalies, they were rebuffed.

In 2021, we might find that the best rejoinder to our establishment isn't a new journal, but an entirely new way to think about science and how it's published: a way that doesn't hand over all our trust to editors and reviewers, but that emphasises openness and transparency right from the start. There are several proposals for how it could happen. The next rotten thing that needs to be cut away could be the journal system—and *Lancet* itself.

By arrangement with the Spectator

SHORT TAKES

5 DIE IN HOT AIR BALLOON CRASH IN NEW MEXICO

Los Angeles: Five people died in a hot air balloon accident in Albuquerque, in the south-western United States, the city's police announced on Saturday.

The accident caused power outages in the area for several hours after the balloon came into contact with a power line.

"Unfortunately, 4 individuals died as a result of their wounds from the hot air balloon crash," Albuquerque police said on Twitter, adding that one person was taken to a hospital in critical condition.

Authorities said later Saturday that the adult male had died of his injuries.

"Our prayers go out to the friends and family of all five people who tragically lost their lives," police said on Twitter. Early Saturday morning, some 13,000 people were without power because of the accident, local utility PNM weeted.

VATICAN PROBES ALLEGED ABUSE NEGLIGENCE

Warsaw: The Vatican's embassy in Poland said on Saturday that a Holy See envoy spent 10 days in the country checking reports of alleged negligence by a retired archbishop of Krakow who had served as personal secretary to the late Pope St. John Paul II.

The embassy said that during his June 17-26 visit, retired Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco held a number of meetings and reviewed documents.

"The aim was to verify signals, also made in public, of negligence by Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz during his term as the archbishop of Krakow (2005-2016)," the embassy statement said.

Bagnasco is to present his finding at the Vatican.

A priest in Poland, the Rev. Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zaleski, says that in 2012 he personally gave Dziwisz a letter containing evidence of sex abuse by a priest of a 12-year-old altar boy. Dziwisz at first denied it and suggested the matter should be investigated, but later said the letter had been found.

MAN JUMPS FROM MOVING PLANE AT LA AIRPORT

Los Angeles: A passenger was taken to the hospital Friday night after jumping out of a moving plane at Los Angeles International Airport, authorities said.

United Express flight 5365, operated by SkyWest, was pulling away from a gate shortly after 7 pm when the man unsuccessfully tried to breach the cockpit by pounding on the door; then managed to open the service door and jumped down the emergency slide onto the tarmac, according to the airport, the FBI and SkyWest.

The man was taken into custody on the taxiway, treated for injuries that were not life-threatening and taken to the hospital, authorities said.

The twin-engine Embraer 175, which was headed to Salt Lake City, returned to its gate, the airport said. Nobody else aboard the plane was injured. The flight department for Salt Lake City late Friday evening and arrived early Saturday morning, according to the flightaware.com website.

TWO CHURCHES BURNT ON CANADA INDIGENOUS LAND

Ottawa: Fires on Saturday destroyed two more Catholic churches in indigenous communities in western Canada, following grim discoveries at former church-run indigenous residential schools of nearly 1,000 unmarked graves.

St Ann's Catholic Church on the Upper Similkameen Indian Band and the Chopaka Catholic Church on the Lower Similkameen Indian Band were set ablaze less than an hour apart in the early morning, federal police said.

"Both churches have been destroyed," Sergeant Jason Bayda of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said in a statement. Authorities consider the two fires "suspicious, and are looking to determine any possible connection to the church fires in both Penticton and Oliver on June 21, 2021," he said.

The Penticton and Oliver fires are still under investigation. The destruction of the four churches comes at a raw time for many of Canada's Indigenous peoples still struggling with the discovery.



People crowd to board a ferry as authorities ordered a new lockdown to contain the spread of the Coronavirus in Munshiganj in Bangladesh on Sunday. —AFP

Moscow sees high Covid death toll

New delta variant drives infections in Russia since mid-June

Moscow, June 27: Moscow on Sunday recorded the worst daily coronavirus death toll so far for a Russian city, as countries across the Asia-Pacific region extended or reimposed restrictions to tackle fresh waves of infections.

The pandemic has now killed close to four million people across the world but vaccination drives have brought down infection numbers in many wealthy countries, though the Delta strain of the virus remains a concern.

The variant is now in 85 countries and is the most contagious of any Covid-19 strain identified, according to the World Health Organisation. Still, in much of Europe and the United States curbs on daily life are easing as vaccination programmes bear fruit, although Russia is grappling with a deadly third wave.

The Russian capital on

Migrant workers flee Bangla capital

Reenagar, Bangladesh, June 27: Tens of thousands of migrant workers fled Bangladesh's capital Sunday on the eve of a tightened lockdown that will curtail most economic activity and confine people to their homes as Coronavirus infections soar. Restrictions on activities and movement have been in place since mid-April as cases and deaths jumped.

Infections declined in May but started to rise again this month, with

over 5,000 new cases and a pandemic-high of 119 deaths on Sunday, according to the health ministry.

The resurgence has prompted the government to tighten restrictions in stages from Monday, with economic activity — including shops, markets, transportation and offices — to shut down by Thursday. People will be ordered to stay at homes while only emergency services and export-oriented factories continue operations. —AFP

Sunday recorded 144 Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours, a day after Saint Petersburg set the previous highest figure.

Saint Petersburg has hosted six Euro 2020 matches and is due to host a quarter-final on Friday, with spectator numbers

capped at half but still upwards of 26,000 people.

Russia as a whole has seen an explosion of new infections since mid-June driven by the Delta variant. The dramatic rise in cases comes as officials in Moscow are pushing vaccine-sceptical Russians to get inoculated after lifting most anti-virus restrictions late last year.

"To stop the pandemic, one thing is needed: rapid, large-scale vaccinations. Nobody has invented any other solution," Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyanin told state-run television on Saturday.

The Delta variant is also feeding fresh outbreaks in Southeast Asia and Australia where authorities have brought back or prolonged restrictions. More than five million Sydney residents endured their first full day of a two-week lockdown Sunday to contain an outbreak of the strain. —AFP

UK FINDS SECRET DEF. DOCUMENTS AT A BUS STOP

London, June 27: Britain's government said Sunday it was investigating how secret defence documents, outlining the movements of a warship that led to Russia firing warning shots off the Crimean coast, were found at a bus stop in England.

The Ministry of Defence said that an employee told it last week that the documents had been lost, and that an investigation had been launched. "It shouldn't be able to happen," Brandon Lewis, minister for Northern Ireland, said. —AFP



Matt Hancock

There had been growing calls for a probe after questions were raised about the reasons behind the presence of a camera inside a smoke alarm in

Hancock's former office and security concerns over footage from it being accessed.

"The Department of Health will be investigating quite rightly to understand how this was able to happen," UK Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis said.

"We have got to be concerned about the fact that someone was able to secure a recording from inside a government building... We have to understand how that happened and how we deal with that," he said. —PTI

Nearly 20 hurt in Lebanon protests

Beirut, June 27: Nearly twenty people were wounded in overnight scuffles in northern Lebanon between security forces and protesters angered by a spiralling economic crisis, a medical association said on Sunday.

The protests in the city of Tripoli came as the Lebanese pound plummeted fresh lows on the black

market due to a financial crisis that the World Bank says is likely to rank among the world's worst since the mid-19th century.

Calm returned to the city on Sunday after protesters tried to storm official buildings, including a branch of the central bank, overnight, forcing the army to deploy.

"18 people, both civilians

and soldiers, were injured, including four who were hospitalised," said the Emergency and Relief Corps, a local medical charity that dispatched ambulances to treat the wounded.

Rubber bullets and shrapnel from stun grenades accounted for some of the injuries, a spokesperson for the charity said.

The army said 10 sol-

diers were wounded in the Tripoli clashes, the majority in a single incident that it said involved a group of protesters on motorcycles throwing stun grenades at personnel.

The southern city of Sidon and the capital Beirut saw smaller demonstrations against the ongoing dramatic fall in living standards. —AP

Macron, Le Pen face new poll test

First round of France's regional polls were shunned by a record 66.72% of voters

Paris, June 27: France was voting in the second round of regional elections on Sunday after a first round that saw a drubbing for President Emmanuel Macron's ruling party, disappointment for Marine Le Pen's far-right and record low turnout.

For some observers, the outcome of the June 20 first round raised doubts over whether the 2022 presidential election would come down to a duel between Macron and Le Pen in a run-off long seen as the most likely scenario.

The first-round results marked a boost for the traditional right-wing The Republicans as well as the Socialist Party, who have been squeezed after the centrist Macron surged into power in 2017 with his brand-new Republic on the Move (LREM) party.

Analysts warn against too much extrapolation onto a nationwide scale from the results of the regional elections, which choose the heads of France's 13 mainland regions from Brittany in the northwest to the Provence-

Alpes-Cote d'Azur (PACA) region in the southeast.

But there was cross-party concern over the turnout for last week's polls, which were shunned by 66.72 percent of voters — a record in modern France. "What we are seeing is the culmination of a disconnection between voters and the political class," said Jessica Sainty, politics lecturer at Avignon University, while acknowledging the Covid-19 crisis also played a role in high abstention rate.

The woeful turnout prompted a debate over how to improve participation, with several figures including government spokesman Gabriel Attal suggesting electronic voting could help in future.

According to a poll published Thursday, just 36 percent of voters plan to cast their ballots on Sunday. "France is sulking," the Le Parisien newspaper said.

Four hours after polls opened, turnout on Sunday stood at the same dismal 12.66 percent as during the first round.

The first-round results put Le Pen's National

Rally (RN) ahead in just one region, PACA, a major disappointment after polls showed a possible breakthrough in several areas.

One of the most closely watched races on Sunday will be whether RN candidate Thierry Mariani can defeat his right-wing rival Renaud Muselier in the region. Gaining control of a region for the first time would be a huge boost for Le Pen as she seeks to convince voters that the RN — which she has reformed and rebranded since taking over from her firebrand father Jean-Marie — is a serious party of power.

Muselier could be helped by the withdrawal of left-wing candidates in a repeat of the "Republican Front" seen in past presidential elections to block the far-right.

"The idea of a victory for Mariani — even if it is far from being probable — would show that the RN can almost triumph alone over the coalition of all the others and head the powerful executive of a modern region," said Jerome Sainte-Marie, president of the Pollingvox Institute. —AFP

Trump silent on 2024 election bid

Wellington, June 27: Donald Trump held his first big campaign-style rally since leaving the White House, giving a vintage, rambling speech Saturday to an adoring audience as he launched a series of appearances ahead of next year's midterm elections.

The former president, who has been booted from social media platforms and faces multiple legal woes, has flirted with his own potential candidacy in 2024, but in the 90-minute address at a fair grounds in Ohio he made no clear mention of his political future, even when the crowd chanted "four more years! four more years!" Trump did tease them at one point by alluding to the possibility of another stab at the White House.

"We may have to win it a third time. It is possible," he said, showing yet again he thinks he won in November. The crowd

cheered wildly.

On other matters Trump flitted from one to the next — immigration, crime, gun rights, Afghanistan, Iran and more — bouncing like a pinball in true Trumpian style. One repeated message was that President Joe Biden is a catastrophe. "Joe Biden is destroying our nation before our very eyes," Trump said. And Trump hammered away yet again at the falsehood that he won the November election but Biden prevailed through fraud.

"The election was over," Trump said. "And we took a massive victory. They did into something that should never be allowed." Until now Trump had delivered two major speeches since leaving Washington in January, including a vindictive monologue in North Carolina early this month when relitigated his loss to Biden. —AFP

Friction in North America after one year of trade deal

Washington, DC, June 27: One year after it took effect in the midst of a record economic downturn, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) has yet to end trading friction between the North American allies.

The three countries said the new treaty would benefit their economies and workers but, as the anniversary nears on Thursday, the neighbors have already entered into a range of disputes — many of which have seen the United States object to Mexican or Canadian

practices. "Most of the focus on USMCA over the next several years is going to be on the disputes," said Edward Alden, an expert at the Council on Foreign Relations.

USMCA replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement, which had been in force since 1994, and which Alden said had envisioned the continent's three economies at one point becoming a single market, like the European Union.

That vision appears to be dead, at least for now. "USMCA is very much

the rules for three separate North American economies to cooperate, where they can, and rules for fighting where they can't cooperate," Alden said.

While the disputes between the countries have made headlines, Jeffrey Schott, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, credited the deal with "removing the cloud of uncertainty" over continental commerce.

"That creates a better atmosphere for trade and investment than we've had in some time," he said. —AFP

DESPERATE | MOVE

G7 hopes to see through proposal after a year of pandemic-induced stimulus spending

Paris, June 27: Nearly 140 countries will haggle over key details of a global corporate tax plan this week, with some concerned about giving up too much and others eager to ensure tech giants pay their fair share.

The Group of Seven (G-7) wealthy democracies approved a proposal to impose a minimum corporate tax rate of at least 15 per cent earlier this month, hoping to stop a "race to the bottom" as nations compete to offer the lowest rates.

It is one of two pillars of

reforms that would also allow countries to tax a share of profits of the 100 most profitable companies in the world — such as Google, Facebook and Apple — regardless of where they are based.

The deal now goes to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which is overseeing two days of talks starting on Wednesday (June 30) to find a consensus among 139 countries.

The proposal will then be taken up by the G-20 club

of wealthy and emerging countries at a meeting of finance ministers in Italy on July 9 and 10.

"I don't think we have ever been so close to an agreement," said Mr Pascal Saint-Amans, director of the OECD tax policy centre. "I think that everybody has realised that a deal is better than no deal," Mr Saint-Amans said earlier this month, adding that failing to agree would lead to unilateral taxes and US reprisals.

US President Joe Biden has galvanised the issue

by backing the global minimum corporate tax, and Europeans want a deal, he said. Negotiations have gained new urgency as governments seek new sources of revenue after spending huge sums on stimulus measures to prevent their economies from collapsing during the coronavirus pandemic.

While the G-7 — the United States, Canada, Japan, France, Britain, Italy and Germany — approved the plan, it still faces hurdles as the negotiations expand to other nations. —AFP



The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development will on Wednesday discuss a plan backed by G7 leaders for a minimum 15% corporate tax rate. —AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,925.04	0.43
Nifty 50	15,860.40	0.44
S&P 500*	4,280.70	0.33
Dollar (₹)	74.20	-0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.17	0.39
Euro (₹)	88.59	0.00
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,309.66	0.14
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	76.07	0.67
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.028	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.502	0.015

* As of Friday/Saturday

FPIs invest over ₹15,280 cr in stocks in June

After remaining net sellers for two months, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) in June turned net buyers by pumping in a net Rs 12,714 crore into Indian markets. Prior to this, they had pulled out Rs 2,666 crore in May and Rs 9,435 crore in April. According to depositories data, FPIs invested Rs 15,282 crore in equities between June 1 and 25. At the same time, FPIs withdrew Rs 2,568 crore from the debt segment.

Front seat airbags must for cars by Dec. 31



The road transport ministry has deferred by four months the mandatory installation of dual airbags for front seats in the existing car models, in view of the pandemic, an official said. Now only the driver's seat airbag is mandatory for existing models of cars. The ministry on March 6 had said that existing models shall be fitted with an airbag for the person occupying the front seat, other than the driver, by August 31.

KIMS, Dodla Dairy to make mkt debut today

Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) and Dodla Dairy, which recently concluded their initial public offerings, will make debut on the stock exchanges on Monday. KIMS successfully raised Rs 2,144 crore through its IPO, which included a little over Rs 955 crore that was mobilised from anchor investors. Dodla Dairy garnered Rs 520 crore from its public issue, including Rs 156 crore from anchor investors.

Crude steel output grows 47% in May

India registered a 46.9 per cent year-on-year growth in its crude steel output at 9.2 million tonnes (mt) in May, according to worldsteel data. The country had produced 5.8 mt steel in the same month a year ago. "The production of the 64 countries reporting to the World Steel Association (worldsteel) was 174.4mt in May 2021, a 16.5 per cent increase compared to May 2020," the global industry body said.

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■ Broader market rally helps smaller funds win by large margin Mid-cap, small-cap funds shine in H1

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JUNE 27

The broader market out-performance in the first half of 2021 has helped mid-cap and small-cap mutual funds outshine large-cap funds by a big margin. The returns kept increasing down the ladder, said analysts about the stock performance in January-June period.

The top five small-cap funds, ranked by the size of their assets under management (AUM), have given returns between 30 per cent and 44 per cent in the last six months period. This is way higher than the returns of the top five large-cap funds, which grew by 11.69 per cent to 20.48 per cent. The top five

BEATING THE BIG BOYS	
Mutual funds' performance in the first half of 2021	
Fund return %	(Last six months)
LARGE CAP FUNDS	
Axis Blue Chip Fund	11.69
ABSL Frontline Equity Fund	17.43
HDFC Top 100 Fund	20.48
ICICI Prudential Blue Chip Fund	17.58
Mirae Asset Large Cap Fund	17.78
MID-CAP FUNDS	
Axis Midcap Fund	22.82
HDFC Midcap Opportunities Fund	27.51
Kotak Emerging Equity Fund	32.76
Nippon India Growth Fund	27.22
Sundaram Midcap Fund	24.25
SMALL CAP FUNDS	
Nippon India Small Cap Fund	44.52
HDFC Small Cap Fund	42.08
DSP Small Cap Fund	33.70
Franklin India Smaller Companies Fund	32.60
SBI Small Cap Fund	30.55

mid-cap funds by AUM have given returns ranging between 22.82 per cent and 32.76 per cent.

These top performing funds are managed by the top 10 fund houses by AUM.

Executives, babus vie for Irdai chairman's post

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 27

A government-appointed high-level search committee is learnt to have identified the best performing CMD of the insurance sector for the Irdai chairman's post.

It is, however, expected that the top post at the insurance regulator may be offered to a retired or working bureaucrat. The post at the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (Irdai) has fallen vacant after Subhash Chandra Khuntia, a former chief secretary of Karnataka, completed his three-year term on May 6 this year.

According to a finance

ministry source, technically, no other chairman and managing director (CMD) of any state-run insurance firm, except LIC chairman, is eligible for the post, which is equivalent to the Union secretary post. "As all the heads of state-run insurers are having the rank of additional secretary, the search committee has the power to consider a relaxation in case it finds an eligible candidate therein," the source said.

"Many heavyweights, like retired and working bureaucrats, and a few heads of insurers have applied for the Irdai chairman post. The selection committee will vet them. The final announcement

for the post will come soon," the source added.

It is learnt that Anup Wadhawan, commerce affairs secretary, who will be retiring this month-end, is another name doing the round for the coveted post. Wadhawan had a good stint in the Department of Financial Services earlier as a joint secretary in charge of the insurance sector and was also an acting chairman of the PFRDA, the pension regulatory body.

Among the serving and retired IAS officers who are believed to have applied for the top regulatory job are B.V.R. Subrahmanyam (1987 batch), who recently joined as secretary, Ministry of Comm-

The large-cap indices—Sensex, Nifty-50 and BSE 100—have given returns of 11.76 per cent, 14.85 per cent and 15.20 per cent, respectively, during the last six month period.

But broader market returns are much higher, with the BSE Mid-cap Index's return at 26.27 per cent, Nifty Mid-cap's, at 28.06 per cent and BSE Small-cap's, at 40.85 per cent.

These top performing funds are managed mostly by the mutual fund industry's top 10 fund houses.

For some of the smaller asset managers in the mid-cap and small-cap categories the outperformance is even higher, like in cases of Edelweiss Midcap Fund (33.08 per cent),

Quant Mid-cap Fund (36.16 per cent), Quant Small-cap Fund (66.93 per cent) and BOI-Axa Small-cap Fund (40.02 per cent).

Mid- and small-cap scrips continued to fare better than their larger peers for the second consecutive month even during the second wave of the pandemic, according to a report by Tata Mutual Fund.

"This is evident from the performance of the broader market indicator—CMIE Overall Share Price Index (Cospi), which housed 2,810 actively traded scrips in May 2021. The Cospi rose by 7.8 per cent, outperforming the Nifty 50 and the S&P BSE Sensex by 1.3 per cent each," Tata Mutual Fund said.

erence after having served as a chief secretary of J&K since 2018, Manoj Parida (1986 batch), advisor to the administrator of Chandigarh, V.P. Joy (1987), chief secretary, Kerala, Chhabilendra Roul (1985), former secretary, Department of Fertilisers, and Preeti Sudan, (1983-batch) who retired as the Union health secretary in July 2020.

The name of Injeti Srinivas is also doing the rounds in the government circuit. Srinivas is currently the chairman of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA), located in GIFT City, Ahmedabad. Srinivas was also a former secretary of Ministry of Corporate Affairs and was

instrumental in pushing through significant reforms in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and the Companies Act.

Irdai members such as K. Ganesh and T.L. Alamelu have also applied for the post. LIC chairman M.R. Kumar, who has got one-year extension of late, has also applied for the post. The other applicants for the post include Rajesh Relan, former head of PNB Met Life, who is currently the CMD of Economy Insurance, and S.S. Gopalaratnam, MD of Chola MS General Insurance.

The government is yet to decide on the date of the interaction to be held for the post.

E-commerce rules could prolong MSME recovery

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 27

Disruption and uncertainty over the proposed new amendments in e-commerce rules will affect the recovery of micro, small and medium businesses hit by the pandemic, say experts.

"During the pandemic a large number of MSMEs are struggling to restart their business. During lockdowns and other restrictions, e-commerce is the most viable platform for MSMEs to sell their goods and services. By coming out with new rules for e-commerce at this time will disrupt the market and hinder the recovery of MSMEs," says Aruna Sharma, member, digitisation committee, Reserve Bank of India.

According to her, MSMEs that are looking to grow their export businesses are increasingly depending on e-commerce platforms, replacing the traditional exporter and trader meets. "MSMEs account for 45-48 per cent of exports and the aim is to take it to 60 per cent.

For this, MSMEs will have to tap the e-commerce route," she said.

In a similar vein, Anil Bharadwaj, secretary general, Fisme said, "In recent times we have increasingly seen MSMEs using the digital platform to improve their reach. E-commerce has played an important role during the lockdowns by ensuring products are delivered at home safely."

E-commerce companies have been handholding MSMEs and providing sales platforms as well as logistics services. For instance, Amazon Small Business Days from July 2 to July 4 to help generate customer demand for the unique and differentiated selection of products offered by small sellers, manufacturers, start-ups, and brands, women entrepreneurs, artisans and weavers and local shops.

Some of the proposed amendments in the E-commerce Rules are detrimental for the MSMEs. As per the rules, no e-commerce entity shall indulge in mis-selling of goods or

services offered on its platform. Mis-selling means an e-commerce entity selling goods or services by deliberate misrepresentation of information by such an entity about such goods or services as suitable for the user who is purchasing it.

According to experts, goods and services are sold by the seller, and e-commerce companies are just the platforms. E-tailer can do due diligence and take measures based on customer feedback. But for all the products and services, the platform cannot be held liable.

Further, a marketplace e-commerce entity shall be subject to a fall-back liability where a seller fails to deliver the goods or services due to negligent conduct, omission or commission of any act by such seller in fulfilling the duties and liabilities in the manner as prescribed by the marketplace e-commerce entity which causes loss to the consumer. These two rules will result in restraint on the part of the platforms while boarding MSMEs.

Bankruptcy board goofs up, leaks Aadhaar and PAN info of creditors

New Delhi, June 27: The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) "inadvertently" put out on its website Aadhaar and PAN details of creditors, including workmen, of some companies undergoing resolution process, and the issues are expected to be sorted out in the next few days.

A senior official said the details came into the public domain "inadvertently", as the regulator is working on a beta project to host the information of creditors of companies undergoing Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) and liquidation.

The IBBI, a key institution in implementing the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), is working on the project to ensure and enhance transparency with respect to CIRP and liquidation processes, the official said, adding that the matter will be sorted out in the next few days.

The details that were put out have been removed, the official added.

It could not be immediately ascertained details of how many creditors were put on display.



There was no official comment from the IBBI. Under the IBBI regulations, details about creditors, including workmen, of companies undergoing CIRP or liquidation should be disclosed on the websites of the companies (corporate debtors). The details reported include name of the creditor concerned, amount claimed and amount admitted.

In case of a CIRP, these details have to be disclosed by the resolution professional while in liquidation processes, the liquidator would make these disclosures.

Such details have to be put out on the websites of the companies concerned.

With instances where many small companies do not have or are unable to maintain their websites, the IBBI is working on a project to host these details on its website for easy

access of the creditors. The work started a few days back.

In some cases, the details about creditors, including information such as their Aadhaar and PAN, were submitted in the PDF format. Since it is difficult to remove specific details from the PDF files, Aadhaar and PAN information of many people were inadvertently made available on the IBBI website, the official said.

There have been instances of resolution professionals approaching the IBBI and the National Company Law Tribunal over the regulations requiring public disclosure of details of creditors.

Since the provisions of the CIRP came into force on December 1, 2016, a total of 4,376 CIRPs have commenced till the end of March this year.

Out of the total, 2,653 have been closed, including 348 CIRPs that ended in approval of resolution plans. As many as 617 CIRPs were closed on appeal or review or settled, while 411 were withdrawn and 1,277 ended in orders for liquidation. —PTI

ABU DHABI FUND PICKS UP STAKE IN MOBIKWIK

Mumbai, June 27: The UAE's sovereign wealth fund Abu Dhabi Investment Authority has picked up a minority stake in the IPO-bound digital payments player Mobikwik for nearly \$20 million (about Rs 150 crore), valuing it at \$700 million, the company has said.

Mobikwik had a bad press in March after alleged massive data theft, following which the Reserve Bank of India had ordered a forensic audit on the Gurugram-based company set up in 2009. Personal data of its about 10 million customers were allegedly stolen by hackers.

Since March 2021, the firm has raised over Rs 235 crore. It is reportedly working on a Rs 1,200-crore IPO. —PTI

TIGHT MARKET Domestic travel is roaring back but many workers are still at home After layoff, Disney offers \$1,000 signing bonus

CHRISTOPHER PALMERI JUNE 27

Walt Disney Co is offering \$1,000 bonuses to recruit new housekeepers and select kitchen staff at its Florida theme parks, just months after laying off some 32,000 employees.

Housekeepers, making \$16 an hour, and line cooks, earning \$18, can receive the money if they stay on the job for at least 90 days, according to the company's website.

Disney, the world's largest theme-park operator, also reinstated its paid summer internship programme, which lets students live in dedicated apartments while they work in the Orlando, Florida, resorts.

It's a sign of how tight the labour market has become, with domestic travel roaring back at a time when many potential work-



ers are still at home. The overall unemployment rate in Orlando was 5.6 per cent in April, a third of what it was a year ago.

At Florida's Walt Disney World - which includes four theme parks and a couple dozen hotels - about 33,000 of the more than 41,000 members of the Service Trades Council Union have returned to work, according to Matt Hollis,

president of that worker coalition. About 15,000 of the 32,000 workers at California's Disneyland resort have returned, the company said.

Disney, which was forced to close its theme parks around the world due to the coronavirus, announced plans in September to lay off 28,000 employees, a number that later grew to 32,000 companywide. Most of them were at its domestic resorts.

Disney said it has rehired more than three-quarters of those affected by furloughs and work reductions. Disneyland, in Anaheim, California, has been bringing back 300 staffers a week, and the company wants to hire thousands more at its US resorts this summer and fall.

Enhanced federal unemployment benefits, enacted in the wake of the pandemic, may be one reason employees aren't

returning to work. They were set to end June 26 in Florida, which opted not to continue them, but will last until September in California.

Another union executive said some California employees are reluctant to return to the parks, which no longer take the temperatures of guests coming in the gates and don't require masks, except in select areas like buses. Guests who self-identify as unvaccinated are encouraged to wear them, however.

Another challenge is finding safe child and elder care in the wake of the pandemic, when unemployed workers have gotten used to staying at home. Many of those being asked to return have the least seniority and less certainty in their work schedules when recalled. Disney said it offers employees support for child and senior care. —Bloomberg

Crypto exchange WazirX parent Binance in a jam

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 27

Crypto currency exchange WazirX, which is facing troubles over Fema violations, has more worries in store. Its parent Binance has been asked to stop all regulated activities in Britain.

The UK's financial watchdog, the Financial Conduct Authority, has also imposed stringent requirements on one of the world's biggest crypto currency exchanges. "Binance Markets Limited is not permitted to undertake any regulated activity in the UK... no other entity in the Binance Group holds any form of UK authorisation, registration or licence to conduct regulated activity in the UK," FCA was quoted by a Reuters report.

Binance Markets is not approved under the FCA's crypto currency registration regime. The entity had applied to become a registered crypto currency company with the regulator, but pulled that application last month "following intensive engagement from the FCA".

The FCA reviews controls and practices of such exchanges to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Binance is one of the most important operators in the fast-emerging crypto market, offering a wide range of services to customers around the world,



including trading in dozens of digital coins, futures, options, stock tokens, as well as savings accounts and lending. It recorded crypto trading volumes equivalent to \$1.5 trillion last month.

Japan's Financial Services Agency had warned last week that Binance was conducting unauthorised trade in crypto currencies with Japanese citizens. Germany's financial watchdog too has warned investors in April that Binance had probably violated securities rules over its launch of trading in stock tokens.

A troubled parent could not be of much help to WazirX, which had received a show-cause notice from Enforcement Directorate a few days back for foreign exchange management violations.

"ED has issued show cause notice to WazirX crypto-currency exchange for contravention of Fema, 1999 for transactions involving crypto-currencies worth Rs 2,790.74 crore," the ED had said in a tweet.

WazirX allows users to trade in crypto currencies such as Bitcoin, Ethereum and others.

SHEELA FOAM FOCUSING ON EXPORTS, IMPORT SUBSTITUTION



New Delhi, June 27: Sheela Foam Ltd, maker of popular mattress brand Sleepwell, is looking at exports and import substitution as the next big opportunities for itself, leveraging "on China becoming weaker on sentiments" in the global markets, according to the company's managing director Rahul Gautam.

The company, which recently completed 50 years of operations, is also looking to expand into beddings related areas such as bedsheets, comforters, duvets, and beds and bedroom furniture as it embarks on the journey for the next half century.

"Post-corona, I think, there are two things which are coming out as glaring for us. Number one is exports. Till date we could not have thought that we would be able to export voluminous items like mattresses, but with China suddenly becoming weaker on sentiments and other things, that opportunity has come by and we're trying to take full advantage of that," Gautam told PTI.

Earlier, the company wasn't too focussed into exports although it was shipping some quantity to the US from India.

"Foam products are very voluminous and the freight costs are very high. There was no background or system for exporting polyurethane foam, except that China had learned to compress the mattress into a small box and put it on a ship and send it across. And that's the technology that we use now," he said.

At present, Sheela Foam has a presence in Spain and Australia. The company also uses its Spanish operations to export to the US market. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Sajan scripts new national record

New Delhi: A day after achieving the elusive 'A' cut for the Olympics, swimmer Sajan Prakash continued his purple patch by setting a new national record in the 200m freestyle event at the Sette Colli Trophy in Rome, Italy on Sunday. Prakash clocked 1:49.73 seconds in the heats at the FINA-accredited Olympic Qualifier, bettering the 2010 Asian Games bronze medalist Viradhwal Khade's previous national mark of 1:49.86 seconds. Prakash has been on a record-breaking spree recently. This is his third national mark this month. On Saturday, he created history by becoming the first-ever Indian swimmer to breach the Olympic Qualifying Time in the men's 200m butterfly event. — PTI

India Women lose first ODI match

Bristol: England Women defeated India Women by eight wickets in the first ODI to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series here on Sunday. Put in to bat, India Women scored 201 for 8. Skipper Mithali Raj top-scored with a 108-ball 72-run knock while Punam Raut made 32. For England Women, Sophie Ecclestone (3/40) was the pick of the bowlers, while Anya Shrubsole (2/33) and Katherine Brunt (2/35) shared four wickets between them. Tammy Beaumont (87 not out) and Nat Sciver (74 not out) struck quick half-centuries as England Women comfortably chased down the target in 34.5 overs. — PTI

Brief Scores: India Women 201/8 in 50 overs (Mithali Raj 72; Sophie Ecclestone 3/40) lost to England Women 202/2 in 34.5 overs (Tammy Beaumont 87 not out, Nat Sciver 74 not out; Jhulan Goswami 1/25).

Top-10 finishes for Honda riders

Netherlands: An incredible charge through the field from Marc Marquez at the Dutch TT delivered seventh from 20th on the grid as Pol Espargaro clinches another top-ten. Round nine of the 2021 MotoGP World Championship was held under clear skies at the historic TT Circuit Assen, the Repsol Honda Team lining up on the grid as they prepared for an uphill challenge. The morning started well with both Marc Marquez and Pol Espargaro finishing the morning Warm Up in the top ten and displaying promising pace. Early fears of rain soon vanished as the grid formed up for the 26-lap Grand Prix later in the day. Marc Marquez was unstoppable off the line as he jumped up the order when the lights went out, ending lap one in 12th after starting down in 20th on the grid.

Yuvi may play for Melbourne club

Melbourne: A Melbourne-based cricket club has claimed that it is very close to striking a deal with Yuvraj Singh and Chris Gayle for its T20 games this summer. The Mulgrave Cricket Club, who play in Melbourne's Eastern Cricket Association (ECA) third-tier competition, said they are also in talks with West Indies legend Brian Lara and South Africa great AB de Villiers. Mulgrave have already secured the services of Sri Lanka's Tillakaratne Dilshan and Upul Tharanga for the summer with Sanath Jayasuriya as their head coach. Mulgrave president Milan Pullenayegam said talks are on with former India all-rounder Yuvraj and West Indian Gayle. — PTI

Verstappen cruises in Styria

Spielberg, Austria: Max Verstappen tightened his grip on the Formula One driver standings as he cruised to victory in the Styrian Grand Prix on Sunday with his closest challenger Lewis Hamilton a distant second. The Dutchman started from pole in his Red Bull and led throughout to finish more than 35 seconds ahead of British reigning champion Hamilton in his Mercedes. Finn Valtteri Bottas was third for Mercedes, chased home by the second Red Bull of Mexican Sergio Perez. Verstappen led from start to finish for the third time this season as he increased his lead over Hamilton to 18 points while Red Bull, sponsored by an Austrian company, increased their lead in the constructor's championship. "Unbelievable. The car was on fire," Verstappen on team radio at the finish. — AFP

DJOKER IN FOCUS

Novak ready to be first among equals at Wimbledon

London, June 27: Novak Djokovic targets a record-equalling 20th major and sixth Wimbledon title from Monday which will edge him tantalisingly closer to becoming only the third man in history to complete a calendar Grand Slam.

The world number one has already won a ninth Australian Open and second French Open this season.

That has put him halfway to emulating Don Budge (1937) and Rod Laver (1962 and 1969) in sweeping all four majors in the same year.

It is a feat even his closest rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal have never managed.

Djokovic memorably captured a fifth Wimbledon in 2019, saving two championship points to defeat Federer in the longest ever final at the All England Club at four hours and 57 minutes.

He was deprived of defending his title in 2020 when Wimbledon was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Djokovic has won seven of the last 11 Slams as he ramps up his assault on the record of 20 majors held jointly by Federer and Nadal.

Nadal, the Wimbledon champion in 2008 and 2010, has already withdrawn from this year's tournament, still scarred by the bruising loss to Djokovic in the French Open semi-finals.

FEDERER EYES NINTH TITLE

Eight-time winner



Novak Djokovic of Serbia and his coach Goran Ivanisevic practice prior to the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London on Friday. — AP

Federer, meanwhile, will be 40 in August and won just one match on grass at Halle in the build-up to Wimbledon.

Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries in 2020, won the last of his eight Wimbledon in 2017 and the most recent of his 20 majors in Australia in 2018.

The Swiss star has lost

three finals to Djokovic at the All England Club — 2014, 2015 and the epic 2019 clash.

The rest of the current top 10 have endured relatively mediocre Wimbledon records.

Only 33-year-old Roberto Bautista Agut, a surprise semi-finalist two years ago, has reached further than the last 16.

EX DOUBLES CHAMP OUT WITH COVID SCARE

Former men's doubles champion Frederik Nielsen was Saturday forced to withdraw from Wimbledon after being identified as a close contact of a positive coronavirus case, the All England Club announced. "The referee's office has advised that Frederik

Nielsen has been withdrawn from the gentlemen's doubles draw, having been classified as a close contact," said a statement.

The 37-year-old Dane, who won the 2012 men's doubles title with Britain's Jonny Marray, had been due to partner Croatia's Franko Skugor at Wimbledon. — AFP

Advantage Williams as rivals' fitness in doubt

London, June 27: Serena Williams turns 40 on September 26 and the arrival of that landmark birthday will be all the sweeter if she has at last equalled Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles.

The tennis legend could even hold the record outright if she wins both Wimbledon and the US Open but despite holding her own in the top 10, there is a fear that age is impacting on her powers.

A fourth round loss at the French Open to Kazakh 21st seed Elena Rybakina reflected this although clay would be her least preferred surface despite three Roland



Serena Williams attends a press conference, ahead of the Wimbledon on Sunday. — AP

Garros titles.

However, her chances of an eighth Wimbledon crown have improved with the withdrawals of

world number two Naomi Osaka and Simona Halep, who beat her in the 2019 final.

That was one of four Grand Slam finals Williams has played since she drew within one title of the controversial Court's record at the 2017 Australian Open.

Fellow American tennis legend Chris Evert believes Williams is still capable of winning at Wimbledon where she has been the losing finalist on her last two visits.

"Like Roger Federer I would give Serena a better chance at Wimbledon because the grass is perfect for her game," Evert told Eurosport prior to the French Open. — AFP

Serena says no to Tokyo Olympics

London, June 27: Serena Williams said Sunday that she will not compete at the Tokyo Olympics next month, joining fellow Grand Slam legend Rafael Nadal in withdrawing from the Games.

The 39-year-old American revealed her decision at her pre-Wimbledon press conference.

"I'm actually not on the Olympic list, so... Not that I'm aware of. If so, then I shouldn't be on it," she said.

She refused to divulge the reasons for her decision.

However, a ban on foreign fans as well as family members at the Olympics would have meant Williams being separated from her daughter Alexis Olympia. The Olympics have

already been delayed by a year and organisers have been forced to introduce strict measures to fight Covid-19.

"There's a lot of reasons that I made my Olympic decision," she said.

"I don't feel like going into them today. Maybe another day. Sorry."

Williams is the joint most successful Olympian in tennis history in terms of gold medals alongside sister Venus having won one gold medal each in singles and three in doubles.

Venus edges the medal count slightly as she also won a silver in mixed doubles in 2016 in Rio.

Serena added she had not really thought about what it would mean to miss the Games. — AFP

MALAN, WILLEY STAR AS ENGLAND SWEEP SL IN T20

Southampton (United Kingdom), June 27: Dawid Malan's dynamic 76 from 48 balls helped England to an 89-run win on Saturday as they claimed a 3-0 clean sweep of Sri Lanka in a Twenty20 series.

Malan had managed just single figure scores in England's two wins earlier this series and a lone fifty in seven previous innings at this level.

But the world's top-ranked T20 batsman showed his class during an innings featuring five fours and four sixes.

With Jos Buttler and Jason Roy injured, Malan opened with Jonny Bairstow and the pair shared a stand of 105.

England, however, lost five wickets for 19 runs, with Dushmantha Chameera taking 4-17, as they were bowled out for 180. But a seemingly modest target proved well beyond Sri Lanka, who were dismissed for 91, with left-arm quick David Willey taking 3-27.

Malan thanked England white-ball captain Eoin Morgan, also the skipper of the 2019 50-over World Cup-winning side, for his support. — AFP

Brief scores: England 180/6 in 20 overs (Malan 76, Bairstow 51, Chameera 4/17) bt Sri Lanka 91 in 18.5 overs (Binura 20, Willey 3/27, Curran 2/14).

Sri Lanka series a new challenge for Dhawan

Mumbai, June 27: India captain for the limited-overs tour of Sri Lanka, Shikhar Dhawan on Sunday termed the upcoming series as a challenge and said the matches in the island nation will provide the fringe players an opportunity to showcase their talent and be in the reckoning for a place in the main team.

"This is a very good team. There is positivity, confidence in our team and everybody is confident that we will do well. There is lot of excitement," Dhawan said at the virtual pre-departure press-conference.

"It is a new challenge but at the same time it is a great opportunity for all of us to show our talent. Everybody is waiting (for the tour to begin).

"13-14 days have passed since we are in quarantine, so the players are waiting when we can hit the ground and we have 10-12 days for preparation."

In the absence of regular skipper Virat Kohli and the main side, Dhawan will lead a second-string Indian team in the limited-overs series against Sri Lanka next month. — PTI



Captain Shikhar Dhawan (left) poses with coach Rahul Dravid ahead of the Lanka tour on Monday.

UNREALISTIC TO GIVE GAME TO ALL YOUNGSTERS: DRAVID

Mumbai, June 27: India head coach for the tour of Sri Lanka, Rahul Dravid, on Sunday said it is unrealistic to expect that all the youngsters picked for the limited-overs assignment will get a game as they try to make an impression ahead of this year's T20 World Cup.

The series marks the coaching return of Dravid, who is based in Bengaluru as the chief of the National Cricket Academy. The second string squad has six

uncapped players.

"...I think it's probably going to be unrealistic to expect us in a short tour like this with three games, or three one-dayers to give everyone an opportunity... And the selectors will be there as well," Dravid declared in the press conference.

Among the players who are fighting for a place in the T20 squad for this year's World Cup are the capped trio of Ishan Kishan, Suryakumar Yadav and Sanju Samson. — PTI

Hyderabad cricket season from July 7

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 27

The local cricket season will start on July 7, Hyderabad cricket legend M. L. Jaisimha's death anniversary, amidst Covid precautions and protocols.

This was decided in Sunday's Apex Council meeting which was chaired by Hyderabad Cricket Association's interim president John Manoj. "The local leagues will start on July 7 with the three-day games. A week later, the two-dayers will begin and by the end of the month, the one-day matches will kickstart as well," John said.

Strict Covid measures will be in place. "The first dose of vaccine is compulsory for all cricketers. In fact, tomorrow and day after, we are organising a free vaccination camp for players, coaches, support staff, staff and employees of HCA and other officials who will be involved in the upcoming 2021-22 season, along with their families," John explained.

"The DM & HO, Medchal will be facilitating the free

● **The local leagues will start on July 7 with the three-day games. A week later, the two-dayers will begin and by the end of the month, the one-day matches will kickstart as well.**

vaccination camp at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Uppal and at Wesley College, Secunderabad, on Monday and Tuesday (June 28 and 29) from 9 am to 4 pm," secretary R. Vijayanand said in a press release earlier.

Next up on the agenda is a roadmap to provide affiliation to the newly carved out districts in Telangana.

"A Special General Meeting (SGM) has been called on July 18 to discuss and debate affiliation for the districts," John said.

It was also decided at the Apex Council meeting to increase the umpires' fees by 10 per cent as also to provide medical insurance to the tune of ₹3 lakh per annum for the families of club secretaries.

Run Riot



Telangana's Nithya Gadhe (from left), Harika Devi, assistant coach Korra Laxman, Agasara Nandini and J. Deepthi pose after qualifying for the 4x100 metres women's finals at the 60th National Inter State Senior Athletics Championships being held at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala, Punjab. Nandini also won silver in the women's 100 metre hurdles with a time of 13.70 seconds. C. Kanimozhi of Tamil Nadu took the top spot by finishing the race in 13.66 seconds.

ARCHERY | WORLD CUP



Atanu Das and Deepika Kumari celebrate with their gold medals in Paris on Monday. — Twitter

Deepika leads India's gold rush

Paris, June 27: Star archer Deepika Kumari led the show with supreme authority to grab a hat-trick of gold medals as India made an unprecedented clean sweep at the World Cup Stage 3 here on Sunday for a perfect build-up to the Tokyo Olympics in less than a month's time.

In the absence of the world number one Korea, the Indians faced little challenge to win the women's individual, team and mixed pair events with Deepika a constant in each of them, playing back-to-back four matches in less than five hours.

Having secured Olympic qualifications, Korea, along with other Asian heavyweights like China and Chinese Taipei, skipped all the World Cups in the build up to the Tokyo Games.

India topped the medals tally with four gold medals as Abhishek Verma had clinched the solitary top medal in the compound section on Saturday.

India's gold rush began with the women's recurve

team of Deepika, Ankita Bhakat and Komalika Bari notching up a comfortable win over Mexico, shrugging off the disappointment of missing Olympic qualification last week.

In a repeat of the World Cup first stage final where they struggled to clinch the gold, the trio this time did not even drop a set to win their second world title in two months.

Eying their first-ever gold medal together, Deepika and husband Atanu Das, who are India's best medal hope in archery in the Olympics, bounced back from a 0-2 deficit to down the Netherlands's Sjeef van den Berg and Gabriela Schloesser 5-3.

That was the only time India faced some challenge on the final day here as they displayed fine composure to reign supreme.

Deepika blanked 17th ranked Russian Elena Osipova 6-0 to cap a perfect three out of three in the recurve women's section, her fourth individual World Cup gold medal. — PTI

