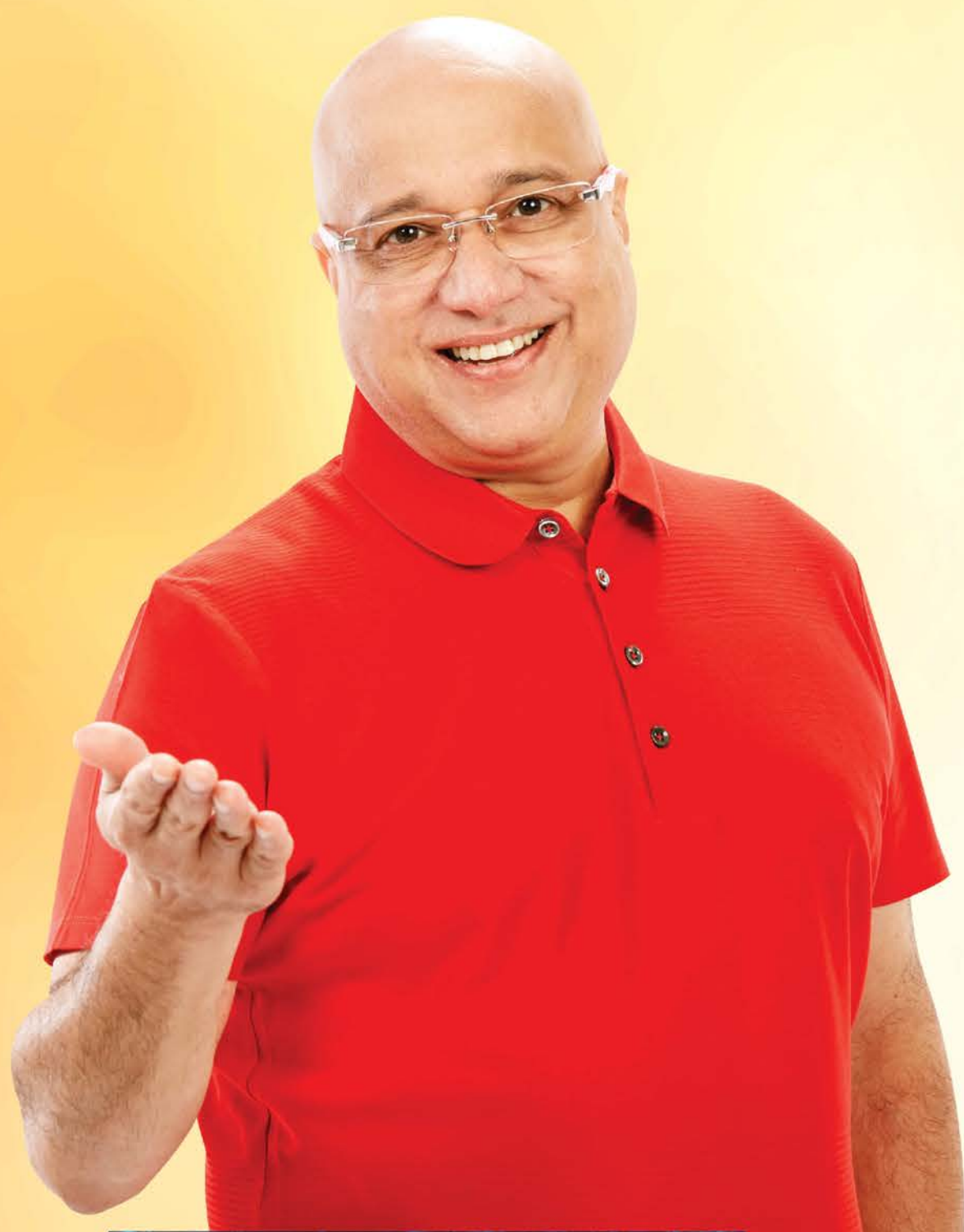


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THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | FRIDAY 7 | AUGUST 2020



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DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | FRIDAY 7 | AUGUST 2020

WEATHER



Max: 36°C
Min: 27°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

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

CORONA COUNT

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

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

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

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

1,91,15,986

DEATHS

7,13,901

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

213

worldometers.info

COUNTER POINT



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

STATE | 5

E-pass process simplified, says CM



WORLD | 7

Times Square displays Lord Ram's image

SPORT | 8

BCCI sets strict guidelines for IPL teams



8 PATIENTS DIE IN A'MD HOSPITAL FIRE

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

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

RAJAPAKSA CLAN HEADING FOR LANDSLIDE WIN

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

The SLPP has polled more votes than its rivals, scoring over 60 per cent of the total votes in the 16 seats declared so far from the South, dominated by the Sinhala majority community. The party won 13 seats out of 16. In Galle district, the SLPP won seven out of nine seats on offer while in the neighbouring Matara district they did even better by winning six out of seven seats on offer. — PTI

RBI panel leaves rates unchanged

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, AUG 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

Min pulls docu on China incursion

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

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

There was no official word why the document uploaded on Tuesday was removed after two days. This comes as the fourth and fifth round of corps commanders' talks between India and China seems to have been unable to reach any major breakthrough on further disengagement in Pangong Tso and other friction areas. The government is yet to come out with any statement on the outcome of

Chinese Aggression on LAC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

700 TONNES AMMONIUM NITRATE

Explosive chemical stored in Chennai for over five years

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
CHENNAI, AUG 6

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

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

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

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

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

India surpasses 20L Covid-19 cases mark

S. UMAMAHESHWAR I
DC
HYDERABAD, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SHORT TAKES

E-pass racket busted

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, AUG. 6

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

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

Chennai has an explosion threat: Ramadoss

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

More FPOs in Thanjavur dt

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, AUG. 6

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

School reopening not now

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

Schools in the state will not be opened in the near future, minister for school education K. A. Sengottaiyan informed through a tweet on Thursday.

"In the present situation there is no chance for opening schools. After the spread of Coronavirus declines, based on people's perceptions and the ground situation schools will be opened later," he said.

E-pass process has been simplified: Palaniswami

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

Coronavirus infections and deaths continued to linger at the same level of the previous few days with the state total on Thursday being 5,684 new cases and 110 deaths, while in Chennai city it was 1,091 fresh infections and 22 fatalities.

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

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

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



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

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

mount importance to return to normalcy, he added.

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

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

Kumaravel is VC in-charge of Central varsity

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUVARUR, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

First ringwell structure



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

Tiruchendur MLA dispels rumours of defection

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

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

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

BJP as mentioned in those social media messages.

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

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

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

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

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



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

Cop succumbs to Covid in Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Applications/bio-data are invited in the prescribed format to fill up eight vacancies of Judicial Members and five vacancies of Administrative Members in the Armed Forces Tribunal. The details of eligibility conditions, other information and prescribed format of bio-data may be downloaded from the Ministry of Defence's website www.mod.nic.in and the Armed Forces Tribunal website www.aftdelhi.nic.in. The last date of receipt of applications in the Department for the posts of Judicial & Administrative Members is 25th August, 2020. It may be noted that the previous advertisement of this Ministry dated 25.07.2019 in this regard has been scrapped consequent on the announcement of Hon'ble Supreme Court's final verdict dated 13.11.2019 in Civil Appeal No.8588/2019 titled "Rojer Mathews V South Indian Bank Ltd" in which "The Tribunal, Appellate Tribunal and other Authorities (Qualifications, Experience and other Conditions of Service of Members) Rules, 2017" were quashed in its entirety. Therefore, such applicants who had applied previously vide circular dated 25.07.2019 will have to apply afresh now. The applications should be addressed to Under Secretary (AFT Cell), Ministry of Defence, Room No. 308- A, 'B' Wing, Sena Bhawan, New Delhi - 110011.

Davp: 10146/11/0001/2021

Avalanche records 581 mm of rainfall

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, AUG. 6

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

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

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

Water from Kabini, KRS dams fill Mettur dam

ZAKEER HUSSAIN | DC
SALEM, AUG. 4

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

The Kabini and Krishna Raja Sagar dams are filling

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

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

up fast.

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

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

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

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

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

hit water supply also in many areas here.

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

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

DECCAN Chronicle

7 AUGUST 2020

Did PM just discredit India's freedom fight?

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

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

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

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

In Beirut, avoidable tragedy

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

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

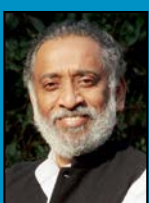
The scale of indecisiveness and lack of clarity on what to do with a chemical that has at least half the explosive power of TNT is risible. The human tragedy caused by such apathy, particularly when it comes to handling the complexity of man's ingenuity in making substances that can blow mankind to pieces,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

DECCAN CHRONICLE		
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Dilip Cherian

Dilli Ka Babu

Officer sent to PMO won laurels in TN



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

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

WHO WILL BE NEW RBI DEPUTY GOVERNOR?

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

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

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

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

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

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

HALT OR GO TO J&K CADRE CHANGE?

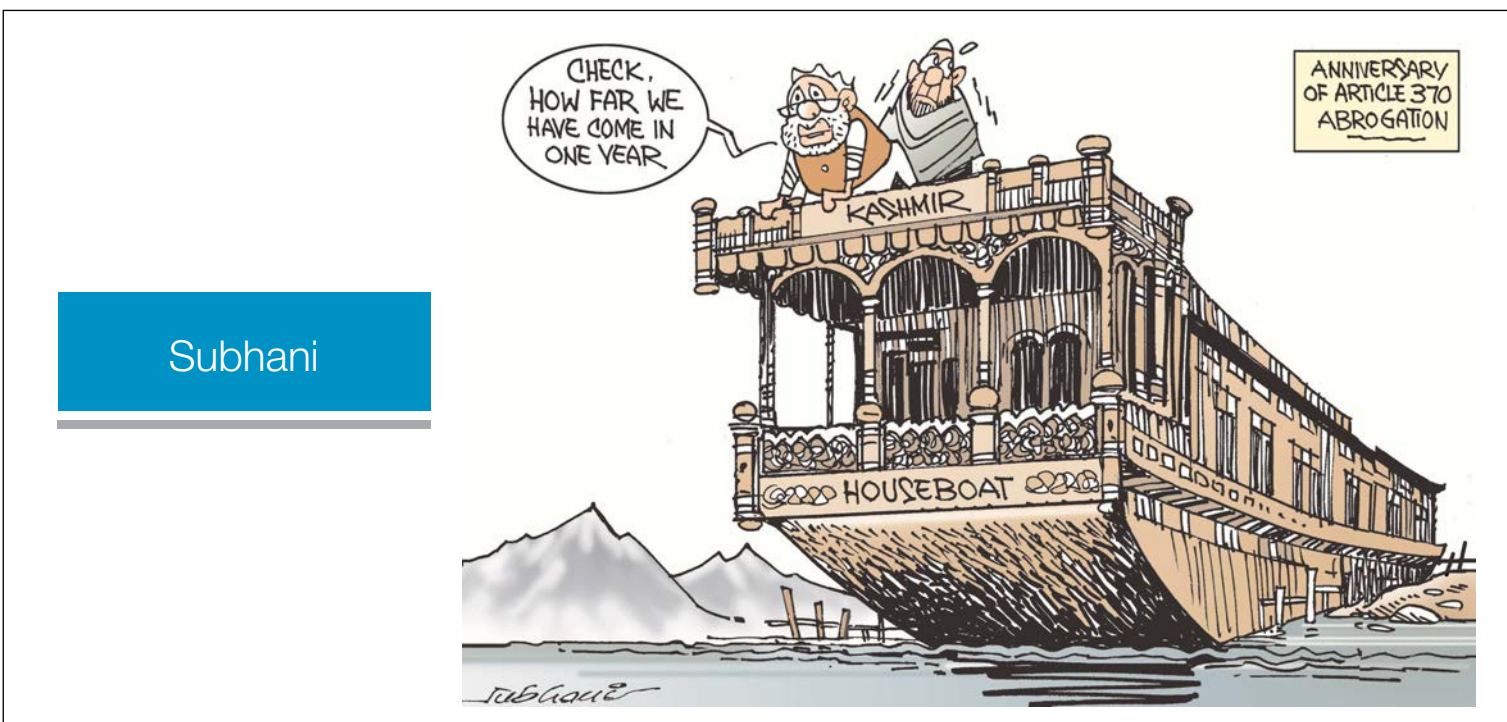
The Centre stopped inducting new officers in the J&K cadre of the All India Services after the re-categorisation of Jammu & Kashmir into two Union territories, J&K and Ladakh, in August last year. The process was recently reinitiated, but sources say, it has been put on hold again after receiving feedback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

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

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

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

Share a babu experience! Follow [@dilipthecherian](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherian) on Twitter. Let's multiply the effect.



Subhani

Pandemic on rise: More questions than answers



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

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

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

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

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

There are masses of data swirling around.

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

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

is on the right track.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS ROLE MODEL

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

Jacqueline Netto
Chennai

RELIGIOUS BEGINNING

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

V. Rajagopalan
Chennai

SETBACK FOR TRUMP

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

R. Sivakumar
Chennai

SHORT TAKES

SUSHANT CASE: CBI BOOKS FIR AGAINST RHEA, OTHERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

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

A senior official in the agency said the CBI has booked six accused and others under sections including criminal conspiracy, abetment of suicide, wrongful restraint, wrongful confinement, theft, criminal breach of trust, cheating and criminal intimidation. The agency sleuths are also in touch with Bihar Police, which was earlier investigating the case, said the official.

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

Rajput, 34, was found hanging from the ceiling of his apartment in suburban Bandra in Mumbai on June 14 and since then Mumbai police has been probing the case. Bihar Police also swung into action following a complaint by his father Krishna Kishore Singh of Patna.

India snubs China for remarks on J&K

Urges Beijing not to interfere in India's internal affairs

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

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

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

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

'India committed to its objective'

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 6

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

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

Ministry of external affairs (MEA)

saying Pakistan "welcomed" the meet.

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

spokesperson, Anurag Srivastava, said, "As I have conveyed earlier, the special representatives of India and China had a telephone conversation on July 5 where they discussed the situation in the border areas. They had agreed that early and complete disengagement of the troops along the line of actual control and de-escalation from India-China border areas in accordance with the bilateral agreement and protocols and full restoration of peace and tranquillity was essential for the smooth overall development of bilateral relations."

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

China first began raising the Kashmir issue last year at the UNSC for informal

deliberations soon after India revoked Article 370.

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

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

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

Rural Telangana continues to report spike in Covid-19 cases

DC CORRESPONDENTS
AUG. 6

Hyderabad: The spread of Covid-19 in the rural areas continued with the non-GHMC areas registering 1,557 cases on Wednesday, of the state's 2,092 cases, according to the health department bulletin of Thursday. On Tuesday, the districts had reported 1,480 cases. The GHMC area had 535 cases. Thirteen persons died of Covid on Wednesday, taking the toll to 589.

Warangal Urban registered 128 cases, Ranga Reddy 169, Medchal-Malkajgiri 126, Karimnagar 123 and Sangareddy 101. A total of 21,346 samples were tested and results of 1,550 are awaited. A senior government doctor in a district blamed the trend on poor sanitation. "People have only understood that they must wear masks. There is no social distancing. They have no idea about sanitisation. The concept of isolation has not been understood at all."

Andhra Pradesh adds
10,328 to the tally

Vijayawada: Andhra Pradesh on Thursday added 10,328 new cases to the number of people infected by Covid-19, taking the total tally to 1.96 lakh. The Covid-19 toll in the state rose by 72 to 1,753 while another 8,516 patients had been discharged from hospitals in the last 24 hours, the latest bulletin said. After a total of 1.12 lakh coronavirus patients recovered, the state now has 82,166 active cases.

Karnataka reports spike
of 6,805 cases

Bengaluru: An addition of 6,805 new cases took the Covid-19 tally to 1.58 lakhs in Karnataka on Thursday. The day also witnessed 93 related fatalities. Out of the fresh cases, 2,544 were from Bengaluru urban alone. As of August 6, cumulatively 1,58,254 cases have been confirmed in the state.

'KERALA TO SEE DECLINE BY SEPT'

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
AUG. 6

Kerala's High Level Expert Committee on Covid Control believes Coronavirus cases are expected to decline in the state by mid September if the state government continues with tough disease control and prevention measures.

Committee chairman Dr B Eklab said the state needs to strictly comply with the break-the-chain activities, strict quarantine and reverse quarantine measures to ensure the slide of Covid -19 by next month.

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

BJP SARPANCH SHOT DEAD BY KASHMIR ULTRAS

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, AUG. 6

The killing of a village head associated with the BJP in southern Kulgam by suspected militants on Thursday triggered a new wave of resignations by party activists across the Valley.

Over half a dozen BJP workers took to social media platforms to say they were dissociating from the party. Some even sought forgiveness from the militants.

The police said at about 9.30 am militants shot and critically wounded BJP sarpanch Sajad Ahmad Khanday in Vesoo village in Kulgam. The police said the slain sarpanch feared a threat to his life and was given accommodation in a "secure camp".

Panel has discretion to decide on prisoners'

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, AUG. 6

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

The HC also made it clear that no prisoner can claim right or entitlement

to seek temporary release during the pandemic.

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

As per the order dated March 25, 2020, the com-

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

The petitioner's advocate S.B. Talekar had argued that the committee had exceeded its jurisdiction by classifying prison-

ers and it was infringing upon a person's fundamental right to equality.

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

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

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

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

WORLD



A digital billboard of Lord Ram and Ram Mandir at Times Square, New York, to mark the Ayodhya 'Bhoomi Pujan', on Wednesday. — PTI

TIMES SQUARE DISPLAYS LORD RAM'S IMAGE

New York, Aug. 6: The image of Lord Ram and the grand Ram Temple to be built in Ayodhya beamed across a giant billboard at the iconic Times Square in New York City where members of the Indian community gathered in large numbers to celebrate the 'Bhoomi Pujan' performed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The bright image of Lord Ram, the grand temple and the Indian Tricolour beamed on a giant wrap-around LED display screen on Wednesday. While the organisers had planned to beam the photos from 8 AM to 10 PM on Wednesday, the image of Lord Ram and the temple was displayed for about four hours till 1 PM.

"Extremist groups can try to stymie us but they cannot silence Hindus. Come celebrate our Ram-Ji in Times Square tonight at 7:30 for a diya lighting!! (there will be no displays in the evening)," the organisers said on the website ramecelebration.org.

Prominent community leader and President of the American India Public Affairs Committee Jagdish Sewhani and organiser of the event said that the members of the Indian community gathered in huge numbers to celebrate the historic day when PM Modi performed the 'Bhoomi Pujan' of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Members of the Indian diaspora gathered at Times Square where organisers had planned to light diyas, sing bhajans and distribute sweets. — PTI

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

Test travellers from 'risk areas': Germany

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

statement.

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

— AP

Lebanon officials shift blast blame as Macron calls for serious reforms

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

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

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

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

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



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

OZ PLEDGES \$1.4MN FOR BEIRUT RELIEF

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

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

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

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

Explosion likely an attack: Trump

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

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

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

OBITUARY

Ramjee Swaminathan
The uncle we love remains with us, for love itself lives on and cherished memories never fade because a loved one is gone. Our Uncle, Mr. Ramjee Swaminathan reached the lotus feet of God on 26th July 2020. We pray for his soul to rest in peace.
Jyothsna, Aparna and Renuka.
jyothsna.m@gmail.com
arm.mahan@gmail.com

SHORT TAKES

Camps for junior athletes from Oct.

New Delhi: The national training camps for junior athletes will begin in a phased manner from October 1, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Wednesday. It was decided in SAI's Mission Olympic Cell review meeting that training of junior athletes at its National Centres of Excellence (NCOE), shut since March due to the COVID-19 outbreak, will start in a phased manner from October. The SAI, however, said that the respective state governments where the NCOEs are situated will take the final call, keeping in mind the health and safety of athletes and coaches amid the pandemic. In view of the preparation for Olympics and to ensure that athletes have world-class infrastructure and equipment to train with, the SAI has also decided to enhance the funds at all its NCOEs. To ensure a safe environment for all the athletes, especially those joining the camps in their teenage years, a series of sensitisation workshops will be held in these NCOEs. — PTI

258 juniors make TOPS scheme

New Delhi: The Sports Authority of India has shortlisted 258 athletes from across 12 sporting disciplines for support through Target Olympic Podium Scheme Developmental Group, also known as Junior TOPS. The support will be extended through a group/systems approach and a monthly out of pocket allowance of ₹25,000 will be given to every athlete.

Regd. No.

TNENG/2010/35692

Printed & Published by
K. Sudhakar on behalf of
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited
and Printed at
Deccan Chronicle Presses situated
at SP 3, Developed Plot, Industrial Estate,
Guindy, Chennai - 600 032.
RNI Registration No: TN ENG/2005/14987
Ph Nos: 22254747, 22254748, 22254750,
22254751
Editor: **ADITYA SINHA**

TIGHTROPE WALK

BCCI sets strict guidelines for IPL teams

New Delhi, Aug. 6: Eight different hotels for the eight participating teams, two mandatory negative Covid-19 test reports before flying to the UAE and punishment for any breach of the bio-secure protocol are part of the BCCI's SOP for the IPL that was handed over to the franchises on Wednesday. The document, accessed states that every franchisee's medical team should obtain the "medical and travel history of all players and support staff" since March 1 this year.

"All Indian players and team support staff must undergo two Covid-19 PCR tests, 24 hours apart, in the week before assembling in the franchises' city of choice," it states.

"This will help reduce the risk of cross infection within the group before flying to the UAE."

"Breach of any Bio-Secure Environment protocols by players and team support staff will be punishable under the IPL Code of Conduct Rules."

Anyone testing positive for Covid-19 will be quarantined and after completion of a 14-day period, the individual will have to undergo two Covid-19 tests, 24 hours apart.

"...if both test reports are negative, he/she may be allowed to fly out to the UAE. After arrival in UAE, there will be tests on Day 1, 3 and 6 with testing every fifth day throughout the tournament."

The SOP states that all "franchise teams will be put up in different hotels."

"Team members must be allotted rooms in a separate wing of the hotel that has a separate centralised air conditioning (AC) unit than the rest of the hotel," it adds.

— PTI



Royal Challengers Bangalore's captain Virat Kohli (left) and coach Gary Kirsten look on during a training session in this file photo.

Empty stands extended room

New Delhi, Aug. 6: The BCCI's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the upcoming IPL recommends that teams use "empty stands" as extended dressing rooms for training and matches while strategy meetings can now be held outdoors in order to maintain social distancing.

The IPL, to be held from September 19 in the UAE, won't feature any toss mascot this year which means the BCCI will lose out on another avenue of earning sponsorship

money. While players and support staff's families can join them, they won't be allowed to travel in the team bus and can't leave the bio bubble.

According to the SOP which was handed to the franchises the teams will be encouraged to use the stands for dressing room purpose which helps in maintaining social distancing.

"The Bio-Secure Environment means only essential staff will be on site and no members of

the public will be allowed. Therefore there will be more vacant areas at the stadium and hence the dressing room does not have to remain within the traditional area.

"Venue Cricket Operation teams should consider using appropriate areas beyond the normal dressing room," the SOP states.

Also, the teams have been asked to use electronic team sheets rather than captains carrying hard copies of their playing XI list.

The SOP also states that franchises might install "Scalene Hypercharge Corona Canon (Shycocan), a device that has the ability to neutralise 99.9 per cent of the coronavirus that might be floating in the air in closed spaces."

For the medical team, including physios and masseurs, the SOP recommends that if they need to get in physical contact with the player (massage sessions etc), they have to wear PPE kits.

— PTI

BCCI, VIVO OFFICIALLY PUT OFF DEAL FOR THE SEASON

New Delhi, Aug. 6: The BCCI on Thursday suspended the IPL title sponsorship deal with Chinese mobile phone company Vivo for the event's upcoming edition amid the Sino-India border face-off.

The BCCI sent out a one-line statement, without giving any details, to say that Vivo will not be associated with the IPL this year.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and vivo Mobile India Pvt Ltd have decided to suspend their partnership for Indian Premier League in 2020," the press release stated.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and vivo Mobile India Pvt Ltd have mutually decided to pause their partnership for the 2020 season of Indian Premier League," it stated.

— PTI

England collapse to 12/3 on day 2

Manchester, Aug. 6: England collapsed to 12-3 in the first Test against Pakistan at Old Trafford on Thursday, with star batsman Ben Stokes out for a duck.

It took Pakistan just four balls to strike, with Rory Burns lbw for four to towering left-arm paceman Shaheen Afridi on the second day.

England captain Joe Root was still on nought when he was given out leg before to Afridi but a successful review spared the skipper.

Pakistan were soon celebrating again, however, when Mohammad Abbas had Dom Sibley lbw, the batsman wasting a review

when clearly out.

But there was no need for the third umpire to get involved when Abbas bowled left-handed batsman Stokes for a seven-ball nought with a superb delivery that clipped the top of off-stump.

That left England 12-3 inside six overs.

Pakistan made 326 all out in their first innings, opener Shan Masood top-scoring with a Test-best 156.

— AFP

Brief scores (At the time of going to press on Day 2): Pakistan 326 in 109.3 overs (B. Azam 69, Shan Masood 150, S. Khan 45, S. Board 3/54, J. Archer 3/59) vs England 12/3 in 5.3 overs.



England fast bowler James Anderson (centre) celebrates taking the wicket of Pakistan's Babar Azam on the second day of the first Test cricket at Old Trafford in Manchester on Thursday.

— AFP

LIVE RICH

FINANCIAL Chronicle

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	38,025.45 0.96
Nifty 50	11,200.15 0.89
S&P 500*	3,326.43 -0.04
Dollar (₹)	74.92 0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.64 -0.81
Euro (₹)	88.78 -0.35
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	55,850.752 1.36
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	45.60 0.43
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.862 0.035
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.515 -0.028

* As of 10:30 PM IST

Gold and silver prices touch new record high

Gold and silver prices touched record levels in the national capital on Thursday and the yellow metal rose by ₹225 to ₹56,590 per 10 grams amid strong rally in the international market, according to HDFC Securities. Silver price surged by ₹1,932 to ₹75,755 per kilogram. On Wednesday, it had closed at ₹73,823 per kg. In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at ₹56,365 per 10 grams.

Printed & Published by
K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed & Published at Deccan Chronicle Presses situated at SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai. Editor: **T. Venkatram Reddy**, RNI Reg. No. TNENG/2008/25473 Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle © is prohibited.

FALAKNAAZ SYED

MUMBAI, AUG. 6

Even as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) held interest rates steady on Thursday and disappointed borrowers by not extending the loan moratorium in its Monetary Policy, it announced a onetime restructuring of loans for personal loan borrowers, corporate borrowers and Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) hit by the Covid 19 pandemic. The restructuring will be allowed as per the prudential framework issued on June 7, 2019, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said.

In his speech, Das, said, "The disruptions caused by COVID-19 have led to heightened financial stress for borrowers across the board..."

Accordingly, it has been decided to provide a window under the 7 June Prudential Framework to enable lenders to implement a resolution plan in respect of eligible corporate exposures—without change in ownership—as well as personal loans, while classifying such exposures as standard assets, subject to specified conditions."

Personal loans include those given to individuals and include consumer credit, education loan, loans given for creation or enhancement of immovable assets and loans given for investment in financial assets such as shares, debentures, as per RBI.



RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

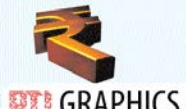
Bi-monthly Monetary Policy Review



Highlights

- Policy rate unchanged at 4%, reverse repo at 3.35%
- Loans against gold enhanced to 90% of the value from current 75% to mitigate COVID-19 impact on households
- To continue with the accommodative stance to revive growth
- Supporting economic recovery assumes primacy in conduct of monetary policy in uncertain global environment
- Sees upside risk to inflation, projects moderation in Oct-Mar
- GDP growth to be negative in current fiscal
- Stressed MSME borrowers eligible for loan restructuring if their accounts were classified standard

- Allows lenders to provide window to restructure loans of corporate, individual borrowers to ease COVID-19 impact
- A new resolution window for corporate and personal loans to be framed
- To put in place safeguards for opening of current accounts and overdraft accounts for customers availing credit facilities from multiple banks
- Priority Sector Lending (PSL) to include startups
- Increased limits for renewable energy, including solar power, and small and marginal farmers and "Weaker Sections" under PSL
- To allow a pilot scheme for small value payments in offline mode while safeguarding interest of users, liability protection
- Proposes Online Dispute Resolution for digital payments
- Rs 5,000 crore additional liquidity facility to be provided by the National Housing Bank to boost liquidity in housing sector
- Rs 5,000 crore liquidity support to NABARD to aid agri sector
- Economic activity had started to recover, but surge in infection has forced imposition of lockdowns
- Monetary Policy Committee conscious of primary mandate to achieve inflation target of 4% within a band of +/- 2%



Startups get RBI's priority tag

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 6

In a major boost to startups, now their loans will come under priority sector lending. RBI will also look into regional disparities in priority sector lending (PSL).

The PSL guidelines were last reviewed in April 2015. In these five years, the country has seen a lot of activity in the start-up space. Acknowledging the potential of start-ups

in boosting the economy, RBI has broadened the scope of PSL to include start-ups.

As per PSL norms, RBI mandates banks to lend a certain portion of their funds to specified sectors like agriculture, micro, small and medium enterprises, export credit, education, housing, social infrastructure, renewable energy, etc.

Further, RBI has also increased the PSL limits for renewable energy.

As part of reviewing the PSL guidelines, an incentive framework is also being put in place for banks to address the regional disparities in the flow of priority sector credit. While higher weightage will be assigned for incremental priority sector credit in the identified districts having lower credit flow, a lower weightage would be assigned in identified districts where the credit flow is higher.

Positive Pay, offline card payment soon

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, AUG. 6

Enhancing the security of cheque payments, RBI will introduce Positive Pay for all cheques of ₹50,000 and above.

As for digital payments, RBI also wants offline payments through cards, mobile wallets and devices to become possible for remote areas with low internet connectivity.

In order to check increasing cheque frauds, RBI has decided to introduce a mechanism of Positive Pay for all cheques of value ₹50,000 and above, RBI said.

This measure will cover approximately 20 per cent of all cheques issued in the country in volume terms and 80 per cent of cheques in terms of value.

RBI also wants to make offline payment through cards, wallets and mobile devices possible. "There has been considerable growth in digital payments using mobile phones, cards, wallets, etc. Lack of internet connectivity or low speed of internet, especially in remote areas, is a major impediment in adoption of digital payments," the central bank said in its statement.

Gold can get you 90% of its value as loan

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, AUG. 6

In order to provide higher liquidity to households and small businesses, RBI has increased the Loan-To-Value (LTV) ratio of gold loans offered by banks from 75 per cent to 90 per cent. However, the higher LTV will not be available for non-banking finance companies.

As per the current guidelines, gold loans sanctioned by banks for non-agricultural purposes should not exceed 75 per cent of the value of gold ornaments and jewellery.

"With a view to mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on households, it has been decided to increase the permissible loan to value ratio (LTV) for such loans to 90 per cent. This relaxation shall be available till March 31, 2021," said RBI.

Higher LTV will put more money in the hands of the customer for the same volume of gold pledged. Gold prices have appreciated more than 40 per cent since the beginning of the year. Due to the price appreciation, the loan amount has naturally increased by 40 per cent even at an LTV of 75 per cent. Once the LTV is increased to 90 per cent, this will increase the loan

amount by another 15 per cent. This will solve the liquidity issues of small scale business persons and traders, who account for the largest chunk of the customer base, as well as individuals to a great extent.

The new LTV will be available for a window of eight months. Fresh loans issued post March 31, 2021 will come under 75 per cent LTV.

THE NEW LTV will be available for a window of eight months. Fresh loans issued post March 31, 2021 will come under 75 per cent LTV.

"LTV of 90 per cent in an increasing gold price scenario is fine. Only we must keep an eye on the margin because 10 per cent is a small cushion. This is still manageable. This will help the small businesses, micro and small units who avail gold loans for business needs as well," said Padmaja Chunduru, MD and CEO of Indian Bank.

Sensex heaves a sigh of relief

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, AUG. 6

The Sensex and the Nifty-50 gained close to one per cent as RBI announced several measures to provide relief to borrowers and others hit badly by Covid-19 pandemic and kept it's policy stance as accommodative, raising hopes of

further interest rate easing in future. The Sensex gained 362.12 points or 0.96 per cent and regained 38,000 levels closing at 38,025.45. The Nifty-50 index closed at 11,200.15 up 98.50 or 0.89 per cent.

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