

Diagram illustrating the addition of three identical color-coded blocks (blue, pink, yellow, black, grey) to form a single block.

SHORT TAKES

AP COUNCIL GETS PROTEM CHAIRMAN

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 18

Senior MLC Vithapu Balasubramanyam was appointed as Protem Chairman of AP Legislative Council by AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Friday. Balasubramanyam was elected as MLC for three times. He would give oath to the newly appointed four MLCs under Governor's quota on Monday.

Recently the Governor appointed Lella Appi Reddy, RV Ramesh Yadav, Thota Trimurthulu and K Moshen Raju as MLCs under Governor's quota. Balasubramanyam would continue as Protem Chairman till election of Chairman to AP Legislative Council.

Meanwhile, Mooshen Raju paid a courtesy visit to Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and thanked him for selecting him for the MLC post. Deputy Chief Minister Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas and Bhimavaram MLA Grandhi Srinivas were present.

YSRC ATTAINS MAJORITY IN AP COUNCIL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 18

Ruling YSR Congress has gained majority in the AP Legislative Council on Friday after two years of coming into power in the state, with seven MLCs of Telugu Desam – Y. V. B. Rajendra Prasad, B. Naga Jagadiswar Rao, Pappala Chalapati Rao, Buddha Venkanna, Gali Sarasawathi, Dwarapudi Jagadeeshwara Rao and Reddy Subramanyam completing their terms on Friday.

AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan has appointed four new legislators to the council under the Governor quota – Lella Appi Reddy, Thota Trimurthulu, R. V. Ramesh Yadav and K. Moshen Raju, all belonging to the YSRC.

There are 11 MLC posts vacant under local bodies' quota. The ruling party is going to win all these seats, as opposition TD had suffered a humiliating defeat in these polls held earlier.

With this, the posts of both chairman and deputy chairman posts will now be bagged by the ruling party.

The term of YSRC senior leader and MLC Ummareddy Venkateswarlu also ended on Friday. According to sources, YSRC high command is expected to re-nominate him as its MLC.

LAND SURVEY TO BE MADE FOOLPROOF

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 18

Deputy Chief Ministers' Dharma Krishna Das and Pamula Pushpa Srivani launched the comprehensive survey of the land at Marrivalasa village in Ramabhadrapuram mandal in Visakhapatnam on Friday morning.

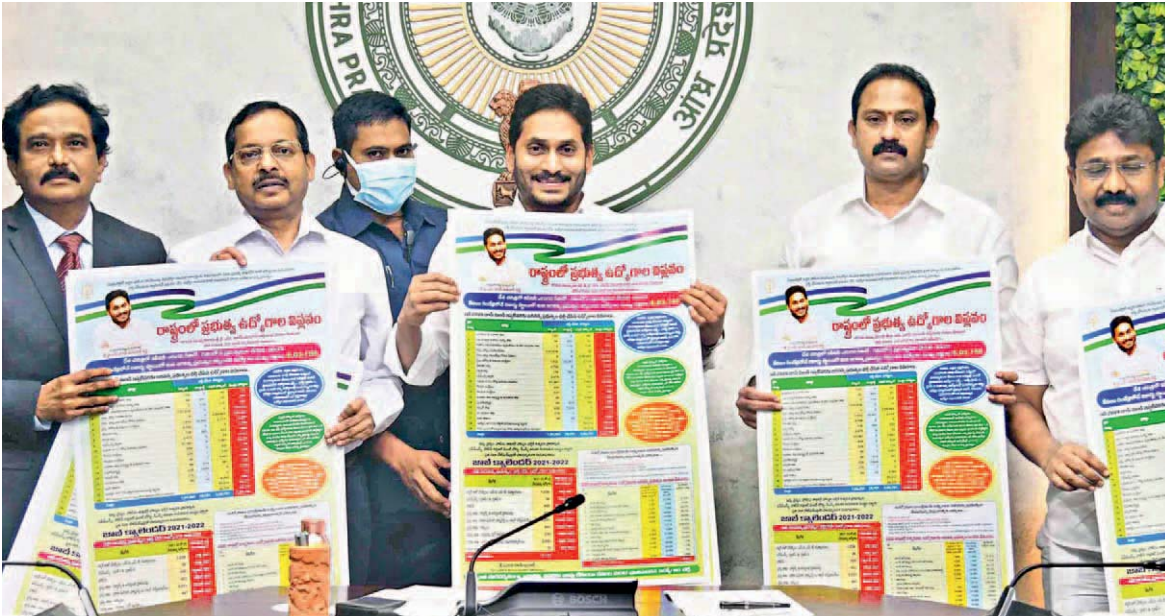
Speaking on the occasion, Krishnadas said the survey christened as YSR Jagananna Saswatha Bhuhakku and Bhuraksha Pathakam was being conducted after a century. The last survey was conducted during the British era. He said most modern technology including drones would be used to conduct the survey that would put an end to the land disputes in the state. He said in Vizianagaram district, an extent of 12,43,475 acres under 23,91,983 subdivisions and 1,99,404 survey numbers was being surveyed.

In the first phase, 499 revenue villages would be surveyed and the entire process would be completed by October 2023. "Not just agriculture lands, the survey will also cover residential plots as well in the urban areas," he said, adding that grama sabhas would be held at all the places to clarify doubts to the farmers and residential plot owners.

Pushpa Srivani said the farmers who purchased lands with their lifetime earnings were being duped by unscrupulous elements with false documents. This was making the farmers run around the courts to solve the dispute for years. "The comprehensive survey will not give scope to such irregularities," she said.

She said around 16,000 persons were trained across the state to conduct this survey.

Release of job calendar



Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy releases Job Calendar 2021-22 at the camp office in Tadepalli on Friday. APPSC secretary P. S. R. Anjaneyulu, principal secretary (HR) ministry of finance Shashibhushan Kumar and ministers Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas and Adimulapu Suresh are also seen.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

Farmers fret over lack of soil tests

In the past, tests were conducted free of cost by govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JUNE 18

Farmers are fretting over huge difficulties in getting soil tests done for their fields to grow compatible crops. The YSRC government is not only not offering them free of cost but has also turned soil test centres defunct in the district.

In the past, these tests were conducted free of cost by the government. The government would set targets for collection of soil samples before Kharif each year.

After coming to power, the YSRC has completely halted this policy. Not a single soil sample was col-

● **AFTER THE** formation of the new government, the staff at the Proddatur and Rayachoti centers were transferred to another area. As a result, both the centers were closed.

lected anywhere by the government last year, except those taken by the farmers themselves and submitted to laboratories. Farmers have now lost that opportunity due to the government decision. Farmers have to pay ₹300 per acre for availing soil tests.

Farmers need to know about the nutrient levels in their fields to take corrective steps before sowing. Crop yields depend on soil fertility. Depending on the test results, crops are selected

and required nutrients are applied to the land. For this, there are four soil testing centers in the district. There are two centers in Vutukuru on the outskirts of Kadapa and one each in Proddatur and Rayachoti.

After the formation of the new government, the staff at the Proddatur and Rayachoti centers were transferred to another area. As a result, both the centers were closed. Electricity supply to two stations in Vutukuru was also cut off last March due

to non-payment of bills by the government. As a result, the conduct of soil tests has stopped here as well. Unaware of this, farmers still take soil samples to the soil testing center in Vutukuru.

While some farmers approach the Agricultural Research Center in Kadapa to pay high fees for the tests, others return in frustration. In fact, the government has decided to set up mini-laboratories at Rythu Bharosa Kendrams (RBKs) and conduct soil tests. It also wants to train village agricultural assistants for this purpose. However, the proposal has not come to a pass due to Covid-19.

APCOS to ensure transparency in hiring

From page 1

The CM stated that unlike the previous government, where brokers were more involved in outsourcing appointments, the current government set up APCOS (AP Corporation for Outsourced Services) to ensure transparency in recruitments and payments, giving no room for middlemen or corruption. In spite of having a ₹3,500 crore burden, APSRTC has been merged with the State government, where the lives of 51,387 RTC employees have been secured. He said the job market would be expanded with decentralisation and more jobs would be created at the village level itself.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister slammed the previous government for not keeping the election promise of providing a job to each household and leaving the unemployed youth in the lurch by not paying the promised unemployment allowance. He said N. Chandrababu Naidu promised to fill 1.4 lakh

LOKESH DESCRIBES YSRC JOB CALENDER AS 'FAKE'

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 18

Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh described the job calendar released by the YCP government as a 'fake calendar.' He asked how the CM could show the RTC employees and the volunteers in the list of job calendar. The 54,000 RTC employees' jobs were not newly created but they came into the job calendar as part of the RTC

vacant posts listed in his election manifesto, but in reality the manifesto itself was dumped in a trash bin.

He also criticised Naidu for failing to create jobs to youth in the private sector by securing the Special Category Status (SCS) to Andhra Pradesh in his previous rule. He flayed him for accepting a special package offered and

merger.

The CM's job calendar was full of false figures, duplicate claims and empty promises, he added.

After Jagan became the CM, he assured the people of creating 2.3 lakh jobs but did not create even a few hundreds of regular government jobs for the youth. He promised to release the job calendar every January 1 but the present one came over two years after he came to power.

mortgaging state benefits to escape from the cash-for-vote case. He said his government would continue to exert pressure on the Centre for the special status and reiterated that both development and welfare were prioritised even during the Covid-19 times supporting the weaker sections in all forms.

YSRC lambasts Lokesh for offensive remarks on CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 18

YSR Congress has slammed Telugu Desam MLC Nara Lokesh for making derogatory words against Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy without the least common sense.

MLA T.J.R. Sudhakar Babu refuted the allegations of TD leaders including Lokesh that the ruling party was fomenting faction politics. He claimed it was the TD that promoted fractious and murder politics and condemned Lokesh's remarks against CM Jagan as severely objectionable.

The MLA also came down heavily on TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and his son for venting their frustration at the state government by resorting to abusive remarks. He said Naidu should be ashamed of his son for his vulgar language during the Kurnool visit. He stated that out of frustration over his incompetence in politics and fearing about losing the MLC term, Lokesh was uttering offensive abusive words while addressing a Chief Minister. He commented that Lokesh would remain a comedy actor in politics and can never grow as a leader, if the same attitude continued.

Sudhakar Babu stated that in contrast to TD leaders' offensive behaviour, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was totally devoted to taking public welfare to the village level, benefiting every eligible person in the state without leaving any scope for corruption and regardless of political affiliations. He had earned an indelible impression in the hearts of people as a great leader. The whole country is looking to AP as a role model as the best governance is being provided there.

Speaking of revenge politics, the MLA said that the father-son duo was responsible for the murder of YSRC in-charge Narayana Reddy. He said TD leaders were politicising the feud between the two families

BREACH OF TRUST OVER SARPANCH POSITION CAUSED DOUBLE MURDER

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JUNE 18

The double murder of former village Sarpanch V. Nageswara Reddy and his brother Pratap Reddy, at Peasarvai village in Gadivemula Mandal of Kurnool district on Thursday, appears to be a fight for one-upmanship in the faction-ridden village.

According to villagers, in the Gram Panchayat elections held in 2013, Vaddy Nageshwar Reddy and Dwaram Rajeshwar Reddy alias Raja Reddy contested the elections. But in view of the village welfare, an accord was worked out wherein Nageshwar Reddy will act as Sarpanch for the first two and a half years and the remaining period will

to to Raja Reddy.

However, Nageshwar Reddy after completion of his two and half years breached the agreement to hand over reins to Raja Reddy to act as Sarpanch for the remainder period. This breach of trust angered Raja Reddy's faction and developed animosity against Nageshwar Reddy. Meanwhile, the changed political equations also fuelled the differences between the leaders which led to the recent double murder.

A senior police officer said, Peasarvai village had faction history but was under control. He said that the old fights are renewing, which sometimes cause a law and order situation.

LOKESH CHALLENGES JAGAN FOR CBI INQUIRY INTO POLITICAL MURDERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JUNE 18

Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Friday challenged Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to order a CBI inquiry into the double murder of TDP followers at Peasarvai village in Kurnool district. He said the law and order deteriorated in the state in the past two years, and criticised that AP was slowly going the Bihar way in anarchy and lawlessness. He reminded Jagan of the oft-quoted Biblical saying that "those who swear by a sword shall perish by it."

Calling Jagan 'Faction Reddy,' Lokesh decried the implementation of "the Raja Reddy Constitution (the grandfather of Jagan)" for perpetuating the culture of murderous

in Panyam constituency for the sake of political gains. He clarified that the government would conduct a detailed probe

politics in AP rather than the Ambedkar version of the Constitution.

Lokesh visited Peasarvai village on Friday where two TD party activists were brutally killed by rivals. He consoled the bereaved family members, and then also participated in the last funeral procession of V. Nageswara Reddy and his brother Pratap Reddy.

Later, addressing the media, he recalled that so far 1,400 attacks were made against the TD sympathisers and 27 people were killed during Jagan's two-year rule. He further alleged that the CM could not do justice to his own family members as none of the accused in Vivekananda Reddy's murder was arrested so far. As such, what assurances he can give for the safety of others, he questioned.

into the murders of Nageswar Reddy and Pratap Reddy and action would be taken against the culprits.

Active cases reduce to 69,831

From page 1

● **AS MANY** as 13,738 oxygen beds were available now as compared to only 433 on May 17.

2,584 black fungus cases were registered in the state so far, of which 185 people died and 976 people were discharged.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Krishna Srinivas, municipal administration minister Botsa Satyanarayana, DGP Gautam Sawang, Covid command control chairman K.S. Jawahar Reddy, principal secretary (health) Anil Kumar Singhal, Covid taskforce committee chairman M.T. Krishna Babu, secretary (health) M. Ravi Chandra, commissioner of health Katamaneni Bhaskar, '104' call center in-charge A. Babu, APMISDC MD Vijayarajam Raju, Ayush commissioner V. Ramulu and other officials were present.

GOVT CUTS GST ON COVID RELIEF EQUIPMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 18

The AP government issued orders on Friday for extending concessional rate of SGST to Covid-19 relief supplies. Special Chief Secretary Rajat Bhargava issued GO: 137 giving concession in SGST. According to the orders, the government would provide 2.5% reduction given in SGST on medical oxygen, 2.5% on remdesivir, heparin (anti-coagulant), Covid-19 testing kits, inflammatory diagnostic (marker) kits, namely, IL6, D-Dimer, CRP (C-Reactive Protein), LDH, Ferritin, ProCalcitonin (PCT) and blood gas reagents, hand sanitisers and helmets for use with non-invasive ventilation.

Similarly, 2.5% reduction would be provided on pulse oximeters, high flow nasal canola device, gas/electric/other furnaces for crematorium, oxygen concentrator/generator, ventilators, BiPAP machine, non-invasive ventilation nasal or non-nasal masks for ICU ventilators, canola for use with ventilators, temperature checking equipment and ambulance. The concession rate would be in force up to September 30.

● **ACCORDING TO** the orders, the govt would provide 2.5% reduction given in SGST on medical oxygen, 2.5% on remdesivir, heparin (anti-coagulant), Covid-19 testing kits, inflammatory diagnostic (marker) kits, namely, IL6, D-Dimer, CRP (C-Reactive Protein), LDH, Ferritin, ProCalcitonin (PCT) and blood gas reagents, hand sanitisers and helmets for use with non-invasive ventilation.

COVETED | POST Rumours of YVSR's likely shift to RS also doing the rounds

TTD chairman may get extension

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 18

If the news coming from the YSRC sources is to be believed, Y.V. Subba Reddy is likely to get an extension as the head of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), the country's largest Hindu temples conglomerate. The two-year tenure of Reddy, who is the maternal uncle of CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, ends on June 22.

His extension seems to be certain, though many in the party are lobbying for the prestigious post. Along with him, the tenure of a few Trust

Board members may also be extended by 1 or 2 years, as most of the board's tenure was eclipsed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, rumours are doing the rounds about a move to trim the jumbo size of 37-member Board.

Subba Reddy took oath as the 50th chairman of TTD Board on June 22, 2019. Three months later, the state government, expanding the Board, inducted 37 members into it to manage the affairs of the country's one of the richest Hindu temple bodies.

The Board under the chairmanship of Subba

● **SUBBA REDDY** took oath as the 50th chairman of TTD Board on June 22, 2019. Three months later, the state government, expanding the Board, inducted 37 members into it to manage the affairs of the country's one of the richest Hindu temple bodies.

● **RUMOURS ARE** doing the rounds about a move to trim the jumbo size of 37-member Board.

Reddy has faced quite a few controversies in these two years. Add to it, revenues at all TTD temples including the hill shrine hit the rock-bottom due to low pilgrim turnout on account of Covid-19. A major controversy erupted when the Board revoked the previous Board's decision on disposing of the immovable properties gifted by devo-

tees. To name a few important resolutions, the Board requested the government to entrust the statutory audit of temple management accounts, hitherto being conducted by the state audit department, to CAG, reinstatement of Dr Ramana Deekshitulu's services at Srivari temple, increase in the price of Laddu prasadam etc.

Meanwhile, as Reddy is also involved in the active politics, instead of devoting all his time to TTD alone, sources hint that he could be eyeing a Rajya Sabha seat and the CM may oblige his request. Then, a big question is who will replace him and occupy one of the most coveted nominated posts in the country. A few names including Mekapati Rajamohan Reddy, former MP from Nellore, Akepati Amarnath Reddy, former MLA from Rajampeta, and Bhumana Karunakar Reddy, YSRC MLA from Tirupati, could be in the race for the prestigious post.

SHORT TAKES

TRAIN SERVICES
RESCHEDULED
FOR WORKDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 18

Due to safety-related works for insertion of Limited Height Subways in Visakhapatnam-Palasa main railway line between Vizianagaram-Korukonda railway stations on June 21, five train services will be rescheduled on June 20, Waltair railway senior divisional commercial manager A.K. Tripathi on Friday.

Train No. 07016 will leave Secunderabad at 8.05 pm instead of its scheduled departure at 4.50 pm.

Train No. 02822 will leave Chennai Central at 9.30 pm instead of its scheduled departure at 7.15 pm.

Train No. 08048 will leave Vasco-da-gama at 8.45 am instead of its scheduled departure at 6.30 am.

Train No. 07243 will leave Guntur one hour late instead of 11.20 am.

Train No. 02873 will leave Howrah one hour late instead of 11 pm.

CYBER CELL
INAUGURATED
IN SRIKAKULAMDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 18

Srikakulam district superintendent of police Amith Bardar on Friday inaugurated District Cyber Cell on the district police office premises. He said that the Cyber wing recovered 267 out of the total 378 stolen mobile phones, and handed them over to the complainants.

The cell was built with all advanced infrastructure facilities like social media analysis and forensic tools to track miscreants accused of cyber fraud.

The police would also open special case sheets on the regular offenders of misusing e-mail, cyber stalking, hacking, online cheating for jobs, lottery, credit and debit card phishing and OTP cheating.

The cyber wing was trained in Visakhapatnam.

ANANDAIAH
CONCOCTION GIVEN
TO FRONTLINE MENDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 18

Tourism minister Muttamsetti (Avanti) Srinivasa Rao distributed Anandaiah's Covid-19 concoction to 200 frontline workers of various categories in YSRC office in Visakhapatnam on Friday. Local MPs M.V.V. Satyanarayana from Vizag, Dr K. Satyavathi (Anakapalle) and G. Madhavi (Araku) and MLAs were present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Srinivasa Rao said they would distribute the concoction to 22,000 frontline workers in the ensuing days to protect them from the deadly virus. He said initially the medicine would be distributed to the Visakhapatnam based front-line workers and in the subsequent phases, it would be distributed to all the frontline workers.

The minister cautioned that some tips have to be followed while taking the medicine and a pamphlet was being given along with the medicine which contained all the instructions.

Clinical research centre
set for vax trials in Vizag

Only centre in AP to conduct trials on Covid vaccination

V. KAMALAKARA RAO |
DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 18

The Visakhapatnam Covid Clinical Research Centre (VCCRC) will be ready to facilitate clinical trials by licenced pharma companies from July.

It is the only centre in the two Telugu states, and one among 19 locations in the country, identified by the biotechnology department of the Union ministry of science and technology. The Centre took up this project as part of the Mission Covid Suraksha (MCS) to indigenously develop and manufacture safe, efficacious, accessible and affordable

Covid vaccines to meet the country's requirements in future. Around 26 crore people have been vaccinated in the country till date.

Andhra Medical College (AMC) here was entrusted with the task of creating infrastructure and manpower required for the VCCRC. The Centre allocated ₹1.7 crore as a booster fund to set up the centre. Accordingly, the AMC allotted 2,000 square yards of its land at Simhachalam for VCCRC. Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, AMC principal Dr P.V. Sudhakar said "We received ₹70 lakh out of ₹1.7 crore so far from the Centre for this project. We have almost got

17 candidates recruited on contract basis

The Centre took up this project as part of the Mission Covid Suraksha (MCS) to indigenously develop and manufacture safe, efficacious, accessible and affordable Covid vaccines to meet the country's requirements in future.

VCCRC would be used for clinical research of any disease in future also, apart from the Covid

the centre ready and are expecting clinical trials by vaccine manufacturing companies from July. The AMC handled clinical trials for Covishield vaccine in the first wave."

Dr Sudhakar further said that the biotechnology department would take care of the identification of licenced vac-

cine manufacturing companies and allot for their use different research centres in the country, including VCCRC. "Our role is to identify suitable local volunteers for vaccine trials. We identified nearly 60 volunteers for Covishield last time," he said.

He further informed

that, "We got an offer for the trials of Covaxin and other imported vaccine companies, but rejected their offer due to lack of infrastructure facility here during the first wave. Now, we are ready with the sophisticated VCCRC, which was designed and created with advanced facilities and devices imported from countries like Germany."

VCCRC would be used for clinical research of any disease in future also, apart from the Covid, but the prime focus now would be on the Coronavirus, its new variants, vaccines and medicines.



Members of the Indian Medical Association and doctors from various hospitals stage protest against the attacks on doctors, at GVMC Gandhi statue junction in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Doctors protest
over ex gratiaDC CORRESPONDENTS
VISAKHAPATNAM,
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 18

Members of Indian Medical Association, Visakhapatnam staged a dharna demanding protection to the medical fraternity, in Visakhapatnam. This was a part of the nation-wide agitation held on Friday.

With the slogan "Save the Saviours", the doctors carried placards and banners seeking protection to them at the workplaces.

Doctors led by Indian Medical Association (IMA) staged a protest here on Friday against attacks on doctors even though they are striving hard to serve people affected by Coronavirus crisis.

IMA Vijayawada presi-

dent Dr P.V. Madhusudhana Sarma and secretary Dr Tummalam Karthik said there is no connection between doctors and collection of high fees by hospital managements. Yet, relatives of patients are attacking doctors, which is severely condemnable.

They lamented that as many as 1,400 doctors have so far died in the war against Covid-19. But the government has provided aid to only 168 doctors. They demanded that all deceased doctors dealing with the virus be identified as "martyrs" and ₹1 crore be paid as ex gratia to their families.

Doctors, under the banner of IMA, protested here wearing black badges.

TD leads farmers'
stir for arrearsDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JUNE 18

As two Godavari districts are experiencing rainfall and water has also been let out into canals, farmers are in distress as many of them have not yet been paid arrears by the government for the paddy which was sold in the Rabi season.

According to sources, the state government has to clear ₹500 crore arrears for the second crop in East Godavari district.

The government has set up centres to purchase paddy at the minimum support price (MSP). But the farmers allege that though more than two months passed, the government did not credit amounts to their bank accounts and as a result they were facing hardships to go for the Kharif crop. They said that already the release of water to canals from the Godavari was delayed for

more than 15 days. And even after the water release, they said they were unable to start agricultural operations due to lack of money.

"We have to go to nurseries for paddy crops in the Kharif crop. We should pay wages to agriculture labourers, purchase paddy seed, fertilisers and other expenses. Our Rabi crop money is held up with the government. How can we go for the first crop this year?" asked Y. Srinivasa Rao, a farmer of P. Gannavaram mandal. He demanded that the government clear their arrears immediately.

Former Anaparti MLA N. Ramakrishna Reddy, Rajamahendravaram Rural MLA Gorantla Buchaiah Chowdary, TD leaders of P. Gannavaram mandal, Dokka Nathbabu and others, also expressed concern over non-payment of arrears to the farmers.

YOUTH SLITS
GIRL'S THROAT
FOR REJECTINGDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JUNE 18

A young man Charan murdered a young woman studying second year of degree on Friday for refusing his love. Later, he tried to commit suicide by drinking poison. He is at present undergoing treatment at Badvel government hospital.

According to Badvel police, one Subbayya's daughter Godugunur Sirisha, 17, of Chintalavalasa village in Badvel mandal is studying second-year degree at a college in Badvel. Charan, 20, who hails from Chinnarajupalle, Atluru mandal, is studying final year degree at another college. He had been harassing the girl to accept his love.

Covid cases rise
slightly to 6,341DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 18

Fluctuation in new Covid-19 infections is continuing in Andhra Pradesh, with new Coronavirus cases slightly increasing to 6,341 cases on Friday, compared to 6,151 on Thursday. As many as 8,486 patients have been dis-

charged throughout the state after recovery from Covid-19 in the past 24 hours.

Covid-19 recovery percentage has reached 95.6 with total 17,59,390 patients recovering.

The positivity rate is 5.9 per cent. The percentage of deaths in AP is 0.66.

VMC TO
BEAUTIFY
3 CANAL BUNDSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 18

The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) has launched a massive tree plantation drive for the beautification of canal bunds in the city.

VMC commissioner V. Prasanna Venkatesh said that 15,000 saplings would be planted for the beautification of bunds of the three canals, namely, Eluru, Bandar and Ryves which pass through the city.

The commissioner planted a sapling on the canal bund on Eluru canal opposite the VMC office on Friday to mark the launch of the tree plantation programme. He said 5,000 saplings would be planted in the first phase. VMC would beautify the canal bunds by developing walking tracks, greenery and children play.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR MICRO, SMALL & MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (NI-MSE)
(An Organisation of the Ministry of MSME, Govt. of India, ISO 9001:2015 certified)
Yousufguda, Hyderabad-500045, Telangana
Ph. No. 840-238333/225, Email: nimsme.adm@gmail.com
CORRIGENDUM
A corrigendum to the Notification for hiring under Contract Appointments Regulations (CAR)-2007 vide Advertisement No. nimsme/vacancy notification/2021/01, dated 01.06.2021 is issued. For corrigendum details please visit www.nimsme.org. All the applicants who submitted the applications against the notification to re-submit their application as per the corrigendum. Sd/- DIRECTOR GENERAL

CHANGE OF NAME

I, REVALLA HEMASEKHAR, son of Ex. No. 13898033-A, Naik -TS, Ravalla Malleswara Rao, presently residing at D.No. 1-3-28, Adivarampeta - Vill, Balaga - Post, Srikakulam - Mandalam & District (A.P.) Pin - 532001, have changed my Name from REVALLA HEMASEKHAR to RAVALLA HEMASEKHAR vide Affidavit dated 20-04-2021 before Notary, Srikakulam - 532 001 (A.P.)

PARADIP PORT TRUST
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE
Name of the work : 08th Dry Docking & Repairs of TUG Parvati of Paradip Port Trust. Estimated Cost put to tender : Rs. 1,09,37,841/- excluding GST. Last date & time of submission of tender through on-line bidding is 1500 hours on Dt. 20.07.2021. For details, please log on to the website : <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>. Deputy Conservator PPT/PR/45/21-22 Date : 18.06.2021

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SHORT TAKES

17 CHILDREN DIE OF COVID-19 IN MEGHALAYA

Shillong, June 18: Over 5,000 children in the age group of 0-14 years have tested positive for Covid-19 in Meghalaya, 17 of which succumbed to the infection, state health minister A.L. Hek said on Friday.

He also stated that none of the newborns delivered by Covid-positive mothers were found to have got infected.

“So far, 5,101 children in the age group of 0-14 years were diagnosed with the disease. 17 children died of the infection since last year,” the minister said.

Noting that the third wave of the pandemic, which is likely to strike later this year, may pose a greater threat to the children, as suggested by experts, Hek said the state government is making necessary preparations in anticipation.

“As part of the preparations, the government has decided to build prefabricated paediatric hospitals in Shillong, at Tura town in West Garo Hills and Jowai in West Jaintia Hills,” he said.

Meghalaya has inoculated 5.44 lakh people so far, with over 75,000 of them having received both the doses. The state has registered 762 deaths due to the disease.

Meanwhile, Meghalaya on Friday recorded nine fresh Covid-19 fatalities and 650 new cases pushing the death toll to 771 and the tally to 44,382, a senior health department official said.

The state now has 4,819 active Covid-19 cases, while 38,792 people have recovered from the disease, including 431 on Friday, official said.

Meghalaya has so far tested over 6.38 lakh samples for Covid-19, he said.

OWNER OF ‘BABA KA DHABA’ ATTEMPTS SUICIDE

New Delhi, June 18: The owner of south Delhi’s *‘Baba ka Dhaba’*, Kanta Prasad, allegedly attempted suicide and has been admitted to the Safdarjung Hospital, police said on Friday.

Prasad, 81, attempted suicide on Thursday. The reason behind his extreme step is not yet known, they said.

“On Thursday at 11.15 pm, information was received from the Safdarjung Hospital that Prasad was admitted there. Police reached the hospital and collected MLC (medico-legal case) which mentions the intake of alcohol and sleeping pills as the cause of unconsciousness,” Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Atul Kumar Thakur said.

The statement of Prasad’s son Karan was recorded. He said his father consumed alcohol with sleeping pills, the police said, adding that further inquiry is underway.

Prasad shot into the lime-light last year when a video of him tearfully talking about the lack of customers at his eatery and his financial woes went viral, triggering an outpouring of support in cash and kind from all over the country.

The video was shot and uploaded by YouTuber Gaurav Wasan.

Later, the octogenarian filed a complaint against Wasan for alleged misappropriation of funds raised through donations.

Prasad went on to open a restaurant. However, he faced losses and had to shut it.

Recently, Prasad returned to his ‘dhaba’ and apologised to Wasan. The YouTuber visited Prasad and accepted his apology.

Light of hope



A devotee lights earthen lamps during the annual festival of Kheer Bhawani Temple, amid partial relaxation in the ongoing lockdown, at Tulmula in Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday. The annual mela was held after two years as last year it was a low-key affair with only the ritual pooja taking place at the abode of the deity due to the outbreak of Covid-19. This year, celebrations were held at the mela amidst chanting of religious hymns and sound of temple bells even as most of the devotees followed Covid protocols.

IIT study finds traces of Covid in Sabarmati river

Ahmedabad, June 18: A recent study by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)

Gandhinagar has established the presence of Coronavirus in water samples from the Sabarmati river and two lakes in Ahmedabad city of Gujarat.

While the study, funded by the UNICEF, did not reveal if the genes of Coronavirus found in the water samples were dead or alive, Professor Manish Kumar, who led the research, has emphasised the need for further probe on the subject to avert any future tragedy.

Following the revelation, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has decided to send samples from these water bodies to the Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre (GBRC).

“The GBRC is the authorised agency of the AMC for water analysis. We have been sending samples to them since the last one year and they submit their report to the state government. We have no idea about the IIT’s research. However, we will now send samples of these water bodies to the GBRC for a similar analysis,” said Harpalsinh Zala, the AMC’s city engineer for water resources.

The study was conducted between September and December 2020 and water samples were collected from Sabarmati river, Chandola and Kankaria lakes of the city.

“Our aim was to detect the

presence of N, S and ORF lab genes of SARS-CoV-2, also called as Coronavirus, through RNA isolation. We found N-gene copies in the waters of the Sabarmati river, Chandola and Kankaria lakes. The ORF lab-gene was not found in Chandola, while S-gene copies were present in all the three water bodies,” said Kumar, who teaches in the IIT’s Earth Sciences department.

“Although genes of Coronavirus were detected, our methodology does not tell us if they were alive or dead. However, we can’t just presume that they all were dead. Although virus transmission through water is not proven yet, institutions need to come together and conduct further research on this. Monitoring is needed,” the professor said.

He claimed that if Coronavirus genes reached the surface water through urine or excreta of Covid-19 patients, then the genes would have been dead. However, the genes might have been alive if they came from the mouth of a Covid-19 patient, such as through gargled water, he said.

“We do not know if genes found by us were alive or not. Further research is needed to understand the implications of our findings. Governments should also focus on better solid waste management,” said Kumar, adding that the report has been submitted to the UNICEF.

Cong. MLA in Assam quits party, to join BJP

Says Rahul Gandhi is unable to shoulder the responsibility

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, JUNE 18

In what may be called a major setback for the Congress party in Assam, four-time Congress MLA from Mariani in upper Assam on Friday resigned and declared that he would join BJP on Monday.

Kurmi who was the only legislator in the party from the tea-tribe community accused that the Congress had stopped listening to younger leaders and predicted the party’s downfall if Rahul Gandhi continued to call the shots.

Kurmi also submitted his resignation to the Speaker of the state Assembly. Soon after, the Congress announced his expulsion.

The resignation came close on the heels of resignation and switch over of former union minister Jitin Prasada, one of its top faces in Uttar Pradesh, to the BJP.

Kurmi called it a difficult decision, given that he was born into a Congress family and his mother was a state minister.

The Congress has 29 MLAs in the state Assembly and will now be 28. “I was born into a Congress family, we grew up in Congress culture. I used to put up posters, I served tea in meetings. My mother was a minister. I have been a soldier of Congress. That is why it is a difficult decision,” said Kurmi.

“Rahul Gandhi is unable to shoulder leadership. If he’s at the helm, the party won’t move forward,” Kurmi told reporters soon after submitting his resignation to the speaker.

“My mother was a three-time MLA and also a minister. She died in 2004. I was denied the party ticket to contest the bypolls. The party gave me a ticket in 2006. I have been elected to the Assam Assembly from the

Maken: Pilot is an asset and a star campaigner

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 18

Congress general secretary incharge of Rajasthan Ajay Maken on Friday dismissed reports that senior leaders of the party met the party’s Rajasthan strongman Sachin Pilot.

He called Pilot, who was removed as deputy chief minister and state party chief after he rebelled against chief minister Ashok Gehlot last year, an asset and a star campaigner.

In the last couple of days political activities have heated up in Rajasthan with Pilot demanding that the high powered committee made by the high command take a stand on his and his supporters’ demands.

Maken added that Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who Pilot is in touch with,

has been out of Delhi for the last 10 days.

He added Pilot is also in constant talks with him and another top leader K C Venugopal. “It is not possible that he (Pilot) has sought time for meetings and did not get it,” he said.

Mr. Maken said the work is on to fill the vacant nine cabinet berths and to make political appointments. “I am speaking to the chief minister, state party chief, and other leaders for the appointments,” he said.

He added they were talking to everyone.

“...after the political crisis last year, our effort is that every section, seniority, future of Congress, caste and regional equations are considered,” he said when asked about the expansion and other appointments.

Mr. Maken urged party legislators against going public with their grievances.

He added discipline will be considered whenever political appointments and cabinet expansion are done.

He claimed that all is well in Rajasthan Congress.

“We fought the two waves of Covid-19 in the finest manner. The performance of the state was excellent in comparison to other states; be it the vaccination, infection or the death rate.”

The Congress finds itself pushed into a corner last year Mr. Jyotiraditya Scindia left the party and also topped the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh.

Last week another leader Mr. Jitin Prasada also quit the party to join the BJP.

ter Himanta Biswa Sarma. “The way Himanta Biswa Sarma is leading the state is commendable. The way he has started cracking down on the drug menace etc has impressed me,” he claimed that the Chief Minister’s move from Congress to the BJP in 2015 contributed to his former party Congress’s fall not just in Assam but in other north-eastern states as well.

Congress leader Debabrata Saikia, reacting to the development, said, “He was a very loyal party worker and senior leader and had some issues regarding decisions of the party. We could not discuss those issues that he had flagged regarding policy of the party.”

CONG. MLA WRITES TO GANDHI AGAINST MUMBAI UNIT’S PRESIDENT

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, JUNE 18

Mumbai Congress’s infighting is coming out in the open. In a recent development, Congress’s 27-year-old MLA Zeeshan Siddique has written a letter to party president Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi against Mumbai Congress president Bhaji Jagtap.

Siddique has made several serious allegations against Jagtap in his letter addressed to the party high command. In his letter, the Congress legislator said that the Mumbai Congress chief had ‘rewarded’ four Congress leaders with plump organisational posts even though they had worked with his rivals during the 2019 Assembly elections.

He also demanded that the four should have been expelled from the party for working against the official party candidate.

Siddique also pointed out that Jagtap had organised a programme, which was attended by senior Congress leaders and state ministers in Bandwagon, MLA’s constituency. But he did not get an invitation for the programme despite being the local MLA. Earlier in the week, AICC member Vishwabandhu Rai too wrote a letter against Jagtap over keeping silence in Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation’s corruption.

In a response to Siddique, the Mumbai Congress chief said that Zeeshan is just 27 and he has been working for the Congress for 40 years. “I have not seen Zeeshan’s work on the ground. Other young leaders are being given opportunities because I can see their work,” Jagtap said.

However, Siddique said he raised the party’s internal matter with the party leaders. “Being senior, Jagtap has not learnt that he should not be discussing party’s internal issues in public,” he said.

Meanwhile, AICC secretary and party in-charge for Maharashtra H.K. Patil, who is on a three-day tour of Mumbai from Wednesday, is holding a series of meetings with key party leaders.

BLAME | GAME Vishwanath accuses BSY’s son of interfering in functioning of govt BJP MLC alleges ₹21,473 cr ‘scam’ in K’taka

Bengaluru, June 18: Disgruntled BJP legislator A.H. Vishwanath, who has been demanding that Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa be replaced, on Friday alleged the irrigation department has readied a ₹21,473 crore tender in a hurry and without financial approval, and termed it a “scam”.

He accused Yediyurappa’s son and BJP state unit vice-president B.Y. Vijayendra of interfering in the functioning of the government.

“The tender of over ₹20,000 crore is ready in the irrigation department, which pertains to Bhadra Upper canal project and

Cauvery irrigation project. No financial clearance (from the finance department) has been sought, no board meeting took place. It was done in a hurry,” Vishwanath alleged at a press conference.

He alleged that the intention was to take “kick-backs” from contractors. Is this a contractor-oriented government?” he questioned.

The BJP MLC, who had switched his loyalty from JD(S) to BJP two years ago, alleged that the “entire state” including ministers, had been talking about Vijayendra’s interference in the administration.

“Which minister is con-

tent today? His (Vijayendra’s) interference is in all the departments,” Vishwanath charged.

Vishwanath’s attack came in the midst of a three-day visit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national general secretary and Karnataka in charge Arun Singh to the state to hold discussions with MLAs in the backdrop of some legislators seeking Yediyurappa’s replacement.

Singh is taking part in a meeting of the party’s core committee on Friday before winding up his visit.

Vishwanath also recalled that the rural development and panchayat raj minister

K.S. Eshwarappa had earlier this year approached Governor Vajubhai Vala against the alleged interference by the Chief Minister in the affairs of his department.

The MLC said Yediyurappa had been to “jail in the past due to his family”.

“Is it not true that Yediyurappa had been to jail because of his children? We are afraid that this time again he will land in jail,” Vishwanath said.

After meeting Singh on Thursday, Vishwanath had demanded that the 78-year-old Yediyurappa be replaced, considering his

age and alleged interference by his son.

Reacting to the allegations made by Vishwanath on the “scam” in the irrigation department, JD(S) leader and former chief minister H.D. Kumaraswamy told reporters in Kolar that “this is a government which believes in loot”.

“This is not restricted only to the Irrigation department. It’s a government which believes in loot. I have stopped speaking about it because in 2008 also I had raised the matter with evidence but the case could not reach the logical end”, Kumaraswamy said.

— PTI

Monsoon advances into Gujarat, Rajasthan, MP

New Delhi, June 18: The southwest monsoon has further advanced into some more parts of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the India Meteorological Department said on Friday.

Delhi will have to wait longer for monsoonal showers. The wind system is expected to reach the capital around the usual date of June 27, officials said.

However, conditions are favourable for further advance of the monsoon into some more parts of Gujarat, south Rajasthan, west Uttar Pradesh and remaining parts of Madhya Pradesh during next the

next 24 hours, the IMD said.

The Northern Limit of Monsoon (NLM) passes through Junagarh, Deesa, Guna, Kanpur, Meerut, Ambala and Amritsar, the weather department said.

“The impact of mid-latitude westerly on the monsoon is likely to continue till June 23, and hence the advance of the monsoon into Rajasthan, remaining parts Punjab, Haryana and Delhi is not likely during the same period,” the IMD had said on Thursday.

It had said the monsoon flow pattern is likely to organize and strengthen gradually between June 26 and June 30, and the further

advance to most parts of northwest India is likely during the same period.

The Met office had earlier predicted that the wind system may reach Delhi by June 15, 12 days early. Normally, the monsoon reaches Delhi by June 27 and covers the entire country by July 8.

Last year, the wind system had reached Delhi on June 25 and covered the entire country by June 29, according to Skymet Weather, a private forecasting agency.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

VERBAL TRUCE
BETWEEN FRANCE,
TURKEY: PARIS

Paris: A “verbal ceasefire” is in place between France and Turkey after months of rancorous exchanges that strained the relations of the NATO allies, the French foreign minister said on Friday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron met on the sidelines of the NATO summit this week, following the rows on international crises such as Libya, Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh that led to bitter personal diatribes from the Turkish leader.

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told BFM television that he welcomed the change in tone but said it had to be matched by more concrete steps from Ankara.

“There is a kind of verbal ceasefire. That’s good but it’s not enough,” he said.

UK ‘ASHAMED’
AT POOR RAPE
CONVICTION RATES

London: Britain’s government has apologised to rape victims for declining conviction levels, with senior Cabinet ministers saying they’re “deeply ashamed” by the downward trend in bringing sexual offenders to justice.

The government’s Rape Review, published Thursday, said the situation was “totally unacceptable” and that authorities are determined to change it.

Figures from the Crown Prosecution Service showed that 1,439 suspects were convicted of rape or lesser sexual offenses in England and Wales in 2020 — the lowest level since records began — despite reports of rape to police almost doubling since 2015.

Of an estimated 128,000 reported cases of rape or attempted rape each year, just 1.6 per cent result in a charge. The review said it found no one specific cause for the overall drop in prosecutions.

“These are trends of which we are deeply ashamed. Victims of rape are being failed,” Justice Secretary Robert Buckland, Home Secretary Priti Patel and Attorney General Michael Ellis wrote.

INDIA NAVY DENIES
IT HAD ATTACKED
LANKA FISHERMEN

Colombo: India on Friday rejected as “blatantly false” the local media reports about the Indian Navy’s alleged assault on a group of Sri Lankan fishermen, saying no such incident has taken place.

A group of 13 local fishermen claimed that they had ventured into the sea on May 7 onboard trawlers “Thushan I” and “Thushan II” and were physically assaulted by the Indian Navy in the international waters around Diego Garcia on June 4.

“They demanded drugs from us even after we told them that we were only fishermen,” two fishermen said.

Responding to their claims, the Indian High Commission here denied that the fishermen had been assaulted by the Indian Navy. “Media reports on June 17 stating that a group of Sri Lankan fishermen was attacked physically by the Indian Navy are blatantly false. We deny any such incident having taken place,” the High Commission said.

CHINA IS ‘PACING
CHALLENGE’ FOR
U.S.: DEF SECY

Washington: China is a “pacing challenge” for America, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin has said, asserting that it is “really important” for the US to focus more on creating opportunities to better partner with its allies and partners in the strategically vital Indo-Pacific region.

Austin told members of the Senate Appropriations Committee during a hearing on 2022 Budget Request for the Defense Department on Thursday that China was his “priority focus”.

“China is, in fact, our pacing challenge and it is my priority focus. You’ve seen that quite frankly through our actions. My first overseas trip along with Secretary Blinken was over to the Indo-Pacific region,” he said.

“You saw me stand up a China task force that has helped to focus the efforts of the department on making sure that we are doing the right things to create the capabilities and develop the operational concepts that we need to be successful. You’ve seen that through quite frankly our actions,” he said.

Delta variant becoming
globally dominant: WHO

Geneva, June 18: The Delta variant of Covid-19, first identified in India, is becoming the globally dominant variant of the disease, the World Health Organisation’s chief scientist said on Friday.

Soumya Swaminathan also voiced disappointment in the failure of CureVac’s vaccine candidate in a trial to meet the WHO’s efficacy standard, in particular as highly transmissible variants boost the need for new, effective shots.

Britain has reported a steep rise in infections with the Delta variant, while Germany’s top public health official predicted it would rapidly become the dominant variant there despite rising vaccination rates.

The Kremlin blamed a surge in Covid-19 cases on reluctance to have vaccinations and “nihilism” after record new infections in Moscow, mostly with the new Delta variant, fanned fears of a third wave.

“The Delta variant is well on its way to becoming the dominant variant globally because of its increased transmissibility,” Swaminathan told a news conference.

Coronavirus variants were cited by CureVac when the German compa-

COVID CASES IN
MOSCOW TRIPLE,
FAN ZONES SHUT

Moscow, June 18: New coronavirus infections hit a pandemic high in Moscow on Monday, tripling in just weeks and forcing Russia’s capital to close its Euro fan zone and extend other curbs.

Some 9,056 new cases were recorded in the megapolis of 12 million in the past 24 hours, up from 3,000 two weeks ago and a new daily record since the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020, according to official statistics.

Faced with the spike, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, who has been rolling out restrictions for nearly a week, said that the city would limit gatherings and close the Euro 2020 fan zone outside of the Luzhniki stadium. — *AFP*

ny this week reported its vaccine proved only 47 per cent effective at preventing disease, shy of the WHO’s 50 per cent benchmark.

The company said it documented at least 13 variants circulating within its

study population.

Given that similar mRNA vaccines from Pfizer and BioNTech and Moderna posted efficacy rates topping 90 per cent, Swaminathan said the world had been expecting more from CureVac’s candidate.

“Just because it’s another mRNA vaccine, we cannot presume all mRNA vaccines are the same, because each one has a slightly different technology,” Swaminathan said, adding the surprise failure underscored the value of robust clinical trials to test new products.

WHO officials said Africa remains an area of concern, even though it accounts for only around 5 per cent of new global infections and 2 per cent of deaths. New cases in Namibia, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Rwanda have doubled in the last week. WHO emergencies programme head Mike Ryan said, while vaccine access remains miniscule.

“It’s a trajectory that is very, very concerning,” Ryan said. “The brutal reality is that in an era of multiple variants, with increased transmissibility, we have left vast swathes of the population, the vulnerable population of Africa, unprotected by vaccines. — *Reuters*

UK Conservatives lose
safe seat in major upset

London, June 18: Britain’s ruling Conservative party suffered a major upset in a by-election result announced on Friday, losing a safe seat it had held for nearly 50 years.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s party lost in the contest to elect an MP for Chesham and Amersham — prosperous commuter towns in Buckinghamshire, northwest of London. The centrist Liberal Democrat candidate, Sarah Green, won more than 56 per cent in a constituency that had been held by the Tories since it was set up in its current form in 1974.

The *Times* newspaper said the defeat raised questions over the Conservative strategy of focusing efforts on seizing seats from the main opposition Labour party, rather than on defending traditional Tory seats, known as the “Blue Wall” due to the party’s logo colour.

Johnson’s party in May won a by-election in the traditional Labour-voting Hartlepool, adding another parliamentary seat in



Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson assists in an engine repair at the Automotive shop during a visit to Kierlees College Springfield Sixth Form Centre in Dewsbury, northern England on Friday. — *AFP*

northeast England to those they secured in the last general election in December 2019, when Brexit was the main issue.

The pro-European Lib Dems campaigned actively in Chesham and Amersham, tapping into local opposition to controversial projects in the area, with leader Ed Davey visiting 16 times, *The Times* said.

The BBC said voters this time round focused on local issues: the controversial construction of a high-speed rail link through the constituency

and plans to build more houses in rural areas.

Davey tweeted that the result “sent a shockwave through British politics” and proved the “blue wall can be smashed by @libdems”.

The contest was triggered by the death in April of former government minister Cheryl Gillan, who had held the seat for 29 years.

Peter Fleet, a former motor industry executive who was bidding to replace her, called the result “very disappointing”. — *AFP*

BEAR KILLED
AFTER RAMPAGE
IN JAPAN CITY

Tokyo, June 18: Hunters shot and killed a brown bear in northern Japan on Friday after it rampaged through a city, injuring four people including a soldier and lumbering across busy roads.

The city of Sapporo tweeted that the bear had been “exterminated,” with a local television station saying hunters had shot the bear.

Earlier, dramatic news footage showed the bear bounding along a residential street, crossing a busy road and clawing at the gates of a military barracks, causing alarmed troops to scatter. One soldier was injured in the bear’s rampage in the city, which will host the Olympic marathon and racewalking events in August.

Another victim was mauled by the bear after it attacked him from behind, TV footage showed. The person was taken away on a stretcher. The rampage prompted local school closures and the cancellation of several flights at a small regional airport, NHK reported.

Earlier, government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told people in the Hokkaido region to be on alert. — *AP*



The pro-democracy paper increased its print run to 500,000 copies on Friday, a day after police arrested five top editors and executives and froze \$2.3 million in assets linked to the media company. — *AP*

‘Apple Daily’ increases
print run after arrests
Editors held on suspicion of foreign collusion

Hong Kong, June 18: Hong Kong pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily* on Friday increased its print run to 5,00,000 copies as residents showed support for the beleaguered press freedom a day after police arrested five top editors and executives and froze \$2.3 million worth of assets on national security charges.

The raid on the paper’s offices followed by the arrests on Thursday marked the first time the sweeping national security law, which Beijing imposed on Hong Kong last year, was used against the media, one of the symbols of civil liberties in the semi-autonomous city that don’t exist elsewhere in China.

Police said the editors were arrested on suspi-

● **FRONT PAGE** of Friday’s edition splashed images of the five editors and executives led away in handcuffs. Police also confiscated 44 hard drives worth of news material.

tion of foreign collusion to endanger national security, based on over 30 articles that authorities said had called for international sanctions against China and Hong Kong.

With anti-government protests silenced, most of the city’s prominent pro-democracy activists in jail and many others fleeing abroad, people snapped up copies at newsstands and in convenience stores.

“There are lots of injustices in Hong Kong already. I think there are a

lot of things we cannot do anymore,” said resident Lisa Cheung. “Buying a copy is all what we can do. When the law cannot protect Hong Kong people anymore, we are only left to do what we can.”

The front page of Friday’s edition splashed images of the five editors and executives led away in handcuffs. Police also confiscated 44 hard drives worth of news material. A quote from Cheung Kim-hung, the arrested CEO of *Apple Daily*’s publisher Next Digital, said “Hang in there, everyone.”

Another resident, William Chan, said he bought a copy of the paper as a show of support.

“It was such a groundless arrest and suppressed freedom of the press,” he

said.

State Department spokesman Ned Price said that the US strongly condemned the arrests and called for the immediate release of the five arrested. He also called for Hong Kong authorities to stop targeting independent and free media.

“We are deeply concerned by Hong Kong authorities’ selective use of the national security law to arbitrarily target independent media organizations,” Price said, adding that the suspected foreign collusion charges appear to be politically motivated.

“As we all know, exchanging views with foreigners in journalism should never be a crime,” he said. — *AP*

Ultraconservative cleric
Raisi leads Iran poll race

Tehran, June 18: Iranians voted on Friday in a presidential election in which ultraconservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi is seen as all but certain to coast to victory after all serious rivals were barred from running.

After a lacklustre campaign, turnout was expected to fall to a new low in a country exhausted by a punishing regime of US economic sanctions that has dashed the hopes of

many for a brighter future.

The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, cast the first vote in Tehran and then urged Iran’s nearly 60 million eligible voters to follow suit before the scheduled close of polls at midnight (1930 GMT).

“The sooner you perform this task and duty, the better,” said the 81-year-old, stressing that voting “serves to build the

future” of the Iranian people. Pictures of often flag-waving voters dominated state TV coverage, but away from the polling stations some voiced anger at what they saw as a stage-managed election.

“Whether I vote or not, someone has already been elected,” scoffed Tehran shopkeeper Saeed Zareie about the pre-election vetting that barred all but seven of the more than 600 hopefuls. — *AFP*

NEPAL PREZ SAYS
SC CAN’T REVERSE
DISSOLUTION

Kathmandu, June 18: Asserting that the House of Representatives was dissolved as per the constitutional provisions, Nepal’s President Bidya Devi Bhandari has told the Supreme Court that it cannot overturn her decision on the matter or subject it to a judicial review.

President Bhandari, at the recommendation of Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli, dissolved the lower house for the second time in five months on May 22 and announced snap elections on November 12 and November 19.

Prime Minister Oli is currently heading a minority government after losing a trust vote in the House.

President Bhandari, Prime Minister Oli and Speaker Agni Sapkota separately presented their clarifications in writing to the apex court on the government’s May 21 decision.

The Khadmandu Post reported. The Constitutional Bench on June 9 had asked them to furnish their clarifications in writing. — *PTI*

War, crisis refugees double in decade: UN

Geneva, June 18: Despite the Coronavirus pandemic, the number of people fleeing war and persecution continued rising last year, with global displacement climbing to over 82 million — double the figure a decade ago, the UN said on Friday.

A fresh report from the UN refugee agency showed global displacement figures swelled by around three million in 2020 after an already record-breaking year in 2019, leaving a full one per-

cent of humanity uprooted and displaced.

The report highlighted how drawn-out crises like those in Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen were continuing to force people to flee, while eruptions of violence in places like Ethiopia and Mozambique were causing surging displacement.

The fact that the numbers rose for the ninth straight year was all the more devastating because Covid-19 restrictions had been expected to limit dis-

placement.

During the pandemic, “everything else has stopped, including the economies, but wars and conflict and violence and discrimination and persecution, all the factors that pushed these people to flee, have continued,” UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi said.

The UN agency found that by the end of 2020, a record 82.4 million people were living as refugees or asylum seekers, or in so-called internal displace-

ment within their own countries, up from some 40 million in 2011.

Nearly half under 18. A full 42 per cent of the world’s displaced are girls and boys under the age of 18.

“The tragedy of so many children being born into exile should be reason enough to make far greater efforts to prevent and end conflict and violence,” Grandi said.

Some 26.4 million people were living as refugees at the end of 2020, including

5.7 million Palestinians.

Some 3.9 million Venezuelans were also displaced beyond their borders without being considered refugees, while 4.1 million people were registered worldwide as asylum seekers.

But while both refugee and asylum seeker numbers remained relatively flat from 2019, the number of people displaced within their own countries surged by more than two million to 48 million, the report said. — *AFP*

ENDANGERED | SPECIES

Coelacanths, which have been around for 400M years were thought extinct

Weird ‘living fossil’ fish lives 100 years

Washington, June 18: The coelacanth — a giant weird fish still around from dinosaur times — can live for 100 years, a new study found.

These slow-moving, people-sized fish of the deep, nicknamed a “living fossil,” are the opposite of the live fast, die young mantra. These nocturnal fish grow at an achingly slow pace.

Females don’t hit sexual maturity until their late 50s, the study said, while male coelacanths are sexually mature at 40 to 69 years. And maybe strangest of all,

● **SCIENTISTS CALCULATED** fish’s age by counting big lines on a specific coelacanth scale. But French scientists found they were missing smaller lines that could only be seen using polarised light — the technique used to figure out the age of commercial fish.

researchers figure pregnancy in the fish lasts about five years.

Coelacanths, which have been around for 400 million years, were thought

extinct until they were found alive in 1938 off South Africa. Scientists long believed coelacanths live about 20 years. But by applying a standard technique for dating commercial fish, French scientists calculated they actually live close to a century, according to a study in Thursday’s *Current Biology*.

Coelacanths are so endangered that scientists can only study specimens already caught and dead.

In the past, scientists calculated fish ages by counting big lines on a specific coelacanth scale. But the

French scientists found they were missing smaller lines that could only be seen using polarized light — the technique used to figure out the age of commercial fish.

Study co-author Bruno Ernande, a marine evolutionary ecologist at France’s marine research institute, said polarized light revealed five smaller lines for every big one. The researchers concluded the smaller lines better correlated to a year of coelacanth age — and that indicated their oldest specimen was 84 years old.

— *AP*



A coelacanth in a museum in France. It is believed they can live for a 100 years. — *AFP*

DECCAN Chronicle

19 JUNE 2021

CBSE formula less than perfect, but does the job

The Supreme Court has accepted the 30:30:40 formula for assessing Class 12 students of CBSE and CISCE as recommended by education experts. Principally, there can be no such thing as an absolutely objective system to judge the academic work of young students. But, given the circumstances the country is in thanks to successive waves of the coronavirus pandemic, little else could have been done except find a reasonably acceptable formula that would take care of the assessment process.

There is one fundamental flaw in this 30 (Class 10 marks): 30 (Class 11 marks): 40 (Class 12 unit and term exams besides practicals) formula and that is equating Class 10, in which students take a public examination and Class 11 in which students are known to be less than serious because they only take tests conducted by schools and would normally have no bearing on where they go on their scholastic route through university.

It is arguable whether 40:20:40 would have made for better criteria but then even the top court did not seem to take time to size up the formula offered and agreed straightaway to the criteria offered as assessment of students' performance over three years. So, for better or for worse, the evaluation will begin in the given format.

There are bound to be anomalies as cases emerge from among 15 lakh students who are in these streams of study. Numerous other state boards would have to decide soon too on how they will go about marking students' academic performance as many of them have abandoned thoughts of holding the exams. The top court has taken upon itself to decide on whether four states wishing to go ahead with Class 12 exams can be allowed to do so.

How objective the assessment will be is open to question though the system of evaluation is theoretically better because it is based on performances over three years. This is, however, bound to throw up riddles and local school committees proposed by CBSE will have their task cut out. They will also have the discretion to take all assessments or just the pre-boards tests or even a combination of them, making it all trickier.

The idea of a common entrance test being planned for entry to universities, as distinct from professional courses in engineering and medicine for which elite institutions hold their own entrance tests like JEE and NEET, may further complicate matters. The sheer diversity of curriculums among so many state boards competing with the all-India ones, like CBSE, makes it an onerous task to find an acceptable test format to judge young people facing their first big tests.

In these extraordinary, even desperate times, when the world has been dealt such a blow through the coronavirus pandemic, desperate remedies have to be sought. But there is no judging how much students from disadvantaged sections of society or the ones residing in remote areas have suffered in coping with online classes in the last year in which they may have had to do with unequal resources in terms of smartphones, devices and connectivity. Lakhs of students may be left dissatisfied with the way their work is assessed but the evaluation brooks no delay.

Grace needed in Lakshwadeep

The unilateral acts of the administration in Lakshadweep, an archipelago of 35 islands of approximately 70,000 people, have been going on despite an appeal by the people residing on the island and outside. The latest in the series, initiated by administrator Praful Khoda Patel, is the move to acquire private land for development works without giving notice under the draft Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation.

Mr Patel, a BJP politician who was appointed administrator in December, has been introducing measures that seek to upset and undermine the way the island has been run and the people have lived there. The draft of the three new regulations — the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation (PASA), the Animal Preservation Regulation, and the Panchayat Regulation — are under the consideration of the Union home ministry. It is ironic that the administration is going ahead with its plans based on these draft laws even as the Kerala high court, which has territorial jurisdiction on the island, has refused to entertain petitions against them saying they have not been finalised.

A group of retired senior civil servants, in a recent letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, reminded him of the need to be sensitive to the sentiments of the people while implementing projects there. There are no two opinions on the need for the Union government to show some extra care and attention on the island, which holds geostrategic importance for the country. It goes without saying that any such step must be taken in such a way that the islanders feel more confident and comfortable. Mr Patel's actions, unfortunately, are to the contrary. The government must realise that the mighty Indian state need not use the extra-strong arm of the law to deal with peace-loving people who have one of the lowest crime rates in the country. It must show grace, instead.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Subhani



Twitter vs Govt: Free speech, interrupted...



Shashidhar Nanjundaiah

Twitter, the micro-blogging giant, is no longer the hubless network of global chatter that its model would appear to indicate. After it failed to appoint a full-time officer in charge of compliance in India, its country managing director will be criminally liable for inflammatory or hateful remarks on the platform. In real terms, this means that the social media platform will now be responsible for what the Twitterati say. Not complying with one of the rules mandated by the Indian government has cost Twitter dearly, as it lost the very legal cover that would have enabled it to be treated as an intermediary. Intervention itself could come in the way of intermediary status.

Social media platforms have claimed to be common carriers, or hands-off intermediaries. Section 79 of the Information Technology Act offers a legal shield so long as Twitter remains an intermediary — when it does not initiate message transmission, does not select the receiver, and does not modify the message. The loss of the “safe harbour” offered under Section 79 — perhaps the first such experience in the world — means that the essence of the business model of the social media has come crashing down. As with any house of cards, this crash was just waiting to happen. Arguably, a company's vulnerability is at its peak when a nation's political values are being rewritten.

A newspaper editor's job is to act as a “gatekeeper”, assigning various pages, positions, lengths and levels of prominence to news stories. Unlike a legacy edi-

tor, a social media platform does not edit the content of what we write. It is far more democratic in that way than a newspaper. The role of social media intermediaries in the current framework is not quite as simple, but whether they are completely hands-off is debatable. Whether in the way algorithms are written, or the level of engagement, or other protocols, there is a process of message prioritisation that essentially means one message can attain more visibility than another. Syllogistically, assigning prominence to some content over other content should be seen as a form of editorial intervention.

This form of editorialisation, however indirect and driven mainly by those who wrote the programmes, means that the social media business model that is fed to us — that the social media is truly a free marketplace of ideas — should be questioned. Users may assume that because of the sheer volumes, their posts have the same chance of visibility and impact as their neighbour's. Have social media platforms been transparent with us about how it all really works, and whether it is simply an organic process like Darwin's theory of natural selection?

But the concern for the billions of social media users is much larger. Regulation comes at the price of more, not less, intervention. Liberal policies in a democracy implicitly must assume one factor that really is debatable: “fairness”. If a government tangles with private players and creates a shield of opacity from regular folks, it is unfair to the spirit of democracy. In the same spirit, is it fair to hold a company responsible for what its users do? After

all, users are not employees of the company. Would the police charge the bicycle manufacturer for a rider who chooses to ride illegally on the wrong side of the road?

The difference is that in a social media model, the company and the user are bound by a trapeze-like relationship, bound to each other for a critical moment of *usage*. So, could the answer be an openly stated pre facto intervention? The problem with taking responsibility for content someone else creates is that any damage can only be mitigated after it is done. We may not have reached the stage of being able to prevent an impending message in time (although efforts in that direction could be ongoing). But if it were and Twitter did intervene before a tweet goes public, it would still lose its status as an intermediary. Perhaps as a first step in a precautionary method, Twitter could filter out the bots and fake profiles. Flagging posts for dubious content was always a great idea, but can it be pre facto and more transparent? If intervention is needed, should Twitter's editorial job then be limited to accepting or rejecting posts?

It will be naive to assume that everything will go according to the *spirit* of the law. Twitter will now be an easier target for those who find a post inconvenient, and when users find that their legal responsibility is indirect at best, one wonders whether bad content will be prone to sink even further. In the Ghaziabad incident on the heels of the loss of Twitter's indemnity, the Uttar Pradesh police named the company and

some of its users in a First Information Report, accusing it of circulating a fake video. This means that the police has assumed a broader scope of culpability, holding both the platform and its users liable.

Twitter may therefore need a new operational model. Twitter's India experience also could fortify the brewing idea that after decades of enjoying the status of being the most unregulated and unfettered among modern media technologies, the social media's growth may be cooling off. A report predicted these trends from nearly three years ago: An Oxford University-Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's Digital News Report had reported back in 2018 that for the first time since the phenomenon began, among users in 37 countries across continents (not including India, albeit), the dependence on social media for news consumption had showed a decline.

It is indeed “astounding”, as information technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad pointed out, that an entity that projects itself as the flag-bearer of free speech should defy the law. That observation, however, should apply to governments and private corporations alike. Governments that promote nationalistic narratives, and the societies that are hegemonised into those narratives, prefer images, walls and controls. The new rule is a flag-bearer of that philosophy. Now we can expect less inconvenient chatter from the Twitterati. Free speech is illusory anyway, and if social media giants were to deny that any form of control exists, whether political or not, it would be a little rich. These platforms have been our public *dhobi ghats* for dirty linen. But it seems that is not how we prefer it.

The writer has headed private schools of media and communications, and is a proponent of media literacy at schools

LETTERS

COVID CASES DIP

After a long interlude, it is encouraging to read about the slight dip in Covid-19 cases in AP. However, the pandemic still looms and it may be recalled that even a single infection left unnoticed could spread and repeat the whole cycle. So, let us not lower our guard and the onus is on one and all to strictly adhere to the Covid-19 protocols in order to contain the virus. The government needs to impose conditions to check the spread of the impending third wave.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

FACTION KILLINGS

The heinous crimes carried out in the name of factional feuds are a cause for serious concern not only in Kurnool district but all over Rayalaseema and parts of south coastal AP (*Ex-sarpanch, brother murdered in Kurnool, DC, June 18*). Successive governments have consistently failed in controlling the same because political rivalry in these parts means survival of the mighty.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

DSC ASPIRANTS

AP government issued job calendar for 2021-22 for all categories except schools (*Unprecedented scale of job recruitment by Jagananna government, DC, June 18*). AP must release DSC notification for teacher job aspirants to fulfill the new education policy.

D. Ravikumar
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Union Cabinet discusses Telangana

NEW DELHI, January. 18
The political affairs committee of the Union Cabinet discussed the Telangana problem but no decision emerged as the discussions were informal in nature. Mr C. Subramaniam, minister of planning, who has been asked by the Prime Minister to explore the possibilities of a settlement of the problem, and who has had talks with the TPS leader, Dr M. Chenna Reddy, and others were present. He apprised Mrs Indira Gandhi and senior ministers about the nature of his discussions with the Telangana leaders.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



“Tolerance is an annoying virtue; Generosity a difficult one. Forgiveness can never hurt you. Even makes you feel the superior one.”
— From **The Proverbs of Bachchoo**

In the neighbourhood in which I grew up in Pune, there was, at the end of Synagogue Street — you guessed it — a synagogue! Made entirely of red brick with a Gothic tower it was known locally as *Lal Deval*.

Our immediate neighbour was a Parsi gentleman who, among other things, published an anonymous rag sheet imaginatively called *Synagogue ni Searchlight* — that's Parsi Gujarati with two English words.

It was a gossip sheet with articles about which girls were seen cycling with boys of a different religion, which family was going bankrupt because the male breadwinner was earning no bread and still gambling on cotton figures, which couple had a foul shouting match over the wife's certain adultery... etc.

My grandfather, the head of our household, declared himself against

the *Searchlight* and against all gossip and, I suppose, instilled in me a suspicion of it and an inclination to shut my ears and mind to it.

But now, gentle reader, after decades of following *mamaaji's* banning principle, I am eagerly enjoying a very public, very significant political row based entirely on gossip. I excuse myself with the contention that this gossip holds the future of the government of the UK in suspense, if not in peril, and it embarrasses persons I regard as on the opposite side to myself in every ideological divide.

So, listen closely:
When Boris Johnson won the leadership of the Tory Party, or wrested it from Theresa May, he called upon one Dominic Cummings to prepare his election strategy. This Dombó is a weird character and was a leading ideologue and strategist of the 2016 campaign in favour of Brexit. He carried this strategic stance into BoJo's election campaign with the simple slogan “Get Brexit Done”. Among other factors, including the fumbblings of the Labour Opposition on the issue, this propelled BoJo to victory and into 10 Downing Street. Into this august

address the twice-divorced BoJo introduced his pregnant fiancé, Carrie Symonds. As PM now, he appointed Dominic as his chief adviser.

The Covid crisis came. BoJo, the government and his health secretary Matt Hancock faltered in several ways — lockdowns were introduced too late, the equipment for keeping hospital staff, including doctors and nurses, protected was not commissioned and distributed as it should have been, contracts for testing and tracing the plague were handed out to cronies of the government without adequate scrutiny or being subject to tender. The test and trace programme was an abject failure, if not a complete non-starter... and the bodies just piled up.

One assumed at the time that Dombó was part of all these plans and failures as he was BoJo's right-hand man. In this role he had, before and during the plague, exhibited his weirdo tendencies. He publicly said that he was recruiting advisers and operatives to the government who were, in his own words “weirdos and misfits”. (*So why didn't you apply? — Ed . Sirji, Kyon garib aadmi ki mazaak ouda rahen? —fd*)

It now transpires, or did a few months ago, that the two unelected adjuncts BoJo had imported into 10 Downing Street were — how to put it — incompatible? Carrie was whispering in one ear and Dombó in the other — and they were, one can now deduce, saying opposite things. Dombó introduced his own team into the fray and Carrie likewise prevailed on BoJo to import her friends into influential positions at the helm of the government. Dombó's team referred to Carrie as “Ms Nut Nuts”. Carrie's term for Cummings, if she has a derogatory one, remains undisclosed.

Matters, so to speak came to a head, or at least to the metaphoric decapitation of one or two. Dombó lost out to Ms Symonds, known to the press after her demand that the PM's flat be redecorated to the tune of over £200,000, as Carrie Antoinette.

Dombó packed his bags and left Downing Street. But he didn't just take his bags. He took his documents, his exchange of phone texts with the Prime Minister and others, his notes of meetings at the heart of the British government, his memories of what went on in committees into which he had intruded and a painful of vengeful bile and intent.

He told the press that BoJo had, against urgent advice, delayed the lockdown, using the phrase “let the bodies pile up!”

He was called then to give evidence to a parliamentary committee about his take on the preparations for Covid-19. He spoke to them for seven hours, repeatedly saying that BoJo was not fit for the job and that Matt Hancock had repeatedly lied to Parliament and ought to have been sacked for deceit, if not for total incompetence. Mr Hancock denied all of it and demanded written proof from Dombó.

This week Dombó released the content of several WhatsApp exchanges with BoJo, who replies to him calling Mr Hancock “totally f— ing hopeless!” In a later exchange, again fatally critical of Mr Hancock, BoJo says: “I can't think of anything except taking Hancock off and putting Gove on.” Mr Hancock remains.

There are 6,984 more words to Dombó's released text. He threatens more devastating revelations from his time at the heart of Britain's government. Please, can they be juicy, fatally about other ministers? Can't wait!

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	52,344.45	0.04
Nifty 50	15,683.40	-0.05
S&P 500*	4,185.22	-0.87
Dollar (₹)	73.87	0.28
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.18	0.31
Euro (₹)	88.36	0.19
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,460▲188	0.40
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	73.51	0.59
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.006	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.460	-0.051

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Shareholders of Videocon firms to get 'nil' money

Shareholders of two listed companies of Videocon Group will receive "nil" money at the time of delisting, as the liquidation values of the two firms are not even sufficient to cover outstanding debt. Videocon Industries Ltd and Values Industries Ltd will be delisted as part of the resolution plan. There will be no offers to any shareholders of the two companies at the time of delisting, the firms said in a public notice.

Forex reserves rise \$3.07 bn to record \$608.08 bn



The country's foreign exchange reserves surged by \$3.074 billion to reach a record high of \$608.081 billion in the week ended June 11, the latest RBI data shows. The reserves had increased by \$6.842 billion to \$605.008 billion in the previous week ended June 4. Foreign currency assets rose by \$2.567 billion to \$563.457 billion in the latest week. The gold reserves rose by \$496 million to \$38.101 billion.

Wipro to roll out salary hikes for Jr staff from Sept.

Wipro said it will give wage hikes to junior employees with effect from Sept. 1. "Wipro Limited will initiate merit salary increases (MSI) for all eligible employees up to Band B3 (Assistant Manager and below), effective September 1, 2021. In January 2021, the company had announced salary hikes for eligible employees in these bands, who form 80 per cent of the company's workforce," Wipro said in a statement.

IDBI Bank invites bids to divest stake in Arcil

IDBI Bank plans to divest its 19.18 per cent stake in Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (Arcil) and has invited bids from interested parties. Arcil was incorporated in 2002 and is owned by banks like SBI, IDBI, ICICI, PNB and strategic foreign investors such as Avenue India Resurgence Pte Ltd. Since its inception, Arcil has resolved over Rs 78,000 crore worth of NPAs acquired from Indian banks and financial institutions.



100 commodity players get notice EOW summons brokers again

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 18

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai Police has served summons to directors of nearly 100 commodity brokerage firms who are alleged to have been involved in the 2013 payment default case of the National Spot Exchange Limited (NSEL).

These brokerage firms, which are accused of having indulged in financial irregularities and suspected forgery with their trading clients, have an estimated outstanding receivables of over Rs 4,200 crore in the case.

The brokerages include Motilal Oswal Commodities Brokers, Anand Rathi Commodities, Systematix Commodities, Way2Wealth Commodities, India Infoline Commodities and Progressive Comtrade.

Five brokerage firms with the maximum amount of receivables include Anand Rathi Commodities, India Infoline Commodities, Geojit Comtrade, Systematix Commodities and Motilal Oswal Commodities Brokers.

Others with significant receivable amounts include Philip Commodities India, Emkay Comtrade, JM Financial Comtrade, Ventura Commodities, Arihant Futures and Commodities, SPFL Commodities, RR Commodity Brokers,



Nirmal Bank Commodities, India Nivesh Commodities and Suresh Rathi Commodities.

They have been asked to personally depose before the EOW with information on trade modification details of all their clients, broker and client ledger accounts, client settlement account details, banking details, brokerage earned, client PAN and KYC, visits to warehouses and a host of other functional details.

According to a director of one of the brokerage firms, there is nothing new in this case. "EOW teams keep changing, and whenever a new team takes charge, they come and ask us the same questions and ask for the same documents. We have submitted the same replies and proofs at least three times in the past," he told *Financial Chronicle*.

The brokerage firms have been denying any wrongdoing on their part from the beginning and claimed that the development will not affect their functioning.

In 2019, markets regulator Sebi had passed orders

against some of these brokers in the NSEL case, declaring they were "not fit and proper" to continue as a commodity broker following a report of EOW and NSEL complaint.

EOW's forensic report in 2015 accused many brokers of misguiding their trading clients, routing their money through benami accounts and indulging in various other wrongdoings, including under the pretext of loans against securities in violation of securities laws.

The brokers challenged Sebi orders before the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT). The NSEL had also approached the SAT. Calling itself an affected party, the NSEL alleged that the regulator had failed to consider all the allegations and material in its complaint against brokers.

However, the tribunal refused to admit NSEL's plea, prompting the bourse to seek the intervention of the Supreme Court, pursuant to which the SAT was asked to allow the NSEL to present its case.

Assam set to offer ₹8,250 crore relief to microfinance customers

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 18

The Assam government on Friday has decided on a Rs 8,250-crore package for the microfinance customers in the state. This will provide much-needed relief to the microfinance institutions (MFI), which had seen stressed assets touching new highs due to uncertainties around the state's Microfinance Bill and loan waiver promises.

The package will work at three levels. It envisages complete waiver of loans customers whose revenue sources have been hit by the pandemic. This apart, incentives will be provided to delinquent customers to bring them back to the credit cycle. Part of the package will also reward the prompt payers by providing additional credit of Rs 25,000.

"The cost of the package for the government can go up to Rs 8,250 crore. The state has a total microfinance portfolio of Rs 12,000 crore. Of this, Rs



3000 crore are non-performing assets as on March 2021," Manoj Nambiar, chairperson of MFIN told *Financial Chronicle* after meeting the state government officials.

The package was one of the election promises made by the ruling party in the recent elections. Along with the election promise, the uncertainties around the Microfinance Bill had shot up delinquencies in the states to new highs.

According to CRIF High Mark, delinquencies beyond six months have been rapidly increasing from 1.3 per cent in March 2020 to 6.5 per cent in

December 2020 and went up to 13.6 per cent by March 2021.

P. Satish, executive director of Sa-Dhan finds that microfinance collections in Assam have been getting affected for the past couple of years due to different developments.

In October 2019, protests against micro lenders in some districts had started affecting the asset quality of the entire state. Further, Citizen-ship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens protests too had hit collections.

By March 2020, the country went into lockdown and then the moratorium was announced. In December, the state government came up with the Microfinance Bill, which stipulated micro lenders to collect dues only at gram panchayat offices or public places. Thereafter, during the elections, the political parties promised waiver of micro loans, which has taken the delinquencies higher.

SREI EQUIPMENT TO GET ₹2,200 CR FROM SINGAPORE FIRM

New Delhi, June 18: Srei Equipment Finance on Friday said Singapore-based Makara Capital Partners Pte Ltd has shown interest to invest up to Rs 2,200 crore by picking up equity and other securities in the company.

"This is to inform that the Strategic Coordination Committee has received a term sheet from Makara Capital Partners Pte Ltd (Makara), Singapore indicating interest for the investment of an aggregate amount of Rs 2,200 crore by way of subscription to equity shares and other securities of the company," Srei Equipment Finance, a fully owned subsidiary of Kolkata-based Srei Infrastructure Finance, said in a regulatory filing through its listed parent company. —PTI

Co-founder quits Grofers as Zomato circles it again

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 18

While talks with Zomato on funding and acquisition are still on, Grofers co-founder Saurabh Kumar has quit the company.

"I have been reflecting on my life and personal ambitions for some time. And my decision to step away is the outcome of that. I want to wander again," Saurabh Kumar said in an e-mail sent to the employees of Grofers.

Co-founder and CEO of Grofers Albinder Dhindsa, in a blog post, confirmed that Kumar will no longer be involved in day-to-day responsibilities at Grofers. However, he will continue to be a board member and a shareholder at the company. "This is the end of an era for Grofers," he said.

"Over the last six months, SK had been yearning to invest in his

own personal evolution - to grow beyond a growth driver to become a designer, enabler and coach. And diving deeper has convinced him that this is another area he can have a huge impact on, if he can build on it from scratch," he added.

According to reports, food delivery app Zomato is once again in acquisition talks with Grofers. Talks had failed last year. This time Zomato may lead a \$100 million funding round in Grofers first. After BigBasket getting acquired by Tata Digital, another leading player in the online grocery business, Grofers, has become a hot property.

Kumar and Dhindsa had started Grofers in 2014. Along with BigBasket, Grofers developed the e-grocery business in India and helped the segment touch a turnover of \$3 billion. The segment is now expected to grow at a com-



Saurabh Kumar

pound annual growth rate of 59 per cent to \$18 billion by 2024 with the likes of Amazon, Flipkart, Tatas and Reliance getting into the segment. Around 130 million households are already using e-grocery platforms or are willing to try, and this has created an addressable market of a whopping \$293 billion. The pandemic saw the gross merchandise value of e-grocers growing multi-fold.

The phenomenon of co-founder leaving a startup is not new. In 2018, Pankaj

Chaddah, co-founder of Zomato, left the company. In 2019, Urban Ladder co-founder Rajiv Srivatsa stepped down from active leadership. Smruti Parida and Deepak Dhar of NestAway and Delhivery's Mohit Tandon and Bhavesh Manglani also left their startups.

"There are several opportunities in the digital space and a co-founder leaving the start-up in search of new opportunity is not a new thing. But then, there will be a dominant co-founder who would most probably be the face of the company. Investors too recommend that there should be a first among equals. Sometimes, the vision of the company also changes as it evolves over the time and new investors come in. Naturally, some of the co-founders would want to explore new things," said Arun Natarajan, founder of Venture Intelligence.

Hyundai to begin third production shift

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JUNE 18

Hyundai, India's second biggest car maker, says the demand for cars in India is steadily rising, by about 75 per cent in June itself, as it plans to start three shift production at its factory in Chennai from the present two shifts to reduce waiting period of more than four months for its models.

The Korean automaker introduced the new Hyundai Alcazar SUV, with introductory prices for the 2.0-litre petrol version starting at Rs 16.30 lakh, and the 1.5-litre diesel version at Rs 16.53 lakh pan-India showroom.



Hyundai, also India's biggest SUV maker, is betting big on its Alcazar SUV, confirmed bookings of which crossed 4,000 in less than a month with down payment of Rs 25,000.

The Hyundai Alcazar competes

with the three-row SUVs like the MG Hector Plus, Tata Safari and the Mahindra XUV500. This segment is set to become even more competitive with the arrival of the new Mahindra XUV700, which that replaces the current XUV500, later this year.

"We have already seen demand for cars rising by 75 per cent in June itself," Tarun Garg, director, sales at Hyundai Motor India told *Financial Chronicle*. He said this demand would continue in July and August as people preferred personal mobility to be safe from Covid pandemic. Garg said 45 per cent of the company's total sales now come from SUVs.

Centrum-Bharat Pe bid for PMC Bank gets RBI nod

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, JUNE 18

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday gave its in-principle approval to Centrum Financial Services for the takeover of scam-hit Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank. The financial services company Centrum Financial will be allowed to set up a small finance bank (SFB) with the takeover of PMC Bank.

"The RBI has today decided to grant "in-principle" approval to Centrum Financial Services Limited (the applicant) to set up a small finance bank under general "Guidelines for 'on tap' Licensing of Small Finance Banks in the Private Sector" dated December 5, 2019," said the apex bank in a statement.

"This "in-principle" approval has been accorded in specific pursuance to the Centrum Financial Services Limited's offer dated February 1, 2021 in response to the Expression of Interest notification dated November 3, 2020 published by the Punjab & Maharashtra Co-operative



Bank Ltd., Mumbai," added the RBI.

"The RBI would consider granting a licence for commencement of banking business under Section 22 (1) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, on being satisfied that the applicant has complied with the requisite conditions laid down by RBI as part of "in-principle" approval," it said.

In December 2020, Bharat

Pe and Centrum Group were among the four groups that had made submissions to the RBI for the acquisition. While Centrum Group is co-promoted by Jaspal Bindra, a former Standard Chart-ered banker, BharatPe is a third-party unified pay-ments interface (UPI) player. Both

may own equal stakes in the venture, according to reports.

Asutosh Mishra, head of research at Ashika Stock Broking said, "The RBI has resolved the issue in the best possible way and protected the interest of all depositors. However, we will have to wait and see as to how Centrum recovers the dues of PMC from the defaulters, how it normalises the operations of the scam-hit bank and grows the business."

On September 23, 2019, the RBI had superseded the board of PMC and placed it under regulatory restrictions, including putting a cap on withdrawals by its customers, after detection of certain financial irregularities and hiding and mis-reporting of loans given to realtor HDIL.

Cash withdrawals were initially capped at Rs 1,000 per account initially but relaxed to Rs 100,000 by June last year. Depositors had held several protests demanding their money back. PMC's exposure to HDIL was over Rs 6,500 crore or 73 per cent of its total loan book size.

KIMS SUBSCRIBED 3.86 TIMES, DODLA DAIRY 45.61 TIMES

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JUNE 18

Hyderabad-based Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences' (KIMS Hospitals) Rs 2,144-crore initial public offering (IPO) was fully subscribed on the final day of bidding on Friday.

The public issue was subscribed 3.86 times. The qualified institutional buyer (QIB) portion was subscribed 5.26 times, the non-institutional portion was subscribed 1.89 times and retail portion was subscribed 2.9 times, according to sources close to the merchant bankers.

Earlier the company had allotted shares worth Rs 955.69 crore to the anchor investors.

Another Hyderabad-based company Dodla Dairy's Rs 520 crore IPO was subscribed 45.61 times on the final day of bidding.

The QIB portion was subscribed 84.88 times, the non-institutional portion was subscribed 73.26 times and the retail portion was subscribed 11.34 times.

Earlier the company had allotted shares worth Rs 156.05 crore to the anchor investors.

INDIA PESTICIDES IPO FROM JUNE 23

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JUNE 18

Lucknow-based India Pesticides, manufacturer of agrochemicals announced a Rs 800-crore initial public offering in the price band of Rs 290 to Rs 296 per equity share of Re 1 face value. The public offer opens on June 23 and closes on June 25.

The IPO consists of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 100 crore and an offer for sale of equity shares worth Rs 700 crore, by the selling shareholders.

India Pesticides is the sole Indian agro-chemical manufacturer of fungicide technicals Captain and Polpet, besides Thiocarbamate herbicide. It also manufactures Cymoxanil, used to manufacture fungicides that control downy mildews.

SHORT TAKES

Hyderabad FC rope in D'Silva

Hyderabad: Indian Super League side Hyderabad FC have signed young striker Aaren D'Silva on a three-year deal ahead of the new season, the club announced on Friday. The deal will see him stay at the club till the end of 2023-24 season. Aaren has been involved in professional football since a young age. He spent over four years learning his trade at the SESA Football Academy. He also featured for Dempo SC in the under-19 I-League and Santa Cruz club of Cavellosim in 2016-17 season of the Goa Pro League. "I am really excited to be a part of Hyderabad FC. I want to be a part of the squad, and work hard to make a name for myself at HFC," Aaren said. — PTI

Ten new faces in India hockey team

Bengaluru: India on Friday named 10 Olympic debutants in its 16-member men's hockey squad, which also features seasoned performers like PR Sreejesh and Manpreet Singh, for the Tokyo Games to be held from July 23 to August 8. Amit Rohidas, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Nilakanta Sharma, Sumit, Shamsher Singh, Dilpreet Singh, Gurjant Singh and Lalit Kumar Upadhyay are the 10 players who will make their Olympic debut in Tokyo. Besides, the 16-member team also includes six seasoned campaigners like former skipper and goalkeeper Sreejesh, midfielder Manpreet, defenders Harmanpreet Singh, Rupinder Pal Singh and Surender Kumar and forward Mandeep Singh. — PTI

Boxers head to Italy for training

New Delhi: Eight of India's nine Olympic-bound boxers, along with a few sparring partners, will leave for Italy early Saturday morning for a training camp as they gear up for the Tokyo Games from July 23 to August 8. Six-time world champion M C Mary Kom (51kg), as reported by PTI earlier, has decided to base herself in Pune's Army Sports Institute till the Games. Five Olympic-bound men — Amit Panghal (52kg), Manish Kaushik (63kg), Vikas Krishan (69kg), Ashish Chaudhary (75kg), and Satish Kumar (+91kg) — will be joined by Asian medalist Shiva Thapa (63kg) and Strandja Memorial silver-winner former Deepak Kumar (52kg). — PTI

Bottas sets pace for French GP

Le Castellet: Valtteri Bottas overcame a poor start to top the first practice session ahead of Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton at the French Grand Prix on Friday. Bottas had some early trouble at the Paul Ricard circuit in southern France, bouncing over kerbs and appearing to damage the front wing on his car. But he recovered to post the best lap of 1 minute, 33.45 seconds, putting him 0.335 ahead of Hamilton and 0.432 clear of Max Verstappen. Soon after Bottas had his mishap, Sebastian Vettel lost control of the rear of his Aston Martin and slid backward off the track into the barriers. —AP

Romania banned for Games 'lifting

Lausanne: Romania have been banned from competing in weightlifting at the Tokyo Olympics over past doping cases, the International Weightlifting Federation ruled in a decision. The Romanian Weightlifting Federation was issued a one-year ban from competition over five doping cases. Those included disqualifications for all four of Romania's weightlifters from the 2012 Olympics after various banned substances were found in later retesting of their samples. One of those athletes, Gabriel Sincraian, also lost a medal from the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro for another failed drug test. Romania becomes the fourth country barred from the Tokyo weightlifting competition after Egypt, Malaysia and Thailand, which were also excluded over doping-related issues. — AP

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Brazil's Richarlison (from left) celebrates with teammates Neymar, Everton Ribeiro, Fred and Renan Lodi after scoring a goal against Peru during the Copa America group match in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday. — AFP

SAMBA MAGIC

Brazil outwit Peru 4-0 to qualify for knockout stage

Rio De Janeiro, June 18: A tearful Neymar inspired hosts Brazil to become the first side to qualify for the Copa America knockout stages following a 4-0 win over Peru in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday.

Goals from Alex Sandro, Neymar, Everton Ribeiro and Richarlison gave the holders a ninth straight win and a perfect six points from two games in Group B as Peru dropped to the bottom.

There was little between the two sides in the first half but Brazil's greater quality made the difference after the break as talisman Neymar inspired them to an ultimately comfortable victory.

"It's emotional for me because many things happened in these last two years that were difficult,

complicated," said Neymar as the tears flowed.

Two years ago he missed Brazil's Copa triumph on home soil through injury, although before the tournament began he was accused of rape, a case that was dismissed over a lack of evidence.

His 68th goal in 107 games for his country took him to within nine of the record set by Brazil great Pele.

"It's an honor for me to be part of the Brazilian national team history. To be honest, my dream was always to play for the Selecao, to wear this jersey. I never imagined achieving these numbers."

It took Brazil 10 minutes to get a shot on goal, and when they did it came from the unlikely boot of

through the second half, his second goal of the tournament.

DE BRUYNE FIRES BELGIUM INTO LAST 16

Kevin De Bruyne inspired Belgium to a 2-1 victory over Denmark in Copenhagen on Thursday, securing them a place in the Euro 2020 knockout stage as fans and players showed their support for Christian Eriksen.

Yussuf Poulsen gave the hosts a second-minute lead, but De Bruyne came off the bench at half-time to make his first appearance of the tournament

COPA RESULTS	
Brazil	4
(Sandro 12, Neymar 68, Ribeiro 89, Richarlison 93)	
Peru	0
Venezuela	0
Colombia	0

defensive midfielder Fred, who fired over.

After the break, Brazil continued to create the better chances as right-back Danilo got forward to lash a half-volley wide from the edge of the area.

Brazil thought they had a penalty on the hour mark when Neymar tumbled in the box under pressure from Renato Tapia, but as the Paris Saint-Germain star waited to take the spot kick, Argentine referee Patricio

Loustau went over to check the pitchside monitor and reversed his decision. Neymar didn't have to wait long for his chance to score, as Peru turned over possession in midfield on 68 minutes and Fred played the ball into the striker, who turned quickly to fire low past goalkeeper Pedro Gallese from 20 yards.

The hosts started to play with freedom and substitute Richarlison brought a fine save out of Gallese after he was set up by Neymar, who later shot wide.

Peru should have got back into it 12 minutes from time but Luis Abram and Alex Valera both contrived to miss an open goal from inside the six-yard box.

The third goal finally came a minute from time

as Richarlison teed up another substitute in Everton Ribeiro to tap home from six yards out.

VENEZUELA HOLD COLOMBIA

Venezuela held out under intense pressure in a fractious local derby against Colombia to secure their first point at the Copa America after a 0-0 draw in Goiania on Thursday. Goalkeeper Wuilker Farinez made a string of fine saves, particularly in the closing stages, to keep out the Colombians, who saw a late Miguel Borja goal ruled out for offside.

Venezuela were still severely depleted from a Covid outbreak in their camp that deprived the team of eight players in their 3-0 defeat to hosts Brazil on Sunday.

— AFP

EURO RESULTS

Denmark	1
(Yussuf 1)	
Belgium	2
(Thazard 53, Bruyne 69)	
Netherlands	2
(Depay 11, Dumfries 67)	
Austria	0
Sweden	1
(Emil Forsberg 77-p)	
Slovakia	0

Live on TV

Group Stage: Hungary vs France from 6.30 pm; Portugal vs Germany from 9.30 pm; Spain vs Poland from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Dominant Dutch in Last 16

Amsterdam, June 18: The Netherlands are through to the last 16 at Euro 2020 after Memphis Depay's penalty set up a 2-0 win over Austria on Thursday, their second straight victory securing top spot in Group C.

Depay made no mistake from the spot in the 11th minute in Amsterdam after David Alaba's foul on Denzel Dumfries was spotted by the Israeli referee only after he came across to review the images.

Dumfries, so impressive in the thrilling opening 3-2 win over Ukraine, added another midway

after injury and teed up Thorgan Hazard to equalise before scoring the winner with a fine strike.

SWEDEN ON BRINK OF ENTERING KNOCKOUTS

Emil Forsberg's second-half penalty sealed Sweden a 1-0 win over Slovakia in Saint Petersburg on Friday as the Scandinavians moved top of Euro 2020 Group E. Janne Andersson's men, who played out a goalless draw with Spain in their opener, now look set to reach the knockout stage for the first time since 2004.

A point in their final game against Poland at the Krestovsky Stadium on Wednesday would be enough to be sure of a top-two finish in the group.

Slovakia could have qualified with a game to spare with a win, but still have their fate in their own hands ahead of their final match against Spain in Seville. On Friday, Sebastian Larsson had an early effort comfortably saved by Martin Dubravka, but Slovakia otherwise started brightly, with Juraj Kucka heading wide in the fifth minute.

— Agencies

WOMEN'S | ONE-OFF TEST

Shafali hits fifty, frustrates hosts

Bristol, June 18: The Indian women's cricket team was 83 for one at tea after being forced to follow-on by England women on the third day of the one-off Test here on Friday. Debutant Shafali Verma (55 batting) once again looked in great touch but other opener Smriti Mandhana (8) departed early. Deepti Sharma (18 batting) was the other unbeaten batter at the crease.

Earlier, resuming at overnight score of 187 for 5, India were all out for 231 in their first innings, 165 runs short of England's first innings score of 396. From 167 for no loss, India lost eight wickets for 30 runs with left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone getting 4 for 88.

SHADES OF SEHWAG

Indian men's fielding coach R. Sridhar was all praise for batting sensation Shafali Verma, who has impressed one and all with her twin half-centuries on Test debut. In fact, Sridhar said that the

BRIEF SCORES

England 396/9d vs India 231 in 81.2 overs (Shafali Verma 96, Smriti Mandhana 78, Deepti Sharma 29 not out; Sophie Ecclestone 4/88) & 83/1 in 24.3 overs (Shafali Verma 55 (batting))

whole Indian team whenever they had time off from training have been glued to the Test match and mighty impressed by the Haryana teenager's pyrotechnics.

"Shafali, so much reminds us of Viru, doesn't she? The way she plays and her mindset is so clear, so we are enjoying the innings from Shafali. I wish she had got a hundred in the first innings," Sridhar said.

"And well played to both Smriti (Mandhana) and Shafali, what a rollicking start they gave us in the first innings and unfortunately, we couldn't capitalise on that, but great test match going there," added Sridhar. — PTI



Officials walk in for ground inspection during day 1 of the WTC final in Southampton on Friday. — AP

First day's play washed out

Southampton, June 18: The eagerly-awaited opening day of the World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand was rained out here on Friday, which is set to bring the reserve day into the equation. As per ICC playing conditions guidelines for the WTC final, if required the reserve sixth day can now come into effect with six hours of play lost on Day 1 itself.

There was forecast of rain and thundershowers and the heavens opened up last evening with relentless downpour continuing till afternoon.

With puddles forming throughout the outfield, even the best drainage system couldn't have possibly forced some action on the opening day.

Umpires Michael Gough and Richard Illingworth, after multiple inspections, called off the game at 7:30 pm IST (3 pm local time). While there has been talk about Southampton being the preferred venue, it has been learnt that BCCI was taken into confidence by both the ICC and England and Wales Cricket Board before they finalised the venue which also has a five-star facility within the premises, helping create a tight bio-secure bubble.

Live on TV

World Test championship final (Day 2)
India vs New Zealand, from 3pm on Star Sports 1, HD1

The English weather is known to be fickle and in any case, there was no guarantee that the match being played at any other venue would have not led to a wash-out on the first day.

In the last five years, England has hosted 32

EURO | PREVIEW

Germany eye Portugal scalp

Munich (Germany), June 18: Germany coach Joachim Loew is under pressure to find a way for his side to create more chances when they host holders Portugal at Euro 2020 on Saturday, with their hopes of reaching the knock-out stage hanging in the balance.

A tense 1-0 defeat by France in their opening Group F game leaves the Germans needing a result at the Allianz Arena against Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal.

Loew's efforts to strengthen Germany's defence meant only a Mats Hummels own goal was the difference against world champions France.

However, the hosts managed just one shot on target on Tuesday.

"If we can be more vigorous up front, we will be able to beat Portugal," said Loew.

Germany have won their last four meetings with Portugal over the last two decades, most recently with a 4-0 victory in the 2014 World Cup group stage as the Germans went on to win the title in Brazil.

However, much has changed in the last seven years.

FOCUS ON MORATA AS SPAIN MEET POLAND

Spain and Poland will have a common challenge when they meet on Saturday at the Euro. And, that is Goals.

Spain created chance after chance against Sweden but were still held to a 0-0 draw in their opening match. Poland lost to Slovakia 2-1 as Robert Lewandowski was held scoreless in yet another lacklustre performance at a major football tournament.

The focus on Spain at La Cartuja Stadium will be on Alvaro Morata, the striker singled out by fans and Spanish media for his misses against Sweden. He had also been ineffective in Spain's warm-up match against Portugal, which ended 0-0.

Spain coach Luis Enrique will have to choose whether to keep the Juventus striker in the starting lineup or make a change to try to boost the attack. — Agencies



Germany's Leroy Sane (left) and Ilkay Gundogan arrive for a training session in Herzogenaurach on Friday, on the eve of their Euro group match against Portugal. — AFP

OSAKA PULLS OUT OF BIG W, BUT READY FOR TOKYO GAMES

Los Angeles, June 18: Japanese star Naomi Osaka has withdrawn from Wimbledon this year, her agent confirmed on Thursday, weeks after the world number two pulled out of the French Open citing her struggle with depression and anxiety. "Naomi won't be playing Wimbledon this year," Osaka's agent Stuart Duguid said. "She is taking some personal time with friends and family."

"She will be ready for the Olympics and is excited to play in front of her home fans."

Osaka has been in the

spotlight since withdrawing from the French Open.

She was fined \$15,000 and threatened with disqualification from Roland Garros after she refused to honour mandatory media commitments.

French Open organisers protested that they had treated her with "care and respect" after they were accused of being heavy-handed. Osaka lost in the third round of Wimbledon in 2017 and 2018 and bowed out in the first round in 2019. Last year's tournament was cancelled due to coronavirus. — AFP

ROHIT WANTS THINGS TO BE SIMPLE & REAL

Southampton, June 18: Rohit Sharma believes that keeping things "simple and realistic" against a quality side like New Zealand should be the way to go for the Indian team in the World Test Championship final.

Rohit, who will be opening for the first time in England, is also confident of tackling the New Zealand attack, having faced it enough in the shorter formats.

"I have played those guys and know about their strengths and weaknesses. It will all boil down to what the conditions are, what sort of situation the team is in, whether we are batting first or second," Rohit told broadcasters *Star Sports*.

"All that will count and it's important not to overthink. Against a quality side, it is also very important to keep things simple, and realistic," said Rohit.

A white ball superstar, Rohit loves the traditional format for the challenges that it poses for sustained periods of play.

— PTI