

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SATURDAY 19 | SEPTEMBER 2020

WEATHER



Max: 30°C
Min: 23°C
Rainfall: 4 mm

Forecast: A shower in spots in the evening followed by occasional rain and drizzle late

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CM asks for more seats under BPO promotion scheme



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US bans TikTok and WeChat to safeguard national security



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Duplantis high over 26-yr-old Bubka bar



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No contempt proceedings against actor Suriya

Chennai: The Madras high court on Friday declined to initiate criminal contempt proceedings against well-known actor Suriya for his comments against the judiciary made in the light Neet. Earlier, a row erupted after Suriya said the court functioned virtually, but asked students to appear for Neet, prompting a Madras High Court judge and an advocates association to seek contempt action against him, while six former judges took a stand against it. ■ P3

Paytm app back on Google Play store

New Delhi: Google on Friday restored the Paytm app on its Play Store after removing it for a few hours for violating its policy on sports betting activities. The app was back on the Google Play store on Friday evening after the Softbank-backed Paytm removed the 'cashback' feature from a recently-launched game on the application. ■ P6

Omandurar govt hospital bags award

Chennai: The Government Medical College in the Omandurar Government Estates in Chennai has won a first prize given by the Consortium of Accredited Healthcare Organizations (CAHO), India's premier body of accredited healthcare organizations dedicated to improving the quality and safety of healthcare services.

AIADMK decides to sort out internal differences

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

The top brass of the AIADMK went into a huddle on Friday, apparently in a bid to resolve the internal differences within the party particularly the issue relating to finalisation of the next Chief Ministerial candidate, and finally decided to convene the executive committee on Monday (September 28).

The impromptu meeting

Executive committee meet on September 28

on Friday was called by the party convener and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam through a communication issued on Thursday. Even as the meeting was on, supporters of both Panneerselvam and Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami had gathered at the party headquarters premises.

Posters hailing both the leaders were put up and slogans raised when the leaders emerged from the meeting indicated the bone of contention was the Chief Minister's post. While Palaniswami's supporters called him the 'permanent chief minister', Panneerselvam was hailed as the 'political heir of Jayalalithaa'.

The meeting was attended only by prominent leaders of the party, not numbering more than 50. ■ P3

Army finds prima facie evidence against its troops

Srinagar, Sept. 18: The Army has found "prima facie" evidence its troops "exceeded" powers under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act during an encounter in Kashmir's Shopian district in which three men were killed in July this year and has initiated disciplinary proceedings, officials said on Friday. On July 18, the Army claimed three militants were killed in Amshipura village in the higher reaches of south Kashmir's Shopian district. — PTI ■ P4

Lok Sabha impasse ends after Thakur's apology

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

There was high drama in the Lok Sabha as minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur made disparaging remarks about the Nehru-Gandhi family, which led to several adjournments, as Congress Lok Sabha leader Adhir Ranjan Choudhury called him "a chhokra from Himachal Pradesh".

Later, the proceedings resumed only at 6 pm after four adjournments, when Mr Thakur "apologised" to the House, saying he was "pained" if his words had hurt anyone, on the insistence of Speaker Om Birla.

Earlier, the trouble began when during the introduction of the Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation and Amendment of Certain Provision) Bill by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Opposition members criticised the PM-Cares fund's validity. Mr Thakur counter-attacked immediately and accused the Gandhi family of "cheating" people by pooling public money through creation of various funds under

different names. While Opposition leaders — Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury — were critical of the PM-Cares fund during the discussion on the legislation, Mr Thakur said: "From the high court to the Supreme Court, all courts have validated the PM-Cares fund. Even children have contributed to it from their piggy banks. Nehru had set up a fund that has not been registered to date. You (Congress) only made a trust for the benefit of the Gandhi family.

You made Sonia Gandhi its chairman. It should be probed." "Nehruji ordered the creation of Prime Minister's National Relief Fund in 1948 like a royal order, but its registration has not been done even till today. How did it get FCRA clearance?" Mr Thakur sought to know. This irked the Opposition and Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury lashed out at Mr Thakur, calling him a "chhokra", demanding an apology for maligning the Nehru-Gandhi family.

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IPL promises a 'happy distraction'

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

It's billed a "positive distraction", a catalyst that's going to "change the mood of the nation" and a "much-needed chaos" in the time of pandemic. The 13th edition of the Indian Premier League beginning in Abu Dhabi on Saturday is expected to grab more eyeballs than usual as the five-month delay caused by Covid-19 has whet cricket aficionados' appetite for slam-bang action.

The IPL juggernaut had to be moved out of India, was

brand — and suffered many a nervous moment with over a dozen Covid-19 positive cases in its UAE bubble, but has marched on and is now ready to enthrall millions of fans watching from the convenience of their living rooms.

Unlike previous editions, the show begins without a glamorous opening night and boisterous crowds, but the high-octane clash between defending champions Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings promises to be a blockbuster start. The two teams had

featured in the final of the last edition of IPL with CSK going down by one run.

Saturday's match will be M.S. Dhoni's first appearance in a competitive game since July 2019. The recently retired player had his task cut out, motivating the players amidst the Covid-19 scare in the CSK bio-bubble. The twin pullouts of Suresh Raina and Harbhajan Singh added to their pre-season drama. Despite suffering a delayed start to their training camp, the Super Kings are raring to go.

Why insult corona warriors: Rahul on govt's 'no data on deaths of healthcare worker' RS reply

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday attacked the government for stating that data on healthcare staff who were affected by Covid-19 or had died from it is not maintained centrally and alleged that "corona warriors" are being insulted.

Minister of State for Health Ashwini Choubey informed the Rajya Sabha this week that health is a state subject and "such data is not maintained at Central level by Ministry of Health". This was in response to a question on the number of healthcare staff, including doctors,



Rahul Gandhi

nurses, support staff and ASHA workers, who have been affected by coronavirus or died due to it. Tagging a news report on Mr. Choubey's reply, Mr. Gandhi titled his tweet, "Adverse data-free Modi

government!" "Their (healthcare workers') safety and respect are more important than beating plates or lighting lamps," the former Congress chief tweeted in Hindi, referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi

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initiated campaigns honouring 'corona warriors' "Modi government, why this insult of corona warriors?" Mr. Gandhi asked.

Mr. Choubey, in his reply, however, also said the database of those seeking relief under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Insurance Package is maintained at national level. As many as 155 healthcare staff, including 64 doctors, have died due to the coronavirus infection, according to the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting Covid-19, he said. — PTI



Parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha during the ongoing Monsoon session of Parliament, amid the coronavirus pandemic, in New Delhi, on Friday.

— PTI

Govt trying to end MSP through farm bills: Cong

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Likening farmers to the "Pandavas" and the Centre to the "Kauravas", the Congress on Friday accused the government of trying to end minimum support price (MSP) through three new farm bills and asked political parties to decide with whom they want to stand.

The Congress also said that it will fight for farmers in Parliament as well as on the streets. Lok Sabha has passed the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, which seek to promote barrier-free interstate and intra-state trade in agricultural produce.

These will now be tabled in the Rajya Sabha.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said farmers have lost faith in the Modi government as there is a difference between its deeds and actions.

"This government wants to benefit its 'friends' by attacking the lives and livelihood of farmers, he said. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said this fight has now become "the battle of truth" like the Mahabharata. Here the Modi government is like the "Kauravas" and the farmers are the "Pandavas", he said.

He said various political parties will now have to decide whether they stand with the "Kauravas" or the "Pandavas" in this "dharma yudh" (battle of truth).

Congress leader P. Chidambaram said the laws passed by the government scuttle the MSP principle and undermine public procurement. In a tweet in Hindi, Gandhi said, "Farmers have lost faith in the Modi government as there has been a difference in their deeds and actions right from the start - demonetisation, wrong GST and heavy tax on diesel." — PTI

Over ₹3,024 cr released under Nirbhaya fund to states/UTs

New Delhi, Sept. 18: The Centre has released an amount of over ₹3,024 crore under the Nirbhaya fund out of which states have utilised around ₹1,919 crore, the Women and Child Development Ministry said on Friday. The Nirbhaya fund was set up in 2013 by the UPA government to improve the safety and security of women in the aftermath of the brutal gang rape of a 23-year-old paramedic student, who came to be known as Nirbhaya, in December, 2012 in a mov-

ing bus in Delhi.

Responding to a question in the Lok Sabha, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani gave out state-wise data of release and utilization of the Nirbhaya fund.

The data showed the Centre has released an amount of ₹3,024.46 crore under the Fund out of which states have utilised ₹ 1,919.11 crore. The highest amount has been released to Delhi at ₹ 409.03 crore out of which ₹352.58 crore has been utilised by it, according to the data. — PTI

Despite efforts injured elephant dies

ANANTH MATHIVANAN | DC COIMBATORE, SEPT. 18

Amid all the existing furore over the series of wild elephant deaths in the Coimbatore forest range, another elephant died in a span of 10 days. The elephant was found dead inside the woods on Friday evening, as foresters were preparing to tranquilize it for treatment.

The injured male elephant estimated to be around 15 years to 16 years old, was first sighted by foresters by March-end in Mettupalayam range,

Coimbatore forest department, with injuries in one of its front legs and a wound near its rear thigh.

From then on, a special team of forest department personnel were monitoring the animal round-the-clock, and provided it medicines mixed with fruits for its wound to heal. Recently, two kumki elephants were brought to Nillithurai village to tranquilize the elephant, but it moved deeper in the woods. As AP watchers went searching into the woods for the jumbo, they found the animal dead lying in a slushy area, on Friday evening.

● **Metal detectors used during the postmortem revealed that there were no pellets or metal objects in the animal's body, clearly dismissing the gunshot rumour, added the DFO**

DFOD Venkatesh said, the post-mortem report revealed that more than 15 tusk-inflicted puncture wounds were found on its body. The nature and gravity of wounds suggested that

these would have been sustained at various points of time.

Ossification and fibrosis of the front left knee joint, had resulted in immobility of the joint leading to the uneven erosion of the foot pad, nail cracks and inter digital ulcerated wounds. Severe congestion on the lungs, heart and brain, were also observed.

These injuries had totally disabled the animal. Veterinarians opine that the elephant had died due to attack by another wild tusker. Field staff have been instructed to closely monitor elephant movement, and

record their observations.

Metal detectors used during the postmortem revealed that there were no pellets or metal objects in the animal's body, clearly dismissing the gunshot rumour, added the DFO.

Anti-poaching watchers suspect that a male elephant nicknamed 'Oosi Komban', could have grievously injured the animal. They also suspect that in Mettupalayam range, this bull is responsible for the death of a female elephant aged around 50 years which was found dead on May 14, and a sub-adult male aged 10-11 years on July 31.

Delhi e-rickshaw driver's son crowdfunds for fees at London ballet school

London, Sept. 18: A 20-year-old ballet enthusiast, who is the son of an e-rickshaw driver in Delhi, is using a crowdfunding campaign to raise money to pay the fees for a training course at the famed English National Ballet School in London.

Kamal Singh dreams of representing India at an international dance platform after he won admission to the school's one-year Professional Trainee Programme.

However, he needs to raise enough funds not only

towards the fees but also the high living costs in the UK capital.

"My family and my coach always stood by my side, they never gave up on me. Unfortunately, I could not afford the fees of the one-year programme — 8,000 pounds (USD 10,365) — not to mention the additional living expenses in London — at least 1,000 pounds (US\$ 1,295) per month," said Singh, whose father runs an e-rickshaw in Delhi.

"I decided to raise funds on Ketto. I am moved by the love and support I have been

getting from the people. I am so grateful to the people who donated for my campaign," he said.

Singh has already raised over 18,000 pounds (US\$ 23,297) of a 27,777 pounds (US\$ 35,952) target, attracting messages of support from hundreds of supporters from around the world.

"You are a great dancer and I hope your dreams come true. Do India proud in the international dance community," notes one contributor.

"I hope you succeed to the best of your capabilities, raise the bar and reach

● **Kamal Singh dreams of representing India at an international dance platform after he won admission to the school's one-year Professional Trainee Programme**

greater heights. Make every well-wisher proud of your achievements," adds another.

The young dancer was oblivious to the world of ballet four years ago, when a

chance encounter with Maestro Fernando Aguilera, the director of a ballet school and company in New Delhi, changed the course of his life.

He soon fell in love with the classical dance form and embarked upon the tough training regime, finding it quite challenging as he started to learn only from the age of 17. But he says that Aguilera had confidence in his talent and trained him for eight to nine hours a day. After years of intense training, his dream came true with an enrol-

ment at the renowned ballet school in London. "We are excited to introduce this new programme to support talented individuals such as yourself to prepare for your career progression with the dance world," notes his admission letter, he says. After the one-year training course,

Singh hopes to join the English National Ballet Company as a professional dancer on a monthly salary. Mumbai-based Ketto, co-founded by Varun Sheth, Zaheer Adenwala and actor Kunal Kapoor, is a platform

for online crowdfunding for social, creative and personal causes.

"Ketto's primary objective is to use technology to optimise efficiency, reduce redundancy and increase impact targeting the social sector of the country. We are working with grass-root level nonprofits on technology enablement (including capacity building) to achieve our goals," the company said.

The company's online campaigns raise over ₹300 crores per year for various causes. — PTI

OTHER STORIES

CS discusses monsoon readines

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

Chief secretary K Shanmugam on Friday convened a meeting at the secretariat involving officials of all concerned departments to discuss the state's monsoon preparedness. Officials of the Indian Air Force, Coast Guard, National Disaster Management Authority and the Chennai Corporation Commissioner participated in the meeting which discussed the preparedness of the state to face the NE monsoon that is likely to set in the month of October.

Aspects like details of honing the skills of personnel involved in disaster management, mock drills to train a minimum of 50 personnel at a time, health norms to be adopted in view of the pandemic, social distancing and wearing of face masks were stressed at the meeting.

Officials were instructed to take due care that the pandemic did not spread and gain intensity. They were also asked to conduct awareness camps to promote the government's concept of health and safety even to the public.

SIT to probe PM kisan scheme scam

CHENNAI: A Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been set up by the Tamil Nadu police to probe the alleged irregularities in the Central government's Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi. The Crime Branch CID said on Friday that the SIT has been set up to look into allegations of a large number of ineligible farmers availing benefits of the scheme using fraudulent means. "Complaints were received that many ineligible farmers were inducted and availed the benefits through malpractices with the connivance of officials and outsourcing agencies," a CB-CID release said. Based on the complaints, 13 cases have been registered. —PTI

COUNTER POINT



Robbery attempt on woman on shared auto

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

A shared auto ride in Pammal area turned a nightmare for a 45-year-old woman on Friday. Police said Saraswathi, a government school teacher and a resident of Thiruvallur Nagar in Pammal, was almost robbed of her 7-sovereign chain in broad daylight.

According to the police, when the victim boarded the auto from Pammal to go

Ward for Covid suspects opened in RGGGH: Min

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

A 120-bed special ward was opened for admitting 'Covid-19 suspect' cases at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital on Friday by health minister C. Vijayabaskar.

The special ward is to take care of those who test negative for coronavirus but develop breathlessness due to serious lung infection.

Vijayabaskar said that this was the first time such an exclusive ward was being opened in a hospital. Soon one more such ward would be opened in Truchi and subsequently in other districts also.



He said the positivity rate of Covid-19 in Chennai had gone down to 10 per cent, which was a welcome sign as the positivity rate was at 30 per cent at one point of time and added that people should be more careful now as relaxations had been brought in to the lockdown norms.

When asked about discrepancies in the numbers put out by the State government and the Central government, health sdecretary J. Radhakrishnan said that can happen because of the time lag in uploading the data.

Some time it took four days to upload the data, he said, adding that in many states it took even 10 days.

Meanwhile, the state reported 5488 infections and 67 deaths.

Chennai had 989 new cases and 16 fatalities, while some districts reported high level of infection. They were Coimbatore 543, Salem 288, Chengalpattu 265, Thiruvallur 258 and Cuddalore 254.



The old bus terminus at Vellore remains cramped for space.

— K. Senthil Nathan

SR to install solar plants on 460 acres of land

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

The Southern Railway is on a mission to become energy efficient and is making all-out efforts in tapping alternative sources of energy.

In tune with the robust policies of the ministry of railways, the Southern Railway has been cutting down on energy costs making substantial savings in this front. With the vision of becoming a 'Green mode of transport', the zone is expediting its electrification projects, thus reducing carbon emission. Besides track electrification, the Southern railway is eyeing for solar power projects and other initiatives like harnessing renewable energy through wind mills.

In a press release issued on Friday, Chief Public Relations Officer, Southern

Solar plants on vacant unused railway land will be installed with a capacity of 40 MWp will be installed along the track over Southern Railway through PPA mode. Southern Railway has identified 300 acres of vacant land and 160 acres of land alongside the track

Railway, B. Gugesan, said, "Solar panels have been installed in various locations and railway stations like Dr MGR Central station, MMC complex, Katpadi, Tambaram EMU car-shed, Mambalam, Guindy, Chengalpattu suburban stations and many other places. The zone has ambitious plans of increasing solar power generation in the coming years. It is proposed to provide rooftop solar plants of 2.69 MWp under developer mode by

solar power developer, at Perambur, and the Golden Rock workshops." Solar plants on vacant unused railway land will be installed with a capacity of 40 MWp will be installed along the track over Southern Railway through PPA mode. Southern Railway has identified 300 acres of vacant land and 160 acres of land alongside the track.

To harness renewable energy through windmills, plants have been installed in Kayathar near Gangai Kondan and Kadambur railway stations in Tuticorin district, under the Madurai division. The railway is committed to fast tracking its renewable energy projects with a vision to cut down power costs and support the cause of 'Atma-Nirbhar'.



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami addressing the audience over video-conferencing the 29th convocation ceremony of the Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology on Friday. The convocation was presided over by chancellor Dr Mariazeena Johnson. A total of 3,190 graduands and 129 Ph.D scholars received their degrees. Among them, 20 students were awarded gold medals for their exemplary performance. Sathyabama is ranked one among the top 50 universities in India for four consecutive years by NIRF, Government of India.

CM asks for more seats under BPO promotion

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami urged the Union minister for electronics and communication Ravi Shankar Prasad, to allot 10,000 more seats to the state under the India BPO Promotion scheme.

In a letter to the Union minister on Friday, Palaniswami said the scheme was very successful in the state and had provided 7,705 seats in Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) Chennai jurisdiction (7,605 seats in of Tamil Nadu and 100 seats in Puducherry).

It had resulted in creating direct employment for 8,387 people and indirect employment for 16,774 people and the success rate of the scheme in the state in terms of commencement of operation was more than 93%, the Chief Minister said.

The scheme, which was launched to incentivize Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and

OPS for forming high-level committee to guide party

From P1

It is learnt that Pannierselvam had been insisting on the formation of a high-level committee to guide the party and that was also discussed at the meeting.

However, the waiting media was told that the meeting discussed the activities of the party and about its growth.

The executive committee is expected to decide on the date for holding the general council, which would take a final call on sorting out all

the issues before the release of V. K. Sasikala, the close friend of former Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha, from the Bengaluru jail.

The party leaders, it is said, want to finalise as to who would be the general secretary and who would be the Chief Ministerial candidate in the general council and ensure that Sasikala did not meddle with the party affairs once she comes back.

Though many leaders of the AIADMK had been

averring the Sasikala's return would not affect the functioning of the party in any way, the party's minorities wing secretary A. Anwar Raja said on Friday something contrary to that.

"The decision that Sasikala takes on her return will have a serious impact on Tamil Nadu politics," Anwar Raja said at Ramanathapuram after holding a local level meeting to decide on the reception to the Chief Minister when he visits the town in a few days' time.

Farmers resent Centre's three bills

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, SEPT. 18

Farmers in the district, particularly those belonging to Kumbakonam area, lodged a protest on Friday, against three alleged anti-farmers legislations of the Centre.

Farmers who participated in the monthly grievance-day meeting held by Collector M Govinda Rao through video-conferencing, wore black badges and staged a walk out for a short time against the three legislations.

The Central government introduced the three legislations in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, replacing three ordinances on reforming the farm sector, which includes dismantling the age-old mandi system.

Sundara Vimalanathan, a farmer from Kumbakonam area, said that the farming community welcomed the resignation of Union minister for food processing, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, of Akali Dal, and said that the legislations would help only the corporates.

South Korea donates one lakh masks

CHENNAI, SEPT. 18 A South Korean social welfare corporation, Anguk Zen Center, has donated one lakh health masks for free distribution to local communities in India to aid the country's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. The consignment was handed over to TVS Motors chairman, Venu Srinivasan, who is also the chairman of InKo Centre and Goodwill Envoy for Culture and Diplomacy of the Republic of Korea.

Stalin flays AIADMK for support to anti-ryots bills

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

DMK president M. K. Stalin launched a scathing attack on the AIADMK for supporting three Central legislations that were basically anti-farmers and urged Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to never call himself a 'farmer' on stage.

Referring to the resignation of Union food processing minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal in protest against Parliament passing the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill 2020 and Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, Stalin, in a statement on Friday, said that the AIADMK had been saying that the legislations would help farmers.

He said those two bills and the Essential Commodities Amendment Bill would pledge the livelihood of farmers to the Corporate Houses and tantamount to the Centre interfering in the State's

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

The DMK had lost the faith of the people and would hence not win the next election as the party's president M. K. Stalin was hoping for, revenue minister R. B. Udhayakumar said on Saturday.

He told the media after inspecting Covid-19 prevention work at Thiru Vi Ka Nagar that the AIADMK was preparing for the elections like a student would prepare for examinations and would hence win.

affairs against the spirit of federalism as agriculture is a state subject.

The bills would also help corporate houses hoard agricultural products and essential goods and sell them for a profit, he said.

When the DMK had

He said the Chief Minister was touring every district to ensure that the people's welfare programmes were properly implemented all over the State.

But Stalin had been complaining about everything that the government was doing, Udhayakumar said, adding that he even criticized the government for announcing that the students need not appear for the arrears examinations and would be declared pass in the papers.

SRMU to switch off lights at 8 tonight as protest

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

In protest against the Central government's decision to implement the Dr Bibek Debroy committee recommendation roping in private players in the railway sector, the Southern Railway Mazdoor Union (SRMU) will conduct a unique agitation by switching off electric lights at everyone's homes between 8 pm and 8.10 on Saturday to create awareness among people.

Dr N. Kanniah, general secretary, SRMU, said the Central Government has a fancy for privatisation despite the railways earning profits.

"Indian Railways earns nearly ₹1,87,770 crore per year. However, only 27per cent of it is earned from passenger services. Due to concessions and low ticket charges, the railways is losing ₹56,000 crore every year. The Central Government is not reim-

bursing this subsidy to the railways. Therefore, the railways is taking this subsidy from the ₹1.28 lakh crore income received from the freight traffic. The Central Government should bear the subsidy/low cost fare charged by the railways," he said.

Right from 2015, the Central Government began steps to privatise the railways by forming a committee under Dr Debroy. In 2017, the Central Government even stopped the submission of a separate Railway Budget.

Meanwhile, Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said on Thursday that privatisation of the railways will create a win-win situation for the Indian railways, investors and the users. "Private investment will bring in newer technologies. It will create a competition in the railway sector, which will increase efficiency and reduce fares in the long run," Kant said.

Actor's Neet remarks unwarranted, says HC

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

Entirely agreeing with the opinion of the advocate general, declining to consent for any step to initiate a criminal contempt proceeding against film star S.Surya for his alleged criticising statement against the judiciary in the mater relating to holding Neet amid pandemic, the Madras high court has declined to pursue the matter further.

The First Bench comprising Chief Justice A.P.Sahi and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy said, "This matter, therefore, in our judicious discretion does not deserve to be pursued further and we entirely agree with the opinion

expressed by the advocate general. We put on record our appreciation for the able guidance of the advocate general in promptly assisting us to deliver our opinion so as to tide over this legal complexity. We say all this only that the time has come when every citizen of this nation needs to educate himself even if curriculums do not prescribe, and the upbringing of our generations, also deserves to be tutored by all those who are possessed of such gifts to leave no stone unturned to impart the best they have to infuse civility, humility, courteousness and righteous expression amongst their fellow citizens for a better citizenry. The proceedings are thus

consigned. We direct the registry to maintain the records of these proceedings along with the order of the advocate general and the respective letters that have been referred to herein above, as part of the present proceedings".

The bench was passing orders on the letter sent by Justice S.M.Subramaniam, suggesting initiation of contempt proceedings against Surya, letters from certain section of the bar to the same effect and some letters from the legal fraternity including retired judges and couple of lawyers, requesting the court to exercise restraint and consequently not to proceed in the matter.

The bench said, "We find

that the utterances by the cine actor may have been absolutely unnecessary or even unwarranted, for being ignorant of the manner in which the entire judiciary of this state has served the interest of its citizens during this pandemic, and any such statement could have been avoided in a much more sober way, instead of an accusing tone, which though trivial in nature has raised a storm in a tea cup. A person in public life enjoys a position because of the responsibility with which he conducts himself and not by making other human activities look small for perceptibly no valid reason, but we would not say anything further, as we find that the Neet and

the dispute around it was not even a subject matter of the courts in the state of Tamil Nadu. A self-righteous person should himself be humble enough to acknowledge the contribution of others".

Disclosing the data relating to institution and disposal of cases during the pandemic period by the subordinate courts and high court, the bench said, "We only wish to point out that the judiciary was not sitting idle and was itself on trial during this pandemic, where the judges of the high court, of the subordinate judiciary, the entire staff and all stakeholders have served to the best of the capacity of the institution. This is not self praise,

but to state our humble performance of duty."

The bench said it has also perused the contents of the statement of the cine actor disclosed in the letter of the judge, his opinion, as also the other letters. A language which may, might be perfectly proper if uttered in a temperate manner, be grossly improper if uttered in a different manner: What may appear to be disrespectful may also be short of insult, and may be touching the borders of criticism. A reasonable precaution has to be taken in matters of public affairs, particularly Courts, Judges and their functioning, where fair and temperate criticism should not be contemptuous, the bench added.

SHORT TAKES

COVID-19 DEATH
TOLL CLOSE TO
85,000-MARKDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

With 96,424 fresh cases, India on Friday recorded close to 52.15 lakh cases of Coronavirus. The number of deaths in a day was 1,174 taking the total number of fatalities due to Covid-19 to 84,372, as per Union health ministry figures. However, according to covid19India.org, the total number of cases had crossed 52.50 lakh by Friday evening and deaths were close to 85,000.

Health ministry officials said India has recorded an “unprecedented high” of single day recoveries after 87,472 persons recovered and discharged in the past 24 hours. The Recovery Rate has reached 78.86% as total recovered cases touched 41.12 lakh. India's Case Fatality Rate (CFR) currently stands at 1.62%.

“India has been consistently reporting a very high level of daily recoveries of more than 70,000 for the past 11 days. Recovered cases are 4.04 times the number of active cases as recoveries outnumber the latter by 30,94,797,” they said.

Officials said 90 per cent of the new recoveries are reported from 16 states and Union Territories. Maharashtra (19,522) contributed 22.31% of the new recoveries while Andhra Pradesh (12,24%), Karnataka (8.3%), Tamil Nadu (6.31%) and Chhattisgarh (6.0%) followed with 32.8% of the new recoveries.

In view of rising cases in the city, Delhi government has announced to continue closure of schools till October 5. Meanwhile, ministry of health and family welfare has decided to depute a high level Central team to Jammu after a high number of cases were reported from there.

Earlier, a special team had visited Srinagar Valley to review Covid management with the district collectors. The current Central team too will interact with the district collectors and health officers of Jammu and visit hospitals in Bakshinagar and Gandhinagar.

The total number of confirmed Covid cases in Jammu is 9,428. Of these, 3,196 have recovered. Covid deaths are reported to be 117.

There are 6,115 active cases in the district. The total cases one week ago were 6,878. Jammu has been reporting Doubling Time of 15.4 days, Recovery Rate of 33.9% and CFR of 1.24%.

Meanwhile, Kerala on Friday reported 4,167 new cases of Covid-19 taking the total number of infected persons in the state to 1,26,381.

Of the total cases, 90,089 persons have recovered and 35,724 patients are under treatment in various hospitals across the state.

Of the new cases on Friday, 3,849 persons contracted the infection through contact, the source of infection among 410 is yet to be traced, 48 came from abroad, 165 from other states and 102 health workers got infected. As many as 2,744 persons recovered from infection.

The state recorded 12 more deaths taking the official toll to 501.

Army admits to killing
of three J&K youths

Army finds evidence against its men in Shopian encounter

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, SEPT. 18

The Army on Friday admitted that three youths of Jammu and Kashmir's frontier Rajouri district who had disappeared a day after their arrival in Shopian district in July to work as labourers in a local apple orchard to earn livelihood were killed by its troops during an “operation”.

It said that “disciplinary action” is being initiated by it under the Army Act against the officers and soldiers involved in the operation as the inquiry conducted by it “has brought out certain prima facie evidence indicating that, during the operation, powers vested under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1990 were exceeded and the Do's and Don'ts of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) as approved by the Hon'ble Supreme Court have been contravened”.

It has said that the slain men's “involvement with terrorism or related activities is under investigation by the J&K police”.

According to the families of three labourers Muhammad Intiaz, Abrar Ahmed Khan and Abrar Yusuf, the trio were killed by the troops in a fake encounter in Shopian's Amshipora area on July 18. A night before, the youths had informed their respective families over the phone that they had reached Shopian where they had been hired by a local fruit grower to work in his apple orchard.

After their killing, the Army had passed them off as “terrorists”.

‘Action taken must
be transparent’

Srinagar, Sept. 18: National Conference leader Omar Abdullah on Friday said the process of disciplinary action against those found guilty of killing three young men from Rajouri in an alleged fake encounter in Shopian should be transparent.

“The families of the three murdered men had continued to proclaim their innocence. Disciplinary action initiated by the army would suggest the army agrees with the families. The

process must remain transparent & the guilty must face the full weight of the law,” Omar tweeted.

He was reacting after the Army said it has found “prima facie” evidence that its troops “exceeded” powers under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act during an encounter in Kashmir's Shopian district in which three men were killed in July this year and has initiated disciplinary proceedings.

— PTI

Earlier this month, the families accused both the Army and the J&K police of dilly-dallying in the probes ordered by them separately into their complaint.

In a letter to J&K's Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, they sought his personal intervention into the matter. They also demanded that an impartial and fair inquiry be held, the DNA reports made public and, if it is established that their kin are the same youth who were killed in the purported July 18 encounter at Amshipora, they be allowed to exhume their bodies so that the victims are given a decent burial by them.

Sinha had while speaking to reporters here on September 14 assured that justice would be done with the families of slain youths.

He had said, “The Army has ordered its own inquiry and the administration is doing its own probe. I want to assure that justice will be done.”

J&K's DG Police, Dilbag Singh, said on Thursday that the DNA reports in the case would be made public soon.

The DNA samples of the parents and siblings of the missing youth were collected from Rajouri under the aegis of Jammu and Kashmir Police in August and subsequently sent for matching with the trio killed on July 18.

Defence spokesman Colonel Rajesh Kalia, said here on Friday that the inquiry ordered by the Army authorities into Operation Amshipora has been concluded.

He said that since the inquiry has brought out certain prima facie evi-

dence indicating that during the operation, powers vested under the AFSPA 1990 were exceeded and the Do's and Don'ts of the Army Chief as approved by the Supreme Court were contravened, the competent disciplinary authority has directed to initiate “disciplinary proceedings under the Army Act against those found prima facie answerable”.

He added, “The evidence collected by the inquiry has prima facie indicated that the three unidentified terrorists killed in Operation Amshipora were Muhammad Intiaz, Abrar Ahmed Khan and Abrar Yusuf, who hailed from Rajouri. Their DNA report is awaited. Their involvement with terrorism or related activities is under investigation by the police.”

He said, “Indian Army is committed to ethical conduct of operations. Further updates on the case will be given periodically without affecting due process of the law of the land”.

Last month, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch called for investigation and prosecution into the alleged extrajudicial execution of the three labourers by independent civilian authorities, saying civilian investigations and trials “offer a degree of transparency and independence that is missing from the military justice system”.

Various political parties and human rights activists in J&K too demanded an impartial probe into the alleged staged encounter.



A group of devotees pose for a selfie with the idol lord Vishwakarma during its immersion in the River Ganga after a day long worship, in Kolkata, Friday. — PTI

Chinese intel mounts
pressure on MuivahMANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, SEPT. 18

The Chinese government has not only been snooping on over 10,000 Indian individuals and organisations through a global database but its Intelligence agencies have been working in the northeast to rope in rebel leaders to create “internal” unrest and delay the ongoing peace-process in the region.

Disclosing that Chinese Intelligence agencies wanted NSCN (I-M) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah to delay the settlement of ongoing Naga peace talks, authoritative security sources told this newspaper that the Union government had prior input about the ongoing attempt of China.

Informing that the action of Chinese agencies coincided with problem in Galwan Valley in June, security sources said that it was almost the same time when NSCN (I-M) general secretary after agreeing on all the major issues suddenly changed his stand and started raising some of the irrelevant issues about the interlocutor.

Asserting that the ministry of home affairs had

● **REPORTS STATE** that the Chinese Intelligence agencies have been working in the northeast to rope in rebel leaders to create ‘internal’ unrest and delay the ongoing peace process in the region.

● **SECURITY SOURCES** disclose that Chinese Intelligence agencies wanted NSCN (I-M) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah to delay the settlement of ongoing Naga peace-talks.

such inputs of China trying to create problems in the northeast, security sources claimed that Chinese agencies have very strong connection with NSCN (I-M) leaders who had been taking shelter in China since 1966 before the ceasefire agreement was signed.

Claiming that intelligence inputs were corroborated with NSCN (I-M) general secretary taking hostage to Naga peace process by raising some rhetorical issues, security sources said that all these started in June. The NSCN (I-M) also started laying more stress on demand for a separate flag and constitution once again

in June. It is significant that the Centre had outrightly rejected the demand of a separate “flag and constitution” in October 2019.

Apart from the civil society groups, all the stakeholders of Nagaland including NNPGs have said their discussion with the Centre has concluded and the “agreed position” has been signed.

The Forum for Naga Reconciliation, which is leading the voice for reconciliation between NSCN(IM) and NNPG, are also saying that it is time for these two Naga political groups to meet and take forward the unfinished task of reconciliation. Meanwhile, NSCN (I-M) chairman Q. Tuccu, vice president Tongmeth Wangnag and 13 others have also reached New Delhi to join general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah in the ongoing informal talks but differences among the rank and file of the NSCN (I-M) was quite visible as its chairman Q. Tuccu and his team has been living at a separate location in New Delhi. However, the Centre has facilitated accommodation for both the chairman and the general secretary at one place.

Fashion designer found
dead at Kolkata residenceRAJIB
CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, SEPT. 18

Renowned fashion designer Sharbari Dutta, who earned accolades for her creations in Bollywood and Tollywood, was found dead with a leg injury and blood on face at her home in South Kolkata under mysterious circumstances early Friday. She was the daughter of Bengali poet Ajit Dutta.

While her Facebook profile shows May 7, 1957 as her date of birth reflecting her to be aged 63, the Kolkata Police, however, found it 78 actually after talking to her family members.

Dutta's body was recovered by her son Amalin, also a fashion designer, and daughter-in-law Kanaklata from the ground floor bathroom of their two-storeyed resi-

dence on Broad Street at around 12.30 am.

Amalin and Kanaklata, living at the first floor, said they went down to search for Dutta at the ground floor, where she used to stay, after getting calls from the members of a photoshoot team which failed to connect with the fashion designer repeatedly throughout Thursday.

Dutta, who created ‘Shunyaya’ fashion label, had plans to go out with the team on Friday to choose a location for a photoshoot.

Though cardiac arrest looked as the cause of her death in the initial findings of the doctors at Calcutta National Medical College and Hospital where the body was taken, blood stains on her face and an injury mark on her left ankle prompted them to send the body for post mortem.

The city police also started a probe after finding Amalin was unaware of his aged mother's whereabouts for long hours despite his presence at the same house.

Kanaklata told the police she last saw her mother in a w o t h e r - i n - l a w on September 16 evening.

The mother-son relation was not reportedly well following a tiff about a family property at Ahmedpur in Birbhum.

But Amalin said, “We had good relation. I did not see her on Thursday as I was very busy in my work. I thought she was busy too.”

In the evening Dutta's post-mortem report indicated that she fell down at the bathroom under suffering cerebral attack which left her dead at least 24 hours ago.

The autopsy surgeons ruled out foul play.

Sushant case:
NCB conducts
raids across
India, 17 heldDC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, SEPT. 18

The NCB conducted massive raids pan India and seized around three kilos of cannabis in connection with the ongoing drugs probe in the Sushant Singh Rajput suicide case. The officials said that the operations on the Andhra — Orissa border, UP and Assam and arrested 17 persons.

The officials said that several teams began “intensive operation” at the three locations from where 2,795 kg of cannabis. The officials apprehended the operatives of the narcotics substances which includes source, receivers and traffickers, NCB officials said.

“The raids were conducted based on the specific inputs generated through the manual and technical surveillance. A truck was intercepted in UP from which 1,138 kg of cannabis concealed was recovered,” said an NCB officer.

Covid comes as a boon for
Odisha cannabis peddlersAKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, SEPT. 18

Taking advantage of Covid-19 pandemic situation and subsequent lockdown and shutdown restrictions, a section of people in Odisha in connivance with their links in other states have got vigorously engaged in ganja (cannabis) peddling to earn quick bucks. Deployment of police personnel on Covid duty has provided them the much needed opportunity for unrestricted movement on highways and seamless transportation of the contraband.

In the past one week, the state excise department officials and police personnel have seized ganja worth about ₹1 crore and arrested half-a-dozen people. The seized ganja was being transported to different districts in Odisha and to other states also. Odisha cannabis is sold between ₹5 lakh and ₹8 lakh per quintal in domes-

RISE IN ACTIVITY

► **IN THE past one week, the state excise department officials and cops have seized ganja worth about ₹1 crore and arrested half-a-dozen people**

► **Odisha cannabis is sold between ₹5 lakh and ₹8 lakh per quintal in domestic markets**

tic markets.

On Friday morning, the excise department officials intercepted a Mahindra Bolero vehicle at Bharatpur on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar and seized 93 kilograms of the cannabis hidden in three specially-designed chambers placed under the front and rear seats. Two persons were arrested in connection with the transportation of the contraband. The market price of the seized ganja was estimated to be worth ₹5 lakh. Minutes later, a mini-

truck bearing Chhattisgarh registration number was intercepted by the excise department sleuths at Chandiput-Luhagudi in Jagapati district with seven quintals of ganja worth ₹35 lakh.

On September 8 and 11, the excise department officials had also seized ganja worth over ₹16 lakh from two separate places on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar city.

A couple of days ago, two persons from Uttar Pradesh using a car with Army logo were arrested while transporting ganja in their vehicle.

What is surprising is that ganja traders have been more active ever since the lockdown process started as the demand for the contraband increased following the shutting down of liquor shops. Even though lockdown restrictions have been removed, ganja still remains in high demand for the boozers because of its affordability.

ED ATTACHES 3
HOTELS WORTH
₹100CR IN PMC
BANK SCAMDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 18

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday attached three hotels, worth ₹100 crore, in Delhi in connection with its money laundering probe into the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank fraud case.

The three hotels that have been provisionally attached are located in Kailash Colony, East of Kailash and Kalkaji areas in the national capital.

“The attached assets are owned by Libra Realtors Pvt Ltd, Deewan Realtors Pvt Ltd, Rakesh Kumar Wadhawan, Romy Mehra, Libra Hotels Pvt Ltd and its directors,” the agency said in a statement issued here on Friday. It said the “market value” of these three properties is about ₹100 crore.

Farm Bills are protection shield,
Oppn misleading farmers: PM

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday stoutly defended farm sector reform bills, asserting that they will act as a “protection shield” for farmers and accused those opposing the measures of standing with middlemen and “deceiving” and “lying” to peasants.

With Opposition parties dubbing three bills, passed by Lok Sabha and now to be tabled in Rajya Sabha, as “anti-farmers” and the BJP ally Shiromani Akali Dal quitting his government to protest them, Modi refuted their criticism, and said these laws will unshackle farmers by allowing them to sell their produce anywhere by negotiating a better price.

He asserted that the government purchase of farm produce will remain, adding that the mechanism of minimum support price will continue in the same way it always has.

At a virtual event to launch several rail projects in Bihar, Modi said his government is committed to



● **THE PRIME MINISTER** stoutly defending farm sector reform Bills said these laws will unshackle farmers by allowing them to sell their produce anywhere by negotiating a better price.

● **HE SAID** his govt is committed to providing farmers appropriate price through the MSP.

providing farmers appropriate price through the MSP, and asserted that no government has done as much for the farming community as the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in its six years in power since 2014.

Farmers of the country are aware and can see who

are standing with middlemen, who “pocketed” profits meant for them, and opposing new opportunities being provided for them through these measures, he said.

The Prime Minister said the Congress had also promised in its manifesto what his government has now done through these bills, as he attacked the Opposition party for fanning protests against these proposed legislations.

Without naming it, he launched a blistering attack on the Congress, saying those who remained in power for decades are trying to “mislead” farmers and “lying” to them on the agriculture bills.

Lok Sabha had passed two bills on Thursday and another bill earlier with the government asserting that they will open new avenues for farmers by unshackling them from existing mechanism and allowing them to enter into agreements with private parties to sell their produce.

— PTI

■ 2 Maha ministers test +ve ■ 1,174 fresh death reported

96,424 new Covid cases in India
in 24 hrs, recovery rate at 78.9%DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI/ MUMBAI,
SEPT. 18

With 96,424 fresh detections, India on Friday recorded close to 52.15 lakh cases of novel coronavirus. The number of deaths in one day was 1,174, taking the total number of fatalities due to Covid-19 to 84,372, as per the Union health ministry figures. However, according to COVID19India.org, the total number of cases had crossed 52.50 lakh by Friday evening and deaths were close to 85,000.

Meanwhile, two Maharashtra ministers — Nitin Raut and Hasan Mushrif — on Friday said they

COVID WATCH

52.15 lakh

CASES ACROSS NATION

41.12 lakh

PEOPLE CURED SO FAR

have tested coronavirus positive. The leaders shared the information on their Twitter handles.

With this, the number of ministers in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, who tested positive for the infection has reached 11 so far.

The health ministry offi-

cials said India has recorded an “unprecedented high” of single day recoveries after 87,472 persons recovered and discharged in the past 24 hours. The recovery rate has reached 78.86 per cent as total recovered cases touched 41.12 lakh. India's case fatality rate (CFR) currently stands at 1.62 per cent.

“India has been consistently reporting a very high level of daily recoveries of more than 70,000 since the past 11 days. Recovered cases are 4.04 times the number of active cases as recoveries outnumber the latter by 30,94,797,” they said.

Officials said 90 per cent

of the new recoveries are reported from 16 States and UTs. Maharashtra (19,522) contributed 22.31% of the new recoveries while the States of Andhra Pradesh (12.24%), Karnataka (8.3%), Tamil Nadu (6.31%) and Chhattisgarh (6.0%) followed with 32.8% of the new recoveries.

In view of rising cases in the city, Delhi government has announced to continue closure of schools till October 5.

Meanwhile, the ministry of health and family welfare has decided to depute a high level Central team to Jammu after a high number of cases were reported from there.

DECCAN Chronicle

19 SEPTEMBER 2020

Does the govt wish grief upon farmers?

After a long time, politics at the national level was impacted by farmers as their months' long movement against three controversial farm bills the Lok Sabha passed with a voice vote on Thursday has led to the first big resignation from Narendra Modi's NDA 3.0 government in the person of Union food processing minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal. The pressure is now on Haryana deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala to pull the rug out from under the Manohar Lal Khattar government by exiting with his 10 MLAs. Not unexpectedly, *this* crisis has led to a belated awakening of the electronic media to the issue, one that directly affects the livelihoods of a maximum number of Indian citizens and is critical to the nation's food security, even though the ordinances which form the basis of the bills were passed as early as June and crop growers have been agitating since then.

It would seem ironical that the government has set out to kill the proverbial golden goose. Agriculture is the only sector that beat the pandemic as, in the April-June quarter, the GDP shrank, for the first time, by a massive 23.9 per cent. As such, in passing these bills, the government is also encroaching — and dismantling the constitutional ideal of cooperative federalism, the subject of agriculture being squarely on — the state list. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill is an assault on states' revenues — as states will no longer be allowed to exact market fee, cess or levies under the state APMC Act from farmers and traders for trading in a trading area defined by the new bill.

But the most insidious effects of the bill will be on the farmers themselves. The APMC market yard or the mandi, with all its existing problems and the presence of greedy commission agents and middlemen, has so far been serving as the mechanism of setting the minimum support price, MSP. Now that the majority of transactions will take place elsewhere and its need is obviated, there will be no benchmark. No trading licence will be required for traders. Thus farmers will be left open to unprecedented exploitation.

The Farmers (Empowerment & Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, opens the door to big business in agriculture. Food Producer Organisations, comprising a thousand odd farmers, are now being put on a par with big corporations to compete in the marketplace. It is unclear why FPOs are being over-regulated when the FPO movement itself is in a nascent stage. The arrival of corporate farming will at best mean less decision-making power for small farmers who form the majority of the farming community. At worst, it will be land-grab. The requirement of written agreements has been removed from the bill. Yet the farmer no longer has access to civil courts, only to a grievance disposal mechanism, likely to be rigged against them. The farmer's remuneration is no longer not tied to the MSP. It also raises the real fear of monopoly, coupled with hoarding by corporates which is being legalised by the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill.

The agriculture minister has gone on record trying to sell his bills with the hope of corporate-built infrastructure. Experience shows that investment only happens in ancillary areas like hospitality and food processing. Hence, the vision of aggregation of suppliers sold by the government is a flawed one. Aggregation has proven benefits when happening at the production side in the form of farmer cooperatives that these bills undoubtedly hurt.

Turning the farmer to a landless labourer, with no crop set aside for their family's own food security, dependent on the mercy of an artificial "market", while the corporates does easy business, nay profiteering, seems to be the singular sinister motive of these bills. The Opposition must build more pressure on the government so that it has no choice but to withdraw them.

IPL's here to entertain

The hoopla and razzmatazz of Indian Premier League (IPL) inaugurals featuring Bollywood stars, nautch girls and cheerleaders will be missing as IPL 2020 is slated to get off to a no-frills start today at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi. The fact that the IPL is being played at all this year is itself a tribute to the spirit of Indian cricket towards presenting to the people a shade of normalcy to life amid the pandemic. The IPL is not only about the money it lavishes on around 200 cricketers. It is an entertainment industry with a big big slice of television time to fill and the show must go on to keep a Rs 4,000 crore ecosystem ticking.

The wisdom of shifting the action to a bio-secure bubble in the UAE becomes more apparent as India grapples with a rising Covid-19 caseload close to one lakh fresh infections every day. Even those who have endured the crisis and the lockdown while personally suffering the ill-effects of the coronavirus may welcome the relief in this daily dose of cricket featuring their favourite teams and their Indian and international stars competing in the universally popular T20 format. Pro sport has already shown the way forward to life in the new normal and cricket has also thrown up thrilling contests in England.

There is no reason to believe the elaborate bio-bubble set up in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah will be any less secure. It is the responsibility of the millionaire stars of the game to follow the strict protocols, including not sharing water bottles and umpires not being allowed to be the friendly repository of the bowlers' caps, sunglasses, etc. Every detail has been fastidiously put down in the book of the new normal and the least expectation is there will be quality cricket even if the players have to learn to do without the adrenaline rush of cheering in-stadium spectators. A captive TV audience in millions of Indian households will be too happy to stay tuned.

Subhani



A reign of obstinacy and self-centredness

Shobhaa De



A bhishek "Manu" Singhvi used a lovely phrase the other evening, as he responded to questions on a prime-time television show. The topic was the prompt go-ahead given to the construction of a brand new Parliament House building. He called it the 'Politics of Zidd'. To that, let me humbly add, it can also be called the "Politics of Ego" Never before in the history of India have we witnessed such a display of egotism. The new Parliament House will be the ultimate symbol of a government that only and exclusively thinks of its own grandeur and brand positioning — a monumental error is being made by men with monumental egos who have not bothered to consult their countrymen before sanctioning such a project. An announcement says the contract will be awarded to an infrastructure major after the mandatory scrutiny. This is hardly the point. Whosoever bags the contract (CPWD's estimated cost is ₹899 crores) will no doubt do a competent job and create a handsome house for our parliamentarians. The more important question is this: does India need a swanky new Parliament House? For what? Beyond the redundancy of the project looms an even larger issue — and I am not going into the delicate debate about propriety. Why was no thought invested in ecological concerns? At a time when the whole world is thinking of what is good for the planet, now that we know our post-pandemic priorities a little better and are acutely aware of how arrogantly we have abused our precious ecosystems — should

this grand plan still be on? It involves stripping prime urban areas in central Delhi of tree cover and creating havoc with a whole host of other concerns. But here is an administration merrily going ahead and building on a precinct that is stunningly beautiful and aesthetically perfect the way it is. The way it has been for 85 years. People from all over the world come here to admire the architectural beauty of Rajpath. To think it is going to be marred by an ill-conceived proposal, hastily pushed through by those in an obvious hurry to create a different "legacy" for future generations.

What sort of a "legacy" is this? The young are far more engaged with global crises — environmental issues top their list. Delhi remains one of the worst polluted cities in the world. Adding to the terrible air over the capital will be the construction of this controversial building. A timeline of 24 months is in place — which must be a record of sorts. The timeline is not arbitrary. Nothing that the Narendra Modi government undertakes can be viewed in isolation. Take the design elements for one — there will be *shlokas* inscribed on the walls. Surprise! Surprise! *Shlokas*. Read the writing on the walls, folks. Oh yes, instead of the original tall spur atop the monument, it's

Whosoever bags the contract will no doubt do a competent job and create a handsome house for our parliamentarians. The more important question is this: does India need a swanky new Parliament House?

The timing to get this project up and running is incredibly insensitive. Forget the tanking of our economy during the pandemic — so many countries are dealing with Covid-driven economic crises.

now going to be a gigantic national emblem. No quarrel with that. Approvals for the Central Vista project? Ummm... no problem, boss. Those will be given *phataphat*. Those who have any issues with the plan — well, too bad. Cribbing will get you nowhere. The timing to get this project up and running is incredibly insensitive. Forget the tanking of our economy during the pandemic — so many countries are dealing with Covid-driven economic crises. But here in our own backyard, we have a Prime Minister admitting his government does not possess the data on the deaths of migrants — how many died on those roads, desperately attempting to reach their distant villages on foot. India is still reeling from Covid deaths, with experts telling us we have not peaked so far. Health remains one of our biggest concerns, with countless Covid centres falling short of oxygen cylinders and ICU beds. Can we really afford to spend on a new Parliament House during such dark and dire times?

For all the proclamations of austerity and simple living, what citizens have seen is the arrogant strut of the peacock. Nobody in the PM's circle lives modestly. Not even the PM himself. Crores of taxpayers' hard-earned money is spent on ensuring our elected representatives live life kingsize — with sprawling homes and lavish perks. Nobody grudges them their indulgences. Citizens are large-hearted enough to say, "Be comfortable — *khaao, peeyo,*

jiyo." But hello! Spare a thought for us, less privileged beings too. By digging up those beautiful lawns to build this House of Vanity is like rubbing our noses into the dirt thrown up by bulldozers uprooting magnificent trees and going into the bowels of what is public property — which rightfully belongs to all of us.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi celebrated a landmark birthday this week. He turned 70 — an excellent age for reflection and introspection. One wonders what his conscience tells him when he presides over such a redundant project, using resources India can barely afford to fritter away at this critical stage. Heritage and history need to be respected, even by those determined to rewrite both. The magnificence of Rajpath cannot be arbitrarily trifled with, based on the whims of politicians in power. Ironically, India lost one of its most valued cultural doyennes during the same week, on September 16. Kapila Vatsyayan was the grande dame of India's glorious cultural heritage. A formidable intellectual and a highly respected scholar who authored 20 books. She passed away at the age of 91. Her obituaries were tucked away into obscure corners of our dailies. The front page was reserved for more "important" news — like Tata Projects Ltd emerging as the lowest bidder for the new Parliament House building project, beating Larsen & Toubro to it by a whisker. Hurrah! Says something about shifting perspectives, doesn't it?

Mirza Ghalib said it all in the aftermath of 1857: "*Bazeechaye atfal hai dunhya mere aagey.../ Hota hai shabe-roz tamashaa mere aagey...*"

Meanwhile, Happy 70th Birthday, Narendra! Your birthday present will be delivered by July 2022. Mubarak!

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

JOB LOSSES

The staggering data of 6.6 million white-collar job losses and over 5 million jobs lost of industrial workers as surveyed by the CMIE is not only worrisome but pathetic. The government is yet to acknowledge the issue and go to the rescue of the labour force with only government employees safe, their monthly salary remaining unaffected till date (66 lakh white collar jobs lost, Sep.18). That said, it is a million-dollar query as to how the professionals and the industrial workers are going to be resettled or paid compensation. Come what may, as opined, the government can't remain 'mum' over post-Covid job losses.

E.S.Chandrasekaran, Chennai

NEROS FIDDLE

I AGREE with every sentence of your editorial with regard to the grand plan of the government to have a monumental structure to be built adjoining the existing Parliament. I remember that the civil and structural engineers of the country had opined that the existing Parliament is strong enough to last for nearly 25 plus years thus expressing opinion against construction of a new one at a whopping cost of hundreds of crores in this cash starved period of the government due to corona, a reliable solution for which still appears to be elusive. I also do not know how far the new Parliament building to be built will improve the quality of our democracy and law and order.

S. Nagarajan Iyer, Coimbatore

NEW NORMAL OF LEARNING

APROPOS THE article *Online classes: Help soothe the frayed nerves of children* (Sept. 18). The natural effects of the strain in mind and body obviously reflects upon an individual's behaviour pattern. These online class studies don't seem to be fruitful while there were four students who had lost their lives with the inability to cope with this learning strategy. A real hard scenario is facing the education sector. While the crux of the issue is based on the new learning process, the educational institutions and parents should support their wards and not have high expectations in terms of their outcome. Considering some children are unable to muddle through even normal classes, one can imagine the grasping capacity through mobile learning. The irony is that there was a time when we used to tell our wards not to use mobile phones in schools and now it's the other way round where the new normal of learning demands a mobile phone.

Jacqueline Netto, Chennai

G. Babu Jayakumar



Why NEET wreaked havoc on Tamil Nadu youth alone

A spate of suicides in Tamil Nadu over the fear of NEET, the all-India medical entrance examination held on September 13, may be a matter of intrigue to many well-meaning people outside the state. In unsympathetic people, both within and outside the state, the suicides evoked gleeful ridicule that got expressed through insensitive sarcasm or trolls or memes on social media and elsewhere.

For many others it was an opportunity to blame politicians, who had been demanding the scrapping of the exam and also paying condolences to the families of the deceased students. But by no means can one accuse any politician of compelling a student to commit suicide. So the question: Why has NEET provoked so many suicides, starting from that of Anita in 2017. For those interested in statistics, there were four in 2018, six in 2019 and six in 2020, taking the total to 17.

To understand it, one has to take a

stroll down the lanes of history. First, medical education in Tamil Nadu was out of bounds for the masses who did not know Sanskrit. The rule was changed by the government run by the Justice Party, the precursor of the Dravidian Movement. Subsequently the ushering in of social justice, which imbued in subaltern communities a quest for education, enabled even first generation learners from impoverished homes to become doctors and also serve in their own communities in the remotest of rural areas, enabling the state to build a robust medical infrastructure that most states cannot aspire to achieve in the near future with or without NEET.

Since those doctors from poor homes did not aspire to go abroad or win the Nobel Prize through research or work for a corporate hospital, they worked in public health centres or set up cheap clinics in villages, inspiring local children, who always found in doctors a role model for emulation. Seeing

doctors as an embodiment of education, knowledge, empowerment and social respect, most children in rural areas grew up with dreams of becoming doctors. But it was common knowledge that to become a doctor one has to study well.

The state's education system facilitated the students who scored high marks in the final school examination to enter courses of their choice and that was how the state achieved an outstanding GER of 49.3 per cent. The best of the students necessarily made it to medical colleges, not just realising childhood dreams but also uplifting families and serving local communities, earning respect and often shedding caste prejudices. Seeing such success stories, more children dreamt of becoming doctors, which can emancipate them from many socio-economic oppressions.

With teachers, parents, relatives and the local community often turning cheerleaders of the high scorers in their race to storm Hippocrates' citadel, students came under pres-

sure to perform well. Yet, they know pretty well that the game was over if they scored less and looked elsewhere for alternative career options.

But when NEET came in with a bang, it suddenly shifted the goalposts for lakhs of such rural, poor, hardworking students, who only knew the game of studying well and entering college based on the marks they scored. Suddenly they were told to take an exam afresh in some centre in a faraway town, sitting in an unfamiliar ambience. And it was here they were made to realise their own cultural and economic backwardness.

For example, Vignesh, the boy from Elanthankuzhi in Ariyalur district who jumped into a well and killed himself a few days before the examination, had to travel 10 km to Jayamkondan to take a print out for the NEET hall ticket. He would have changed two buses to reach his examination centre, 110 km away from home, in Tiruchirappalli. He had seen his father selling prop-

erty to fund his coaching for NEET, for which he was to appear for a third time and could not bear the thought of failing again.

Most rural students who spend a year or more preparing exclusively for NEET often feel that it is the end of the road when they don't make it. Those who had seen their seniors making it just by studying well in school become too "tired" — to borrow the word used by Jothishree Durga in her suicide note — going through the processes of applying for NEET online from villages without any connectivity and the rest of the procedures. Repeated attempts at NEET also brings with it the anxiety that is, tragically, too much for poor, rural children to handle.

The realisation that NEET was to ensure that medical education was for children from elite, urban and privileged backgrounds has not sunk into the minds of children in rural hinterland. Once it does, they will not aspire for it. And of course will not think about suicide.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	38,845.82	-0.34
Nifty 50	11,504.95	-0.10
S&P 500*	3,305.47	-1.54
Dollar (₹)	73.45	0.27
Pound Sterling (₹)	95.39	-0.007
Euro (₹)	87.07	-0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	52,672▲224	0.42
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	42.72	-0.58
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.014	-0.019
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.686	0.004

Fan-makers want GST lowered to 5% from 18%

Fan manufacturers sought lower GST rate at 5 per cent on fans, saying the existing 18 per cent tax is "adversely" impacting the industry. "The current GST rate standing at 18 per cent is adversely impacting the industry as well as the entire supply chain, from distributors to end-consumers," said Atul Jain, chairman, Indian Fan Manufacturers Association (Ifma). A lower GST slab would make the fans more accessible, Ifma said.



■ Bid to stop China goods entry via trade bloc
Govt tightens vigil over Asean route

SANGEETHA G.
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

In a move that will check Chinese products being routed through Asean countries, the government has decided to strictly enforce production of 'certificate of origin' for every imported item claiming free and preferential trade concessions. Further, the government said it will engage with the Asean countries to review gaps or imbalances in the free trade agreement (FTA). The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has made some changes in the declarations made by importers while claiming free trade and preferential trade duties. These changes will come into effect from September 21. Whenever such claims are made, documents pertaining to the certificate of origin of every item will have to be mandatorily uploaded on eSanchit and the 'invoice reference number' should be declared in the supporting document table for the item. "If imported goods are transported directly from the country of origin and not through another country, then the certificate of origin code itself can be given in the transit country field. In case of transport through a different country then the country code of that country should be indicated in the transit country field. A self-declaration that the items qualify as originating goods for a prefer-



ential rate will have to be made by the importer in the bill of entry." Further, the certificate of origin must be defaced before the out of charge (OOC) at the port of import. From September 21, marking defacement of each certificate uploaded for a bill of entry will be mandatory, without which OOC would not be allowed by the system. "With effect from 21 September 2020, businesses availing benefits of FTA would be required to comply with the revised bill of entry format declaring additional particulars in relation to FTA benefits, and will be required to upload the copy of certificate of origin on the customs portal. While the intent of the government is clearly to curb wrongful claim of concessional customs duty by routing the exports to India through preferential trade countries, practically, compliance even by genuine importers at short notice will be challenging," said Abhishek Jain, tax partner, EY. According to K. Unnikrishnan, deputy director general, Federation of Indian Export Organisations, the government has made the rules stricter in order to check Chinese goods getting routed through FTA and PTA countries. "Import of some of the automotive parts from FTA countries with components coming from China as part of the global value chain may become tougher," he said. The commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal said India is engaging with the 10-member Asean to review the free trade agreement. In the India-Asean Economic Ministers Consultations held on August 29, officials will determine the scope of review. "Provisions are envisaged to periodically address any gaps, shortcomings and imbalance. India proposes to suitably use these provisions," Goyal said. The Asean-India Trade in Goods Agreement came into force on January 1, 2010.

Select high frequency indicators move up

SANGEETHA G.
CHENNAI, SEPT. 18

Providing more hope of recovery, some of the high frequency indicators, including electricity consumption, digital payments, real estate purchases in select cities and railway freight volumes have moved closer to pre-Covid levels in the first half of September. E-way bills generated by businesses and transporters in August were also higher sequentially. Electricity consumption over the seven-day period ending September 16 showed the country consumed more power during the period compared to a similar period in the previous year, said a Kotak Institutional Equities' report. In digital payments, daily average UPI and IMPS transaction values recorded an all-time high in September. NETC-Fastag transactions are at pre-Covid levels. The e-waybills generated in August numbered 4.87 crore, valued at over Rs 13.85 lakh crore. The numbers stood at 4.76 crore and 4.27 crore in July and June, valued at Rs 13.66 lakh crore and Rs 12.40 lakh crore, respectively, GSTN data showed. Railway freight volume was up in September compared to the same period last year. Volumes also have returned to February 2020 levels. But container volumes in most ports declined in September.

Paytm back in Play after ousted by Google

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Google on Friday restored the Paytm app on its Play store after removing it for a few hours for violating its policy on sports betting activities.



The app was back on the Google Play store on Friday evening after the Softbank-backed Paytm removed the 'cashback' feature from a recently launched game on the application. "Update: And we're back!" Paytm said in a tweet. On Friday morning, Google removed the Paytm app—which facilitates use of wallet and payments bank services—from the Play store. However, users who had already downloaded the app could continue using the services. "The app was blocked for violation of Play policies—a clarification of our policy was released earlier today ahead of the IPL tournament," Google said in an e-mailed response, adding that only the app availability on Play store was impacted. Google, in a blog post earlier on Friday, said it does not allow apps facilitating sports betting and will remove such apps from the Play store. These policies are in place to protect users from potential harm, it added. "We don't allow online casinos or support any unregulated gambling apps that facilitate sports betting. This includes if an app leads consumers to an external website that allows them to participate in paid tournaments to win real money

or cash prizes, it is a violation of our policies," the blog post said. Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma said the company has already removed the scratch cards which offered the cashbacks, complying with Google's concerns. Stating that Google was not allowing it to acquire new customers by blocking Paytm's promotion, Sharma said India needs support for further growing the startup ecosystem. "(Platforms like Google) are dominating platforms and with power comes responsibility. I believe that they should be responsible for this country's growth and startup ecosystem... India's ecosystem needs support, not stifling of innovation," he told a news channel. A Paytm spokesperson said the company had recently launched the 'Paytm Cricket League' on its consumer app for users to engage in their passion of cricket and get cashbacks. "The game allows users to get player stickers after each transaction, collect them and get Paytm cashback. Cashback is legal in India and we strictly follow all rules and laws of the land. "Unfortunately, Google believes this to be a violation of its policies and has unlisted the Paytm Android app from the Play store," the spokesperson said. The spokesperson added that the cashback feature has been removed and confirmed that the app has been restored on the Play store. Google, in its blog post, had said that when an app violates its policies, it notifies the developer of the violation and removes the application from Google Play until the developer brings it into compliance. "And in the case where there are repeated policy violations, we may take more serious action which may include terminating Google Play Developer accounts. "Our policies are applied and enforced on all developers consistently," said the blog post by Suzanne Frey, vice president-product, security and privacy, Android. There is often a surge in launches of such apps before major sporting tournaments like the IPL. The latest season of the Indian Premier League is scheduled to start from September 19 in the UAE. —PTI

WORLD

China flies 18 military aircraft near Taiwan during US talks

Unusually large show of force in response to US envoy's visit to Taipei

Taipei, Sept. 18: The second high-level US envoy to visit Taiwan in two months began a day of closed-door meetings Friday as China conducted military drills near the Taiwan Strait after threatening retaliation. China's military sent 18 planes including fighter jets over the Taiwan Strait in an unusually large show of force on Monday as a US envoy held a day of closed-door meetings on the self-governing island claimed by China. Undersecretary of State Keith Krach, who handles the economic growth, energy and the environment portfolio, held talks with Taiwan's minister of economic affairs and the Cabinet's vice premier. He was due to meet with business leaders over lunch and dine with President Tsai Ing-wen later on Friday. In response to Krach's visit, the Eastern Theater Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army held combat exercises near the Taiwan Strait, at least the second round of war games this month aimed at intimidating supporters of the island's independent political identity. "This is a legitimate and necessary action taken in response to the current situation across the Taiwan Straits to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity," said China's defense ministry spokesman Ren Guoqiang. In a brief message on its microblog, the Eastern Theater Command said the exercises involved naval and air force units in the Taiwan Strait aimed at gauging their ability to carry out joint operations. China on Thursday con-



Taiwan's foreign minister Joseph Wu meets with US Undersecretary of State Keith Krach in Taipei, Taiwan on Friday.

— AP

demned Krach's visit and warned it could retaliate. It views Taiwan as part of its own territory and strongly opposes any type of formal interaction between other countries and the self-ruled island democracy. Krach's trip follows a visit in August by US health secretary Alex Azar, the highest-level U.S. Cabinet official to make the trip since the U.S. switched formal relations from Taiwan to China in 1979. It is one of a series of moves by the Trump administration to strengthen relations with Taiwan, including stepped-up arms sales and support for the island's participation in interna-

tional forums. Before Krach's arrival, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, had lunch Wednesday with Taiwan's top official in New York, in a meeting she called historic. On Saturday, the last day of his visit, Krach will also attend a memorial service for former President Lee Teng-hui, who led the island's transition to democracy and died at age 97 in July. Tensions between Washington and Beijing have already reached high levels as the governments spar over the coronavirus pandemic, trade, technology, Hong Kong and the South China Sea. The frequency of

Chinese exercises near Taiwan recalls the last major crisis between them in 1995-96, when China fired missiles near the island and held war games in a bid to intimidate voters in Taiwan's first direct presidential election. Those actions were largely seen to have backfired. Taiwan said Chinese warplanes entered its airspace over two days last week during large-scale war games that it called a "serious provocation to Taiwan and a grave threat to regional peace and stability." Such actions by the PLA threaten the entire region, it said, calling on the international community to respond. China has

increasingly relied on military threats and diplomatic isolation to pressure Taiwan. That follows the apparent failure of its efforts to win over the island's 23 million people to the prospect of political unification under the "one country, two systems" framework in place in China, with a large majority of Taiwanese favoring maintaining the status quo of de facto independence. China cut contacts with Taiwan's government following Tsai's 2016 election. She was reelected by a large margin this year while her Democratic Progressive Party maintained its majority in the legislature. —AP

FBI chief warns Russia actively targeting Biden

Washington, Sept. 18: FBI Director Christopher Wray on Thursday warned that Russia is interfering in the 2020 US presidential elections with a steady stream of misinformation aimed at Democrat Joe Biden as well as sapping Americans' confidence in the election process. Moscow is also attempting to undercut what it sees as an anti-Russian US establishment, Wray told the Democratic-led House of Representatives' Homeland Security committee. He said his biggest concern is a "steady drumbeat of misinformation" that he said he feared could undermine confidence in the result of the 2020 election. Wray's testimony follows an August 7 warning by the director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center that Russia, China and Iran were all trying to interfere in the November 3 election. Wray said the FBI is increasingly worried about possible violent clashes between ideologically-motivated extremist groups before the November election. The FBI is keeping a close eye on groups who have faced

off in protests in cities such as Portland, Oregon, and Kenosha, Wisconsin. In those places, anti-racism and anti-police groups have squared off with right-wing and white nationalist activists who are often armed. Wray also told lawmakers that antifa is an ideology, not an organization. Wray did not dispute that antifa activists were a serious concern, saying that antifa was a "real thing" and that the FBI had undertaken "any number of properly predicated investigations into what we would describe as violent anarchist extremists," including into individuals who identify with antifa. Hours after the hearing, US President Donald Trump took to Twitter to chastise Wray for his statements on antifa and on Russian election interference. Referring to antifa, the President wrote: "And I look at them as a bunch of well funded Anarchists & Thugs who are protected because the Comey/Mueller inspired FBI is simply unable, or unwilling, to find their funding source, and allows them to get away with "murder". Law & Order!." —Reuters/AFP/AP



US BANS WECHAT, TIKTOK CITING RISK

Washington, Sept. 18: The US will ban the use of WeChat Sunday to "safeguard the national security of the United States." The Chinese app TikTok will also be banned by Nov. 12, but Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said early Friday on CNBC that access to that app may be possible if certain safeguards are in place. "At the President's direction, we have taken significant action to combat China's malicious collection of American citizens' personal data, while promoting our national values, democratic rules-based norms, and aggressive enforcement of US laws and regulations," Ross said in a prepared statement. The government said its order, previously announced by Trump in August, will "combat China's malicious collection of American citizens' personal data." The government previously said that using and downloading the app to communicate won't be a banned transaction, although messaging on the app "could be directly or indirectly impaired" by the ban, and people who use it for messaging won't be subject to penalties. —AP

US court turns down H1-B plea by Indians

Washington, Sept. 18: An Indian-American federal judge has turned down an appeal by 169 Indian citizens who had challenged the proclamation of President Donald Trump that barred foreign nationals on H-1B specialty occupation visa from entering the US till the end of the year.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

US District Judge Amit P. Mehta of US District Court for the District of Columbia said that Indian citizens, who are now trapped abroad during trips to India when borders closed, are unlikely to win their case contesting the travel ban proclamation of Trump. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Hari goes down, stays in 5th place

Chennai: Indian Grandmaster P. Harikrishna maintained his joint fifth place in the Saint Louis Rapid and Blitz online chess tournament even as American Wesley So climbed to the top spot ahead of world champion Magnus Carlsen. Competing in the last three rounds of the Rapid event, Harikrishna started well with a win over American player Jeffery Xiong in 66 moves. After a draw against another US player Hikaru Nakamura, the India number was outlasted by So in 69 moves on Thursday. The win allowed So to take the lead after nine rounds of the Rapid competition with two days of Blitz events to come. Carlsen crashed to a 46-move defeat at the hands of Russian Alexander Grischuk. So is in sole lead with 13 points followed by Carlsen (12) and the two Russians Ian Nepomniachtchi and Alexander Grischuk on 10. After a bright start to his campaign with two victories on the opening day, Harikrishna could manage only one more win in his other six games. — PTI

Injured Osaka out of French Open

Paris: US Open champion Naomi Osaka has pulled out of the French Open because of an injured left hamstring. Osaka joins defending champion Ash Barty in skipping the French Open, which opens on September 27 in Paris. In another blow to the clay Grand Slam, tournament organisers announced a further reduction in crowd sizes, because of France's worsening Coronavirus epidemic. The new limit is 5,000 spectators per day, organisers said in a statement late Thursday. They'd previously been planning for 11,500 spectators, split among three sites at Roland Garros. It is important for the sporting, social and economic life of the country that a major event like Roland-Garros can be put on while respecting health imperatives, organizers said. Osaka hurt the hamstring last month at the Western & Southern Open, also in New York, and withdrew from that tournament's final because of it. — AP

Justin grabs lead at US Open golf

New York: Justin Thomas closed with a 25-foot birdie putt to seize a one-stroke lead after Thursday's first round of the 120th US Open, while three other major winners lurked within two shots. Third-ranked Thomas, the 2017 PGA Championship winner, fired a five-under par 65 at Winged Foot with a pack one back on 66 including Reed, the 2018 Masters winner who had a hole-in-one, 21-year-old American Matthew Wolff and Belgium's Thomas Pieters. "This is one of the better rounds I've had tee to green," Thomas said.

Live on TV

CRICKET

IPL: Mumbai Indians vs Chennai Super Kings from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, 2

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Everton vs West Bromwich Albion from 5 pm; Leeds vs Fulham from 7.30 pm; Manchester United vs Crystal Palace from 10 pm; Arsenal vs West Ham United from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 2, HD

Spanish League: Villarreal vs Eibar from 7.30 pm; Celta Vigo vs Valencia from 12.30 am (Sunday) on LaLiga page on Facebook

Italian League: Fiorentina vs Torino from 9.30 pm; Verona vs Roma from 12.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

TENNIS

Rome Masters: Matches in two sessions — from 3.30 pm and 9.30 pm on Sony Six, HD

UFC FIGHT NIGHT

Colby Covington vs Tyrone Woodley and other bouts from 5.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

BASKETBALL

NBA Eastern Conference Finals (Game 3 of best-of-7): Boston Celtics vs Miami Heat from 6.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Six, HD

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CLASH OF TITANS

Dhoni fresh and determined as IPL begins today

Abu Dhabi, Sept. 18: His sabbatical from the game has done Mahendra Singh Dhoni a world of good, Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming said on Friday, asserting that the enigmatic skipper is "mentally engaged and determined" to encounter the challenges of a "tactically different" IPL.

Dhoni's CSK will take on Rohit Sharma's Mumbai Indians in the tournament opener on Saturday. Fleming, a former New Zealand captain, stressed that his team's experience of winning big matches will come in handy during the next 53 days.

Dhoni retired from international cricket last month after being on a break for over one year and when asked about the 39-year-old's preparedness for the IPL, Fleming said, "It has been no different. He's very fit and mentally, he's been very engaged and determined."

"In some ways the break can work for the experienced and older players that we have. MS is fresh and ready to go," Fleming said in a pre-tournament interview to CSK's official website.

The three-time champions are banking heavily on their 35-plus players, including Dhoni himself, Shane Watson, Dwayne Bravo, Kedar Jadhav, and Imran Tahir to name a few.

"...experienced players identify key times and that's why they've done so well in their careers. They can turn games, absorb pressure or just sum out the situation. That's what experience is about and that's why we value it so highly. And that's why we've been able to get over the line in so many close games because the key player has been one with a lot of experience," Fleming further said.

Starting against a quality side like MI is certainly



Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (left) and Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma in this file photo.

NUMBERS GAME

HEAD TO HEAD

OVERALL:

- Matches: 28
- Mumbai Indians won: 17
- Chennai Super Kings won: 11

MEETING IN 2019

- Mumbai Indians defeated Chennai Super Kings by 37 runs at Mumbai (League)
- Mumbai Indians beat Chennai Super Kings by 46 runs at Chennai (League)
- Mumbai Indians beat Chennai Super Kings by 6 wickets at Chennai (Qualifier 1)

- Mumbai Indian beat Chennai Super Kings by one run at Hyderabad (final)

FOR THE RECORD

- Rohit Sharma who scored 4898 runs at an average of 31.60 in 183 innings of 188 matches for Deccan Chargers and Mumbai Indians is the third highest scorer in IPL behind Virat Kohli (5,412 runs in 177 matches) and Suresh Raina (5,368 runs in 193 matches).
- Dwayne Bravo who claimed 147 wickets in 131 innings of 134 matches, needs just three wickets to become the fifth bowler to take 150 wickets in IPL.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

exciting for Fleming, who wants his men to have a crack at the defending champions after their agonising last-ball loss in the previous edition.

BRETT BETS ON CSK

Former Australian speedster Brett Lee has tipped three-time champions Chennai Super Kings to win the 13th IPL, saying the variety in their spin department gives them an

advantage in the UAE conditions.

"They (CSK) are up there. I have picked them to win and I think CSK have a good chance because of their spin attack," Lee said on Star Sports' show *Game Plan*.

"With Santner, Jadeja needs to step up and be the no.1 spinner and CSK have got great variety and none of the spinners are same, so they are at an

advantage for the conditions in the UAE as the tournament progresses," he added.

Mumbai Indian will miss the services of their bowling spearhead Lasith Malinga who opted out of the tournament citing personal reasons.

However, Lee said he has no doubts that Jasprit Bumrah will be able to fill in the shoes of the experienced seamer. — PTI

ICC has task to balance cricket against IPL burnout

New Delhi, Sept 18: The ICC faces a serious challenge in striking a financially viable balance between the thriving T20 leagues and international cricket over the next decade, says renowned coach Andy Flower.

He also feels it is important for stars like Virat Kohli to keep "talking up" the five-day format.

Led by the BCCI-backed IPL, most ICC full members have their own T20 product and the rapid growth of franchise-based cricket has put more stress on the international cricket calendar and its

viability, leaving the big three — India, Australia and England — aside.

"It is a serious challenge for the ICC to make a fine balance between viable international cricket and the burgeoning franchise world. That is going to be interesting to watch over the coming decade. I still think there is huge interest, primarily in three nations (India, England, Australia), in Test cricket.

We have had two good series in England without spectators, as a TV product, the five-day format offers a lot to the broadcaster," Flower said. — PTI

BARCA PREZ TO FACE VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE

Barcelona, Sept. 18: Barcelona president Josep Bartomeu faces a vote of no confidence after club members gathered enough signatures to force a referendum on his future.

The vote will be held after the club verifies all the signatures. Bartomeu would have to step down if two thirds of the votes are against him, and new elections would have to be scheduled.

The opposition members had announced their intention to remove Bartomeu from the presidency after Lionel Messi told the club last month he wanted to leave amid one of its worst crises ever.

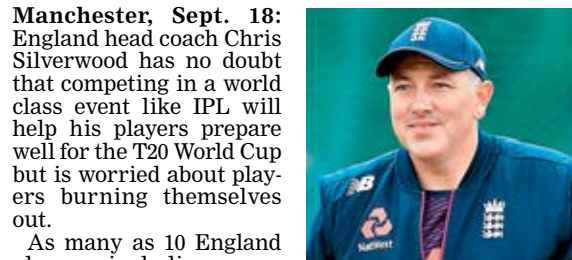
Pressure on Bartomeu increased after the team's embarrassing 8-2 loss to Bayern Munich in the quarterfinals of the Champions League. The defeat prompted Bartomeu to announce big changes at the club and call for new presidential elections for next March. — AP

Tanguy saves Spurs blushes

London, Sept. 18: Tottenham Hotspur scored twice in the final 10 minutes to avoid a humiliating Europa League exit to Lokomotiv Plovdiv as Jose Mourinho's men came from behind to beat the nine-man Bulgarians 2-1 on Thursday.

Harry Kane's penalty and Tanguy Ndombele's winner five minutes from time ensured the 2019 Champions League finalists did not fall at the first hurdle of their Europa League campaign to a side that have never progressed beyond the qualifying stages of European competition.

Mourinho named a strong side featuring Kane, Hugo Lloris and Son Heung-min with just four changes from Sunday's 0-1 defeat to Everton to start their EPL campaign. The tie swung back in Spurs favour nine minutes later when Momchil Tsvetanov punched clear off his own line and the referee had no option but to point to the spot and send Tsvetanov off. Birsent Karagaren was then also shown a second yellow



Chris Silverwood

players need to be cautious against burn-out as they have to stay in the bio-bubble for another seven weeks.

"It's their decision really but we'll have to keep an

eye on them," he said after England's three-wicket defeat in the third ODI at Manchester.

"Obviously, the contracts are good for them but equally as well we're looking forward at a T20 World Cup. The more high-class T20 they can play will be a good thing for us. The one thing that I have encouraged is that they keep talking to us. We need to make sure that they don't burn out as well" he added.

The next T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held in India next year in October-November. — PTI



Armand Duplantis of Sweden clears 6.15 metres to set a new men's pole vault world record during the IAAF Diamond League competition at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Thursday. — AFP

INTO THE CLOUDS!

Duplantis high over 26-yr-old Bubka bar

Rome, Sept. 18: Swedish pole vault star Armand Duplantis eclipsed Ukrainian legend Sergey Bubka's 26-year mark, setting a outdoor new pole vault world record of 6.15 metres (20 feet, 2 inches) at the Diamond League meeting in Rome on Thursday. Duplantis bettered the mark of 6.14m (20 feet, 1 1/2 inches) set by Bubka in Sestriere, Italy, in July 1994.

The 20-year-old succeeded on his second attempt in a competition he dominated in perfect warm and windless conditions, but without spectators to celebrate in an empty Stadio Olimpico.

Duplantis already holds the world indoor record of 6.18m (20 feet, 3 1/4 inches).

"I think I'm still up in the clouds right now. It's a surreal, super crazy feeling," said the US-born athlete.

Ukrainian Bubka broke the world record on 17 occasions in the 1980s and 1990s, famously edging the mark up by one centimetre on no fewer than nine occasions between 1988 and 1994 so he could collect a bonus each time.

Duplantis was a child prodigy who broke age-group records on his way to joining the pole vaulting elite. He chose to compete internationally for Sweden, his mother's home country. He won the silver medal at last year's world championships.

Born and raised in Louisiana, Duplantis is a photogenic new star in a sport searching for star quality since the retire-

ment of Jamaican sprint legend Usain Bolt in 2017. His exuberant celebrations and looks straight out of a teenage romantic film mean he fits the bill.

Coached by his American father Greg, a former pole vaulter, Duplantis is a product of a track and field-crazy family which had their own vaulting apparatus in the garden. His older brother Andreas vaulted for Sweden at various age-group championships, while another sibling Antoine dropped pole vault in favour of baseball.

Armand spent summers with his Swedish grandparents, keeping the link with his former heptathlete mother's home country. He started pole vaulting, which requires the speed and strength of sprinter and the flexibility of a gymnast, when he was four years old.

He announced his talent to the world when he cleared 5.90m aged just 17 at the Texas Relays in Austin in 2017. He turned professional last year after one season on a scholarship at Louisiana State University. — AFP

Goran shines as Heat pip Celtics

Miami, Sept. 18: The Miami Heat turned it up in the second half, rallying again for a 106-101 victory over the Boston Celtics and a 2-0 lead in the NBA Eastern Conference finals.

Trailing by 17 in the second quarter and down 60-47 at halftime, Miami thrashed the Celtics 37-17 in the third quarter and held on for the victory.

Bam Adebayo scored 15 of his 21 points in the Heat's blistering third quarter.

The Celtics, who let a big lead slip in a 117-114 game one overtime defeat on Tuesday, regained the lead in the fourth quarter and were up 94-89 with 4:25 left to play.

But the Heat chipped

away with a hook shot from Adebayo and a steal and dunk by Jimmy Butler.

Goran Dragic followed up two free throws with a three-pointer over Boston big man Daniel Theis that put the Heat ahead 100-95 with 1:42 remaining and Miami powered to the finish line. Dragic finished with 25 points, and Duncan Robinson added 18, all on three-pointers.

Adebayo added 10 rebounds and four assists, Jimmy Butler had 14 points, four rebounds, three assists and four steals.

"We like to make it hard for ourselves," Butler said of the Miami "comeback kids." — AFP